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Beware Religious Right In 2008 Down But Not Out

By Frosty Troy

"All men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinion in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or effect their civil capacities." – Thomas Jefferson

Some think the current First Amendment political uproar created by the Religious Right is a new issue. The truth is, Americans have never quit debating the separation of church and state.

Vilifying the courts is nothing new. The courts have perpetually heard church-state cases involving schools, government and other social issues involving religion.

There is no such thing as "judge-made law." In beginning the courts were authorized to give life to the brief words in the First Amendment to the Constitution: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Angry rightwingers argue that what was "legal" once upon a time is now illegal, due to court opinions. They cite sectarian prayer in the public schools, once common but now prohibited. Segregation was once legal, now it isn't, thanks to judicial action. The court initially approved slavery, then reversed course.

Critics, such as Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, who argue that the Constitution is immutable should read it. The difference today among those asserting that this is a "Christian nation" is the growth of the fundamentalist movement, spearheaded by the Republican take-over of the Southern Baptist Convention beginning in 1967.

Baptists were gradually joined by Pentecostals and elements of the Catholic hierarchy.

Fundamentalists received a huge boost with the election of George W. Bush to the presidency. He proclaimed he was a "born again" Christian and began pumping billions of tax dollars into Religious right affiliates.

Bush's cynical manipulation of the estimated 30 million fundamentalists was aided and abetted by the GOP packing of the federal courts beginning with Ronald Reagan.

Look no further than Oklahoma, America's second reddest state after

Utah. Beginning with the election of Republican Frank Keating, millions in government dollars began pouring into programs backed by the religious right.

It continues to this good day under Southern Baptist Gov. Brad Henry, whose Commerce Department and Department of Human Services have pumped millions of tax dollars into purely religious programs.

Much of the money has come in the form of federal aid to the states. More than \$10 million went to the Oklahoma public schools to teach abstinence-only. [That program has failed nationwide.]

From promoting vouchers for religious schools to attempting to hand tax dollars to homeschoolers, politicians, especially Republicans, have wooed the religious right with money.

A prime example is GOP House Speaker Lance Cargill's Transformational Justice Act that will steer at least \$100,000 in state tax money to faith-based groups with prison ministries.

Some Democrats play the game, too. Oklahoma City Rep. Rebecca Hamilton laundered more than \$109,000 to favored churches in her district. The money was appropriated to the Oklahoma Department of Commerce for

"economic development and community projects."

From there it was funneled to the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments, which then sent a total of \$13,500 to Sacred Heart Catholic Church, \$60,000 to Exchange Baptist Church, \$8,000 to the Cross of Calvary Baptist Church, and \$25,000 to Birth Choice, a Catholic Church ministry.

Amazingly, the Exchange Baptist Church money was laundered through OSU-OKC.

This is a clear violation of Oklahoma's Constitution [Article II, Section 5] which contains the strongest language of any state on the subject of church and state:

No public money or property shall ever be appropriated, applied, donated, or used directly or indirectly, for the use of, benefit or support of any priest, preacher, denomination or system of religion, or for the use, benefit or support of any priest, preacher, minister, or other religious teachers or dignitary, or sectarian institution as such."

Unfortunately none of these programs have been litigated except for a case involving a Ten Commandments monument on public property. A GOP-appointed federal judge said it passed constitutional muster.

Much of the misinformation visited

upon the American people is coming from well-heeled televangelists and politicized church pulpits.

On the Catholic side, members of the hierarchy and the Knights of Columbus are pushing hard for vouchers. Vouchers for parochial schools would suck \$40 billion out of America's underfunded public schools.

The most influential political preachers rake in millions a year, pouring the money into more propaganda. There are also the mansions and executive jets.

Televangelist Pat Robertson reaches millions of viewers weekly via his Christian Broadcasting Network [CBN]. The station's flagship broadcast, The 700 Club, is a popular forum for powerful politicians.

Robertson calls church-state separation a "lie of the left." The 2004 annual budget for CBN was nearly \$200 million.

James Dobson's Focus on the Family ministry is so large that it has its own zip code and responds to as many as 155,000 letters per week. Dobson routinely secures private meetings with top congressional leaders and was regularly in contact with President George W. Bush's former political adviser Karl Rove.

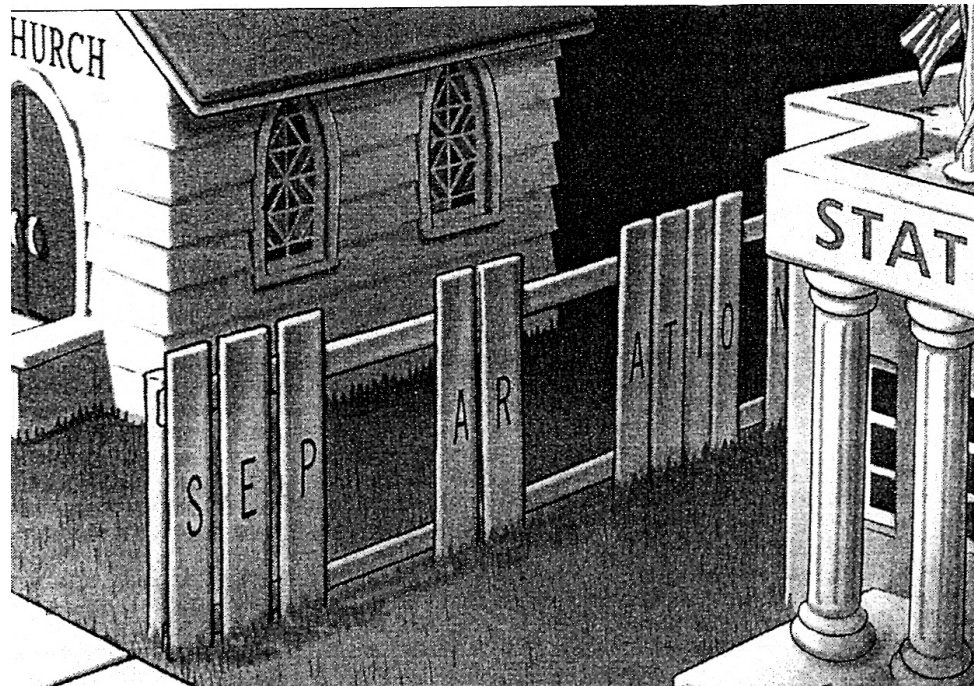
Dobson also appears frequently on cable news networks, such as the Fox News Channel and CNN. The ministry's 2005 annual budget was close to \$140 million.

Alliance Defense Fund, a coalition of 30 Religious Right leaders including Dobson, threaten lawsuits against public schools and government officials to force Religious Right values on every person. The latest budget figures for ADF are from 2004, when the group took in \$17 million.

American Family Association, led by far-right minister Donald Wildmon, launches boycotts of businesses and groups promoting values offensive to the Religious Right.

Wildmon's group mounted a nationwide campaign to pressure states to pass laws mandating the display of "In God We Trust" posters in the public schools. Wildmon's 2005 budget topped \$17 million.

American Center For Law and Jus-



Observations

Cooked Books

Republican House Speaker Lance Cargill is an expert at cooking the books – a perfect example of why so many Oklahomans have such a low opinion of the Legislature.

Consider his press release after a hearing on his so-called merit pay proposal. He neglected to mention that his witness imported from Minnesota hardly supported his position.

Randi Kirchner testified that only 41 of the state's 341 school districts have a merit pay program. There is no funding for all schools.

Cargill failed to mention on his blog that the Oklahoma Education Association President Roy Bishop also made a presentation. Oops!

He has yet to admit Oklahoma education cost per pupil is the 47th lowest in America. Our teachers are dead last in teacher pay in the region. Nationally they rank 47th.

Thankfully, Gov. Brad Henry has said he is sticking to his pledge to bring Oklahoma teachers to the regional average before considering merit pay. That gap today is \$1,500.

Get that veto ready, Governor, this GOP-controlled Legislature proved this year that they would rather cut taxes than deal with genuine needs.

Langston

Langston University is a mess, and that's putting it mildly. Faculty and staff have had only one raise in ten years. It's a case of horrible neglect.

In the past decade they have received several "stipends" of 4%-6% in addition to a .5% pay hike. That doesn't even come close to covering the cost of living. Stipends for faculty and staff are pathetic compared to regular raises.

New faculty hires with no experience have been paid as much as \$8,000 more than faculty of the same rank who have worked hard for years here.

It is Oklahoma's only regional university with no independent faculty organization, despite new President JoAnn Haysbert agreeing that it is a

good idea when she was seeking the presidency.

The previous president, Dr. Ernest Holloway, left Langston \$600,000 to \$1 million in the red. Yet in 25 years he nearly doubled the enrollment but not one new classroom was built for the general undergrad population.

The university has faced a spate of lawsuits charging various types of discrimination.

Enrollments have declined under Dr. Haysbert in part because she will no longer let kids slide on paying bills or on academics. The school gets its funding based on enrollment.

There is no recognition of faculty members, formally or otherwise. That's another reason why Regents ought to take a close look at the university and its policies.

Earning An "F"

The factually-challenged State Chamber's Bill Hanna, writing in an op-ed piece for the anti-public education Daily Disappointment, says money isn't the answer for public education.

Hey Bill, let's try it one time and if it doesn't work, we will go on to something else.

How come you didn't mention Oklahoma is 47th in what it spends on a student's education? Or that our teachers now rank 47th in salaries? Or that we're dead last in salaries in the region, leading to heavy recruitment of our best and brightest?

Why would you let your wife spend her entire career as a public school teacher? Shame on you.

Why would you send your kids to those so-called terrible public schools? Shame on you.

You are one of those hypocritical loons who demean public education but have not the foggiest notion of what you're talking about.

Did you read Ken Neal in a recent Tulsa World? He cited scientific data that the leading cause of school failure is poverty – not teacher organizations as you would have the public



believe.

Hey Bill, did you know one out of five Oklahoma children lives in abject poverty? Is that how the State Chamber wants to build a quality workforce?

You are typical of the bitter opposition of the State Chamber to anything that would cost a tax dollar – unless it fattens business coffers.

The State Chamber is a disgrace. If public education fails some children, point the finger at Oklahoma's business community, not at our schools.

Our beleaguered educators are trying to help the kids, which is more than you can say for the greedheads at the State Chamber.

Postal Facts

We hear so many complaints about the Post Office, we thought we'd share a few facts with you because, warts and all, it is the best in the world.

The U.S. Postal Service delivers to every household and business in the United States. Every American has access to its services and pays the same postage rate for First-Class Mail regardless of geographic location.

The USPS:

- Delivers mail to over 144 million homes, businesses and post office boxes in every state, city, and town in the country; including Puerto Rico, Guam, the American Virgin Islands and American Samoa.

- Serves more than 8 million customers daily at over 37,000 post offices and contract stations.

- Provides alternative access for customers to purchase stamps at more than 27,800 vending machines; nearly 25,400 commercial retail outlets [grocery, convenience, drug and gift stores]; nearly 15,300 banking and credit union ATMs and 2,500 automated postal centers across the country.

- Added over two million new addresses to the delivery network in 2006.

- Generates annual operating revenue of nearly \$70 billion.

- Delivered nearly 212 billion pieces of mail last year.

- Employs more than 700,000 career employees.

- Pays over \$2 billion in employee salaries and benefits every two weeks.

- Does not receive tax dollars from the federal government – it's a self-supporting agency, using the revenue from the sales of postage and postage-

related products to pay expenses.

