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The Difference Is Leadership Energized Democrats

By Frosty Troy

Taking stock of a battered party, Oklahoma Democrats are expressing a surprising optimism.

The political difference today is being made by Ivan Holmes, new party chair who draws no salary and has energized the party to new heights.

The only way Democrats can reclaim the high ground is to close ranks, quit squabbling and start joining hands – regardless of being right, left or center.

By now Democrats realize that imitating Republicans won't win the vote. The GOP has been framing the issues – abortion, gay rights, gun rights. Democrats have been reactive, not proactive.

The word "abortion" does not appear in the state or national platform. Discrimination against gays is fostered by the Sally Kerns, busy peeping into other people's bedrooms.

As for guns, Democrats are clearly more likely to own guns than Republicans.

Yes, the country is evenly divided between Republicans and Democrats, with Independents and Libertarians making up about 20%. But even Republicans are sick of the gross mismanagement of the economy.

When Reagan began preaching that our government is the enemy of the people, far too many Americans – especially in the South – began to believe it.

Ex-Congressman Mickey Edwards is busy pushing his book, claiming the GOP lost its way when it abandoned Reaganomics.

Not true. Reagan's unprecedented national debt and his drive to wipe out public education started the GOP on the low road.

The government is our enemy?

When the government was needed in the Gulf Coast, America learned that Bush's destructive anti-government policies led directly to the New Orleans disaster. The levee budget alone had been cut 44.5%.

Bush's lack of weapons of mass destruction has pitted us in a civil war that has claimed more than 4,000 brave American military – with no end

in sight. The cost is expected to top \$2 trillion.

Now John McCain & Co. want to destroy Social Security by privatizing it. Even some Republicans in Congress are opposed to that stupidity.

Democrats will begin to gain influence because Bush has made a mess of unprecedented proportions. Tax cuts for the rich. Tax cuts that undercut 100,000 cops on the street, education, Headstart and senior feeding programs.

It used to be that Democrats were painted by the Republicans as "big spenders." In fact, beginning with Reagan's unprecedented red ink, Republicans have so enlarged the national debt that it has weakened the dollar worldwide.

Nearly 25 cents of every dollar sent to Washington now goes for interest

alone on the national debt. China and Saudi Arabia own 22% of U.S. debt.

The American Political Science Association's committee on political parties identified "the inadequacy of the party system in sustaining well-considered programs and providing broad public support for them" as a leading danger to American democracy.

Proactive Democrats must return to their principled message – good public education, Social Security, a strong national defense based on solid intelligence, unswerving support for unions, and social services only for those in need – not trillions in tax cuts for fat cats.

If voters face a clear-cut choice, Democrats win. Look at the case of Gov. Brad Henry. By listening to the people and bringing coherent pro-

grams, he has racked up unprecedented victories – even in the face of the first Republican House in 86 years.

Analysts point to the declining influence of political parties and increasing independence of candidates. That's something Ivan Holmes is trying to correct. Democrats in the lifeboat had better start bailing.

Special interest groups [i.e. Chesapeake, Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs] indirectly target candidates for defeat on the basis of relatively narrow considerations.

Look what Chesapeake did to Brad Carson – \$1 million. Look what the Swift Boat liars did to John Kerry – \$30 million.

Oklahoma Democrats had a huge deficit that Holmes has paid off and is busy building a campaign war chest.

The Republican legislative leadership is squeezing every business and industry in the state, garnering \$1 million going into the general election.

Democrats have to stand up to special interest politics and the kind of strong-arm tactics used to slip Chesapeake Energy and other fat cats millions of tax dollars despite their unprecedented profits.

Instead of standing together as a party on the principles in which we believe, Democrats have torn out in all different directions. It was three Democratic votes in western Oklahoma that led to a redistricting plan that puts most Democrats in a single congressional district.

To the country's shock and awe, the Bush crowd has run up horrific debt, governed by cronyism and damaged or eliminated truly fine programs in public education with their so-called No Child Left Behind law.

Republicans want vouchers to rob public school funding, tax cuts that enrich their donors, laws to restrict civil liberties and government by fear.

Consider a milk carton on the counter of a convenience store: a teenage boy begging for money for an organ transplant. Here is the richest nation on earth and still no national health insurance program.



Observations

Tax Truth

You are probably weary of our routine corrections of propaganda by the far right Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, but the corporate media keeps parroting them as facts.

Consider the latest outrage by Steve Anderson who teaches at the University of Central Oklahoma, claiming that the State Board of Equalization's report of income tax collection for FY 2007 was wrong.

The Equalization Board reported \$2,337,689,693. Anderson claims the real figure was \$3,413,564,946.

Why the huge difference? Anderson implies some dark budget misdeed. The truth is simple: the governor's budget contained an error. [Check the Tax Commission if you doubt it.]

David Blatt, probably the foremost nonpartisan fiscal authority in Oklahoma, said he immediately checked Anderson's figures with the Office of State Finance.

They admitted the mistake but also told Blatt that Anderson contacted them and they told him of the error.

He chose to ignore the correction. The OCPA not only printed it, they sent it to news media across Oklahoma.

Sure enough, the Daily Disappointment reprinted it without checking it for accuracy, as did other news outlets across the state.

Pity the poor misinformed Oklahoma voter, often the victim of the poisonous propaganda of the OCPA. Unfortunately, they are like Will Rogers: "All I know is what I read in the newspapers."

Aw Shucks!

John McCain's newly acquired aw-shucks persona doesn't match the facts.

For example, when asked about his greatest moral failing, he replied it was the divorce from his first wife. What he didn't mention is that he was having an affair with his present wife when he was still married.

He has tried to distance himself

from President Bush but has a 95% support record for Bush.

He voted 10 times against raising the minimum wage – despite the fact it hadn't been raised in 10 years.

His health plan would insure only up to nine million of the 47 million now uninsured. All heart, huh?

First he opposed Bush's tax breaks for the super rich, now he says he's for them. Flip meet flop.

Exploiting his prisoner of war days rings hollow when he just voted against funding a new GI bill. Today's veterans get little help – and McCain would keep it that way.

Aside from a raft of other reasons, a vote for Barack Obama would keep McCain out of the White House, benching his big oil buddies and every major lobbyist in Washington.

Obese USA

Results from a new study by researchers at Johns Hopkins University show that, in eight years time, 75% of American adults will be either overweight or obese.

As scary as that proposition is, it is worse for children, who, just accounting for age, should be pictures of health and well-being.

A report released last year by the Cities, Counties and Schools Partnership notes that nearly 30% of children and teens were overweight or obese – twice as many as a decade ago.

Being overweight at a young age poses a myriad of health concerns, and overweight adolescents have a 70% chance of becoming overweight or obese adults.

What's worse is that, for educators, the health of children is intrinsically tied to their academic success.

There is one straight forward remedy gaining momentum – official acknowledgement of physical education programs by including grades received in these classes in grade point averages.

Tying grades to physical education would force parents and students to



focus on and understand healthy lifestyles.

This would serve to change the misconception of physical education from a course purely concerned with sports or games to a more valid one concerning teaching children the value and joy of an active and healthy lifestyle.

Schools need to realize it is vital to spend at least a little time on the structure responsible for moving the brain from stimuli to stimuli.

Water Woe

Gov. Brad Henry has had two terms to fix the east tunnel to the State Capitol – a tunnel that leaks copiously every time it rains.

A small thing? Not really. It's the tunnel thousands of school kids and visitors use to reach the Capitol.

Their alternative is to dodge 40 mph traffic on Lincoln.

When we originally asked the governor about this, he said it would be included in the next bond issue. That was many bond issues ago.

Why doesn't the Legislature force his hand? Because all the big shots use the west entrance. Irony of ironies, more than a million bucks was used to beautify that entrance.

During the most recent rainfall, several women took off their shoes to wade the water.

We will ask the next governor the same question. And the next governor. And the next governor.

It's A Failure

A voucher program designed to send low-income children in the District of Columbia to better-performing private schools has allowed some students to take classes in unsuitable learning environments, reports the Washington Post.

The controversial voucher program was passed by Congress in 2004 and gives low-income families the option of using \$7,500 toward private school tuition [the average applicant is a single parent of four making \$17,000 a year].

The shortcomings of the \$12.9 million DC Opportunity Scholarship program are detailed in a draft prepared by the Government Accountability Office [GAO].

In a random sample of 18 of the 58 participating private schools,

two lacked occupancy permits, four lacked permits needed for buildings that serve educational purposes and at least seven were certified as child development centers but not as private schools.

In addition, some schools said they had certain amenities such as gymnasiums or auditoriums, which the report says they did not. In one case, a school was operating in space designed for a retail store.

This was possible because schools were largely allowed to self-report that they were in compliance with city regulations.

The Washington Scholarship Fund, which operates the program, told the GAO that investigators conducted site visits at 42 schools, but the GAO could confirm only one visit!

The report also notes that the fund had high turnover and weak internal controls for handling the grant money, issues the fund attributed to a rapid three-year expansion because of high demand.

So much for vouchers – another way of ripping off taxpayers Where they have been tried, there is a severe lack of accountability.

A Sorry Law

Both Republicans and Democrats acknowledge that the No Child Left Behind law needs to be fixed or trashed.

Talk to virtually any teacher or administrator and they will tell you the test mania robs them of quality time with students.

Not the Daily Disappointment's factually-challenged editorial writer, joining hands with John McCain in defense of the sorriest unfunded mandate in the history of Congress.

Decreed the Disappointment: "...we expect a lot of noise about too much testing, teaching to the test, the need for implementation delays and asking too much of students who aren't college bound."

This is a law so bad it decrees grade level testing of special ed students, thus cunningly reducing overall test scores.

The Disappointment has yet to print the fact that the state with the most fines for not following all the stupid NCLB mandates is – you guessed it – Bush's Texas.

We would pay to have the editorial writer given an ACT or SAT or ACE test.

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SPEAKERS BUREAU: To book Founding Editor Frosty Troy for your Chamber banquet, convention or other gathering, and for rates and availability, call 405.525.5582. You also may submit your request via e-mail to ftroy@fullnet.net or by U.S. mail to P.O. Box 53371, Oklahoma City, OK 73152-3371.

To invite Editor Arnold Hamilton to address your civic club, students or political gathering, contact him directly at 405.478.8700 or at ahamilton@okobserver.net.

PUBLISHER
Beverly Hamilton
405.478.8700

EDITOR
Arnold Hamilton
ahamilton@okobserver.net
405.478.8700

FOUNDING EDITOR
Frosty Troy
ftroy@fullnet.net
405.525.5582

OUR MOTTO: To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

OUR CREDO: So then to all their chance, to all their shining golden opportunity. To all the right to love, to live, to work, to be themselves, and to become whatever thing their vision and humanity can combine to make them. This seeker, is the promise of America.

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

Observerscope

Another black eye for Oklahoma. A Robert Wood Johnson Foundation study shows 28.1% of Oklahomans are obese, eighth place nationally. For Type 2 diabetes the state ranks sixth.

Dart: To Republicans who keep peddling the lie that Oklahomans are over-taxed. Yet another Tax Foundation report is out and Oklahoma is 50th in combined state, local and federal taxes.

Of the Top 10 richest Americans, four are Wal-Mart heirs with a total wealth of \$62.3 billion. Of course they support elimination of the inheritance tax. How hard did they work for that money?

Laurel: To Kelly Osborne of Oklahoma City, one of four protesters deported by China after hanging a banner in Beijing reading "Free Tibet" in English and Chinese.

More than 90 Oklahoma nursing homes have closed due to the low reimbursement rates. We all want high-class nursing homes except when it comes time to pay for them.

Dart: To Republican legislators for importing industry shill Grace-Marie Turner of the Galen Institute to decry insurance mandates such as that for autism. If not for mandates, insurance coverage would be a joke.

When Republicans passed out tire gauges engraved "Obama's Energy Plan," mocking Barack Obama, he replied: "It's like they take pride in being ignorant." AAA applauded the Obama suggestion.

Laurel: To ex-Gov. Frank Keating for opposing the Invasion of Iraq, saying that Bush needs to figure out where he's going. Duh!

Oklahoma ranks third in the nation in the percentage of children who are hungry - 22.3%. Only Texas [24.3%] and Oregon [22.8%] have more hungry kids. A whopping 55.5% of Oklahoma school children are on free or reduced meals.

Dart: To Rep. Randy Terrill, R-Moore, saying he welcomed a probe of his failure to include \$11,000 in his bankruptcy filing. In fact, Terrill's lawyer tried to stop it. Each time Terrill opens his mouth he subtracts from the sum of human knowledge.

A majority of troops abroad contributing to presidential candidates prefer Barack Obama - six times what John McCain is drawing.

Laurel: To private investigator Gary Glover, hired by parents, for revealing inadequate care at the Norman Veterans Center, including a Vietnam vet lying in his own feces for more than an hour.

Oklahoma's two GOP U.S. senators, Jim Inhofe and Tom Coburn, voted with a Senate minority on extending tax credits for solar and wind energy projects. Stupid? Both reportedly got a D in recess.

Dart: To the dumbest voters in America - those in Louisiana, giving Bush an approval rating of 40% compared to the national rating of 30%. This after Katrina. Go figure.

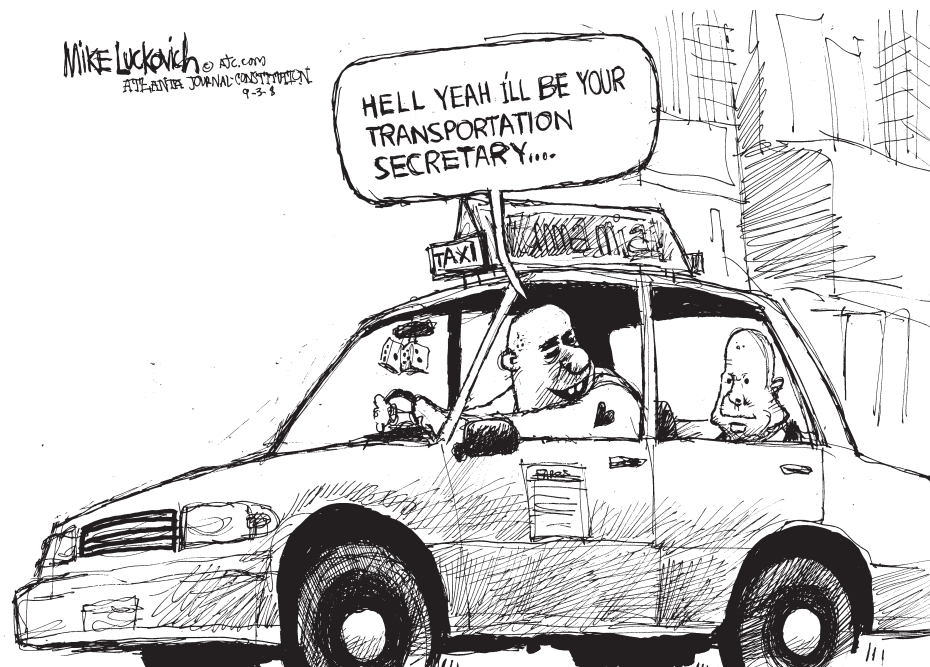
The braying media jackasses keep pointing to the low rating of Congress but guess what? Congress has a deserved 9% approval rating while the media got 7%. - U.S. News & World Report

Laurel: To Dr. Jeff Mills, promoted to replace Dr. Keith Ballard as head of the Oklahoma School Boards Association. Ballard is taking over the troubled Tulsa superintendency.

It's official: Oklahoma has more than 640,000 without health insurance, including 140,000 children. That's out of a population of 3,547,000, or 18.4% - U.S. Census Bureau

Dart: To GOP Congressman John Sullivan, running against an opponent not on the ballot. Someone who can talk slow enough needs to explain to him Nancy Pelosi is not on the Oklahoma ballot.

Mike Luckovich © 2008
FIVE-DIVISION JOURNAL CONSTRUCTION
9-3-08



Last year 46% of Oklahoma babies were born out of wedlock, yet our leaderless state government continues to push abstinence only sex education. Trust kids with the whole truth, nothing but the truth.

Laurel: To the secretaries, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, custodians, ESL instructors, technology staff, program assistants, library aides, nurses, health aides and police liaison - unsung heroes who make public education a reality every day.

The Oklahoman is the latest metro daily to announce cutbacks, looking to trim 150 positions. Senior staffers [read: highest paid] are principal targets of the buyout.

Dart: To legislative Republican opposition to Oklahoma's fantastic CareerTech system. A national study shows tech grads make considerably more money eight years out of high school compared to other high school graduates.

How low can a man sink? Ex-friend Ross Perot says he had to pay all the medical bills for Carol McCain, John's first wife, hurt in an accident. She emerged with a limp while he was busy having an affair. Family values?

Laurel: To America, giving more than half of the world's yearly \$4 billion in food aid. We can do no less, given that 850 million people worldwide suffer from chronic malnutrition. [UN Report]

Someone has finally come up with a realistic number on the gay men in America [7.5 million] and lesbians [3.5 million]. - U.S. News & World Report

Dart: To parents who "redshirt" their kids so they will be bigger for sports. Biggest problem is in private schools - with up to 20% holding kids back from kindergarten despite eligibility. - U.S. Department of Education

Only lone Democrat Rep. Dan Boren voted for improved funding for veterans - extended care facilities. Tom Cole, Mary Fallin, Frank Lucas and John Sullivan voted no. Wonder how the American Legion and VFW feel about that.

Laurel: To Tecumseh's Donald Rominger Jr. for calling attention to the fact that with 17,000 employees, OU has nearly one employee for every two students. No wonder President David Boren has frozen employment.

America spends \$6,106 per capita on health care, compared to the international median of \$4,206 - more than \$2 trillion. Canada spends \$3,165. More than 42% reported they were unable to pay medical bills in 2007.

Dart: To those icky Republicans bemoaning the governor's exaggeration on what the lottery would bring in for public education. Hey, it's \$136 million they otherwise would not have received.

Don't look now, but America is in decline on virtually every indicator measured. Latest Time/Rockefeller Foundation poll found 72% of Americans have less economic security than 10 years ago.

Laurel: To the State Health Department for exposing one of the state's dirty little secrets - we lead the nation in domestic abuse per 100,000 population. More than 13,000 women were raped last year.

Some in the media, especially CNN and Fox, keep painting Barack Obama as out of touch with working families. Yet it's John McCain who has seven homes and has yet to vote to support anybody but Bush's rich fan club.

Dart: To legislators bellyaching because 30% raises went to the small Ethics Commission staff - first they've had in 10 years, for a total of \$90,000. When was the last time Sen. Johnnie Crutchfield or Rep. Gus Blackwell got a raise? Oops!

Oklahoma requires licenses for 91 occupations or professions, with most requirements completely arbitrary. Missouri licenses only 41 while ditzy California licenses 177.

Laurel: To ex-OKC Superintendent Arthur Stellar, recognized by the Massachusetts Legislature for his leadership in technology as superintendent of the Taunton Public Schools.

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

In all the media attention given to Sarah Palin's daughter being pregnant and unmarried, NOBODY, it seems to me, is being so bold as to tell the indelicate truth – an evangelical, pro-life Mom who is ardently anti-abortion, anti-comprehensive sex ed and just as vocally pro-abstinence just doesn't "get it." Her teenage daughter, who chose to be sexually active, should have been able to prevent her pregnancy by being fully informed about the availability of contraception.

So if we want to talk about something of substance about the unmarried, pregnant 17-year-old, let's talk about how essential it is to work to prevent unintended pregnancies!

Rev. Linda Morgan Clark
Muskogee

Editor, The Observer:

I really enjoyed the annual education issue.

After reading all of the articles concerning education I paused for a moment and thought about all of the problems that plague our public schools. Problems that range from attendance, discipline, test scores, and students taking responsibility for their actions all brought me to one conclusion: That being the parents or guardians of our students need to take a close look at how these students are being raised.

I believe that taking a close look at the family structure [parenting] will be very revealing into many of the problems facing our youth and our schools in today's society. Many parents or guardians either do not care or have the time to care for their children. Schools are expected to do it all.

Where are the responsible parents that teach respect, discipline, morality, and responsibility to their children? Where are the parents that have high expectations for their children and demand that their children strive to achieve to the best of their ability?

Improve the family structure in relation to parenting and we will see a drastic improvement in education.

Mike V. Wilson
Pawnee

Editor, The Observer:

I have not yet fully developed my opinions about the candidates 100%. But I do know this: I think it's high time blacks in this country have a voice.

Through their unique personal life experiences, African-Americans often know and understand things about oppression that others of us don't, or

are not so quick to see.

They are not unfamiliar with sometimes playing the role of the underdog.

Therefore, I can see that having a bi-racial president could be to everyone's benefit.

Stephanie Hershberger
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

The following letter was sent to the Daily Disappointment on 8.13.08. I really didn't think they would print it but I always have hope. Needless to say, it didn't see the light of day.

This is in regard to the Associated Press piece on page 6A of your 8.13.08 edition. The heading reads "Iraq Contracts Costing Billions, May Not Be Cheapest Method."

For those who might be interested, I strongly recommend a documentary titled "Iraq For Sale – The War Profiteers." This is available at a very nominal fee from amazon.com. It documents contracts worth billions of dollars which were awarded as "sole-source" to contractors "friendly" to the Bush Administration [read Dick Cheney], such as Halliburton-Kellogg, Brown & Root [KBR].

Suspiciously, most of these contractors were prepared to roll into Iraq as soon as the ground had been secured. Most of these contractors are under investigation for billions of dollars in over-billing.

The dollar amounts make this criminal, but they continue to get new contracts from the Defense Department, regardless. There should be criminal indictments by the Justice Department.

Jack O'Connor
Bethany

Editor, The Observer:

While Edwin Vineyard and others make reasonable comments regarding the recent onslaught of information on wind energy, none has taken time to look at a major consumer cost of wind generation. The costs for the highway – the transmission lines – to move all that energy to eastern markets [it can't go west and Oklahoma's population is too small to soak it up] are calculated at \$3.4 billion by the Southwest Power Pool.

Private utilities have announced joint ventures to build the lines. That is the problem. The rate of return in Iowa for new speculative transmission is 13.4%. Here, the regulators are closer to 10%. That's an added \$340 million per year for consumers.

Not bad when the value of wind is considered. But there is no reason for



the highway to be a toll road.

From Nebraska to Oklahoma, the majority of transmission lines are owned by rural cooperatives or public power agencies. Those lines are built for 5-5.5% current interest. There is no profit, no tax on the profit for those entities. Transmission lines are part of national effort, so there is really no reason they should be costing \$150 million more per year just so they can be on the tax rolls.

The cost of the transmission plan to enable proper transmission in western Kansas and western Oklahoma is \$6 billion more over 40 years – and that has no value for interest that could be earned.

Building the transmission for our region to increase reliability makes sense, but it can be done for far less. There are over 4,000 miles of transmission lines in Oklahoma built on a non-profit basis.

The leaders of our state should take note and want to speed our wind energy potential by making it affordable.

Shane Woolbright
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

I wanted to take this opportunity to send an e-mail to you wonderful people for your great work in these hard times. My mother sent me a subscription and I thank her all the time.

I am a 25-year-old single father whose only desire is to teach the children that you and your followers will not let them slip quietly through the cracks.

I am on hard times, too, however. I love sports, really I do. However, currently all I want to do is teach as my daughter is at such a young age, I want to spend all the time I can with her. Since I'm not interested in coaching and have no experience, no school will hire me with my social studies certification. I've had to resort to working at Wal-Mart full-time.

The Bush economic plan [what a joke!] doesn't seem to be helping me at \$8.20 an hour. Funny that my \$20,000 degree only hangs on the wall in front of me. I'm not asking for anything, just wish it was a little easier.

As I read your articles, I imagine how my daughter will have to deal with the events of the past eight-plus years. I can't help but feel responsible for the crumbling roads, homelessness, poverty, high fuel and food prices, health care crises and dire environmental conditions.

Don't get me wrong – I voted on the

losing end in many of the elections I have participated in. But I always wonder if I could have done more.

That's why I'm really trying to help in this election. I have sent what little money I have and am trying to get the message out there.

It's good to see that you are using your voice to spread a good and fair message.

Stephen Frazier
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

I think they refer to the generation that won World War II as the "greatest generation." In elementary school, I made good money selling newspapers on the streets during the war, but my generation inherited the richest, most powerful, biggest creditor, most loved, etc., country in the world. We are the first generation ever to write ourselves a check from our grandchildren [called "stimulus checks"].

When they see how we've messed up, they will call us the a—hole generation.

Al Engel
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

We, Methodists, muffed it. What a chance we had to make a statement against the policies of President Bush.

A chance to say "No, thank you" to the following: 1. Domestic surveillance. 2. The death penalty. 3. The Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

Our church is against all three. Nevertheless, delegates to our Methodists' South Central Jurisdictional Conference rejected a petition to block construction of the proposed George W. Bush presidential library at the Dallas campus of Southern Methodist University. SMU is leasing 36 acres for the Bush library, museum and an independent policy institution.

The church has no business subsidizing a politically, ideologically oriented point of view.

A much better location for the Bush think-tank was suggested by comedian Argus Hamilton, who grew up in Ponca City and graduated from the University of Oklahoma.

"OU is a school built with oil where students love to party and every Saturday brings on a new war," Hamilton said. "Is there a better place to build the George W. Bush presidential library?"

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner
Wagoner

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Frosty's Notebook

America Speaks

One of the few polls I eagerly anticipate each year is the Phi Delta Kappa-Gallup Poll because they never cook the books

With back-to-back Democratic and Republican national conventions, the new poll results show Americans hold strong opinions on a range of issues affecting public education.

According to the poll, if people were voting "solely on the basis of a desire to strengthen the public schools," they'd choose Barack Obama over John McCain by a margin of 46% to 29%.

McCain voted for the No Child Left Behind law and says it should not be touched, despite many Republican members of Congress saying it should be rewritten.

Four years ago, in a similar poll, President Bush and Democratic nominee John Kerry each polled 41%.

Here are other findings:

- People trust Obama to do a better job on closing the achievement gap [59%, compared with 18% for McCain] and on funding education [48% to 28%].

- People are dissatisfied with the No Child Left Behind Act, with 42% wanting to change the law significantly and another 25% saying it should be allowed to expire.

- Thirty-seven percent of the people think that using federal taxes would be "the best way" to finance public schools [compared with 35% for state taxes and 20% for local taxes].

- When asked to grade the public schools in their own communities, 46% say they would give them an A or a B – but only 22% would give those grades to schools in the nation as a whole.

- Half the people favor relying on national educational standards to measure student achievement, while a slightly smaller group [46%] prefers state standards.

- A plurality of Americans [37%] think there is "too much emphasis on achievement testing" in their local schools, while 34% regard the emphasis on testing to



be "about right" and 23% think there's "not enough" emphasis.

- Seventy-three percent of the people want teachers to pass a national competency test before being licensed, in addition to a state test, in the subjects they will teach.

Most politicians constantly prattle about voting their constituents' views but that often doesn't happen. Case in point: Legislative leaders of both parties endorsed getting Oklahoma teachers to the regional average.

Instead, taxes were cut a whopping \$720 million – leaving the state in a huge financial hole, failing by \$114 million to balance the fiscal year budget that ended June 30.

Observer to politicians: Read our lips – the shortest route to industrial development is quality education. Quit pandering.

Help For Hurting Youth

Lost opportunities in education result in the tragedy of the Virginia Tech murders. We have yet to learn about the chances to help the shooter in his school experiences long before he got to Virginia Tech.

That this young man could have been passed along, with the behavior he exhibited, from grade to grade in his earlier school years is incredible.

Yet, it can and does happen. In a new study on high school students and their reasons for dropping out, the traditional reasons about family issues and jobs came up if students said they had the feeling that no adults in the school cared about them.

Oklahoma higher education has come up with a plan to keep students safe. It has drawn national attention, resulting in a conference at the University of Central Oklahoma.

Sen. Debbé Leftwich, D-OKC, has armed Oklahoma with a detailed inside look at gangs in Oklahoma – another violence threat to public schools. Their number is 10,000 and growing.

The sense of not being cared about is devastating to kids, and it should not have to happen. Caring is not only about the so-called harder things such as academic standards and testing accountability.

It also is about student perceptions and feelings. And these are not soft, touchy things.

These are the hard underpinnings of why schools are identified by many as the biggest disappointments in their lives.

We have become so busy with the mechanisms of schooling, we forget the hu-

Black Males

A new survey by Schott Foundation for Public Education details the trouble facing young black males. Graduation rates are below 50% nationally.

There are also excess referrals to special education programs, and disproportionately high rates of suspension and expulsion.

The report, which provides details for 25 states and the District of Columbia, highlights the comparatively poor record of large urban school systems representing 40% of the black males in public schools. Black male students tend to fare better in states and areas with lower black populations, where schools are often more diverse and have more resources, the report says.

Nationally, the graduation rate for black males trails the rate for white males by 28 percentage points.

Barack Obama has addressed this tragedy, calling on the black community to step up and reclaim the family. He was then trashed by several black "leaders" who accused him of disrespecting black families!

The schools only have students for six hours a day. How they spend the rest of their time is a family matter.

Another black personality who addressed the problem was Bill Cosby, subsequently heavily criticized for chastising "young black dudes" bragging about trophy pregnancies.

Not much is going to improve in the lives of young black males until the family is the wellspring of black values.

manity that is basic to good education.

To their credit, a number of fellow students and teachers tried to reach the Virginia Tech senior, but their efforts were not sustained, coordinated and supported.

The killer's video showed very clearly that he, mistaken or not, never felt cared about as a person. Schools are really large families, with function and dysfunction.

Teachers, now stretched to their limits, have to be given the time and resources to reclaim lost opportunities for caring – especially the school counselors.

Why is it that in the movement to reform education we keep forgetting that students' hearts, not just their minds, make all the difference in what they learn and how they perform?

Teachers need to be given what it takes to reach children as individuals, and teachers need to know that caring is part and parcel of the work of education and that the public understands and supports this fully.

One of the cruel blows of the No Child Left Behind law is how it has squeezed out counselors, not to mention magnets that hold many in school – music, art, drama.

It should be obvious that a significant number of parents are not sending disciplined students to school, nor is homework being done.

Various reasons are given for this phenomenon – single parenting, alcoholism and drug addiction, domestic violence, etc.

The loser is the student left behind.

Bad News For Kids

America's leaders have a message for kids going back to school: walk farther to the bus stop, pay more for lunch, study from old textbooks, even wear last year's clothes.

Field trips? Forget about it. Schools are confronted by mounting costs for bus service, heating and air conditioning, and classroom supplies.

To help reduce expenses, a district in rural Minnesota will forgo classes every Monday and tack on an extra 10 minutes to classes on other days.

Nationwide, at least 14 other districts are following suit, according to a survey by the American Association of School Administrators.

In Oklahoma, school bus expenses are being cut by cutting service. Some districts are pleading with patrons to help finance the school needs.

In a report with clear implications for education spending in the coming year, the National Conference of State Legislatures says the decline in states' finances has proven to be worse than expected.

Based on information from legislative fiscal directors through early July, the organization says more states have indicated gaps for the 2009 fiscal year than for 2008, with the cumulative difference between anticipated revenues and expenditures expected to triple – to more than \$40 billion.

Oklahoma is lucky to have its budget financed in large measure by oil and gas revenues, yet the state is in financial difficulty due to poor legislative choices under Republican control of the Legislature.

Cargill's Chicanery Leads To Reprimand

So former House Speaker Lance Cargill won't be prosecuted criminally by the attorney general for his scheme to skirt state campaign finance laws.