- Handles more than 44% of the world's card and letter mail volume – delivering more volume to more addresses to a larger geographical area than any other postal system in the world.

- When fuel costs rise just one penny, USPS costs increase \$8 million.

- Each letter carrier delivers about 2,300 pieces of mail a day to approximately 500 addresses.

- About 14% of the nation's population moves every year generating over 45 million address changes.

- Forwards over three billion pieces of mail a year, at no charge to the customers.

Sounds like the cost of a first class stamp is a bargain, doesn't it?

Be Proud

Don't believe the media and slanted pollsters – the new Democratic Congress has been amazingly successful given the toxic GOP atmosphere in both chambers of Congress.

The public's low approval ratings reflect broad discontent with the direction of the country but also displeasure with Congress for falling to reverse course on Iraq and for continuing the bitter partisan warfare.

Has it been a do-nothing Congress?

The Democratic Congress's legislative harvest this year has been bountiful.

The Democratic Congress enacted a far-reaching lobbying and ethics reform bill, an increase in the minimum wage, recommendations of the 9/11 Commission, foreign investment rules and a competitiveness package, and has embedded a number of major initiatives and new priorities in continuing and supplemental spending bills.

Democrats also made headway on energy, children's health insurance, college student loans, Head Start, drug safety and a farm bill – though much of this awaits action in the Senate or in conference and faces a possible veto.

In the Senate Republicans have made the filibuster, or the threat of filibuster, routine, setting a 60-vote hurdle for all contested legislative matters.

This has led Harry Reid of Nevada, the majority leader, to file many more petitions for cloture.

Democrats can be proud of the congressional majority despite the sorry media coverage.

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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 by Thomas Wolfe

Observerscope

For those distressed by our cover *The Color of Crime*, we vetted all the sources and checked independent sources, including The Sentencing Project. We are just as distressed, but as Bill Cosby puts it, don't kill the messenger, fix the problem.

Laurel: To Gov. Brad Henry who opposes merit pay until teachers are brought to the regional average. Now they are \$1,500 below it and rank 47th in salaries.

The Oklahoma Commerce Department laundered \$71,000 to Speaker Lance Cargill's 100 Ideas [his campaign for governor?]. They sent it to the Oklahoma Community Institute which then partnered with 100 Ideas. Pure political corruption.

Dart: To Sen. James Williamson, R-Tulsa, for using a fake OB/GYN nurse from the OU Health Sciences Center at his press conference to push his anti-abortion bill. He should check his witnesses.

"My wife Mary is completely incensed by the fact that they [newspapers] have drug our name through the mud." - former state Sen. Gene Stipe, a day before reporting for a federal mental health exam.

Laurel: To OU President David Boren for asking the Legislature to grant a moratorium on any more tax cuts, with more than \$700 million adopted in the past three years.

OU and OSU are spending a fortune on advertising when both are overflowing with students. TV, newspapers and billboards abound with promotional ads at the same time tuition is soaring to near double digits.

Dart: To state Rep. Doug Cox, R-Grove, for second-guessing the Court of Criminal Appeals in a death penalty case. Did Cox read the proceedings or was it an instant diagnosis?

State Insurance Commissioner Kim Holland continues her drive to develop a basic health care benefit for all Oklahomans. Today 700,000 Oklahomans are without insurance.

Laurel: To the Democratic Congress for going after a \$6 billion tax break for a small band of powerful Wall Street financiers. It's the result of an arcane regulation issued by the IRS.

Rep. Ron Peters, R-Tulsa, said his interim committee will continue pursuing childcare reform. Let's hope the recommendations include funding for adequate quality DHS staffing.

Dart: To the American media for failing to report on why so many millions are fleeing from Mexico. It has turned into a plutocracy thriving on concessions to more than 946 billionaires - many fattened on drug dealing.

Kudos to the Oklahoma Democratic Party for their packed Support The Troops Night and for 116 care packages sent to the troops in Iraq.

Laurel: To Barbara McBride-Smith of Tulsa's Hoover Elementary School, named Oklahoma's top school media library specialist.

Thanks to the Republican-controlled Legislature, the nation's finest CareerTech system has had to turn away 12,000 students and faces a serious teacher shortage.

Dart: To Chesapeake's Tom Price for attacking Dave Herbert's blistering attack on the oil industry for seeking more and more tax breaks. Price is one of the funders of the Swift Boat liars.

Too many Okies sit around cussing the federal government while they live off of it - Tinker, FAA, the Veterans Affairs health complex and the U.S. Postal Training Center employ more than 26,000 Sooners.

Laurel: To the Republican Texas House, voting 129-8 against a voucher bill. The GOP state Senate buried two voucher bills in committee. They killed a similar proposal under then-Gov. George Bush.

Is marriage a dying institution? A new Pew Research survey reveals that 36.8% of all births in 2005 were born to unmarried cohabitating couples.



Dart: To Linda Chavez, Bush Labor Secretary nominee who had to withdraw her name. Her Chavez Inc. PAC raised \$24.5 million but only one percent went to candidates she was to help.

No global warming? Two-thirds of the world's polar bears will be killed off by 2050 due to thinning ice. This fact comes from government scientists not the Sierra Club.

Laurel: To Dr. Tim Mauldin and Becca Salmon, both of Norman, selected to serve on the American Cancer Society's Government Relations Committee. Two first-class citizens.

Would someone please explain to Rep. Jabar Shumate, D-Tulsa, that he ought to quit criticizing public schools. His district has a median household income of \$21,219. Poverty is the top cause of school failure.

Dart: To State Treasurer Scott Meacham for appearing in ads opposing a coal fired plant in Oklahoma. As noted by Sen. David Myers, R-Ponca City, Meacham should tend to his own office. [Chesapeake seems to have a peculiar effect on politicians in both parties.]

If you don't read another book this year, check out *Supreme Conflict*, by Jan Crawford Greenburg. It's a scary inside tale on how the Bush crowd reshaped the U.S. Supreme Court.

Laurel: To state Sen. Andrew Rice, D-OKC, announcing against Oklahoma's foremost political embarrassment, Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Tulsa. Some say Rice, 34, lacks experience. Jack Kennedy and Ronald Reagan had none.

Rep. Dave Dank, R-OKC, should step aside since he's a legislative joke, lacking sufficient gray matter to find a Capitol toilet. The weenie declined to see state Auditor Jeff McMahan after he attacked him.

Dart: To the mindless journalists who fail to note that the Legislature grossly underfunds the Department of Human Services. Understaffed welfare workers are trying to police 5,100 day care centers, carrying twice the national cases.

Oklahoma's sorry Republican-controlled Legislature has provided for 400 additional beds at \$5,000 per bed to ease prison overcrowding. Can they count? The growth will exceed 900 new inmates.

Laurel: To the new law requiring off-road vehicles operators to wear a helmet in all state parks. It ought to be statewide.

Here we go again. The Libertarian Party, the Constitution Party and the Green Party want on the state ballot. Even if combined, they have just about enough votes to screw up a close election between Republicans and Democrats.

Dart: To GOP presidential candidates Mike Huckabee, Mitt Romney and Fred Thompson favoring a constitutional ban on abortion without an exception for the life of the mother.

It's good to see teachers such as Terecia J. Webb of Norman and George Cohlma of Edmond fighting back against the anti-public education lies and distortions printed in the Daily Disappointment.

Laurel: To the Tulsa World, for reminding the public that embattled state Auditor Jeff McMahan hasn't been charged with anything, yet Republicans are assuming his guilt.

The Centers for Disease Control report that 88% of teens who take a virginity pledge have sex before marriage. The study notes that 47% of high school students report having had sex.


Dart: To an administration that can blow \$500 billion fighting a civil war while 4.8 million people with serious cancer have no appropriate treatment and 1.4 million with late stage AIDS lack medication. [World Health Organization]

Sen. Clark Jolley, R-Edmond, appeared to be a bright star in the state Senate, then he showed his true colors with a factually-flawed attack on public education. Just another Republican dummy.

Laurel: To the AARP for its story on medical tourism - with thousands of Americans going abroad because they can't afford serious medical treatment in the U.S.A. There are 44.8 million uninsured Americans.

Tulsa police have declared war on crime with Operation Bullet Trap. In 18 months it has netted 848 arrests, including 40 for violent crimes, 133 for gang violence and 262 guns taken off the street.

THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

I am alarmed that an imposter has infiltrated your publication. Was it a joke? How else did the blatantly racist and erroneous piece, "The Color of Crime," get into the September 10, 2007 issue of the Observer? The source of the information was stated to have come from the New Century Foundation, and it certainly sounded like their regurgitations.

The New Century Foundation, founded in the early 1990's by Samuel Jared Taylor in Oakton, VA, has been widely criticized as being a conduit of white superiority. Even well known staunch conservative author Dinesh D'Souza has condemned Taylor as being an advocate of "the new white racism."

The New Century Foundation is a self-styled think tank that publishes a monthly journal and a website called American Renaissance. It also hosts biannual conferences. The foundation promotes pseudoscientific and questionably researched and argued studies to validate the superiority of whites.

Presenters at conferences have been Samuel Francis and Gordon Lee Baum of the Council of Conservative Citizens. Attendees have included Don Black, operator of the white supremacist website Stormfront and National Alliance leader Kevin Alfred Strom. Taylor has been a board member of the Council of Conservative Citizens and is on the advisory board and contributed to the racist journal Occidental Quarterly.

I urge readers to do their own research on this outfit [see, for example, www.sourcewatch.org] and then ask the Observer to explain to us this lapse in objectivity. Or was it intentional?

Pauline Overstreet
Wewoka

Editor, The Observer:

Gov. Howard Dean, chair of the Democratic National Committee, recently exhorted attendees at the 2007 Islamic Society of North America Convention to run for office: "Stand up and say who you are and be proud of it," he told a packed house, according to the Chicago Sun-Times newspaper.

I hope more Muslims do run for public office because the Christian Bible-bangers need competition which they haven't had since the founding of the country. And I would go even further: I encourage Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Wiccans, Confuciusists, Protestants, Catholics, the whole motley crew of religionists across the spectrum, to run for public office and scream their creeds from the highest rooftops de-

manding the same space in the public square, the same space on the public calendars, the same accommodation in the public schools and public services.

Just as the capitalist economic model declares that competition is good, at the same time as it wants government protection [witness the failing loan business asking for financial succor due to the busted housing bubble], we'll see how the Christian fundies feel about separation of church and state when there's competition from other religious brethren for the same charitable choice dollars now enjoyed by the Christians.

The competition will result in either the strict observance of the First Amendment's separation of religion and government or finally the complete subservience of the U.S.A. to its alter ego - Christian theocracy declared by fiat.

James Nimmo
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Is it a coincidence or symbolic that the proposed troop withdrawal nearly matches the 4,000 body bags returned from Iraq?