Cargill won the battle: His chicanery helped Republicans take over the state House in 2004 for the first time in 86 years.

But he lost the war: His political career is over – and his reputation is in tatters.

The state Ethics Commission doused what little was left of Cargill's once-unbridled ambition by making public the results of a year-long investigation that concluded the Harrah Republican purposely broke five separate rules.

"There was a deliberate intent to circumvent the law," the Ethics Commission ruled.

CARGILL'S SCHEME DETAILED

In a scathing 14-page reprimand, the ethics panel detailed a scheme involving Cargill and two GOP political committees – the Republican State House Committee and the Oklahoma County Republican Committee – to funnel unlawful, excessive amounts of money into key House races aimed at helping create a GOP majority.

What Cargill and Co. did was divert contributions from other state legislators' campaign accounts – and earmarked specifically to the state Republican Party's Victory Fund – into a county committee that they controlled.

To make its case, the Ethics Commission relied on testimony of four prominent Republicans whose contributions were diverted without their knowledge: Former House Speaker Todd Hiatt of Kellyville; former Rep. Ray Vaughn, now an Oklahoma County Commissioner; and current state Reps. Susan Winchester of Chickasha and John Trebilcock of Tulsa.

At least one of the contribution checks was altered in an apparent attempt to disguise the shenanigans: Former Tulsa Rep. Mark Liotta's \$5,000 check – made payable to the Oklahoma State Republican Party – even noted in the "memo" line that it was a "Victory Fund Campaign Contribution." Someone, however, crossed out "State" and wrote in "County."

'AGAINST THEIR CONSCIENCE'

"Simply put, this is a case of the redirection of campaign contributions intended for one party committee, to another, contrary to the intent of the donors," the Ethics Commission concluded.

"It resulted in the contributors being made to support candidates against their conscience and in violation of several provisions of the Ethics Rules, which are designed to safeguard campaigns in Oklahoma."

Despite the damning evidence, Cargill had the temerity to issue a prepared

statement that sought to downplay the scheme as a simple misunderstanding.

"I certainly worked to promote the election of Republicans," he said, "but I never intended to violate any rules of the Ethics Commission."

Cargill did not seek re-election this year.

'ENRON-STYLE SHELL GAME'

House Democratic Caucus Chair Chuck Hoskin of Vinita said the panel uncovered "deception" and a "blatant indifference to the laws meant to protect the integrity of our election process."

"From missing documents to tampered reports this scheme by Cargill and others looks like an Enron-style shell game ... These wrong-doers must be held accountable."

However, Attorney General Drew Edmondson said the commission's findings did not provide sufficient evidence to warrant a criminal prosecution.

Hoskin said the investigation "underscores the very real need to fully fund the Ethics Commission. Lawbreakers will always argue for fewer cops, but our democracy depends on robust enforcement of ethics laws."

And he said he also hopes the investigation and reprimand will help build momentum for comprehensive campaign finance reform.

MAINSTREAM MEDIA YAWNED

The state's two major newspapers buried the reprimand inside. At least the Tulsa World devoted two stories to Cargill's scheming. The Daily Disappointment gave it a scant 10 paragraphs. Ten!

Imagine if the state's ethics watchdogs had slammed former state Sen. Gene Stipe or former state Rep. Mike Mass, both Democrats. Second coming headlines, day after day, would have followed.

You still doubt the powers that be at the state's largest daily have a political agenda that seeps into the news columns?

HOUSE REPUBLICANS STRANGELY SILENT

The silence – from media and Republicans alike – didn't escape Rep. Mike Brown.

"Where are the statements of outrage from those within the Republican caucus who purportedly espouse transparency and honesty in government?" asked the Tahlequah Democrat.

"Where are the in-depth news articles uncovering the beneficiaries of these practices, or reporting as to the timeline of events wherein Republicans realized a historic takeover of the state House?"

"Are we apathetic to the point that such disregard for ethical conduct of elected leaders barely merits attention? The silence is deafening."

Math Gains Noted But History Lagging

Oklahoma students have made across-the-board gains in math on state exams and gains or level performance on state reading exams. The only downer was in U.S. History.

End-of-instruction [EOI] exams at the secondary level should sound an alarm in many school districts, State Superintendent Sandy Garrett said during the State Board of Education meeting.

Students annually are tested each spring in Grades 3-8 on reading and mathematics and the exams are used for federal accountability purposes.

State law requires students also take state science, social studies and writing exams at Grade 5 and 8 and, at Grade 7, a state geography exam.

At the secondary level, students following completion of courses in Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, English II, English III, Biology and U.S. History take state End-of-Instruction exams.

PLEASED WITH MATH GAINS

"We're particularly pleased with improvement of the math scores," Garrett said. "To make gains at every elementary grade level, as well as Algebra I, indicates schools' efforts to boost math achievement are making a difference."

"Failure to pass EOI exams could prohibit students in just a few years from earning a diploma. Schools should be closely analyzing their students' results and sounding a community-wide alarm if they're falling short."

MANDATED BY STATE LAW

The EOI exams are mandated by the state's Achieving Classroom Excellence [ACE] law, which requires all students beginning with the Class of 2012 to pass at least four of the seven ACE exams to earn a high school diploma, with Algebra I and English II required of all students.

The ACE Geometry, Algebra II and English III exams were new to the state's testing program during the 2007-2008 school year.

By law, all ACE EOI tests are on a multi-year phase-in, meaning the proficiency benchmark will be raised over time.

ACE Biology I results for the 2007-2008 school year indicate 54% of students tested are proficient, compared to 5% in 2007.

U.S. HISTORY SCORES TOO LOW

ACE U.S. History was the only exam on which fewer students scored proficient than in the previous year. In 2007, 66% of students scored proficient, compared to 63% this year.

The 2007-2008 school year was the first year for ACE exams in Geometry, Algebra II and English III. Respectively, the proficiency rates on those exams were 68%, 53% and 75%.

"While we're seeing a significant majority of students scoring proficient on the ACE Algebra I exam, that percentage declines as they take higher-level math courses and take the other ACE math exams," Garrett said.

"Our culture still seems to not value mathematics, as well as science, yet these

Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests (All Students)

Additional* State Test Results, 2008

Grade Level	Subject Area	Percentage Proficient	Change vs. 2007
5	Science	85%	↑ 3%
8	Science	87%	↑ 4%
7	Geography	80%	↔ 0%
5	Soc. Studies	68%	↑ 3%
8	U.S. History	66%	↑ 1%
EOI	U.S. History	63%	↓ 3%
5	Writing	80%	↔ 0%
8	Writing	90%	↑ 4%
EOI	Biology I	54%	↑ 4%

*Scores for tests required by Oklahoma state law but not part of the No Child Left Behind federal accountability system, which uses only reading and math tests.

SOURCE: Office of Accountability and Assessment, State Department of Education, August 28, 2008

skills are incredibly important to students' futures. That is why the work schools are doing to inject more rigor at the elementary and middle grades is so vitally important."

Not mentioned at the meeting was the fact that half of Oklahoma students come to school hungry, and one in five are from families in extreme poverty. That heavily impacts learning.

Humorist Still Uniting Oklahoma Democrats

Democratic Party delegates pledged to Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama came together to form the Will Rogers Caucus during the recent Denver convention.

The caucus unveiled the "Will Rogers Platform for America." Oklahoma delegates Joe Carter and Tim Mauldin co-chaired the group. Carter was a Clinton delegate and Mauldin an Obama delegate.

Floor leaders for the Will Rogers' Caucus included Oklahoma delegates Dr. Laura Boyd and Johanna Best. Boyd was a Clinton delegate, Best an Obama delegate.

Boyd and Best were responsible for rounding up support and planning spontaneous demonstrations at the convention.

OKLAHOMA'S BEST KNOWN DEMOCRAT

"Will Rogers is America's premier political humorist, commentator and convention analyst. He is one of Oklahoma's best-known Democrats, though, of course, he indicated that he belonged to no organized political party," said Dr. Carter, a Norman veterinarian.

"We've formed the Will Rogers Caucus to maintain the great tradition of Will Rogers' wise and witty take on politics and government," Dr. Mauldin added.

Mauldin teaches government and history at Oklahoma City University and is a life member of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Rogers was born in the Cherokee Nation near Oologah in 1879. He authored six books and starred in 71 movies in the 1920s and 1930s.

RADIO SHOW AND SYNDICATED COLUMN

He was a popular radio broadcaster and had more than 4,000 syndicated newspaper columns published.

This year marks the 80th anniversary of Rogers' quest for the presidency. In 1928, Life magazine launched an editorial campaign supporting Rogers for president.

He was courted by both Republicans and Democrats. In 1932, Will Rogers was nominated for president at the Democratic National Convention.

On the second ballot, Oklahoma Gov. Alfalfa Bill Murray ended his own race for the presidency and threw his support to Rogers - "that sterling citizen, that wise philosopher, that great heart, that favorite son of Oklahoma."

WILL LINES UP BEHIND FDR

Franklin Roosevelt went on to win the Democratic nomination on the fourth convention ballot and Rogers enthusiastically promoted FDR's presidential campaign.

"Will commanded the trust and admiration of Americans far beyond any 20th Century celebrity," Mauldin said.

"There is good reason to believe that Rogers was decisive in helping a divided political party during the Great Depression to defeat an incumbent president."

With Will's support, America elected its first physically handicapped presi-



dent.

Rogers' 1932 presidential campaign would be his last. He died in a small airplane crash near Point Barrow, AK, in 1935.

HIS HUMOR WAS 'INFECTIOUS'

Remembering Will Rogers, President Roosevelt said, "There was something infectious about his humor. His appeal went straight to the heart of the nation."

Above all things, in a time grown too solemn and somber he brought his countrymen back to a sense of proportion.

His humor and his comments were always kind. His was no biting sarcasm that hurt the highest or the lowest of his fellow citizens.

"We know Oklahoma's delegation is united and shares a common love for Will," Carter said.

Carter's father, Joseph H. Carter, is the author of several books on Will Rogers and a past reporter for United Press International.

"The platform of the Will Rogers' Caucus seeks to inform the public and our fellow delegates of Will's timeless ideas," Mauldin said.

A Sampling Of Will's Wit And Wisdom

"I belong to no organized political party. I'm a Democrat!"

"Their greatest trait to recommend the Democrats is optimism and humor ... You've got to be an optimist to be a Democrat, and you've got to be a humorist to stay one. Democrats never agree on anything. That's why they're Democrats. If they agreed with each other they would be Republicans."

"You know it takes nerve to be a Democrat ... but it takes money to be a Republican. A Republican moves slowly. They are what we call conservatives."

"A conservative is a man who has plenty of money and doesn't see any reason why he shouldn't always have plenty of money. A Democrat is a fellow who never had any, but doesn't see any reason why he shouldn't have some."

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

"Politics has got so expensive that it takes lots of money to even get beat nowadays."

"The only way to solve the traffic problem of this country is to pass a law that only paid-for cars are allowed to use the highways."

"Always drink upstream from the herd."

"I don't gamble; take all your savings and buy some good stock and hold it till it goes up, then sell it. If it don't go up, don't buy it."

"There ain't any finer folks living than a Republican that votes the Democratic ticket."

"The whole trouble with the Republicans is their fear of an increase in income tax, especially on higher incomes."

INTERMINABLE CONVENTION SPEAKERS

"Nobody wants his cause near as bad as he wants to talk about his cause."

"Make every speaker as soon as he tells you all he knows, sit down. That will shorten our speeches so much you will be out by lunch time."

"My ancestors didn't come over on the Mayflower but they met the boat when it landed."

"We would never understand why Mexico wasn't crazy about us. We have always had their goodwill, oil, coffee and minerals at heart."

"Remember, write your congressman. Even if he can't read, write him."

"It's awful hard to get people interested in corruption unless they can get some of it."

BAILING OUT BIG BUSINESS

"Big Business don't go broke any more. The minute it looks bad for them, they combine with something else and issue more stock."

"Every guy looks in his pocket and then votes."

"I have a scheme for stopping war. It's this: No nation is allowed to enter a war till they have paid for the last one."

"We will never have true civilization until we have learned to recognize the rights of others."

"Every man's religion is good. There is none of it bad. We are all trying to arrive at the same place according to our own conscience and teachings."

"There is nothing that keeps poor people poor as much as paying doctor bills."

Safeguarding Freedom: Is There an Assault on the Independent Judiciary?

Constitution Day is Wed., Sept. 17. This FREE event will be at the Bell Courtroom in the OU Law Center.



Forum begins at 7 p.m. with a FREE reception for the public in the Sneed Lounge at 6 p.m.

Distinguished speakers include Judge Lee West, Andrew Tevington, and Arnold Hamilton. Don't miss it!

Funding sponsors: League of Women Voters Education Fund and the Program on Constitutional and Legal Policy of the Open Society Institute, the University of Oklahoma Honors College, American Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma and Common Cause Oklahoma.

It's Coburn Again! He's Hunger Expert

By Bill Bryant

Help me to understand Sen. Tom Coburn. What does he have against the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO]? I mean, really.

First, let me give you some background information about the FAO. Then, let me show you a letter written by Coburn. In it, Coburn calls for withholding U.S. contributions to the FAO.

Finally, please, help me to understand what makes Coburn tick. Tell me what you think.

According to Wikipedia, the Food and Agriculture Organization "is a specialized agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger.

"Serving both developed and developing countries, FAO acts as a neutral forum where all nations meet as equals to negotiate agreements and debate policy.

"FAO is also a source of knowledge and information, and helps developing countries and countries in transition modernize and improve agriculture, forestry and fisheries practices, ensuring good nutrition and food security for all."

IT HAS A DIFFERENT MISSION

Obviously, the FAO has a different mission from the World Food Program. WFP exists to provide emergency food help to people suffering from extreme poverty and natural disasters.

FAO, on the other hand, has an emphasis on agricultural research and food security policy for everyone. Both are important, necessary international organizations.

As an international organization, FAO is governed by representatives of 191 member nations. Earlier this month, the FAO convened a food security summit in Rome.

THE CONFERENCE WAS INTENSE

As reported by the New York Times, the conference featured "three days of news conferences and nearly nonstop speeches that included everyone from Nicolas Sarkozy, the president of France, to Denzil L. Douglas, the prime minister of St. Kitts and Nevis."

As with any international conference, the food security summit received mixed reviews. Some observers noted that the conference ended without making any strong statements about biofuels or the development of genetically modified crops – both contentious issues.

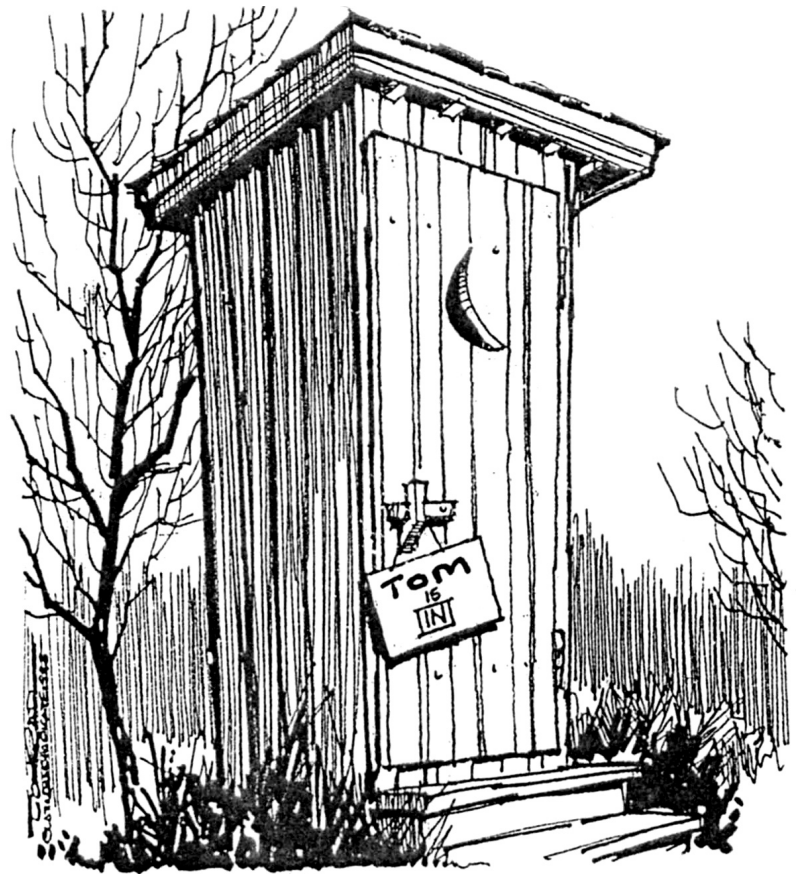
SEVERAL SUCCESSES CITED

On the other hand, the conference could point to several successes. For example, the conference concluded with the adoption of a declaration calling on the international community to increase assistance for developing countries, in particular the least developed countries and those that are most negatively affected by high food prices.