Tom Birbilis
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

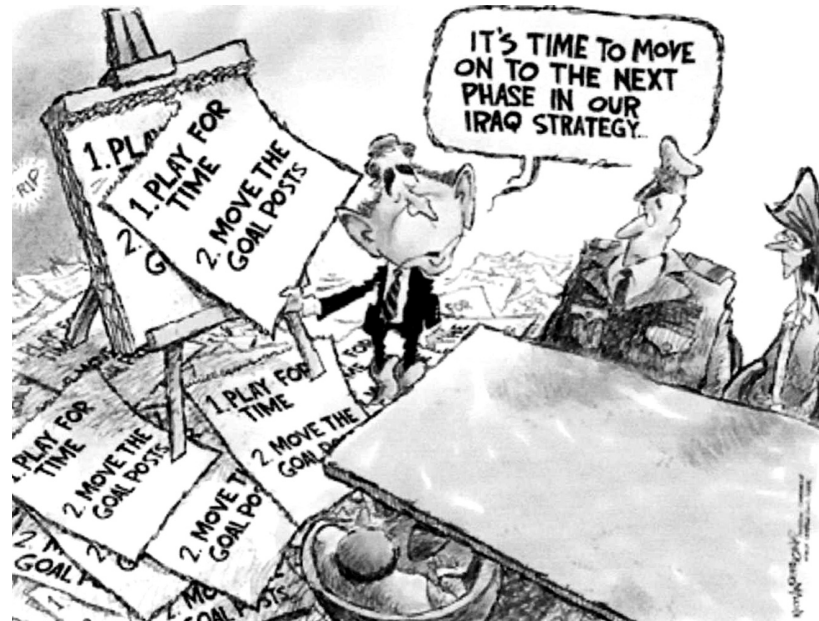
The U.S. is fighting Iraqis in Iraq who are nationalists of various stripes, whether religious or secular. They are Sunni. But what about the minority of foreign fighters - where are they from? None captured from Iran - surprise! A U.S. officer in Iraq says the country providing a lot of foreign suicide bombers is U.S. ally Saudi Arabia - 45% of them. Has any general or Bush administration official called a press conference to denounce Saudi Arabia? No. Has Joe Lieberman threatened it with a war? No. Everything is being blamed on Iran because powerful American special interests want to get Iran, regardless of the facts.

There isn't any significant cadre of foreign "al-Qaeda" fighters in Iraq - at least we haven't captured many. They can't take over the country because they are such a tiny group. Everything Bush and Cheney have said about the nature of the war and the supposed dangers of a U.S. withdrawal is transparent falsehood. Why am I not surprised?

Frank P. Belcastro
Dubuque, IA

Editor, The Observer:

As a scientist, I am dismayed to see the Observer repeating an essen-



tial error concerning one's "belief" in evolution by including the Gallup Poll questionnaire story in the Aug. 25 Observerscope. I take issue with the concept that a scientific theory is a matter of belief, and not one of acceptance.

Scientific theories are rooted in physical observations [those of Darwin, for example] or stem from Gedanken experiments, or thought experiments [a favorite method of Einstein]. In short, a scientific theory is a proposal that offers a particular vantage point from which to better understand the world.

Once a theory is proposed, it is then tested in view of further evidence or predictions. The acceptance or rejection of a scientific theory is based upon how well it succeeds either in its explanation of what is observed, or in its prediction of what will be observable. Thus, religious adherents - for whatever reason they may have - do not have to espouse a belief or disbelief in evolution, but rather they should consider whether to accept it or reject it on its scientific merits.

However, to reject a scientific theory solely on the basis that it calls into question one's religious beliefs [such as the literal interpretation of the creation story in the Bible] says nothing about the validity of the scientific theory and everything about the insecurity of the believer.

Religion may lead us to a better understanding of why we are here, while science strives for a better understanding of where we are and how we got here. These are not mutually exclusive approaches. As a scientist and believer in a Creator God [although not a biblical literalist], both facilitate my search for a better understanding of my place in this world.

Joe Shveima, Ph.D.
Bartlesville

Editor, The Observer:

In a recent Tulsa World article, Pat Buchanan stated, "With no atomic weapons, no ICBM's, no air force to challenge ours, no navy, an economy 2% of ours and its oil reserves running out, Iran is scarcely an existential threat to the United States."

Well excuse me but cannot this description be applied between the U.S. and Iraq? Do either of these nations represent a long-term strategic or ideological threat to a United States of 300 million, with 30% of the world's economy, and the best air force, navy and army on earth, and a nuclear arsenal of thousands of weapons?

Keeping this in mind the next time you hear a conservative tell you that

"they will follow us home." Ask them how they will do this!

Greg Scroggins
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Something quite extraordinary happened recently at The White House. It was covered in the news, but barely.

The 2007 Presidential Scholars were received and welcomed at the White House. It's quite a remarkable collection of young adults. Each state, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico were represented by one male and one female high school senior selected for this honor. It would have been quite a brain trust assembled to be addressed by the President of the United States at the event. But that's not what was extraordinary.

Although it was not officially part of the ceremony, one of the Presidential Scholars handed George W. Bush a letter. The letter was brief, to the point, and criticized our continued involvement in Bush's needless war. The letter encouraged him to realize his policies were failing and bring an end to the quagmire he helped create. The letter was signed by the individual who presented it to Bush. The letter was also signed ... by every single 2007 Presidential Scholar! Bush paused to read the letter, set it aside, and went on with his pre-scripted speech.

The 2007 Presidential Scholars were there representing blue states and red states. We can only assume some were Democrats, some Independents, and certainly some Republicans. The 100% consensus of the entire group was detailed in the letter to the president. Perhaps it can have some impact in providing George W. Bush with a dose of reality outside of his bubble. If so, we'll have a group of teenagers, a remarkable group of teenagers, to thank for it.

Kenny Belford
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Will we look back on this era of illegal and catastrophic war and know we, the American people, should have forced this lousy Congress to impeach these war-mongers and mentally impaired leaders? How much more must we and the Middle East peoples have to pay for these rogue leaders? How many more lives, hopes, children and innocents must be sacrificed before our citizens rise up and do what's necessary to rid ourselves of these vermin sitting in the power seats and spitting on the wishes of a majority of Americans? How much longer?

Darla Sparks
Yukon

Frosty Troy's

Commencement Address

Students and their parents need to hear an up-beat send-off. No politics. A word portait about this wonderful state

**Call Helen Troy 405-525-5582 for modest rates
But Hurry! Frosty's calendar fills fast**

Wither Democrats?

Anywhere you go in Oklahoma, the question is always the same: What is the future of the Oklahoma Democratic Party?

Ivan Holmes has taken over as chairman of a broken party, working non-stop to get the party's finances in shape and retrieve longtime supporters.

It isn't an impossible job and Holmes is a bouncy optimist on the right track, traveling the state, rousing Democrats.

Why did the party lose organized labor? Why are trial lawyers no longer supporting the party? What happened to the young people?

The political shift in Oklahoma is massive. It was the last among border and southern states to shift to the right – handing the Oklahoma House of Representatives to the Republicans 57-44, dividing the state Senate 24-24.

It began with the first Republican governor, Henry Bellmon. Then Dewey Bartlett and Frank Keating. Democrats continued to hold the Legislature and most statewide offices.

What happened? This was a state of “tantamount” – winning the Democratic nomination was tantamount to being elected.

There are many factors, including the fact that only 18% of Democrats identify as liberals – real party activists. That split was never more in evidence than in the 2007 Legislature.

Legislative desertions were chronic in the state Senate where Democrats routinely sided with Republicans – even on a state budget that spelled disaster for programs normally supported by Democrats.

The House sustained Democratic Gov. Brad Henry's veto, but not before Democratic Co-Senate Leader Mike Morgan blistered Henry for the veto. Democrats would probably dump Morgan but they believe he would cross the aisle, giving the GOP total control.

The late U.S. Sen. Robert S. Kerr once said that the state would eventually go Republican for two reasons – the Baptist church and the Daily Oklahoman.

Baptists number 700,000 out of 3.5 million population, and many have shifted to the Republicans, in voting if not in registration.

Their pet peeves – abortion and gay rights – which they identify with the Democratic Party. “Abortion” doesn't appear in the Oklahoma or Democratic National platform.

Add to the huge Baptist vote the most rightwing Catholics on the planet, tons of holy rollers, and you have a recipe for political disaster for any candidate who doesn't toe the fundamentalist line.

The Daily Oklahoman [renamed the Oklahoman] has long been a shill for the

Abstinence Only Fails

Don't confuse Oklahoma's religious right with the facts – this state is blowing more than \$500,000 a year teaching abstinence-only to no affect.

Latest to weigh in is an Oxford University team that reviewed 13 U.S. trials involving over 15,000 people aged 10 to 21.

Surprise! They found abstinence-only programs had no negative or positive impact on the rates of sex infections or unprotected sex. The report is in the latest issue of the British Medical Journal.

Abstinence-only programs don't work because they provide no safety net for those young people who do have a sexual relationship – and research shows that many do.

President Bush has strongly supported abstinence-only, catering to his base of fundamentalists who deplore real sex education.

A third of the President's HIV budget is wasted on abstinence programs. More than \$300 million has been spent on this ill-fated program.

Legislative Merit Pay?

How about merit pay for the Oklahoma Legislature? If it's good enough for teachers, it's good enough for legislators. Here's how it would work:

- A \$100 pay deduction for each roll call vote missed.
- A \$100 deduction for each member on the losing side of a bill – the equivalent of a low test score.
- A \$1,000 pay deduction for introducing a bill that does not become law. Obviously they are in need of improvement.
- A \$1,000 salary deduction for any member failing to pass a single exam on the state and federal constitutions and all Oklahoma statutes.
- An instant polygraph exam before a vote on any substantive measure in order to prove they read the bills – which most don't.
- Any legislator who consistently scored below average would be judged in need of improvement and transferred to the governing body of his local community.
- Any legislator who scored well would be allowed to replace one of the loons in Congress.
- Any legislative leader who killed bills in committee without hearing them would have to spend three successive weekends in the State Penitentiary in McAlester.
- Any legislative leader who failed to win sufficient votes to override a gubernatorial veto would forfeit his or her office.

Let's get this Merit Pay program on the ballot. Ten to one it would pass.



Republican Party, especially under the late E.L. Gaylord, the man who called Henry Bellmon “the senator from Moscow” because he endorsed the Panama Canal treaty.

The paper, which I dubbed the Daily Disappointment, goes out of its way to trash Democrats, at times using the worst possible picture.

Despite widespread Republican corruption on the Corporation Commission [halted by the FBI], the Disappointment remained silent because the Gaylords owned Publishers Petroleum.

The bitter Gaylord opposition to unions began with a lockout of mailers, replaced by scabs who lived on the premises. Then they sold their truck line to be rid of its union members, forced to drive unconscionable hours.

At one time there were 17 newsroom employees permitted to work only 37 hours a week to avoid fringe benefits.

Oklahoma pulpit politics has been extraordinary in recent years, a crass use of religion.

Add to this the canard, peddled by Sen. Jim Inhofe, that Oklahoma Democrats are on the wrong side of the gun issue. Democrats easily outnumber Republicans in gun ownership.

Most committed Democrats would rather be a minority party supporting the Constitution – such as in federalism, war powers and the separation of church and state – than a majority ignoring it

Ivan Holmes has his work cut out for him. Those who believe in the principles of the Democratic Party ought to weigh in – with money, time and a willingness to proudly declare their party affiliation.

When Republican Frank Keating was governor he supported abstinence-only, winning an initial \$10 million for Oklahoma – but real sex education was eliminated. One sex-ed teacher said she quit because she wanted no part of “deliberately misleading kids” by feeding their ignorance.

British researchers found none of the abstinence-only programs had an impact on the age at which individuals lost their virginity, whether they had unprotected sex, the number of sexual partners, the rates of sexually transmitted diseases or the number of pregnancies.

Another trial even showed that participants in abstinence-only programs were significantly more likely to report pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease, compared to participants using real education on the subject.

This compared to programs that promote the use of condoms which greatly reduce the risk of HIV.

This finding has key implications for policy and practice, especially in the U.S., where abstinence-only programs receive both federal and state funding.