Delegates to the summit announced their increased commitment to the fight against hunger and for agricultural development. Financing announced during the Summit, attended by 181 nations and more than 40 heads of state and government, included:

WHAT THE DONORS PLEDGED

African Development Bank: \$1 billion
France: \$1.5 billion [over five years]
Japan: \$150 million
IFAD: \$200 million
Islamic Development Bank: \$1.5 billion [over 5 years]
Kuwait: \$100 million
Netherlands: \$75 million
New Zealand: \$7.5 million
Spain: \$773 million [over 4 years]
UN Central Emergency Response Fund: \$100 million
United Kingdom: \$590 million
USA: \$5 billion [2008/09]



Venezuela: \$100 million
World Bank: \$1.2 billion

GATES FOUNDATION CONTRIBUTES

Almost simultaneous with the conference, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation awarded a \$5.6 million grant to the FAO. The grant is designed to improve the quality of statistical information from 17 countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

More than 5,000 people attended the conference, including representatives of non-governmental organizations and the news media.

Lennart Bage, president of the UN International Fund for Agricultural Development, commented: "I think there is momentum that is unique over the last 25 years. When did you have heads of state coming to talk about seeds and fertilizer?"

Considering the obvious importance of the conference [and the substantial successes achieved during the summit], it is hard to imagine that anyone would protest against U.S. participation in the conference. But, someone did.

YOU KNOW WHO

You know who: Our state's junior senator, Tom Coburn. Coburn's Letter: "Dear Secretary Rice, I write to express concerns I have with the use of U.S. taxpayers' dollars at this week's United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization's [FAO] summit on world hunger."

In his letter to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Coburn elaborates on his concerns:

- He calls for the removal of FAO executive director Jacques Diouf.
- Asks Rice to "withhold [U.S.] contributions" to the FAO; and
- Suggests that spending on the summit was "wasteful and unnecessary."

NOW HE'S AN EXPERT ON FEEDING THE POOR

He adds: "I'm skeptical that federally funded conferences are an effective way to feed the world's hungry. In fact, it is the world's bureaucrats who are fed at conferences, not the poor or hungry."

Why does Coburn think the FAO director should be fired? Because Director General Diouf dared to invite the heads of state of Iran and Zimbabwe to speak at the conference.

Never mind that both Iran and Zimbabwe are member nations of the FAO.

Never mind that there were 55 other speakers on the day when Iran and Zimbabwe appeared on the agenda.

Coburn thinks Diouf exercised poor judgment in the choice of summit speakers, making a "mockery" of the conference.

Never mind that the FAO "acts as a neutral forum where all nations meet as equals to negotiate agreements and debate policy."

– The author is a member of Concerned Citizens of Stillwater

Poverty Rate Falls As Income Goes Up

New data released by the U.S. Census Bureau reveal that Oklahoma's on-going economic expansion led to a decline in the population living in poverty and a significant increase in median household income in 2007.

Still, Oklahoma's poverty rate remains well above the national average and significantly higher than the rate in 2000 at the peak of the last economic cycle. The poverty level in 2007 was \$20,650 for a family of four.

Matt Guillory, executive director of Oklahoma Policy Institute, stated that, "These numbers remind us that while the rising tide of energy prices has been lifting the Oklahoma economy, many families have not managed to make it onto the boat of prosperity."

"Unfortunately, it is these low-income families that are facing the hardest times managing recent steep rises in the price of food, gas and utilities."

Here are facts from the 2007 American Community Survey on poverty in Oklahoma. Among the key findings:

Nearly one in six Oklahomans [15.9%] lived in poverty in 2007. This is a 1.1 percentage point decrease from 2006 but well above the poverty rate of 2000

[13.8%]. Oklahoma's poverty rate is 2.6 percentage points higher than the national average.

The poverty rate for children [22.1] is higher than that of working-age adults [14.5%] or seniors [10.1%]

A majority [62.8%] of Oklahomans in poverty is white. Within Oklahoma, Hispanics [29%], African-Americans [27.4%], and Native Americans [23.6%] have the highest rates of poverty.

Oh, Deer!

We live in a semi-rural area. We recently had a new neighbor call the local township administrative office to request the removal of the Deer Crossing sign on our road.

The reason? Too many deer were being hit by cars, and he didn't want them to cross there anymore.

T. Boone Crusade Is A Ponzi Scheme

By Scott Thill

"If you are going out of business, you don't go down with the ship, you get another ship. For us, it's natural gas." – T. Boone Pickens, *Becoming a Billionaire*

You can't always get what you want, the Rolling Stones counseled. But if you try sometimes, you get what you need.

Factor billions of dollars, questionable loyalties and a privatization rap sheet invested more in profit than people into the equation, and you usually can get both what you want and what you need.

In the case of hyperloaded oil tycoon T. Boone Pickens, that means having your cake on climate crisis, fossil fuel addiction, eminent domain, water privatization and corporate earnings – and eating it, too.

WELL-PUBLICIZED CAMPAIGN

In July, the oil magnate unveiled a well-publicized campaign, the Pickens Plan, which begins with an obvious premise: "America is addicted to foreign oil."

Pickens' proposal to kick the habit is straightforward and simple: "Building new wind generation facilities and better utilizing our natural gas resources can replace more than one-third of our foreign oil imports in 10 years."

Sounds fair enough, especially given that Pickens and climate-crisis herald Al Gore have melded minds on the issue. But not hard enough, which is where the cracks in the Pickens Plan begin.

"Gore asked if we could we join together and do something," Pickens explained to Bloomberg News. "I told him no, because global warming is on page two for me. Page one is foreign oil."

PICKENS HELPED DERAILED KERRY

That page seems to be recently written. As previously noted on either side of the red-blue divide, Pickens has funneled \$3 million into 527s Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, helping derail John Kerry's bid for the White House in 2004.

He simultaneously committed hundreds of thousands on top of that to the election and inauguration of both Bush administrations, both spearheaded by fossil fools whose kinship with foreign oil producers not only launched an invasion into an oil-rich but nevertheless sovereign nation, but also nearly tripled the price of oil in seven years and handed campaign contributors like Exxon the most bloated earnings in corporate history.

DEATHBED CONVERSION?

Sure, Pickens eventually decided to stop funding political campaigns, but that deathbed conversion happened the same July that the Pickens Plan ramped up its nearly \$60 million media blitz.

It gets worse. Pickens is currently the head of BP Capital Management, a secre-

King Coal's Future Depends On Science

Eastern Oklahoma sits on a motherlode of coal but its high sulphur content makes it unusable. If science could figure out how to get it to market, it would light up the state for years.

Coal-fired plants provide over 50% of the electricity in the United States and over 83% of the global-warming pollution from the power sector.

For years Oklahoma-mined coal was used in the homes and businesses of Oklahoma. Today a major Oklahoma utility imports coal to a Muskogee plant, turning it into electricity.

A large coal-fired power plant emits the carbon dioxide equivalent of one million SUVs, and the United States has nearly 500 plants.

DECISION IS MONUMENTAL

Because power plants are a generational investment – the average age of U.S. coal plants is 40 years – the decision to construct new plants in a world at risk from global warming is monumental.

NASA climatologist James Hansen argues that a "firm choice to halt building of coal-fired power plants that do not capture CO2 would be a major step toward solution of the global warming problem."

In addition to the pressing issue of climate change – exacerbated by the surge in coal-fired electricity in the developing world – "the conventional coal fuel cycle is among the most destructive activities on earth."

COAL CONTAMINATION EXTREME

Coal is contaminated with toxic elements such as mercury, arsenic, and lead that end up in the air, water, and soil. The costs of coal are disproportionately borne by the poor communities where it is mined and by children exposed to its pollution.

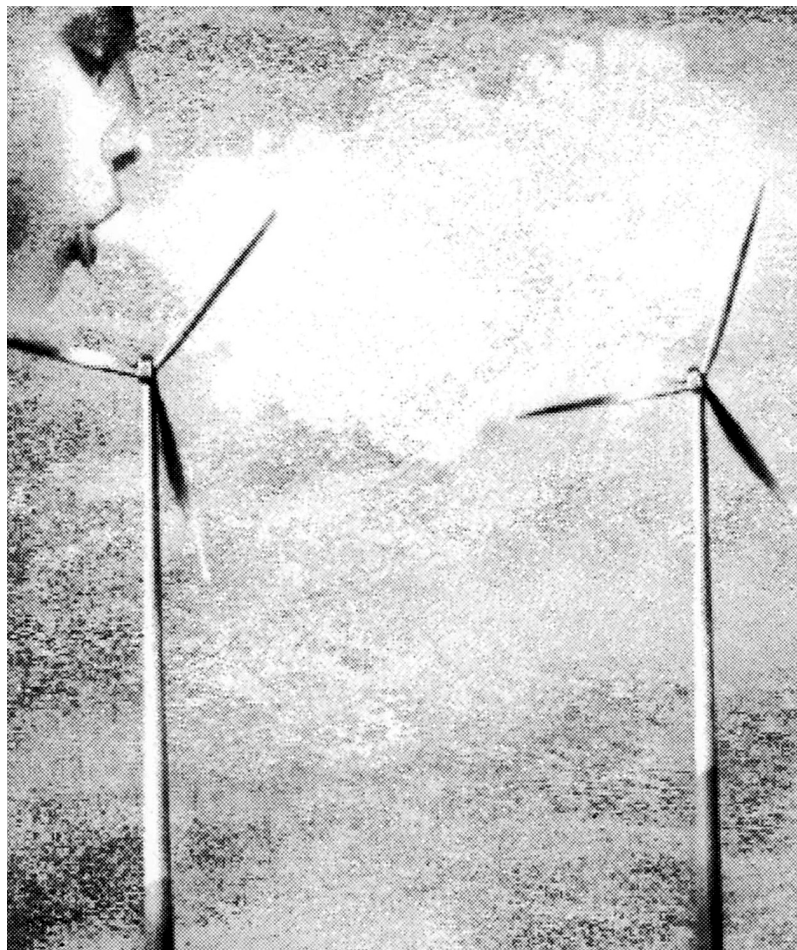
In the United States, power companies have pushed to build more than 150 new coal-fired power plants. European countries are slated to build about 50 coal-fired plants over the next five years. China is completing two new coal plants per week.

COAL ECONOMICS ATTRACTIVE

Since the rise of the Industrial Age, economic growth has been tied to increased electricity demand. Although the price of coal, like all other commodities, is rising to record levels, its economics are attractive to companies wary of the even greater price jump in natural gas, its primary fossil fuel competitor.

Part of this drive to build new plants in the United States is driven not by demand, but by political calculus. The United States is poised to join Europe in placing mandatory limits on greenhouse emissions.

Electric utilities hope they can successfully lobby for existing plants to be



tive hedge fund [aren't they all?] that has extensive connections to the magnate's hated "foreign oil" interests.

The most glaring example from its investment portfolio is Halliburton, which was once run by U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney, is currently headquartered not in America but Dubai, and whose main business segments and subsidiaries involve oil exploration, construction, production and refining.

RAMPANT FRAUD AND CORRUPTION

That's not mentioning its resume on rampant fraud and corruption, especially in Iraq but also elsewhere, which has so far cost American taxpayers billions.

Halliburton isn't the only BP Cap holding that stinks. Pickens is also heavily invested in Schlumberger, the world's largest oil services corporation; nuclear and conventional energy powerhouse Shaw Group; the embattled ex-Halliburton subsidiary Kellogg Brown and Root and so on.

For a very rich man who decries the influence foreign oil has on American life, Pickens sure hasn't put his money where his mouth is. He's put his money

See PONZI Page 19

grandfathered into a new system of regulation, as they did in 1970 with the Clean Air Act, shifting the significant financial and environmental risk from the companies to everyone else.

Public opposition to coal plants due to their mercury, acid rain, smog, and carbon emissions has helped kill 60 coal plants in the past several years, including one proposed in Oklahoma.

Americans for Balanced Energy Choices [ABEC], the \$40 million coal-industry public relations effort, is no more. In recent months, youth, environment, and health activists exposed ABEC's efforts to attack green-collar jobs and propagandize coal.

ABEC and the Center for Energy and Economic Development [CEED], the trade organization that started the front group, have now become the American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity [ACCCE].

CEO CALLS FOR GLOBAL WARMING ACTION

Jim Rogers, president and CEO of coal-heavy Duke Energy, an ACCCE member, has become one of the most prominent industry voices calling for the regulation of global warming pollution from power plants and other sectors of the economy.

In making his case for action, Rogers includes a very important caveat: regulate greenhouse gases, but regulate in a way that ensures that the American taxpayer foots the bill for cleaning up the company's aging and high-emitting power plants.

The European Union has signaled it is willing to invest government dollars into finding a possible future for coal, pushing forward proposals for a dozen demonstration projects of coal plants with carbon capture and sequestration [CCS]. CCS is still unproven but may be the key enabling technology for a future in which we can continue to use our vast coal resources and also protect the climate.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY RIGHT CHOICE

If not hundreds of new coal plants a year, then what? Energy efficiency is the most powerful choice.

A new study by the electric utilities found that "energy efficiency improvements in the U.S. electric power sector could reduce the need for new electric generation by an additional 7% to 11% more than currently projected over the next two decades.

McKinsey and Co. found that improving energy efficiency could offset some 85% of the projected incremental demand for electricity in 2030, largely negating the need for incremental coal-fired plants.

Success Despite Tragedy

Real Joe Biden Happy At Home

By Noam N. Levey

The personification of the white-haired Washington insider, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Joseph R. Biden Jr. has spent more than half his life in the Senate, seemingly so in love with his own voice that his colleagues must fight to be heard at his hearings.

A hundred miles away from Capitol Hill, however, is another Joe Biden, more a character in Mister Rogers' neighborhood than a globe-trotting statesman or a pontificating fixture on the Sunday talk shows.

He is a putterer who plants bushes in his backyard and designed his own house, including space for his elderly parents.

He's a man quick to find a doctor for someone's sick grandmother or hold a fundraiser for a local firefighter battling cancer.

SON OF A CAR SALESMAN

This Joe Biden is the son of a car salesman who lost nearly all his money and moved his family from Scranton, PA, to a hard scrabble neighborhood in Delaware.

As a boy, Biden struggled to overcome a bad stutter and the nickname Joe Impedimenta.

As a 29-year-old freshman senator-elect, he lost his wife and infant daughter in a car crash that also severely injured his two young sons.

The tragedy almost caused Biden to abandon his political career. For years afterward, he took the train home almost every night from Washington to Delaware to be with the boys as they grew up.

THE REAL JOE BIDEN

"I tell people that you get to know Joe Biden the closer you get to Wilmington, DE. And when you see him with his family, then you know the man," said John Marttila, a longtime friend and advisor who worked on Biden's first Senate campaign in 1972.

Biden's family was at the core of his first run for office. His sister, Valerie, ran that campaign, as she has each one since. His brother headed the fundraising operation. His mother and father sat in on most of the strategy meetings.

HE SWEEPED OUT A POPULAR INCUMBENT

Biden was challenging a popular incumbent Republican who maintained a



Veep Choice Often Hurts More Than It Helps

By Danny M. Adkison

"My country has in its wisdom contrived for me the most insignificant office that even the invention of man contrived or his imagination conceived."

Thus did the man who first held the office – John Adams – describe the vice presidency.

Adams went on, "I am nothing ..." But even nothing is something, right? Where is Jerry Seinfeld when we need him?

Adams ended the thought with, "but I may be everything!" This sums up the paradox of the vice presidency. The vice presidency is a "do nothing" office, yet the vice president is a heartbeat away from the presidency.

What explains the near media obsession with the presidential nominee's selection as a running mate?

MAJOR CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

The explanation is a constitutional modification that occurred between Adams' statement and the fifth presidential election. Namely, the Twelfth Amendment, ratified in 1804.

That Amendment changed the way vice presidents are selected. Prior to the amendment no one ran for vice president [which explains why there are no qualifications for being vice president in the original Constitution].

Everyone ran for the presidency and whoever came in second was named vice president.

When Jefferson and Burr tied in electoral votes, with the election decided by the House of Representatives [the first of only two times this has occurred], the Twelfth Amendment was proposed so that electors would have to specify which of their two votes was for president and which was for vice president.

Thus was a minor problem solved, and a huge problem created.

A CHANGE FOR THE WORSE

The huge problem was that the seemingly innocuous changes the amendment intended versus the unintended modification in the office of the vice presidency for the worse.

Following the amendment, presidential elections now officially had presidential "tickets." And as every reporter in America that covered the recent Biden selection knows, tickets must be balanced.

Barack Obama is 47, Biden is 65. Obama is black and perceived as elitist, Biden is white and is associated with fighting for the concerns of the blue-collar voter, the working class.

Obama is Protestant, Biden is Catholic. Obama is from the Midwest, Biden

huge lead in the polls in a year that would sweep Richard Nixon to his second term in the White House.

The campaign had so little money to advertise, Marttila recalled, that Biden's army of volunteers had to get mailers to voters by walking neighborhoods around the state. But Biden eked out a victory.

A month later, as he was in Washington interviewing candidates for his office staff, the fatal accident occurred. His wife and three children had been out shopping for a Christmas tree.

HE DIDN'T WANT TO TAKE HIS SENATE SEAT

Biden didn't want to take his Senate seat, said Ted Kaufman, another longtime friend who worked on that campaign and would serve as Biden's chief of staff for 22 years.

Waiting for his sons to recover in the hospital, Biden wrote in his 2007 memoir, "Promises to Keep," he would take long walks around the seedy neighborhoods nearby.

"I liked to go at night when I thought there was a better chance of finding a fight," Biden wrote. "I was always looking for a fight. I had not known I was capable of such rage."

HE WAS DOUBTING HIS CATHOLIC FAITH

The loss also shook his deep Catholic faith. "I felt God had played a horrible trick on me," he wrote.

Montana Sen. Mike Mansfield, the Democratic leader at the time, convinced Biden to stay in the Senate. [He was sworn in at one son's bedside in the hospital.]

But Biden resolved not to be separated from his family. He gave up a house that he and his wife had planned to buy in the capital and instead went back to Delaware every night.

"The rule in the office was if the boys called, he was to be interrupted no matter what he was doing or who he was talking to," Kaufman said. "He was never out of communication with them."

HIS DAD FOLLOWED HIS CAREER CLOSELY

Biden's father, a proud man who had made his children talk about foreign affairs around the dinner table, would frequently come down to the Capitol to see the young senator, sitting in on his son's hearings and other meetings.

Under the tutelage of Mansfield and other senior senators such as Minnesota's Hubert H. Humphrey, Biden quickly landed plum committee assignments.

The ambitious young senator showed an early affection for the limelight. After traveling with five other senators to Moscow in 1979, Biden emerged from

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from the East. Obama doesn't have much experience in foreign affairs and this is vulnerable to Republican criticisms about being weak on national security; Biden chairs the important Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Obama has been criticized for not being pro-Israel, Biden has been a staunch supporter of Israel. Obama is not known for raising his voice, even when arguing with his opponents who may be unfairly describing his positions; Biden is so easily engaged in debate, he is often criticized for talking too much [and prior to fully engaging his gray matter].

BALANCE MAKES SENSE, RIGHT?

One would think that "balancing the ticket" makes sense. It seems intuitively correct. Presidential candidates are seeking a vote. They must, because of our Constitution, have a vice president. And tradition has it [not the Constitution] that presidential candidates have the say in selecting their vice presidential running mates.

Thus, it seems only normal that presidential candidates would pick someone who will attract votes. And what better way to do that than by naming someone who "balances" their characteristics.

That way, if voters don't like the presidential candidate they might want to still vote for the "ticket" because they find something attractive about the vice presidential candidate.

It may be intuitive, but it is incorrect.

The practice of seeking to "balance the ticket" as a strategy for picking up votes would make sense if voters voted on a ticket based on who the vice presidential running mate is. They don't

NIXON KNEW THE TRUTH

Richard Nixon knew this. When searching for a vice presidential running mate in 1968 he once remarked, "He can't help you; he can only hurt you."

In spite of his failed presidency, Nixon had honed his political instincts. He selected Spiro T. "Ted" Agnew in 1968 because he knew Agnew as an unknown [the media kept asking, "Ted who?"]

His strategy was since the vice presidential candidate only hurts a ticket, the way to minimize the possible damage is by naming someone with the fewest negatives.

While intuition and hunches say one thing, objective evidence says something else. It turns out that data show that on average for every vote a presidential

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A Hot Temper

Fellow POW Is Not For John McCain

By Phillip Butler

I spent years as a POW with John McCain, and his finger should not be near the red button.

John McCain is a long-time acquaintance of mine that goes way back to our time together at the U.S. Naval Academy and as prisoners of war in Vietnam.

He is a man I respect and admire in some ways. But there are a number of reasons why I will not vote for him for president of the United States.

When I was a Plebe [4th classman, or freshman] at the Naval Academy in 1957-58, I was assigned to the 17th Company for my four years there.

In those days we had about 3,600 midshipmen spread among 24 companies, thus about 150 midshipmen to a company.

ROOMED ACROSS THE HALL

As fortune would have it, John, a First Classman [senior] and his roommate lived directly across the hall from me and my two roommates.

Believe me when I say that back then I would never in a million or more years have dreamed that the crazy guy across the hall would someday be a U.S. senator and candidate for president!

John was a wild man. He was funny, with a quick wit and he was intelligent. But he was intent on breaking every USNA regulation in our four-inch-thick USNA Regulations book. I believe he must have come as close to his goal as any midshipman who ever attended the Academy.

BREAKING ALL THE ACADEMY RULES

John had me "coming around" to his room frequently during my plebe year. And on one occasion he took me with him to escape "over the wall" in the dead of night.

He had a taxi cab waiting for us that took us to a bar some seven miles away. John had a few beers, but forbid me to drink [watching out for me, I guess] and made me drink Cokes.

I could tell many other midshipman stories about John that year and he unbelievably managed to graduate though he spent the majority of his first class year on restriction for the stuff he did get caught doing.

He barely managed to graduate, standing 5th from the bottom of his 800-man graduating class. I and many others have speculated that the main reason he did graduate was because his father was an Admiral, and also his grandfather, both U.S. Naval Academy graduates.

HE WAS A POW WITH ME

People often ask if I was a prisoner of war with John McCain. My answer is always "No, John McCain was a POW with me." The reason is, I was there for eight years and John got there 2 1/2 years later, so he was a POW for 5 1/2 years. We have our own seniority system, based on time as a POW.

Was he tortured for five years? No. He was subjected to torture and maltreatment during his first two years, from September 1967 to September 1969.

Palin As Veep: Risky Or Political Genius?

By Heather Gehlert

With no foreign policy experience and a political resume that could fit on my pinky fingernail, Sarah Palin is an absurd choice for vice president.

It should come as no surprise to the public – especially to Democrats – that John McCain chose her anyway.

That's because the very issues that Democrats say make her a political risk – her newness to the political world stage, her anti-choice stance, her opposition to gay marriage, her support of capital punishment, her disregard for the environment – matter very little in determining the outcome of elections.

Voters – some of whom dissect policy issues daily, but most of whom don't – ultimately cast their ballots based on emotion. Not logic. Not knowledge of "the issues."

PERCEPTION ELECTED JOHN F. KENNEDY

This was supposed to have been the big take-away lesson of 2004. That debate, perhaps more so than any other since the first televised presidential showdown between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon, showed that appearance, charisma, personality and likeability matter.

Smarts are mostly a bonus and a distant second.

Dr. Drew Westen, a clinical, personality and political psychologist who teaches at Emory University, explains this phenomenon in his recent book, *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation*.

"The vision of mind that has captured the imagination of philosophers, cognitive scientists, economists, and political scientists since the 18th Century – a dispassionate mind that makes decisions by weighing the evidence and reasoning to the most valid conclusions – bears no relation to how the mind and brain actually work," Westen writes.

VISIONARIES TYPICALLY LOSE

"When campaign strategists start from this vision of mind, their candidates typically lose."

Simply put, people don't always vote for the candidate or the policy that serves their own best interests.

In the short while since the news about McCain's choice for VP broke, we've



After September 1969 the Vietnamese stopped the torture and gave us increased food and rudimentary health care. Several hundred of us were captured much earlier. I got there April 20, 1965 so my bad treatment period lasted 4 1/2 years.

NEW REGIME CHANGED THINGS

President Ho Chi Minh died on September 9, 1969, and the new regime that replaced him and his policies was more pragmatic. They realized we were worth a lot as bargaining chips if we were alive.

They were right because eventually Americans gave up on the war and agreed to trade our POWs for their country. A damn good trade in my opinion! But my point here is that John allows the media to make him out to be THE hero POW – which he knows is absolutely not true – to further his political goals.

John was badly injured when he was shot down. Both arms were broken and he had other wounds from his ejection. Unfortunately this was often the case – new POWs arriving with broken bones and serious combat injuries.

WOUNDS USED TO INFLICT PAIN

Many died from their wounds. Medical care was non-existent to rudimentary. Relief from pain was almost never given and often the wounds were used as an available way to torture the POW.

Because John's father was the Naval Commander in the Pacific theater, he was exploited with TV interviews while wounded.

These film clips have now been widely seen. But it must be known that many POWs suffered similarly, not just John. Many were similarly exploited for political propaganda.

John was offered, and refused, "early release." Many of us were given this offer.

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learned a lot about Sarah Palin.

We know that she played point guard on her high school's state champion basketball team. She's worked as a sports reporter. Her favorite food is moose stew. She's outdoorsy and comes from a family of hunters.

She rides snowmobiles. She's a mother of five and a member of the PTA. She's a self-described "hockey mom." She was furious when the Bush Administration put polar bears on the endangered species list.

Sarah Palin is also young. At 44, she's three years younger than Barack Obama. And she's beautiful. In 1984, she was runner-up for Miss Alaska.

But as New York Times reporter Timothy Egan writes, "Palin brings a bit of the 'Legally Blonde' aspect to the race – you underestimate her at your peril."

HE IS AFTER THE FEMALE VOTE

What about the questions that female voters, the media and no small number of female bloggers have been asking? McCain almost certainly picked Palin to try to rope in the female vote, a plan that Democrats are arguing won't work.

Hillary Clinton may have gotten 18 million votes, but Sarah Palin is no Hillary Clinton.

Trouble is, she doesn't have to be. Clinton supporters do not have to cross over and vote for Palin for her to be effective on the Republican ticket.

With such a close race between McCain and Obama, Palin may need only to motivate conservative women or independents who weren't sold on McCain or persuade those who hadn't planned on voting to show up at the polls.

EVERY EMOTIONAL PLOY POSSIBLE

Palin is likely to use every emotional ploy possible to bring in more female voters. She's already co-opting Hillary Clinton's remarks on having 18 million cracks in the highest, hardest glass ceiling – a ceiling that Palin says women can still shatter "once and for all."

Already a flurry of conservative and independent women have been rallying behind Palin. Policy aside, on a personal level, she represents work-life balance – something that resonates "with women of all political affiliations."

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Obama Tax Critics Less Than Honest

Some anti-tax commentators and rightwing blogs have apparently given up trying to paint Barack Obama's tax plan as a tax increase on the middle-class since that would be untrue in any interpretation humanly possible.

Instead, they have settled on a novel argument: The Obama tax plan would unacceptably raise marginal tax rates on low- and middle-income people, as argued by Alex Brill and Allen Viard of the American Enterprise Institute.

People who don't live and breathe tax policy might scratch their heads and say, "Wait, I thought I heard that Obama wants to cut taxes for everyone except the rich."

SPECIFIC INCOME RANGES

He does. The critics' new argument is not that he would raise taxes but that he would raise the marginal rates, meaning the tax rate applicable to an additional dollar of income, for people in specific income ranges.

This would occur, they complain, because the various new or improved tax credits that Obama proposes would be phased out for people above certain income levels.

Imagine a working person paying income taxes at the 25% rate.

Imagine also that in 2009 this person benefits from a newly enacted tax credit that is phased out for people with higher income, at a rate of \$100 for each \$1,000 of income over some threshold, and that this taxpayer's earnings are just one dollar above that threshold.

PLAYING AROUND WITH FIGURES

The critics reason that this would translate into a tax rate of 10% for each additional dollar earned, on top of the ordinary income tax rate of 25%, resulting in a marginal rate of 35%.

This would be true even though the taxpayer has lower taxes as a result of the new credit.

Surely, the critics argue, this person would be better off if she never received the tax credit, because then her marginal rate would be just 25% and she would have greater incentive to work and save.

The rightwing critics want this working person to pay higher taxes? Are they against tax cuts? Yes, actually, if they're targeted towards poor or middle-class people.

THEY COME WITH A SPECIOUS ARGUMENT

These critics are essentially against any tax benefit [or any public benefit, for

that matter] that is made available only to people with incomes below a certain level because such income-targeting, in their view, discourages people from working harder to increase their income.

So would low-income people or middle-income people see a new credit on their federal tax form and decide that they should work fewer hours?

No! Common sense, and the academic literature on this topic, tells us that people do not respond this way to tax policy.

The evidence that marginal tax rates really impact decisions about work is weak or nonexistent. The last time the right trotted this line out, it was to support the Bush income tax cuts, which reduced marginal rates, with most of the benefits going towards the well-off.

MARGINAL RATES IMPACT WORK?

Put aside for a moment the tax cuts Bush has showered on people who live off their investments. As the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities pointed out back when the 2001 Bush tax cut was being debated, it's not clear that higher marginal rates discourage work or savings, and they may even encourage it.

Logically, if someone has a particular earnings goal or savings goal, the result of a higher marginal tax rate could be that they work more in order to meet that goal.

THE EVIDENCE IS VERY WEAK

The Center on Budget cited several economists who found that the evidence pointing towards reduced work was very weak.

It is extremely doubtful to us that cutting taxes for any income group is a wise policy right now given the budget deficit and the fact that people are paying relatively low taxes already.

Sen. Obama has proposed tax cuts nonetheless, and he at least has ensured that the bulk of them would go to people who are not super-rich.

Some rightwing activists feel like they've won the argument about whether tax cuts are good – both candidates seem to think they are – so now they want to argue with Obama because he refuses to target most of his tax cuts towards the wealthy instead of the poor and middle-class.

It's a telling moment for the right: And it shows us what happens when you start to give in to anti-tax rhetoric.

– *The Center for Tax Justice is a highly respected nonpartisan tax watchdog of who pays and who doesn't and why*

POW

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It meant speaking out against your country and lying about your treatment to the press. You had to "admit" that the U.S. was criminal and that our treatment was "lenient and humane."