Of course young people need to know that they can say no to sex, just as they need to know how to protect themselves from pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections if they decide to have a sexual relationship.

Listen up, religious supporters of abstinence-only: It can have the reverse effect, making things worse as people do not have the knowledge or confidence to have safe sex.

Tragedy

One of the genuine tragedies of the unlamented 2007 Legislature was the failure to adopt Sen. Andrew Rice's bill to clean up the sorry payday lending industry.

Rice, an Oklahoma City Democrat, could not get his bill out of a Republican-dominated committee.

Payday loans are banished for military families but not for civilians. Interest can run as high as 300%.

Rice wanted to limit them to one short-term loan at a time and would have placed a waiting period between loans.

He also proposed reducing the maximum fee to \$10 per \$100 borrowed and increasing the maximum loan term from 12 days to 14 days.

One of the problems with payday loans – strongly backed by the state's banking industry – is the tendency to keep on borrowing.

The industry – targeted in almost every state by critics – has launched a \$10 million campaign to urge borrowers to use the system responsibly.

Addictions Costing State \$4.4 Billion

By Pam McKeown

Alcoholics Anonymous calls addiction "cunning, baffling and powerful." This truth is evident in individual lives and also in the world of business, where untreated addictive disorders cost Oklahoma businesses, governments and families an estimated \$4.4 billion annually.

September is National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month, which this year focuses on the economic costs to society, and the benefits of treatment and recovery.

"Addictive disorders constitute a tremendous drain on our state's businesses and governments," said Terri White, commissioner of the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.

RELATED SUBSTANCE ABUSE COSTS

"Of the \$4.4 billion in annual economic costs related to substance abuse in Oklahoma, \$1.4 billion of the direct costs are attributed to issues such as incarceration and prosecution, and health care.

"The remaining \$3 billion constitutes indirect costs from lost or reduced productivity, premature death, and academic under achievement such as dropping out of school because of alcohol-related problems.

"Each year, more than 6,500 students in Oklahoma's colleges and universities drop out due to alcohol," she said.

Absenteeism, turnover and lower productivity are some of the more obvious effects of substance abuse in the workplace.

NATIONAL COST IS STAGGERING

Nationally, the cost to American businesses because of drug addiction is approximately \$128.6 billion in lost productivity each year.

Alcohol dependence is estimated to cause 500 million lost workdays annually. In 2005, nearly 77% of adults with substance abuse or dependence were employed.

However, it is essential to realize that treatment for addictive disorders is highly effective, White said.

"It is just as effective as treatment for other chronic conditions such as high blood pressure, asthma and diabetes."

Nationally, studies have shown that job problems related to addiction – such as incomplete work, absenteeism, tardiness, work-related injuries, mistakes and disagreements with supervisors – were cut by an average of 75% among employees who received treatment for substance abuse disorders, White said.

HEALTH CARE COSTS DECREASE

"Additionally, one insurance company found that a family's health care costs decreased by 87% after treatment," White said. "Overall, the cost-benefit ratios for early treatment and prevention is about 7:1, with some studies touting a return-on investment of up to 20:1."

White said it is in Oklahoma's best interests to support those in need of treatment.

The Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services operates a 24-hour-a-day "Reachout" hotline that can direct family members or those with drug or alcohol problems to appropriate community-based treatment centers or other resources. For more information, call the hotline at 1-800-522-9054.

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF DISORDERS

In Oklahoma, employers will spend more than \$600 million annually in additional medical costs for the 200,000 Oklahoma workers suffering from addiction and depression.

The fact is that untreated mental health and substance abuse problems greatly affect any employer's bottom line in the form of decreased productivity and increased on-the-job accidents, absenteeism, turnover and medical costs.

And those costs are not just associated with employees who themselves have a problem. The on-the-job performance of workers whose family members or



friends have an addictive disorder is also affected.

In 2005 as many as 74% of Americans said that addiction to alcohol had some impact on them at some point in their lives, whether it was their own addiction, that of a friend or family member, or any other experience with addiction.

HOW IT AFFECTS FAMILIES

One quarter [26%] of American employees surveyed reported actual drug/alcohol abuse or addiction within their family. Of these employees, 42% reported being distracted and less productive at work because of their family member's addiction.

More than one-third [36%] of employees admitted that at least one of their coworkers had been distracted, less productive, or missed work because of alcohol/drug abuse or addiction within their family, according to a new nationwide poll conducted by the Hazelden Foundation.

According to the survey, more than two-thirds [67%] of HR professionals today believe that substance abuse and addiction is one of the most serious issues they face in their company.

Absenteeism, reduced productivity and a lack of trust are major problems stemming from substance abuse that affect the efficiency and success of companies across the country.

TREATMENT GAP

Despite the serious nature of the issue and the wide adoption of policies and programs, many HR professionals are not referring employees to treatment programs. Less than one-quarter [22%] of HR professionals say their companies openly and proactively deal with employee substance abuse and addiction issues.

An overwhelming majority of HR professionals [92%] agree that an effective treatment program increases employee productivity. Two-thirds [67%] of HR professionals believe that access to an effective treatment program reduces overall health care costs for employers.

BENEFITS OF TREATMENT

More than 72 medical conditions have risk factors that can be attributed to substance abuse. Investing in treatment programs for people with substance abuse disorders can prevent the onset of long-term medical conditions, ultimately saving lives and decreasing long-term costs.

Investing in treatment can have significant effects on employment and the viability of employers and businesses in the community. Treatment is associated with a 19% increase in employment and an 11% decrease in the number of clients who receive welfare.

Reported job problems, including incomplete work, absenteeism, tardiness, work related injuries, mistakes and disagreements with supervisors, are cut by an average of 75% among employees who have received treatment for addictive disorders.

– The author is with the ODMHSAS Public Information Office

Rightwing Senator Hits Appeals Court

Outrage and disappointment ought to be the reactions of Oklahomans to Sen. Jonathan Nichols' attack on the Court of Criminal Appeals.

It was in response to the decision by the court to overturn the death penalty in the Trooper Nikky Joe Green murder trial.

Nichols, R-Norman, blasted the court's decision to reverse the imposition of the death penalty for Green's killer, Ricky Ray Malone, in part because Green's widow referenced God and the Bible.

"The Court of Criminal Appeals has broken loose like a liberal cannon on the deck of Oklahoma's system of justice," said Nichols.

"This latest opinion blows a gaping hole in the heart of Oklahoma's conservative, but fair, courts of law and order."

That's hardly true. God is not a defense attorney and the use of his name and his word is especially repugnant to non-fundamentalists.

Talk about your cheap shots. Check this quote from a Nichols press release: "I thought I was reading an opinion written in some bizarre world where Ted Kennedy was running our courts," Nichols said. "Instead, I was reading an opinion that the majority of our justices wrote while sitting on Oklahoma's highest court for criminal appeals."

The court concluded that, "While Malone might have had only a slim chance of

avoiding a death sentence in his original trial, the religious and duty-based plea of the victim's wife that Malone be shown 'no mercy' squelched whatever slim chance he had."

Nichols believes that the court's ruling to ban religious invocations in victim impact statements was unnecessary and over-reaching.

Any fair reading of the court's opinion would dispel the notion that the court is anti-God.

Nichols, a former prosecutor, is also an officer of the court and should be ashamed of his off-the-wall criticism.

Someone tell Nichols that the law is supposed to be interpreted, regardless of ideological viewpoints.

Living Will

Last night, my wife and I were sitting in the living room and I said to her, "I never want to live in a vegetative state, dependent on some machine and fluids from a bottle. If that ever happens, just pull the plug."

She got up, unplugged the TV and then threw out my beer.

Meddling Legislature Hurts Small Schools

By Mike McGregor

Our small schools face a dilemma regarding buildings. This is especially true if you have a growing student population. The problem exists because by law we are only able to vote 10% of our district's valuation.

Our small schools have a limited bonding capacity. I have approximately \$700,000 as my bonding limit for Foyil schools. To get around this restriction the attorney general has ruled that a lease purchase process is legal.

What many schools are doing is voting several bond issues that cover one construction project. Then they sell each individual issue separately, usually one per year and thereby remain under their legal limit of indebtedness. This ties up your bonding capacity from four to five years to get all issues paid.

In the past few years another method of construction has entered the picture, the use of construction managers.

WHAT THE CONSTRUCTION MANAGER DOES

In this process a board of education will hire a construction manager at a cost of 5% of the project and they will oversee the open bidding process as well as the construction.

Another savings to the district is completed in that if negotiations result in a lower price with a sub-contractor, the savings goes to the district rather than in the general contractor's pocket.

General contractors figure anywhere from 20% to 30% profit into their bidding process. As you can see the district can save 15% to 20% on the cost of the project. This allows more buildings for less money.

Now the Legislature enters the picture. The general contractors, feeling a piece of their market being taken, lobbied the Legislature and got a law passed that eliminates the construction manager.

THEY DON'T PUT UP A PENNY

Their excuse is that the local board of education and the district superintendent are not knowledgeable enough to make these types of decisions.

Remember the Legislature provides zero funding for local building projects yet it has dictated to the schools how they can spend funds that the district has raised.

When this legislation first appeared we spoke to John Morrison who is the administrator at the Central Services agency over construction and properties and

Student Achievement Can't Be Only Measure

By Sharon Edge Martin

One of the things I've noticed most about school reform is that teachers are seldom consulted. If legislators talked to teachers, much of what passes for reform would never make it into committee. Take the subject of merit pay as an example.

There are good teachers, bad teachers, and all degrees between. The same designations probably apply to employees of any organization. Now, a good teacher can work until her heart gives out, but some students will never make it. If parents don't care whether or not a student shows up for school, and if a municipality or district doesn't have laws that punish parents of truants, no amount of good teaching can help a student who doesn't come to class.

Some students show up hungry. Again, it is up to parents to feed children and to make sure the food they get is nutritious. Poverty is one factor. Poor parenting is another. When a parent says, "Oh, my son won't have anything but donuts and Dr Pepper for breakfast," the parent isn't parenting. And that son won't be in any frame of mind to learn, no matter how good the teacher is.

A recent phenomenon is missing mothers. In Oklahoma, we lead the nation in the number of incarcerated women. Many are in prison on drug charges, another subject we should tackle.

ALTERNATIVE ED STUDENTS OFTEN HAVE MOTHER ISSUES

When I taught alternative education, what I discovered as I got to know my students was that the majority had mother issues. Some had been abandoned, others had mothers in prison, and some few just had mothers who didn't "get" mothering. These students were only successful after we established a good, one-on-one working relationship, but I had to be careful that I didn't become a mother surrogate.

It is harder to build these one-on-one relationships in a regular classroom, but it isn't impossible. In alternative classes, the ratio is one teacher to 15 students. In most high schools, the number of students each teacher sees daily ranges from 90 to 150. If students fall between the cracks, does one always blame the teacher?

Finally, there are test scores that legislators like to peruse. If test scores rise, schools and teachers should be rewarded, they say. If scores fall, they threaten to take away the one thing that isn't equal anyway, the funding.

TEST SCORES, SOCIOECONOMICS INEXTRICABLY LINKED

Listen, folks, rich neighborhoods fund their schools better than poor neighborhoods, at least in Oklahoma. And there is a .99 correlation between test scores and socioeconomics. Now, that doesn't mean that individual students from poor homes won't excel. Many can and do. What it means is this: a group of students with more resources will score better than a group of students with fewer. And when the scores come in low, the Legislature wants to take even more of those resources away?