NONE OF US COULD ACCEPT THE OFFER

So, like numerous others, he refused the offer. This was obviously something none of us could accept. Besides, we were bound by our service regulations, Geneva Conventions and loyalties to refuse early release until all the POWs were released, with the sick and wounded going first.

John was awarded a Silver Star and Purple Heart for heroism and wounds in combat. This heroism has been played up in the press and in his various political campaigns.

It should be known that there were approximately 600 military POWs in Vietnam. Among all of us, decorations awarded have recently been totaled to the following: Medals of Honor 8, Service Crosses 42, Silver Stars 590, Bronze Stars 958 and Purple Hearts 1,249.

ONE HERO AMONG MANY

John certainly performed courageously and well. But it must be remembered that he was one hero among many – not uniquely so as his campaigns would have people believe.

John McCain served his time as a POW with great courage, loyalty and tenacity. More than 600 of us did the same.

After our repatriation a census showed that 95% of us had been tortured at least once. The Vietnamese were quite democratic about it. There were many heroes in North Vietnam.

I saw heroism every day there. We motivated each other to endure and succeed far beyond what any of us thought we had in ourselves. Succeeding as a POW is a group sport, not an individual one.

WE SUPPORTED EACH OTHER

We all supported and encouraged each other to survive and succeed. John knows that. He was not an individual POW hero. He was a POW who surmounted the odds with the help of many comrades, as all of us did.

I furthermore believe that having been a POW is no special qualification for being president of the United States. The two jobs are not the same, and POW experience is not, in my opinion, something I would look for in a presidential candidate.

Most of us who survived that experience are now in our late 60's and 70's. Sadly, we have died and are dying off at a greater rate than our non-POW contemporaries.

HIS SURVIVAL MAY BE LIMITED

We experienced injuries and malnutrition that are coming home to roost. So I believe John's age [72] and survival expectation are not good for being elected to serve as our president for four or more years.

I can verify that John has an infamous reputation for being a hot head. He has a quick and explosive temper that many have experienced first hand.

Folks, quite honestly that is not the finger I want next to that red button.

It is also disappointing to see him take on and support Bush's war in Iraq, even stating we might be there for another 100 years.

For me John represents the entrenched and bankrupt policies of Washington-as-usual. The past seven years have proven to be disastrous for our country.

HE SIDES WITH BUSH ON EVERY ISSUE

I believe John's views on war, foreign policy, economics, environment, health care, education, national infrastructure and other important areas are much the same as those of the Bush Administration.

I'm disappointed to see John represent himself politically in ways that are not accurate. He is not a moderate Republican. On some issues he is a maverick. But his voting record is far to the right.

I fear for his nominations to our Supreme Court, and the consequent continuing loss of individual freedoms, especially regarding moral and religious issues.

John is not a religious person, but he has taken every opportunity to ally himself with some really obnoxious and crazy fundamentalist ministers lately. I was also disappointed to see him cozy up to Bush because I know he hates that man.

BUSH INTENSELY DISRESPECTED HIM

He disingenuously and famously put his arm around the guy, even after Bush had intensely disrespected him with lies and slander.

So on these and many other instances, I don't see that John is the "straight talk express" he markets himself to be.

Sen. John Sidney McCain III is a remarkable man who has made enormous personal achievements.

He is a man that I am proud to call a fellow POW who "Returned With Honor." That's our POW motto.

Since many of you keep asking what I think of him, I've decided to write it out. In short, I think John Sidney McCain III is a good man, but not someone I will vote for in the upcoming election to be our president of the United States.

– *The author is a 1961 graduate of the United States Naval Academy and a former light-attack carrier pilot. In 1965 he was shot down over North Vietnam where he spent eight years as a prisoner of war. He is a highly decorated combat veteran who was awarded two Silver Stars, two Legion Of Merits, two Bronze Stars and two Purple Heart medals. After his repatriation in 1973 he earned a PhD in sociology from the University of California-San Diego and became a Navy Organizational Effectiveness consultant. He completed his Navy career in 1981 as a professor of management at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, CA.*

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GOP Trashes Hillary, Now Courts Her Voters

By Lynn Green

As anyone who follows politics knows, Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin has been chosen by Sen. John McCain to be his running mate. The choice has been touted as being a "bold move" that reaffirms McCain's "maverick status."

Well, maybe so, maybe not.

In her introductory speech by McCain's side, Palin praised Sen. Hillary Clinton for creating "18 million cracks in the glass ceiling" for women. Palin promised to be the one who "broke through" for them.

Of course, Palin was referring to the 18 million votes, many by women, for Sen. Clinton in the Democratic primaries.

AN UNEARNED MANDATE

She claimed this mandate, and hopes to claim their votes, despite the fact that she did not do one thing to earn it or them.

She did not raise or contribute a single dollar to Sen. Clinton's campaign. She did not knock on a single door or make a single phone call on Clinton's behalf. She did not take the heat Clinton took in the senator's historic bid for the nomination.

All she did do was say "Yes" when the man in charge asked her if she would hitch a ride at his side.

What really galls me is that Palin now praises Hillary even though Palin is a member of the party that spent the last 18 months trashing Hillary.

ENERGIZING THE ANTI-HILLARY BASE

Palin is valued for the fact that she will "excite" the party's conservative and

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evangelical base, the very people who said of Hillary, "Life is a B*tch; Don't Vote for One."

The GOP supposedly decries identity politics, but now brags – in Rush Limbaugh's words – it has "a babe of our own."

So it seems that the Double Standard is alive and well in the GOP despite all their pretensions.

That is unless Palin and McCain wish to issue an apology to Sen. Hilary Clinton and beg forgiveness from the woman they once all hated but now pretend to love.

– *The author lives in the The Village*

CNN Using Racial Extremist As A Source

By David Holthouse

As part of its ongoing "Black in America" project, CNN posted a story to its website earlier titled "Could an Obama presidency hurt black Americans?"

Credited to CNN correspondent John Blake, the piece quotes the wit and wisdom of Steve Sailer, identified only as "a columnist for The American Conservative magazine."

Specifically, the CNN story quotes a column by Sailer first published last year in which he opined that Obama offers voters "white guilt repellent."

"So many whites want to be able to say, 'I'm not one of them, those bad whites. Hey, I voted for a black guy for president,'" Sailer wrote.

CNN DIDN'T REALLY IDENTIFY SOURCE

What the CNN article fails to note is that in addition to writing columns and movie reviews for The American Conservative, Sailer is the founder of the Human Biodiversity Institute, a neo-eugenics online discussion forum where right-wing journalists and race scientists have promoted selective breeding of the human species.

He also writes frequently for the anti-immigrant hate site Vdare.com, named for the first white child born in America, and runs a website, isteve.com.

Sailer's website is rife with primitive stereotypes. On it, Sailer mocks professional golfer Annika Sorenstam for having well-developed muscles and claims that Asian men have a hard time finding dates because they look "less masculine" than other men.

HE CALLED BARACK OBAMA A 'WIGGER'

Last January, on the hate site vdare.com, Sailer called Obama a "wigger."

"He's a remarkably exotic variety of the faux African-American, but a wigger nonetheless," Sailer wrote. "Even genetically, Obama, whose East African descent is apparent in his unusual features, has only a distant relationship to the West Africans who are the ancestors of almost all African-Americans."

Assessing the tragic aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in September 2005, Sailer wrote, "The plain fact is that they [black Americans] tend to possess poorer na-

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PALIN

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She's also popular among blue-collar voters, the Republican Party base and Evangelicals, particularly because of her staunch position against abortion. She, like McCain, favors overturning Roe v. Wade.

ELECTIONS ARE ABOUT EMOTIONS

If Democrats aren't careful, that could easily become their Achilles heel this year. Elections are about emotion, and if there's any topic that's sure to stir emotion, it's abortion.

Despite the majority of the public supporting family planning and comprehensive sex education – both effective ways to reduce unplanned pregnancies – and despite the fact that Democrats champion federal funding for these programs, the Dems still haven't figured out how to defend a woman's right to choose in a way that voters can identify with on a gut level.

PALIN IS A SLICK POLITICIAN

If Democrats have historically had trouble defending their abortion position against male candidates, they will have triple the problem doing so against a woman. And Palin is a slick one.

Palin vehemently opposes abortion, even in the case of rape or incest, a fact that the public may miss while she's busy touting membership in Feminists for Life, a group that focuses on alternatives to abortion, particularly for college-age women.

The organization works under the guise of providing women choices, as long as abortion isn't one of them.

WARNED THE CHILD WAS A PROBLEM

Besides her Feminists for Life affiliation, Palin is herself a mother. In fact, she decided to keep her fifth child even after knowing it would be born with Down's Syndrome.

Imagine it: debating a female candidate – a mother – who can say, "I had a choice, and I chose life."

That's the challenge Biden will face. He must defend a woman's right to choose while avoiding coming across as callous or attacking the mother of a disabled child.

Simply explaining that Palin is an "anti-woman woman" isn't enough. That kind of message assumes voters will respond with logic and reason. But for those who aren't steeped in gender issues, it risks either sounding loony or being dismissed.

DEMOCRATS HAD BETTER BE CAREFUL

Democrats are only too eager to argue that this election will be different from the last two, that people have finally had enough of the Bush brand of conservatism. I hope they're right. But Democrats need to be realistic about the challenges they face with a Palin VP, because abortion is just one of them.

Even women who didn't like Hillary Clinton recoiled at watching her become the target of media-driven sexism. Clinton polled the best when women perceived that she was being treated unfairly.

Having a young, inexperienced woman on the Republican ticket could do more to underscore people's existing concerns about Obama than it does to undercut their confidence in Palin.

SAME PROBLEM WITH BARACK OBAMA

How can Democrats, without appearing hypocritical, level serious charges against Palin for being "untested," when that's the word that's still hovering over their own candidate?

Palin may not have foreign policy expertise, but she has a son who is a soldier. That's no small detail in a country obsessed with patriotism. And it's one that voters can connect with emotionally.

Unlike Obama, Palin is not a change agent. But perception matters in politics, and Palin looks the part. She represents a first for the Republican Party, and her relative youth could dilute Obama's change message – the very message that, for the first time in many years, has allowed voters to identify in an emotional way with a Democratic presidential candidate.

Will Obama be able to keep that emotional connection with voters? His campaign has only two precious months to figure it out.

– *The author is a managing editor at AlterNet*

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Be Careful, Lest U.S. Becomes A Theocracy

By Edwin E. Vineyard

"When does life begin?" pastor Rick Warren of the Saddleback Church in California asked each of the two presidential hopefuls in turn.

One answered in a quick terse manner, as if coached, by saying, "At conception." The other said, "That question is above my pay-grade," going on to discuss the ramifications of the question for two or three minutes.

The crowd in the church cheered the quick, direct answer. Only polite applause followed a thoughtful examination of that question and the issue it poses.

We should not be so quick to answer such a profound question. It deserves serious consideration. Pat answers are generally those supplied by somebody else, learned, and then recited by rote. Obama's answer to the question, as it is generally understood, could well be interpreted as "only God knows." And that very well may be correct.

WHAT DO SCRIPTURES SAY?

If the question is taken precisely as worded, then the direct scriptural answer is found in Genesis 2: 7, which says "And the Lord God formed man out of the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."

This is the scriptural beginning of human life. Man was not alive in his various formative stages, nor in the materials from which he developed. Life was not there until he drew the breath of life from God.

Life has been continuous since. Therefore, "life" is passed on, rather than begun anew with each person. There is also a logical, biblical foundation for a view that an individual human life starts when the babe is independent of its mother and draws its own breath of life.

This does not necessarily negate the value of other scriptures that indicate the selective choice of a person for a divine destiny while still in the womb. One can believe that, while not believing that every egg fertilization necessarily begins a divinely determined destiny.

SCIENCE IGNITED RELIGIOUS DEBATE

Live birth has been the operational assumption under which human societies have generally functioned historically. It is only with the development of man's scientific knowledge of the reproductive process that issues with religious significance have developed.

"Be fruitful and multiply" has been interpreted by certain religious groups as



forbidding birth control. A woman's choice not to remain pregnant was later forbidden by law, as medical procedures safe for the mother's health became available. The "morning after" pill raised a new religious clamor.

Now, to some the embryo itself is an issue. Embryos scheduled for destruction are kept away from scientific use for the benefit of sick people. Nevertheless people die daily and give their bodies to medical science, another practice once legally forbidden by influence of religious zealots.

QUESTIONS OF RELIGION AND LAW

These are questions and issues, both of religion and of law. Because they are debated religious issues, it behooves our democratic society to be very cautious of bringing them into the realm of secular government and law.

It is clear from the writings of the Apostle Paul that the Christianity he preached was opposed to legalisms. Jesus himself is biblically depicted as opposing legalisms. He is also quoted as teaching the separation of religion from government.

A woman is entitled the freedom of her own body. She is entitled to choose whether to conceive and whether to continue an unintended pregnancy. It is not the purpose of our democratic government to interfere with these personal freedoms by enacting religious beliefs and doctrines into law.

This is a very dangerous road, and it can threaten all of our freedoms. Just as many nations are now governed by the fundamentalists' interpretation of the laws of the Koran, so could America become a partial theocracy governed by the interpretations of the Bible by fundamentalists.

- The author, aka The Militant Moderate, lives in Enid

Founders Knew Dangers Of Church-State Mix

By James Nimmo

In a story from the Washington Post by Kathleen Parker about how our founding American principle of separation of church and state is failing, we read that Rick Warren of Saddleback Church - where presidential candidates are vetted as to what their pillow talk with Jesus might be - thinks one's faith is the same as one's worldview.

So Warren thinks faith is a worldview?

I have no faith in gravity, but I have a worldview and the evidence that demonstrates gravity works.

I have no faith in airplanes, but I have a worldview and evidence that the air-foil design of wings will lift a plane into the air.

I have no faith in numerology and its predictions, but I have a worldview and evidence that arithmetic is consistent.

Faith is believing in something - past, present or future - for which there is no evidence that such a wished-for event or action actually happened, might happen, or will happen.

I have a worldview that is based on historical fact backed up with evidence. If the fact is disputed, it can be investigated and discussed without the threat of an eternal punishment in a mythical lake of fire and brimstone.

EXTREMIST

From Page 14

tive judgment than members of better-educated groups. Thus they need stricter moral guidance from society."

This isn't the only time in recent history that CNN has turned to an unabashed bigot for commentary on controversial issues in America while cloaking the source's full identity. One example:

In October 2006, CNN medical correspondent Dr. Sanjay Gupta reported on a study by J. Philpe Rushton that purported to show that men, on average, are more intelligent than women. Gupta identified Rushton only as a professor of psychology at the University of Western Ontario.

Since 2002, Rushton has been the head of the Pioneer Fund, a pro-eugenics foundation that funds the research of academic racists like Jared Taylor and Rushton, who himself has received over \$1 million in Pioneer grants.

Among Rushton's findings are that on average blacks have larger genitals, breasts and buttocks, characteristics that, according to Rushton's "research," have an inverse relationship to brain size and, thus, intelligence.

Southern Poverty Law Center

My worldview doesn't depend on the endless repetition of myths and fables intended to coerce the thoughts of children and blackmail the actions of adults.

Indeed, a good many of our American Founding Fathers would lose if they were to campaign using their colonial experiences in today's capitalist, theocratic, historically illiterate country.

The passage of time has removed us from direct knowledge of the insidious torture, witch-burning, and browbeating that was common in Europe from where the first 17th Century immigrants to North America came.

The Founders were only one or two generations removed from theocratic governments such as what present day Bible-pounders would like to return.

Early colonial history is full of strife brought about by demands from the several state legislatures that only a select few of their citizens could hold office, purchase property, marry, and reside depending on which religious sect they belonged to.

This history of what happens when church/faith and state/politics are allowed to mate and breed mongrels of exceeding ferocity is why our founders wrote the First Amendment allowing religion to be exercised separately from the exercise of the civil legislature.