The moral of all this: pay cannot be based purely on student achievement.



were told that public schools would be exempt from this legislation and that we should not worry. Another example of the Legislature and the state telling us to trust them while they work out the problems.

The bottom line is the legislation passed and we are now told that the use of a construction manager is not allowed. My cost to build buildings has just increased by 20% to 25%. This is taxpayer money that the taxpayers voted on themselves so they can provide needed facilities for our school children.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS GET SHORT END OF THE STICK

Public Education is our No. 1 priority, so says the Legislature.

Wrong! When it comes to taking care of profits going to someone vs. schools saving money, the profit-taking wins every time.

I personally am tired of someone in the Legislature telling professional educators that they know what is best and we are not able to make those decisions. They don't have a clue and are not interested in the truth.

They have three priorities: getting re-elected, taking care of the party agenda and, lastly, trying to take care of the people's business.

In the past three years public education's share of the state budget has declined each year. This is at a time when we had more state revenue than ever before and when we passed record-setting tax cuts. Your priorities are evident by how and where you spend your money.

When the Legislature says "trust us" it is a sure thing that we are about to be given the short end of the stick. Educators are used to the short end, but that doesn't mean we like it.

- The author is superintendent of Foyil Public Schools

There are too many factors that teachers cannot control, two being quality of parenting and inequity in funding. Only the latter can be changed by courageous legislators.

- The author, a public school teacher, lives in Oilton

Does U.S. Care About Military Families?

By Kathy Sullivan

My daughter has been in the Navy for 17 years and her husband is a Marine pilot who has been in the service about the same amount of time.

My daughter has served this country faithfully and has been an excellent officer. She has been deployed to Bosnia and to Kuwait on a preliminary team before the U.S. attacked Iraq. She had her first child two years ago and her second child is eight months old.

After my daughter had her first child, she and her husband worked with the Navy and Marine detailers to make sure they would not be deployed at the same time. The Navy would not let her take an assignment about two years ago because it would put them both in a position that could be deployed.

Her husband was deployed three months after the birth of their first daughter. He received orders for a second deployment and will leave in January 2008 for four months.

In May, my daughter was informed that she was being loaned to the Army and she was to be deployed for a year to Iraq. The Navy policy is that you can't be deployed until your child is a year old but they claimed it didn't apply to her.

They decided she was the one to go by picking her name out of a hat when there was another officer that was two years her senior that had never been deployed. They claimed that because he was in and out of the unit [in the U.S.] he was deferred. Another Marine industrial hygienist volunteered to go in her place and they wouldn't allow it.

I wrote letters to Rep. Tom Cole and Sens. Jim Inhofe and Tom Coburn. I never even got a response from Inhofe or Coburn. Tom Cole's office did a Congressional investigation and convinced Navy Medical West that they needed to apply the pregnancy policy to her situation. That now defers possible deployment until November.

Because of Cole's investigation, my daughter has been harassed at work by her supervising civilian employees [one of whom drew her name out of the hat] and I am sure she will be deployed in November as retribution.

The Senate is debating the defense appropriations bill soon. Amendment 2030, See FAMILIES Page 9

Memoir Of A Child Welfare Specialist

By Susan Gilliland

It is quiet except for the clicking of keys as information is entered. Every muscle and tendon is screaming a silent scream. Outside the parking lot is dark and lonely. One or two cars are there, nothing else.

People are home with their families, or going to a game, or the mall, or doing any number of fun, relaxing things. Inside the keys click.

Just a little longer, the report is due, so endurance is pushed. If they only knew what it is like. Would they understand? Could they understand?

How did you ever get here? Didn't you listen? People warned you. Maybe it was your parents, a teacher, or a well-meaning friend who tried to set you straight. You said you wanted to be a social worker.

How could anyone like or respect the WELFARE department? They are uncaring at best and cruel for the most part. They stick their noses in other people's business.

They hound people and generally make their lives miserable. This is done out of their need to punish others and have power and control. Didn't you know that?

WORKING FOR THE STATE IS A BREEZE

They work for the state. Is work the right word? Once you get on with the state, you no longer have to work. You just sit back and draw that big money.

Whatever the reason for the choice, you are now a Child Welfare worker.

The reality is far different from what you may have been told.

Your day starts like the days of most people. You get up, get the kids up, do a little laundry and then finally get to the office. The day has been planned. Things have to be done on time.

Then the phone rings. Somewhere a child is in pain, a family is in need.

What was planned does not get done. The crisis comes first.

A child is not safe. What must happen to change this? Can you do something to help the family make the child safe? Is it the family that is the threat to the child? Sometimes it is clear, and sometimes it is not, but you have to make a decision.

ABUSED CHILDREN LEAVE PAIN

The baby with cigarette burns, the toddler with bruises and scars, children living in filth with no food, parents using drugs, children home alone for days, and



on it goes day after day.

You see the worst that can be done to children, and you take a little of that pain with you always.

The weight is heavy. Why don't you just quit? Life could be different. With your education, you could find an easier job that pays better.

You could be one of those out there living. Can you turn your back? No, you cannot. You are a Child Welfare worker and there is not enough money in the world to pay for what you do.

Somehow, somewhere, some way you learned early to feel the pain of others. You did not learn how to turn your back. The pleas of family and friends will not stop you. You just cannot turn off the cries of the children.

THEY KEEP SHOWING UP TO WORK

Sometimes you cry. Sometimes you laugh and those outside think you must have lost your mind. You look around the office and see others just like you. You know each worker is different, and yet you are alike. Each one gets up and comes to the office for the same reason.

You care and are willing to give up a large part of your life to help others.

When tears come, and they do, you can turn to the next desk and find one who understands. When you feel alone, there is comfort and support.

The report is finished and you step outside. Night came long ago. The air is cool and soft. There is a different smell in the air. Muscles and tendons will take some time to quiet down. You know you have done your best on this case. Maybe one less child is in pain.

- The author is director for Delaware County. This article is from Inside OK-DHS

Court Liaisons Are DHS Success Story

In early 2005, Harry Biggs found himself in the Muskogee County jail for failure to pay child support to his two pre-teenage daughters. The surroundings mirrored how he felt inside - desolate, restricted and hopeless.

He could easily explain how he ended up in jail. After he and his wife divorced in 1997, a lengthy custody battle wiped out his resources, both financially and emotionally.

He tried to stay current on his child support, but due to physical and mental illnesses, he kept losing jobs.

Without a job, he couldn't access medical help. Without medical help, he couldn't maintain a job. Without a job, he couldn't help care for his daughters.

"I didn't have a clue how the courts worked or what I needed to do to make the courts happy," said Biggs, 29.

District Judge Mike Norman assigned Biggs to the Child Support Enforcement Division Court Liaison Program, an act that Biggs describes as lifesaving.

It is part of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services - one of the DHS successes you don't read about.

IT OPENED DOORS, RESTORED HOPE

"It opened up a bunch of doors that I didn't know existed," said Biggs, who credits the commitment and compassion of Ted Williams, court liaison program coordinator, with restoring hope.

"If it was not for the program and tasks I have had to do, I would be in jail right now doing nobody any good," said Biggs.

"The program has saved me in many ways by keeping me out of jail, finding doctors and [offering] a better way to work with the courts on my child support. Ted is always willing to help or find you the help you may need."

Jerry Clouse, who works with the Court Liaison Program part-time after retiring from 35 years of service with the Department of Human Services, doesn't see the program participants as delinquent, but as people with goals facing insurmountable barriers. The program helps break down the barriers.

PROCESS FROM THE KNOWN TO THE UNKNOWN

"We try to make heroes out of everyone," said Clouse. "The Court Liaison Program is a process of going from the unknown to the known."

The court requires 100% participation in the program, which combines OK-DHS, Workforce Oklahoma and other community resources.

In the six-month program, Biggs committed 40 hours a week learning about resume-writing and job interviewing, made five job contacts every day, attended doctor's appointments and court hearings, followed up with Social Security and his attorney and met with Williams and Clouse.

Williams reported Biggs' progress to the courts as requested.

"We provided a structure to help Biggs know what to do, and he did very well," said Williams, who's served OKDHS for nearly 29 years.

The Court Liaison Program currently serves five counties in northeast Oklahoma. To date, the program has collected \$380,000 in child support, and incarceration rates in the counties have declined.

Sally Frasier Named Woman Of The Year

By Barbara Santee

Heart of the Party Federation of Democratic Women held its "Just Desserts" recently to celebrate its 2007 Woman of the Year - Sally Frasier.

For decades she has been an active voice in Tulsa County for many causes. She has advocated strongly for literacy in her role on the Tulsa City-County Library Commission.

She has advocated strongly for women in her role on the board of Planned Parenthood of Arkansas and Eastern Oklahoma and also in her role on the Oklahoma Status for Women Commission.

She spent many years as an officer of the Democratic Party, supporting and promoting the principles of equality for all and raising funds for candidates who stood solid on those principles.

Throughout all of these years she raised her children to be grounded in Democratic principles and she is now helping instill these noble principles in her grandchildren.

With her mother growing older, she recognized the importance of caring for and spending time with her loved ones during the winter of their life.

Because she fostered relationships and encouraged young Democratic women over these decades, she was able to pass the torch to a new generation.

This year as Democrats in the United States see victory at the end of the 2008 tunnel, and Democrats in Oklahoma find themselves in a fight to keep the state Senate, she selflessly put aside past transgressions to support having everyone at the First District table.

It was an effort to achieve unity within our party so that we may work together to elect Democrats, instead of fighting amongst ourselves and further eroding our chances for any real success.

For all of these reasons and many others too numerous to mention, we honored Sally Frasier as Heart of the Party's 2007 Democratic Woman of the Year.

- The author lives in Tulsa

Oklahoma Learning High Wage Game

Through innovation and diligence, Oklahoma manufacturers are learning to succeed in a 21st Century economy.

The Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance plays a key role in helping the state's industry grow and prosper. Now more than ever, manufacturing is about competitiveness, continuous learning and constant change.

"The Manufacturing Alliance is committed to improving our state's economy by leading the movement toward modernization," said President Roy Peters.

"One of the most important components of Oklahoma's economy is manufacturing. It generates nearly 16% of the Gross State Product – the largest of any economic sector.

"The gateway Oklahoma must travel through to catch up with the rest of the nation, in terms of per capita personal income and economic growth, is unlocked through manufacturing."

NOT FOR PROFIT ORGANIZATION

The Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance is a not-for-profit organization providing a variety of support to Oklahoma industry.

Through a network of manufacturing extension agents and applications engineers, the Manufacturing Alliance provides hands-on resources for improving productivity, increasing sales, and reducing costs. In partnership with an array of organizations, it connects small and medium-sized manufacturers to local expertise and state, regional, and national resources.

"We make a positive difference for the state's manufacturers and Oklahoma's economy," Peters says. "Often working behind the scenes, our organization builds beneficial, lasting relationships that lead to beneficial, lasting results."

In the past five years alone, the Manufacturing Alliance assisted more than 2,000 individual companies.

LEADERSHIP AND ASSISTANCE

"We continue to help manufacturers create wealth and bring prosperity to the workforce by providing the leadership and assistance they need to become more successful," Peters says. "Our strengths, built over more than a dozen years of service, have established us as a trusted and valued organization."