If only the fundamentalist Bible-pounders who so fervently rejoice in the myths of the Old Testament - their founding document - would treat the Constitution - America's founding document - with the same intensity of scrutiny and scholarship, our country would be much farther along on the road to achieving our goals of a just social society.

- The author lives in Oklahoma City

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Independent Judiciary Safeguards Freedom

By Randall Coyne

On September 17, 1787, at Independence Hall in Philadelphia, the Constitutional Convention held its last meeting, with 42 of the 55 delegates in attendance. The sole item of business was for the framers to affix their signatures to the four-page handwritten document. Thirty-nine did so and the result was the most enduring written constitution ever created by human hands.

In a very real sense, American democracy was born that day.

Heeding James Madison's warning that "[t]he accumulation of all powers, legislative, executive, and judiciary, in the same hands, whether of one, a few, or many, may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny," the framers established a government with three separate, coequal branches.

Each branch has certain powers, and each of these powers is limited – or checked – by another branch. In simplest terms, the legislative branch makes the law, the executive branch enforces the law, and the judicial branch interprets the law.

In *The Federalist No. 78*, founding father Alexander Hamilton defended the critical importance of an independent judiciary in our constitutional structure. Hamilton emphasized that "there is no liberty, if the power of judging be not separated from the legislative and executive powers. Liberty can have nothing to fear from the judiciary alone, but would have every thing to fear from its union with either of the other departments."

SYSTEM HINGES ON INDEPENDENT JUDICIARY

In other words, the very existence of our system of constitutional government and liberty itself depends on the vigilance of a judicial system that is not subject to domination by other government branches.

Consider some modern alternatives. According to Ed O'Brien, executive director of Street Law Inc., as recently as 20 years ago, judges in the Soviet Union frequently employed "telephonic justice" to render their decisions. They would call the Communist Party leadership, ask, "What does the Party want in this case?" and rule accordingly. Russian presidents often declared rulings by that country's highest court null and void because they disagreed with them.

Until South Africa's new constitution took effect in 1994, the all-white Parliament – not the courts – had the final say on the constitutionality of laws.

The colonies were all too familiar with external interference with judicial decisions. As Thomas Jefferson protested in the Declaration of Independence, King George III "made judges dependent on his will alone."

FRAMERS FORESAW PUBLIC OUTRAGE

The framers foresaw both [1] the inevitability that truly independent judges would render unpopular decisions which provoke public outrage; and [2] the need to safeguard judges' ability to rule fairly on the law and facts, without regard to retaliation from Congress, the executive branch, or the public.

The Constitution provides protection from reprisals by keeping the positions and salaries of judges beyond the reach of outside influence. Federal judges hold their offices "during good behavior" meaning they have lifetime job security and may only be removed for the most serious misconduct. Also, the salaries of federal judges may not be reduced while they serve.

In recent years, politicians and critics have lambasted judges for decisions that are said to defy conventional wisdom or thwart the popular will. Some have called for the impeachment of federal judges viewed as being "too activist." Others have demanded the popular election of federal judges. Still others have insisted on judicial term limits or proposed amending the Constitution to allow Congress to overrule Supreme Court decisions by a majority vote.

There are, of course, remarkable examples of judicial courage, where judges endured vicious assaults on their independence but somehow managed to do the right thing. Southern judges who handed down desegregation decisions in the 1950s and 1960s come to mind.

JUDGES UNDER FIRE

Consider Judge J. Skelly Wright, who served as a federal district court judge in Louisiana during that period. According to Professor Susan Estrich, Judge Wright had become so accustomed to the lash of public criticism and vilification that he instructed the U.S. Marshals' security detail watching his home to not even call him unless the crosses burning in his yard were close enough to endanger his house.

It is telling that when Judge Wright was elevated to the court of appeals, he was not assigned to a court in the South, but was instead installed on the DC Circuit.

Contrast Judge Wright's experience with that of fellow District Court Judge Harold Baer of New York.

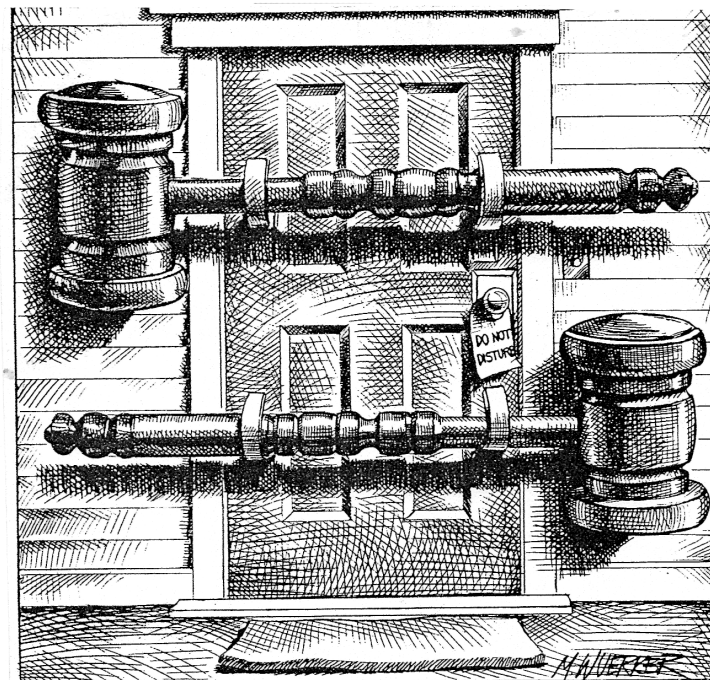
Judge Baer provoked a storm of criticism after he ruled in a criminal case to suppress 80 pounds of cocaine and heroin, as well as the videotaped confession of the drug courier. Judge Baer ruled that the evidence had been seized illegally, because simply running from a car when approached by the police did not give the police probable cause to search the car.

Judge Baer reasoned that highly publicized police corruption in that particular neighborhood made it reasonable – not suspicious – for people to flee when police officers approach.

WITHERING PUBLIC CRITICISM

Both Judge Baer and his decision were subjected to withering attacks, from public commentators, public officials, and the White House. Here's a small sample of the criticism:

New York Governor George Pataki told CNN audiences "the judge's decision is despicable." Sen. Orin Hatch called Baer a "bleeding-heart judge" who "lacks common sense and judgment." Rep. Fred Upton called for Baer's resignation, calling him "a Monopoly game gone bad . . . handing out 'get-out-of-jail free'



Panel Explores Importance Of Independent Judiciary

In 2004, Congress established Sept. 17 as Constitution Day in recognition of the signing of the United States Constitution. Constitution Day will be celebrated in the Bell Courtroom of the University of Oklahoma College of Law on Sept. 17 at 7 p.m. A distinguished panel will explore the importance of an independent judiciary during a presentation titled "Safeguarding Freedom: Is There an Assault on the Independent Judiciary?"

Panelists include Senior Federal Judge Lee West, Andrew Tevington, chief counsel to former Governor Henry Bellmon, and Arnold Hamilton, editor of the *Oklahoma Observer*.

The program is jointly sponsored by the League of Women Voters Education Fund; the University of Oklahoma College of Law; the University of Oklahoma Honors College; the American Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma; the Program on Constitutional and Legal Policy of the Open Society Institute; and Common Cause Oklahoma.

Additional sponsors include the League of Women Voters of Norman; the League of Latin American Citizens; the Peace House; the Peace Education Institute; the Unitarian University Community Church; the Norman Unitarian Universalist Fellowship and the Interfaith Alliance.

A reception in the Sneed Lounge at 6 p.m. precedes the program. Both are free and open to the public.

cards with reckless abandon." Newspaper columnists and editorial writers also leveled scathing attacks on the judge.

Judge Baer reconsidered his decision and reversed himself.

We all recall the 2000 Supreme Court decision in *Bush v. Gore*. In that case, the appointees of the first President Bush cast decisive votes that helped guarantee the election of the second President Bush. In so doing, the court overturned the contrary decision of the Florida Supreme Court, whose members had all been appointed by Democratic governors. So much for even the appearance of impartiality.

REFRESHER COURSE IN CIVICS

Those who criticize as undemocratic judges who render unpopular decisions – from the Left or the Right – could stand a refresher course in civics.

Democracy means that people ought to be able to vote for public officials in fair elections, and make most political decisions by majority rule. Liberty means that, even in a democracy, individuals have rights that no majority should be able to take away.

Those who condemn judges as anti-majoritarian would be advised to consult history to bring to mind majoritarian mischief. The majority crucified Jesus Christ; the majority burned Christians at the stake; the majority threw Columbus into a dungeon for having discovered a new world; the majority cut off the ears of Prynne and Burton because they dared advocate freedom of the press; and a majority of Americans may well have opposed the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which brought about desegregation of public schools and an end to the farcical separate but equal doctrine.

Former President Woodrow Wilson wrote that government "keeps its promises, or does not keep them, in its courts. For the individual, therefore, . . . the struggle for constitutional government is a struggle for good laws, indeed, but also for intelligent, independent, and impartial courts."

The struggle for constitutional government continues today, 221 years after the framers affixed their signatures to the four-pages of parchment in Philadelphia. In the midst of the so-called "war on terrorism" and in the face of an executive branch many Americans fear is seriously overstepping its constitutional authority, we can hope and pray for intelligent judges. But we must doggedly insist that our courts remain independent and impartial.

– The author is Edna Asper Elkouri and Frank Elkouri Professor of Law at the University of Oklahoma

A Populist Stirring, From Coast To Coast

By Jim Hightower

Despite all the speechifying, editorializing, barbecuing and general ballyhooing of Labor Day, there really was not all that much to celebrate, for working families across our land are struggling.

To help us understand how it came to this, let's reflect on the profound insight of that eminent economic theorist, George W. Bush. While campaigning for president in 2000, he explained his approach to economic policy with this theorem: "We ought to make the pie higher."

What the professor was trying to express is the old notion that by baking a larger pie, everyone can get a bigger slice.

And, indeed, the pie got higher during his presidency – there have been great gains in worker productivity, a tremendous expansion of America's overall wealth and a boom in corporate profits.

But Bush's high pie theory fails to consider an essential goal of our nation's economic growth: shared prosperity.

GUESS WHO GOT BIGGEST SLICE?

Workers did their part, putting in longer hours, increasing output and getting more creative on the job. But the Bushites baked their pie with heaping cupfuls of anti-worker legislation, skewed tax cuts and assorted wage-busting policies.

As a result, Bush has simply fattened the slice that goes to corporate profits and wealthy speculators, leaving the workaday majority of folks with even slimmer pickings than they had before his bunch came into office.

In the past eight years, workers' share of national income has plummeted, now standing at its lowest level in 40 years.

Maybe so, say Bush and Company, but look at the 5 million new jobs created on our watch. See: tinkle-down-economics works for everyone, and the fundamentals of the economy are sound.

DO THEY THINK WE'RE STUPID?

Do they think we have sucker wrappers around our heads? Far from sound, creating 5 million jobs in eight years is a pathetic record, not even keeping up with the 20 million new jobseekers who've entered the workforce during his tenure.

Besides, the issue is not jobs. Think about it: Even slaves had jobs. You could

ask a waitress at a cafe or bar in your town if she's aware that Bush created 5 million new jobs, and she'll say, "Yeah, I know, I have three of them."

The issue is wages and middle-class income. That's how ordinary Americans measure prosperity, and that's the main reason that 81% of people now say that our current leaders have sent America in the wrong direction.

Despite economic growth, wages are not even keeping up with inflation, and today's median family income is lower than it was eight years ago.

POVERTY UP, HEALTH COVERAGE DOWN

Meanwhile, the number of people without health coverage has risen by more than 6 million in the Bush years, and the number living in poverty has increased by nearly 6 million (including an 18% rise in the number of impoverished children).

Bush is the worst of it, but certainly not all of it.

For three decades, the greedheads of Wall Street and the boneheads of Washington [both parties] have ganged up to push an economic agenda of offshoring, downsizing, union-busting, trade-scramming, privatizing, deregulating and such that has weakened America by disempowering and knocking down the majority.

Worse, these kleptocrats have tried to force an ethic of greed on our country, hoping to bury our historic, unifying ethic of the Common Good.

OUT WITH 'TINKLE-DOWN' ECONOMICS

This is why there's now a populist stirring from coast to coast.

American workers have had all the tinkle-down economics they can stand, and they are eager for a grassroots approach of percolate-up economics, investing directly in workaday people to renew middle-class possibilities.

This means such steps as restoring the right to form unions, providing universal health care, initiating a multibillion-dollar national drive to build a green economy, enlisting millions to repair our neglected infrastructure, making a real commitment to public education and returning to progressive taxation.

The Powers That Be have failed America, and the Powers That Ought to Be – ordinary working families – are on the move.

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DEJA VU

From Page 10

laundry was returned full of sand. Repeatedly we have heard that there have not been sufficient troops to accomplish the war mission.

WHY ARE WE OFTEN SO OBLIVIOUS?

Why is the outcome different this time? This isn't an issue of "you are either with us or against us," nor is it an issue that "you can only support our soldiers if you support the war."

PROFITS

From Page 10

TBN often coaches the audience not to leave their seats and look happy during broadcasts. To those who accused Crouch of being gay, his followers sloughed this off as a ploy of the devil.

TBN used items like the Jewish Passover to raise money when the holiday has nothing to do with collecting revenues. Yet the money and influence keep flowing into Crouch and his wife Jan's organizations.

They have so many houses it must be hard to keep up with the addresses.

HAGEE'S PROSPERITY GOSPEL

Another prosperity gospel advocate is San Antonio's John Hagee, who teaches that "government welfare is a distortion and deception from Satan."

Hagee believes the U.S. government has a secret plot to set up a one-world order. The United Nations, National Education Association and Council on Foreign Relations are working with the secretive illuminati on this one.

Hagee likes to bash the Democratic Party and heap praises on the GOP. He is tied to the wealthy James Leininger of San Antonio who is known as the sugar daddy of the Texas religious right. Leininger sent a great deal of his wealth to Texas Gov. Rick Perry to keep him in office.

Perry has appeared in Hagee's church and received campaign contributions from Hagee.

HAGEE RIDICULES ENVIRONMENTALISTS

Hagee's take on environmentalists is explained by his evaluation of them. He describes them as "overgrown Boy Scouts in green shorts with a backpack filled with trail mix. He is skipping along some nature path, communing with Mother Earth, humming when he stops to hug a tree."

The Texas preacher stated that Bill Clinton might be the anti-Christ. He also advises attacking Iran, claiming that the nation has the capacity to make nuclear weapons even though there is no evidence of such.

Hagee says Russia has helped Iran build a nuclear missile that could reach New York City.

His church has been known to encourage women to leave their unbelieving husbands. Hagee himself has been married before, even though he laments the rampant divorce in the nation.

– The author is pastor of First Baptist Church of Onalaska, TX

This is an internal critique of our own federal government and us as Americans.

Why was it that the House committee in Lincoln's day wanted death to any person who commits a fraud upon the government whereby a soldier is bodily injured – for instance, the sale of unsound provisions?

The House voted to censure former Secretary of War Cameron for conduct "highly injurious to the public service."

Are we in front of TVs, DVDs and movie screens pretending that this make-believe world is our reality? Is it that we haven't economically felt the financial burdens of the war? What is the real financial cost of the war?

By our silence have we allowed the blank check to be written?

WE'RE TOO BUSY SHOPPING

And it is a critique of our federal government that we have an executive branch that tells us to go shopping. And that we have a legislative branch that has chosen to be silent rather than tackle the hard job of a government created by our founding fathers of three distinct branches of government with its checks and balances.

Admittedly, I have been quick to blame our media's lack of investigative reporting as a major factor in our apathy.

However, Goodwin, once again, dispels the illusion.

When Lincoln allowed Secretary of War Cameron to resign, the press was completely taken by surprise. And not one newspaper had conceived the real cause before the report of the House committee was released.