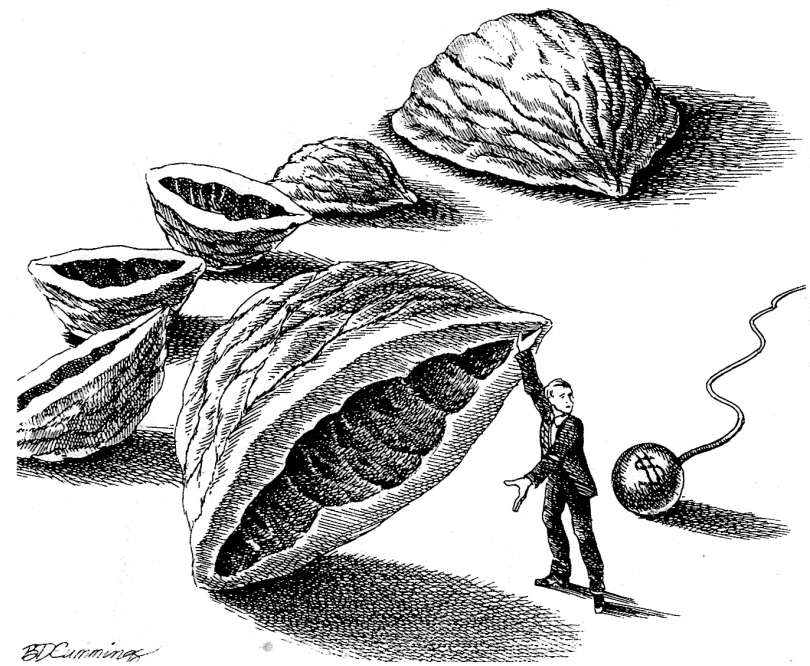
Oklahoma's 4,000 manufacturers employ about 240,000 and pay a livable wage. It is vital to rural Oklahoma where the loss of one company can devastate a community.

One of manufacturing's great strengths is its ability to innovate and apply innovation to increase the state's overall productivity. This leads to a high "multiplier" for increasing demand for intermediate goods and services in other sectors.

The manufacturing multiplier, according to the Commerce Department, is 2.43 in intermediate and final output. This compares to multipliers of only 1.5 for financial and business services and 1.7 for health and education services.

RISING OUTPUT EQUALS MORE GOOD JOBS

Rising manufacturing output, then, provides a bigger boost to overall economic



growth than that of other sectors. On average, for every \$1 million in manufacturing sales there are eight manufacturing jobs plus six service sector jobs.

For every 150 manufacturing jobs there is a \$30 million economic impact. "Simply put, the health of Oklahoma manufacturing affects all Oklahomans," Peters said.

"When I visit manufacturers around the state, one fact that is increasingly apparent is employment growth in manufacturing is embedded in high wage jobs. High-wage jobs are being created, and wages for existing jobs are climbing."

The Manufacturing Alliance receives funding through the Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology and through the Oklahoma Department of Commerce.

PART OF A NATIONAL NETWORK

On the federal level, the Alliance is part of a national manufacturing network that supports similar agencies in each state. A variety of private and local community supporters also make the organization's mission possible.

More than 40 local sponsors – CareerTech centers, higher education institutions, and economic development organizations – contribute office space, clerical support and pay part of the salary of the manufacturing extension agents.

The agents live in their communities and work with manufacturers in their area. "The model is based on the agricultural extension system," Peters said. "But instead of suggesting ways of improving crop production, our goal is to help manufacturers increase sales and reduce costs. They look at industry needs from the manufacturer's viewpoint."

The agents provide a variety of services such as developing marketing plans, helping introduce new technology and suggesting new training. They also provide training on lean manufacturing, which involves analyzing how information and material flow in the manufacturing environment, then continuously improving processes to increase profitability.

– *Business Crossroads*, a publication of the Public Awareness and Outreach Team of the Governor's Council for Workforce and Economic Development.

Rapes Of Indian Women Widespread

By Suemedha Sood

In Indian country, there are a high number of rapes and no resources for victims. One in three Indian women will be raped or sexually assaulted in her lifetime, a rate 3½ times higher than any other racial groups.

Jami Rozell, a 25-year-old teacher from Tahlequah, OK, was raped four years ago after a college party. In her case, all the evidence was collected and she even went through a preliminary hearing.

Two weeks after the hearing, though, the district attorney contacted her to say all the evidence had been destroyed in a routine police cleanup. She was advised to drop the charges.

Rozell says that it wasn't until she herself was raped that she realized just how many women in her community had suffered the same fate and never reported it.

"Ladies I worked with would come up to me and say, you know that happened to me in high school, or that happened to my sister a year ago. But no one ever says anything because they know that nothing will ever happen."

NO ACCESS TO BASIC HEALTH RESOURCES

Many women who are raped do not have access to basic health resources in Indian country. They travel long distances to Indian Health Service hospitals expecting to receive physical and mental health services only to find that there is no staff trained to treat sexual assault victims, says the Native American Women's Health Education Resource Center [NAWHERC].

Many can't even get rape kits, the exams used to collect evidence after a rape. With no forensic evidence, rapists are free to rape again. This is part of the reason that the number of rapes is so high.

The Indian Health Service is the federal agency, within the Department of Health and Human Services, responsible for administering health care to Native Americans.

Fewer than 10 IHS hospitals have trained personnel, including sexual assault nurse examiners [SANE], to perform emergency services in the event of a rape.

The 2005 NAWHERC report – the Survey of Sexual Assault Policy and Protocols within Indian Health Service Emergency Rooms – found that about 30% of IHS service units do not have sexual assault protocols in place.

Of the units that do, only 56% have protocols actually posted and accessible

for staff members; this means that over half of the units have sexual assault policies that are not even being implemented.

IHS UNIMAGINABLY ILL-EQUIPPED

IHS is so ill-equipped that many hospitals do not offer rape victims screening for sexually transmitted infections, emergency contraceptives, and/or the post-exposure-prophylaxis [PEP] used to reduce the transmission of HIV, the NAWHERC report found.

The Indian Health Service director, Dr. Charles Grim, has done nothing to advance the services for women who have been sexually assaulted.

U.S. Senate committee hearings are being held on the fact that IHS has such high sexual assault rates and that they don't have any sexual assault policies and protocols in place.

The lack of response to the crisis is the main reason that a large number of rapes go unreported.

– *The author is a 2007 fellow in the Academy for Alternative Journalism at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism.*

© Wire Tap

FAMILIES

From Page 7

sponsored by Sens. Barbara Boxer, D-CA, and Judd Gregg, R-NH, places restrictions on the deployment of dual military spouses. I called Inhofe's office and they at least listened to my concern. Several people have called Coburn's office and no one answers the phone. I e-mailed him and I have had no response.

There is no way that both parents should be deployed at the same time with the possibility of leaving two little girls as orphans. We will never be able to recruit and retain quality members in our military when we force them to choose between their service and their family. We are wasting our young people's lives because of a religious civil war that we can never solve. We are giving our injured soldiers inadequate care, we have ignored the Katrina victims, and we have neglected the levees and bridges that have caused great tragedies.

What has happened to our values?

– *The author lives in Washington, OK*

Have You Really Seen Oklahoma?



Get out of your rut and see Oklahoma – it's fascinating and beautiful!

The largest contiguous district on the National Register of Historic Places is in Guthrie, extending 1,400 acres and 400 city blocks and containing 2,169 buildings.

Guthrie also has been named one of America's Dozen Distinctive Destinations by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

From forests to sand dunes to rolling prairies to cypress swamps, Oklahoma has more diverse terrain per square mile than any other state.

Despite its Dust Bowl image, Oklahoma has more man-made lakes than any other state in the nation. The state's shoreline totals almost as much as the Atlantic, Pacific, Gulf and Arctic coasts combined. In fact, the Grand Lake O' The Cherokees has more miles of shoreline than the coast of California.

TAKE A DRIVE DOWN ROUTE 66

Oklahoma has more driveable miles of Route 66 than any other state, with numerous eye-catching sites such as the Arcadia Round Barn, Foyil's Totem Pole Park and Catoosa's Blue Whale, along the way. Oklahoman Cyrus Avery is credited for creating the route.

More American Indian tribes are headquartered in Oklahoma than in any other state.

Oklahoma is home to world-class Western art museums, including the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City and the Gilcrease Museum of Art in Tulsa.

The oldest painted object in the New World was found in Oklahoma and is on display at the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History in Norman. It is a 10,000-year-old skull of an extinct bison painted with a zigzag or "lightning bolt" pattern.

SEE A BEAUTIFUL NATIONAL PARK

The Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge near Lawton is the nation's first and oldest national wildlife park.

The only place in the world you can dig for hourglass selenite crystals is in the Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge, adjacent to Great Salt Plains State Park near Cherokee.

The world's largest dinosaur skull, a Pentaceratops skull measuring 10½ feet

Fleece U. Welcomes Students To Debt

By Barbara Ehrenreich

Welcome to Fleece U., where our mission is to take feckless teenagers such as yourself and turn them into full-fledged citizens of our economy, meaning, of course, debtors.

Many life-changing things will happen to you in the next four years. You will make lasting friends, including perhaps the love of your life.

You will drink more than you ever thought possible and bitterly regret it in the morning. You will lose your virginity, if you happen to have brought it with you.

Our stellar faculty ardently hopes that along the way you will be amazed by calculus and charmed by the tipsy conversation between Alcibiades and that wily old radical, Socrates.

There is also a general expectation that you will come out of here with some hazy notion of spelling and grammar.

NEVER FORGET YOUR PURPOSE IN COLLEGE

Never forget that your real purpose here is to shake off the pointless freedom of youth and assume the burden of debt.

To this end, we have just raised our tuition [nearly double digits at OU and OSU] in an attempt to keep up with such top-of-the-line institutions as George Washington University [now weighing in at \$39,210 a year, or \$50,000 with room and board].

You will find us also charging a plethora of additional fees – a "student activities fee," a "technology fee," and an "incidentals fee."

In addition, we will be experimenting this year with a "snow removal fee," a "lecture hall seat-use fee," and the installation of pay toilets in the dorms.

It would be shortsighted to resent these fees, since they provide valuable experience in bill-reading, and will come in handy when you confront your own personal monthly utility statements.

BILL READING TRAINING AT NO CHARGE

At present we do not charge any additional tuition for this training in bill-reading, though we are considering adding a special "fee fee" in the future.

Another thing that will help ease you into the status of debtor is the price of your textbooks – about \$120 to \$180 for a new, graffiti-free copy.

True, this seems high when you could buy a hardcover of Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows for \$20 or less, but the aim is to teach you that a book is something to treasure [and, again, we charge no extra fee for this lesson.]

On average, you will graduate with a respectable-sized debt of \$20,000, which will enable you to establish your all-important "credit history."

If we have succeeded in our educational mission, you will be a first-rate debtor, capable of making minimum monthly payments much of the time.

BRACE YOURSELF FOR A FLOOD OF OFFERS

As fresh offers of credit cards and home equity loans pour in, you will beam with pride at your achievement.

Please note carefully that Fleece U. degree cannot guarantee you a future in-

tall, and the world's largest Apatosaurus more than 92 feet in length are displayed at Norman's Noble museum.

The largest stocker-feeder cattle market in the world is at the Oklahoma City Stockyards.

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT MASTERPIECE

The only skyscraper solely designed by and built by Frank Lloyd Wright is Price Tower in Bartlesville. It is also the only one of Wright's structures where you can book a hotel stay.

Tulsa ranks third in the nation for the most art deco architecture, with stunning buildings including the Boston Avenue Methodist Church. The Tulsa Convention & Visitors Bureau offers free art deco walking tours.

There are more horses per capita in Oklahoma than in any other state. Oklahoman Lt. General Thomas P. Stafford achieved the highest military rank of all astronauts. His achievements in space are memorialized at the General Thomas P. Stafford Air & Space Museum in his hometown of Weatherford.

The first-ever art school program for American Indians was begun in 1926 at the University of Oklahoma. Its first students became internationally famous as "The Kiowa Five."

The Jacobson House Art Center in Norman was the home of Oscar Jacobson, mentor of the Kiowa Five.

The world's largest gypsum cave open to the public is located at Alabaster Caverns State Park near Freedom. The world's largest single deposit of pure alabaster also is found in this park.

come that will allow you to pay off your debts.

Many of our most promising graduates are now, three or four years later, working for \$8 to \$12 an hour serving up lattes, counseling disturbed youth or creating business computer networks.

They are set for a lifetime of debt, and we are proud that they first began to accrue it right here, on our lovely mock Oxfordian campus.

We don't have to remind you not to stigmatize debt as a condition associated with poverty. In 2006, for the first time, the average household's debt exceeded its income.

ENTERING THE AMERICAN MAINSTREAM

By becoming a debtor, you will have entered the American mainstream! We have confidence that you will go on to mature effortlessly from college debt to car loan to mortgage to medical debts occasioned by the ever-growing gaps in coverage.

You will see the value of all this debt when the day comes, as it inevitably will, when you wake up and ask yourself, "Who am I and what am I doing here?"

You will be tempted to take long walks, read the Upanishads, or try out for a new career as a trophy spouse. In a crisis like this, you could easily spend thousands of dollars on life coaching and motivational DVDs.

But you won't have to, because you'll have debt to keep you going. You will get up, shower, and toil faithfully in your cubicle year after year until, in the fullness of time, your family acquires the debt for your interment [at which point we trust you will have remembered Fleece U. in your will.]

So think of debt as the great motivator. Think of it as our gift to you. Because for at least the next academic year, we are not even thinking of charging for it.

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Nukes Kill 4,000 Americans

The U.S. nuclear weapons program has sickened an estimated 36,500 Americans and killed over 4,000, according to an analysis of government figures by the Rocky Mountain News.

The newspaper's estimates may be lower than actual numbers because it only counted people who have been approved for government compensation and not those who were sickened or killed but denied aid.

The numbers include workers who built nuclear bombs, troops that inhaled dust from bomb tests, and workers who mined uranium.

Since 1945, the U.S. has constructed some 70,000 nuclear weapons and remains the only nation to have detonated any outside of tests.

The bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, instantly killed over 200,000 people total and injured and sickened hundreds of thousands more.

BOOKS

Deja Vu All Over Again: 2007 Mirrors 1984

By Alvena Bieri

1984

By George Orwell
First World Library
388 pages, \$15.95

Timothy McVeigh called his 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City “the act of a heroic patriot.” Richard Nixon, holding his fingers high, said, “I am not a crook!”

These weird kinds of contradictions are common now and have been for many years in America.

Over half a century ago, British writer Eric Blair [1903-1950] – under the pen name George Orwell – wrote *1984*, a novel with the theme of loss of honesty and sanity in a police state.

By the way, in the country of Oceania, novels are written by machines. In real life, Orwell was a democratic socialist who did not approve of communism.

The opening words of the book set the tone for the peculiar tone of that culture – “It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.”

Any novel, even this one, has to have a love interest. The hero, 39-year-old Winston Smith is married to a woman [who does not enjoy sex]. He starts an affair with the beautiful Julia [who does], ultimately causing his downfall.

Julia does “voluntary work three evenings a week for the Junior Anti-Sex League.” The group exists because “you could not have pure love or pure lust nowadays. No emotion was pure because everything in Oceania is mixed with fear and hate.”

We are almost 25 years past the year of 1984 now, and Orwell’s explanations of how thought, or the lack of it, or the twisting of it, deeply affects our western civilization.

Look at this list of government agencies: Winston works at the Ministry of Truth in London, and this important place contains an amazing 3,000 rooms. The short name for it is Minitrue, from the language of Newspeak. Standard English, or Oldspeak, is trite. This agency is in charge of both education and entertainment. The past and history itself hardly exist in Oceania.

Here’s a tiny example from 2007: Digital timepieces are popular today. They reveal the time in figures, but an analog clock or watch gives the wider picture since we can look backward and forward at the same time.

The Ministry of Love is the headquarters for law and order. The Ministry of Plenty oversees economic affairs, and of course the Peace Department is in charge of preparations for war.

The Sad Truth About The New West

By Mike Nobles

BRAVE NEW WEST

Morphing Moab at the Speed of Greed

By Jim Stiles

University of Arizona Press

272 pages, \$19.95

Jim Stiles has always reminded me of the Founding Editor of The Oklahoma Observer, Frosty Troy. Stiles is the founder and publisher of Canyon Country Zephyr, an independent newspaper published monthly in Moab, UT. His editorial position has always been one of irreverence and likely as not has “comforted the afflicted and afflicted the comfortable.”

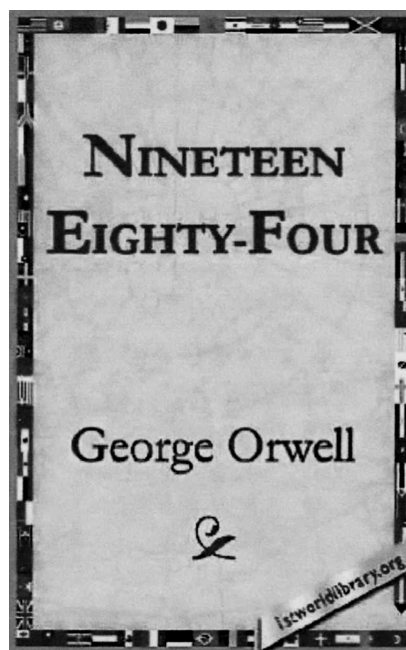
His paper does take some advertising but make no mistake; such ads do not give one license to dictate the content of the paper. In fact, there have been numerous times when the advertisers from out of state have far outnumbered those in state.

He is fond of saying he is “hopelessly clinging to the past.” He has steadfastly defended the wilderness and his beloved West and has viewed with dismay the creeping growth that he believes is caused many times as much by environmentalists as developers. In the words of noted author and writer Terry Tempest Williams, Stiles “...words are born not so much out of anger but a broken heart.”

For more than two decades the burning issue throughout the American West has been what to do about the escalating degradation of the landscape and lifestyle by extractive industries such as mining, timber, and cattle, especially in the rural West.

Gradually it has become apparent that such industries are irreparably damaging the environment. The problem is there seemed to be no alternative to such industries that would replace their impact on the economy and preserve the cherished lifestyle in any meaningful way. That is until the environmental movement offered a proposal that promised to provide a cleaner and economically more lucrative solution to the problem: Tourism and service industries such as hotels, restaurants, and bars.

Did it work? You bet. Towns like Moab, UT, that used to rely on mining have been transformed into tourist Mecca’s with the reputation of being the “bicycle capital of the World.” Literally thousands of tourists line the main street on any given night during the summer and fast food restaurants and trendy boutiques sit side by side. No more smog and noisy ore trucks for Moab. Ditto for Flagstaff,



“
The obvious
conclusion is
that so much of
1984 is so very
true in 2007.
”

The dictator, Big Brother, is over it all. He is not what conservatives today blame for giving too much help, like Medicare, public schooling, and many other good social programs going to people. No, he is – there is no other word for it – a dictator. And he pushes the omnipresent ideas like War Is Peace, Freedom Is Slavery and Ignorance Is Strength.

In that spirit of lying, Winston is supposed to encourage his colleagues to be “one of those completely unquestioning, devoted drudges on whom more even than on the Thought Police the stability of the Party depended.”

The opinions of the people are just not important, but they can be granted a little intellectual liberty because “they have no intellect.” Winston, however, manages to keep a little independent thinking.

The story line of *1984* ends when a friend in whose house Winston and Julia have been staying turns him in. Appropriately he is imprisoned and tortured at – where else? – the Ministry of Love until he changes his thinking. The last two sentences of the book are, “He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother.”

The obvious conclusion is that so much of *1984* is so very true in 2007. At the end of last year the bipartisan study group on Iraq concluded that the situation there is “grave and deteriorating.” About the same time Dick Cheney said that Iraq has been “an enormous success.” George Bush is a daily example of contradictory use of language. We remember the New Orleans rescue fiasco as he said to Michael Brown, “You’re doing a heckuva job, Brownie!”

And the pain goes on. This is a brilliant book, and our awareness of the big depressing picture of our society is getting worse. Now, could we somehow focus on staying honest ourselves and not giving in to Big Brother or whatever you want to call him?

– The author lives in Stillwater

AZ, and Jackson Hole, WY, and Cortez, CO, and Farmington, NM, which are desperately trying to catch up to this seeming nirvana.

All in all things seemed to be improving. The air was getting a bit cleaner and the inevitable boom and bust cycles of the extractive industries were no longer a big concern to the Chamber of Commerce types. Not only did tourism offset this economic cycle but newcomers were moving into the area in greater numbers and the real estate market was robust, to say the least.

So, what’s the problem? The answer as viewed by Stiles is at the heart of this book. After having lived in the Moab area for some 30 years he has experienced both the extractive industry era and the new, “green” tourism era and has determined that all that glitters is not gold. Stiles notes that a certain amount of isolation and lack of services has traditionally characterized rural life in the West. It is part of the trade-off the residents have readily accepted to live in a relatively isolated area far from the so-called maddening crowd.

Unfortunately, all of that has gradually disappeared with the influx of both tourists and urbanites abandoning crowded cities in search of a simpler life. Stiles charges that the newcomers have brought with them a desire for all of the amenities their urban lifestyle provided. The demand for green lawns in a semi-arid environment; the insistence on Starbucks-type cappuccino coffee houses; the increasing crime rate and skyrocketing real estate prices and a host of other issues that ultimately is creating a community that has all but forgotten the native inhabitants.

In short, while he concedes the liberal newcomers came with good intentions they have only replaced the former extractive economy with one, in its own way, as degrading economically and environmentally.

This book has created quite a stir among environmentalists and economic development types of all stripes in the West. It is an in-your-face look at the unprecedented impact the attempted “greening” of the West has had on rural areas many claim to want to preserve.

Perhaps it is because Stiles is more liberal leaning and environmentally aware that he can write such a book. Stiles writes with a wit and provocative manner that is both highly readable and thought provoking. This is a must read for anyone remotely interested in the development of the real West and the lessons it may teach us if we but listen and learn. Stiles is a good teacher.

– The author, cofounder of *A Gathering of Writers*, lives in Tulsa

PUBLIC FORUM

Piling On: The Endless Pursuit Of Gene Stipe

By Edwin E. Vineyard

This writer has had a casual acquaintanceship with Sen. Gene Stipe, both by reputation and occasional contact, for some 40 years. For more than 30 of those 40 years, there was every indication that Sen. Stipe was a highly effective legislator and a brilliant attorney.

In spite of consistent political attacks by his partisan enemies and those in the media, no wrongdoing was ever successfully documented against the senator in his prime years. In pugilistic terms, "They never laid a glove on him."

In the meantime, he accumulated a series of legislative accomplishments to be envied, gave outstanding service to those in his district in a paternalistic fashion, and gained national recognition as the successful attorney for the young constituent soldier from Calvin, OK, accused of a massacre in a military court in Vietnam.