AMERICANS SAW CIVIL WAR DEAD, INJURED

Why as citizens have we allowed our government created by the people to forbid us from seeing and hearing the results our combat? Goodwin described the carts of the wounded and dead being brought to Washington, DC, and many other cities and communities, visually exposing to all the cruelty of war.

Wouldn't we be changed as citizens if each day we witnessed the airlifting not only of the flag-draped coffins but also every wounded soldier returning to America – whether or not those wounds or deaths were inflicted in the arbitrarily drawn boundaries of "the war zone?"

And wouldn't we be changed if we witnessed the "collateral damage" to the civilian populations. Why aren't we seeing each evening the pictures of every civilian wounded and killed? And who has been assessing the financial damages to these civilians as well as the emotional nightmare that has been inflicted on these populations?

We are at war, yet the invitation to the American people to be present and accountable was overlooked by those three branches of government, the press and regrettably overlooked by me until reading the graphic details that Lincoln faced as he entered into a war waged to bring a nation back together.

Ironically, the current wars that we have waged have not only divided the nation but have also separated us from the rest of the world.

– The author lives in Oklahoma City

What America Loses As Newspapers Die

By Susan Estrich

The Sunday opinion section is gone. So is the book review section. So are literally hundreds of the reporters I have come to respect over years of reading my local paper. What is happening in my hometown is happening in every city across the country. Layoffs. Cutbacks. Slow death.

Meanwhile, talk show hosts, who don't pretend to "report," who don't try to be "objective," who will tell you themselves, if they are being honest, that they are in the business of entertainment, sign record contracts.

I don't begrudge them their riches. They're making money because their shows do. But for those of us who care about the role of a free press in a democracy, something is askew.

Not long ago, a fine newspaper reporter who covers the Supreme Court came to lecture in one of my classes about some of the cases then pending before the court. Frankly, I didn't expect that many of my students would be familiar with his work. But I was wrong.

STUDENTS ARE READING – ON-LINE

How many of you read the paper every day, he asked them. A surprisingly large number of hands went up.

We looked at each other, puzzled. We both knew that circulation was dropping, that young people don't buy the paper in the same numbers that their parents did.

How many of you read it on paper, I asked. Most of the hands went down. They read the paper; they just didn't buy it.

I'm not going to mourn the decreasing demand for newsprint. Let the trees live.

The danger of reading newspapers online, I have discovered, is that you miss all the stories you don't think you'd be interested in until they catch your eye as you're turning the page. When I read papers online, I always read the political and legal stories, but I miss an interesting book review, a surprising side bar, an obituary that doesn't make it to the front index.

ON-LINE CHALLENGE: FINDING THE GOOD STUFF

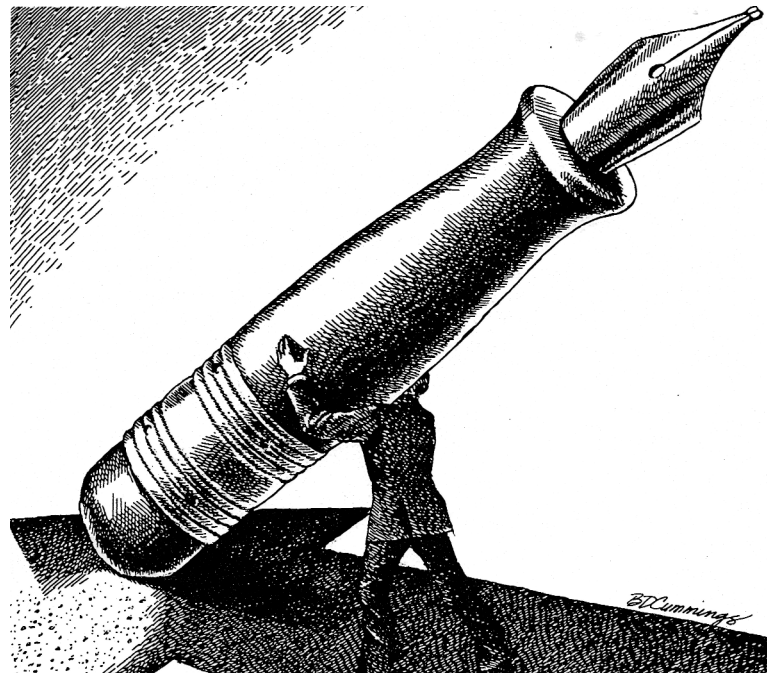
The challenge for newspapers as they go online and off paper is to find a way to tell me about all the good stuff inside that I don't know I'm interested in until I read the first few lines or see the picture.

The bigger problem goes to the question of standards. "All the news that's fit to print," the motto of The New York Times, isn't really about printing, but about standards of fitness.

It's about old-fashioned values like professionalism and fairness, about good and demanding editors who take the time to make sure you've checked the facts and given everyone a chance to respond before they put the story in the paper.

It's about the difference between the news pages and the editorial pages, the difference between reporting the news and commenting on it, and the need to respect that line and make sure readers can see where it is being drawn.

I'm not a reporter and I don't pretend to be. I write commentary. I offer opinions. I do so based on many, many years of working in politics, teaching law, not



to mention raising kids and taking care of family.

I try to be fair and I value my reputation for being honest, but I don't pretend to be objective. That's not my job.

But it should be somebody's. It has always been the job of newspaper reporters and editors to live by a set of rules that ensure that when you read a "news story," as opposed to an opinion column, you can assume that a substantial effort has been made to document the facts, to tell a story rather than opine about it, to ask the tough questions and fairly report the answers.

Moreover, when it comes to news, the evening news still tends to be guided by the morning paper. If the latter declines in quality, so will the former.

OUTRAGEOUS TRUMPS SERIOUS REPORTING

Of course, some television and radio reporters try to live by these standards, as do some bloggers. The problem is that the most-watched programs on television, the reporters who make the most money and the sites that get the most hits are not necessarily the best journalistically.

In all the years I've done television, I can count the number of times someone has complimented me for what I said. People watch TV; they don't listen to it. If you do well, they'll tell you how good you looked, not how smart or knowledgeable you sounded.

What's worse, when it comes to the substance, you get attention not for being well-informed and reasonable, but for being out there and outrageous, even if you know nothing about what you're talking about.

I want to be a political pundit, pretty young girls and boys tell me all the time. No, they don't want to actually do politics, study politics, learn the game. They just want to get paid to look good and give opinions.

Lawyers barely out of law school, who have never argued a case in their life, decide to be legal commentators. And too many good reporters, looking for television slots and the paid speeches that come next and trying to dodge the pink slips that are everywhere, are aiming to play the same game.

They may win, but the rest of us are losing.

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BIDEN

From Page 11

a meeting with Premier Alexei Kosygin to tell reporters of the arms control demands he had put to the Soviet leader.

HE PRESIDED OVER CONTROVERSIAL HEARINGS

By the late 1980s, Biden was chairman of the Judiciary Committee, a post from which he presided over the controversial Supreme Court confirmation hearings of Robert Bork and Clarence Thomas, both of whom Biden opposed.

Biden was accused of mismanaging the 1991 Thomas hearings, which erupted into a dramatic examination of Thomas' alleged sexual harassment of Anita Hill.

But Biden had burnished his image as a Capitol Hill eminence. He would push through major legislation to combat domestic violence and the drug-fueled crime wave.

PICKING UP FOREIGN RELATIONS EXPERIENCE

From his position on the Foreign Relations Committee, he cooperated extensively with several Republicans, including the late conservative Sen. Jesse Helms, with whom Biden worked on a major chemical weapons treaty.

The high profile committee hearings and television appearances that Biden sought so assiduously never seemed to help his political fortunes nationally. He was crushed in both his presidential bids, in 1988 and this year.

Biden never really became a Washington insider. He is not a major fundraiser in the Beltway and gets relatively little money from political action committees.

HE AVOIDS THE COCKTAIL CIRCUIT

Biden doesn't move in the Washington cocktail circuit. When he remarried and started a family with his second wife, Jill, he still returned home to Delaware nearly every night.

"He knew every conductor on the train," said Mark Gitenstein, who worked for Biden for years and remains close to him.

To this day, Gitenstein and others who know him say, Biden keeps up with the people back home.

One is J.D. Howell, a former chief at the Mill Creek volunteer fire company outside Wilmington.

In 1988 Biden suffered a brain aneurysm. Howell was a member of the ambulance crew that rushed him from Delaware to a Washington hospital, where doctors performed lifesaving surgery.

HE DIDN'T FORGET KINDNESS

Fifteen years later, long after Biden had bounced back, Howell was diagnosed with advanced stage lymphoma. Biden called immediately.

"The man was practically at my doorstep," Howell recalled Saturday before reading a letter the senator sent him at the time.

"You wouldn't let me quit on that fateful night," Biden wrote. "Now it is my turn."

When his fellow firefighters held a benefit for Howell, Biden and his wife came to preside.

"It was kind of an emotional thing," Howell said, "because Joe knows what it's like to be down and out."

Los Angeles Times

VEEP

From Page 11

candidate picks up by having named a particular running mate, the presidential candidate loses three votes.

So, it is true that voters aren't inclined to vote "for" a ticket because of a running mate, but it is also true that voters are inclined to vote "against" a ticket because of a running mate.

BIDEN IS RISKY CHOICE

This is what makes Obama's selection of Biden so risky.

Obama apparently took the complete opposite approach of Nixon. He calculated that Biden had already been severely scrutinized over the years, there were no surprises concerning his candidacy, and the ticket could live with Biden's past.

In the final analysis, the presidential election will be determined by Obama and Republican nominee John McCain – not their running mates.

– The author teaches constitutional law at Oklahoma State University

DEMOS

From Page One

Not socialized medicine – but a national Blue Cross/Blue Shield so that no American goes without vital health services.

The new \$400 billion prescription program is a sham, written by pharmaceutical companies that will grow even richer.

It was under Clinton that we got welfare reform. It was under Clinton that the national budget was balanced for the first time since World War II.

The Democratic Party as personified by Presidents Roosevelt, Truman and Kennedy meant generosity. It meant only helping people who could not help themselves.

That must be the Democratic message – serve the needy not the greedy.

It means preserving the land, wood and water to which the late Sen. Bob Kerr dedicated his life.

It was Democrats who came to Rosa Parks' rescue. LBJ's administration brought justice to all Americans.

It was LBJ who declared war on poverty – despite bitter opposition from the GOP.

It has been the Democratic Party fighting for women's rights.

Despite America's growing prosperity, middle class earnings are going down, down, down in terms of real dollars.

Our industrial base is being decimated, yet we let corporations hide billions in off-shore accounts.

The trend toward more rightwing voting patterns was seen among the nation's farmers – and they are paying a dear price for it, with corporations gobbling up farms at a record rate.

We must take back the country one voter at a time – a voter who cares for the great American values of liberty and justice for all.

Some say Democrats aren't respectful enough of religion.

That is a lie. But the last thing Democrats want to see is a theocracy in America.

We were settled by people fleeing from those who would use religion to govern – often in a vicious way.

The lies they tell about us are filtered through radio, TV and newspapers owned by Republicans. There are more than 1,500 rightwing radio talk show hosts.

Let us join hearts and hands in reclaiming this nation. Dig down in your pocket to help the party that helps people.

Our nation is on the brink of ruin – both morally and financially. To quote the poet, "Let us not go gentle into the good night – rage, rage against the dying of the light."

PONZI

From Page 9

where the oil is.

ENERGY INDEPENDENCE WRONG FRAME

"Even under the Pickens Plan," explains Treehugger's Matthew McDermott, "the U.S. will be importing a significant amount of oil. It's a step toward energy independence in that it expands renewable energy production, but I think framing this debate in terms of energy independence isn't the way to go."

"If you want to take a populist angle on this, pushing the very real benefits that wind power and renewables in general can have in local economies stands on much more solid ground."

If Pickens were a populist, that might be true. But he's not; he's a stone-cold capitalist whose taste for profit outweighs his desire for the common good.

SWITCHING FROM HOMES TO CARS, TRUCKS

Pickens may have spent \$3 billion on wind farms to generate enough electricity to take the load off natural gas, which is currently used to heat homes and more, but only so that it can be used for cars and trucks.

Those are the shells being moved around in this particular game. But shuffling responsibilities and resources will do nothing to forestall our dystopian environmental future, unless those resources burn clean.

What the Pickens Plan does not mention is that the oil tycoon has been deeply invested in natural gas for decades. If the entire American fleet were to switch over to natural gas, the air would possibly [but not probably] be around 30% cleaner in a decade – Pickens would be richer in much higher percentages.

CLEANER AIR FOR A SHORT WHILE

While the air would only stay cleaner for a short while, Pickens would stay loaded beyond the grave.

"Pickens has stated on numerous occasions that, of course, he's going to make money off the Pickens Plan," adds McDermott. "That's the nature of what he does and has done. But natural gas is probably better used to generate electricity than as a fuel source in cars."

"A better solution is electrically powered vehicles. While there are still technical issues, if our transportation fleet was all-electric you could power it from whatever is the most regionally appropriate way of generating electricity cleanly and cheaply. As our ability to generate clean power improves, there would be theoretically no need to change the transportation fleet."

It's much simpler than that, argues Food and Water Watch's Wenonah Hauter. "Gas is not the solution for the future, no matter how the gas industry tries to portray it."

The biggest stain on the Pickens Plan is its architect's distasteful history of water privatization. According to Hauter, it is probably the biggest reason, more than all the aforementioned, not to trust him.

"With the water crisis looming in the future and his track record on selling water regardless of the environmental cost," she asserts, "Pickens will be viewed in the future as irresponsible. His background on promoting renewable energy

can't erase his current disregard for the sustainable use of water."

PICKENS PICKED UP 200,000 ACRES

He recently supplemented his property holdings in Texas with 200,000 acres of land atop the Ogallala Aquifer. Under Texas law, this purchase entitles Mesa Water, Pickens' new company, to take more than 320,000 acre-feet of water, equivalent to more than 104 million gallons, from the property.

"The Ogallala is already severely depleted," Hauter said, "and it's outrageous that he can stick a pipe in the ground and suck this water out without any environmental impact assessment."

Pickens has used all manner of stratagems to obtain rights to what is not a recreational, but an essential, resource for supporting life on the planet.

He has spent more than \$100 million to acquire water from outlying areas in Texas to sell to its metropolitan hubs, and although he hasn't yet found a buyer, it's only a matter of time.

BLUE GOLD IS WAVE OF THE FUTURE

Blue gold is the new black gold, and it won't be long until the world is thirsty from one end to the other. Using his wind investment to fuel his water privatization has only made things worse.

"Pickens used the enormous wind farm erected on his property as a means to lobby for the right to pipe the Ogallala water to a major metropolitan center," Hauter adds.

"He successfully passed a bill through the Texas Legislature to allow a water-supply district to transport alternative energy and water in a single corridor."

Pickens also successfully loosened the legal definitions of a water district, allowing him to invoke the right of eminent domain so that he could build the pipeline through the property of several neighboring landowners.

UNDERHANDED BUSINESS DEALINGS

We should be concerned with these types of underhanded business dealings.

We should be concerned everywhere they occur, one might add, not just in Texas. That means putting aside the media buzz and fawning articles and seeing the Pickens Plan for what it is: a resource power grab for a post-oil oil tycoon.

Natural gas will not save us from environmental catastrophe, nor will it wean us off foreign oil.

Wind farms are a great start, but they deserve to be more than leadoff pitchers for natural gas, whose implementation into our fleet will do nothing to kick-start the massive emissions reductions we are going to need.

Everything from oceanic dead zones and bizarre storms to desertification and societal collapse are on the burner. And we need to cool it down, rather than heat it up.

In the end, the Pickens Plan will not make that happen, no matter what kind of deathbed conversion Boone Pickens is experiencing.

– The author runs the online magazine *Morphizm.com*

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