A relative, who is a small town mayor in his district, credits Sen. Stipe with numerous assists in obtaining financial help with much needed infrastructure projects in his community. My elderly mother-in-law, a Republican by history, was devoted to Sen. Stipe, who visited her home and during season brought a small sack of apples from his orchard.

STAUNCH SUPPORTER OF EDUCATION

I have observed Sen. Stipe's legislative work. From the gallery, I have observed him rise to the floor in spellbinding rhetoric on education legislation I was there to support. Sen. Stipe supported any measure which helped higher education or public education. He supported any measure that I told him would help retired teachers. How could I not like Sen. Stipe?

The good senator may be guilty of some campaign financial manipulations. He may be guilty of shenanigans to help a political friend against a political enemy. But it is a sure sign of loss of competency, or the senator would not have been caught doing either.

I began to see a loss of mental acuity and in physical stride some 10 years ago. Grasp of legislative details was more difficult for the senator, and he dealt more in generalities. He often took our word on the fitness of a bill, rather than demanding a full explanation. It seemed harder for him to master intricacies.

It was harder for him to remember names and faces. In greeting a large family dinner in a private room at Pete's Place in Krebs, he had difficulty placing those



of us he knew. At a similar dinner of retired college presidents, also at Pete's Place only four or five years ago, he seemed impaired in his functioning – not at all the same Sen. Stipe that we all knew.

KICKING AN ALREADY BEATEN DOWN PERSON

The U.S. District Attorney, representing the politically tainted national system, has continued to target Stipe, long after his initial charge and conviction. This time it appears to be his failure to separate himself from longtime business and political cronies, who also happen to have been convicted of something. Stipe's attorney is claiming mental impairment, and asking for leniency based upon that defense.

Anyone acquainted with Sen. Stipe could attest to his impairment. He has Parkinson's and other serious health problems, is likely on several medications, and does not seem to be "with it." That should be quite obvious to the prosecutor and to the court.

What is now happening is the equivalent of kicking a person who is already beaten down. It is analogous to "piling on," which draws an unsportsmanlike penalty.

The court should have already appointed a legal guardian for Gene Stipe. Such a guardian could be made the trustee of his assets and put in charge of their management. Stipe would not then be in a position to harm his own case by bad decisions involving money, politics, and old cronies.

– *The author, aka the Militant Moderate, lives in Enid*

Motivated And Optimistic In Troubled Times

By Judy A. Ramsey

It seems the press remains negligent in covering the news that reflects the will of the people. Not only did they feed us all the misinformation leading to this war without question, they continue to ignore the growing movement of citizens for government accountability.

While our elected representatives continue to worry more about their political careers than doing the right thing and protecting the Constitution, I would like to take this opportunity to remind everyone of our Declaration of Independence, the often forgotten second paragraph after the profound statement regarding life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness:

"That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it."

Our founding fathers knew the threat of the power of a king, and therefore, established three separate and equal branches of government, not merely two more arms of the executive branch, as we see today.

They also knew the necessity and power of a FREE PRESS in order to hold our

government accountable. It seems to me that today, this system of government is severely broken, in more ways than one.

It is easy to get discouraged when we see what is being done in our names – war, torture, suspension of these divine rights, the dismissal of the rule of law in the name of safety, and the executive branch becoming more powerful every day.

Do we understand what kind of precedent we're setting here? Do you think there were many Germans like us who chose to believe their leaders were honorable men and did not believe what they were doing for the sake of their country?

Well, I will not be a good German, I will remain optimistic for change, and I will remain motivated, and I believe there is a growing number of people out there who share my concerns who will come together to save this government, our Constitution and the rule of law in this country.

I will not give up. I remain ever vigilant. Make no mistake that a small group of people can change the world, it's the only thing that ever has.

– *The author lives in Collinsville*

In Bush, Signs Of Napoleonic Mental Illness

By Hiram K. Myers

The U.S. Constitution ART. II, SEC. 2, confers upon the President of the United States the position of Commander in Chief of the army and navy of the United States and of the militia of the several states, etc. Each time we elect a President, we grant that individual the awesome power of life and death over all members of the military.

We assume, in a civilized democratic society, that the individual elected will exercise this ultimate power with the utmost care, and then only under the most demanding situations. So far, so good?

The judicious exercise of the power granted to the Commander in Chief was assumed by the founders. But what is to keep a mentally ill individual, whose malady is not discernable by the average citizen, from becoming the President of the United States? Nothing. The inherent power to recklessly kill ones own citizens is granted by the electorate carte blanche. Sound like a gamble?

The idea that an individual, without benefit of any mental or emotional health screening, can take charge of our men and women in uniform and order them to their deaths seems a bit extreme. Examples of how the power has been grossly abused abound. The Spanish American War comes to mind as does the Vietnam

tragedy.

The most recent example of the abuse of constitutionally conferred power is the case of George W. Bush. His violation of the trust placed in him by virtue of being Commander in Chief is Napoleonic in scope. The 19th Century dictator of France, Napoleon, was mentally ill. He was afflicted with what is known today as Narcissistic Personality Disorder [NPD], the same or similar mental illness that causes George W. Bush's aberrant behavior.

If you doubt that the President of the United States suffers the same affliction as that which caused Napoleon to send thousands of his fellow Frenchmen to their slaughter, please consider the following definition found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.

Narcissistic Personality Disorder – A pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by five (or more) of the following:

1. A grandiose sense of self-importance [e.g., exaggerates achievements and

See NAPOLEONIC Page 14

Locked, Loaded And Looney

Tom Coburn Stops Veterans' Critical Bill

As the Army's suicide rate hits record levels in the Iraq war, there's small wonder practically everyone in Congress wants to deal with the parallel emerging crisis of depressed veterans tempted to take their own lives.

Everyone, that is, except Sen. Tom Coburn, Republican of Oklahoma. He stands alone in blocking final passage of a suicide prevention bill in fear that the government's record-keeping on troubled vets might somehow crimp their ability to purchase handguns.

Even the craven gun lobby should manage some shame over this absurd example of Second Amendment idolatry.

The House has unanimously approved a measure mandating the screening of all veterans for suicide risk, but Sen. Coburn worries that veterans' medical data might be appropriated by other agencies to deny that all-encompassing right to wield arms on the domestic front.

The senator's office points to another bill near passage prompted by the Virginia Tech gun massacre that would encourage states to do a better job of listing mentally troubled individuals on the federal roll of risky gun purchasers.

But tying these two measures together is itself evidence of defective reasoning, or at least scurrilous politicking. The Virginia Tech measure has nothing to do with veterans and affects only those Americans formally judged by a court to be mentally disturbed.



It is an eminently good thing that the anti-suicide measure would require medical specialists to keep track of veterans found to be high risks for suicide.

That's to care for them as human beings, under that other constitutional right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Respect for the grave sacrifices by veterans requires the Senate to strike down the Coburn ploy and hurry this vital measure to President Bush.

New York Times Editorial

Veterans Can't Get Timely Treatment

The Department of Veterans Affairs repeatedly understates wait times for injured veterans seeking medical care and in many serious cases forced them to wait more than 30 days, counter to department policy, an internal investigation shows.

The review by the VA Inspector General's office examined 700 outpatient appointments for primary and specialty care scheduled in October 2006 at 10 VA medical centers.

It found that the Veterans Health Administration in recent months falsely reported to Congress that nearly all of its appointments – about 95% – were scheduled within 30 days of a patient's requested date.

In fact, only three in four veterans – 75% – received such timely appointments.

Of the veterans kept waiting more than 30 days, 27 of them had more serious service-connected disabilities, such as amputees and those with chronic prob-

lems including frequent panic attacks.

Under VHA policy, such veterans must be scheduled for care within 30 days of their desired appointment date.

In addition, despite warnings by the IG in 2005 to more accurately report wait times, department officials last year also may have understated the number of veterans on their electronic waiting lists by more than 53,000.

The report comes amid intense political and public scrutiny in recent weeks as injured Iraq war veterans have filed a lawsuit against the VA alleging undue delays in health care.

The department also is struggling to reduce a severe backlog of disability payments, with delays of up to 177 days to process an Initial claim, and it awaits a new leader to make changes once outgoing VA secretary Jim Nicholson steps down Oct. 1.

© Truthout

Deportations Add To Misery Of War Losses

By Domenico Maceri

Three years after U.S. Army Private Armando Soriano, 20, died fighting in Haditha, Iraq, his father is facing deportation. Soriano is now buried in Houston, TX, his hometown, where his parents, undocumented workers from Mexico, are currently living.

Before his death Soriano had promised his parents he'd help them get green cards. He only succeeded partially before losing his life. Although his mother was able to obtain a green card, his father did not qualify and is on the verge of being deported.

Enrique Soriano, Armando's father, is not the only person to have lost a son or daughter in the Iraq war and face deportation. There are more than three million people born in the U.S. with parents who came into the country illegally. Those born in the U.S. are automatically citizens and have all the rights and duties enjoyed by Americans. That includes military service with the possibility of losing one's life.

GOVERNMENT TRIES, BUT CAN'T HELP EVERYONE

Losing a son or a daughter is always tragic. To try to compensate the families the U.S. government makes efforts to help. In the case of individuals with family members needing immigration help, officials assist them to obtain green cards. That's what happened with Soriano's mother. But in spite of governmental flexibility, certain rules prevent some people from qualifying.

Enrique Soriano had been formally deported in 1999 when he returned to Mexico for a brief visit. That makes him ineligible for any immigration benefits. Enrique Soriano is not alone. Although exact figures are difficult to come by, many parents with sons and daughters who died in Iraq have been deported.

Official statistics show that more than 68,000 foreign-born military individuals are serving the U.S. How many of these individuals have relatives who do not have a legal right to be in the United States is not known. Figures from the National Center for Immigration Law show that one in 10 U.S. soldiers who have died in Iraq have been immigrants.

One estimate claims that 5% of those serving in the American military are illegal immigrants who joined with false papers. The military does not recruit illegal immigrants. Yet, given the shortages of volunteers, meeting quotas may put pressure to close some eyes. Illegal immigrants may feel that joining the military will help them and their families obtain legal papers in addition to other benefits.

FIRST IRAQ CASUALTY WAS AN ILLEGAL IMMIGRANT

Inevitably, some die in the process. The first soldier to die for the United States

in the Iraq war was in fact Marine Lance Cpl. Jose Gutierrez, an illegal immigrant from Guatemala.

Enrique Soriano's case is also complicated by the fact that the rest of his family has a legal right to be in the U.S. His wife has a green card, three of their four kids are U.S. citizens, and another bom in Mexico has applied for a green card. If Enrique is deported, the family will have to make the hard choice of going back or separating.

"I think it would be a travesty for these parents to be deported after their son died in Iraq fighting for his country," stated Rep. Gene Green, D-TX. The congressman introduced a bill in the House, which would help Enrique Soriano obtain a green card. Nothing has happened yet.

Earlier this year President George Bush commuted the sentence of Lewis "Scooter" Libby, Vice President Cheney's former chief of staff. In so doing, the President spared Libby two and a half years in prison for his conviction for lying to federal investigators. The President cited Libby's "exceptional public service" and prior lack of a criminal record as explanation for his action. He concluded that Libby's sentence was "excessive" and the punishment "harsh."

In light of the sacrifice made by Armando Soriano, one wonders whether deporting his father is a far more "excessive" and "harsh" punishment?

– The author teaches foreign languages at Allan Hancock College in Santa Maria, CA

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Married For A Night

A man and women, who had never met before, but were both married to other people, found themselves assigned to the same sleeping room on a transcontinental train.

Though initially embarrassed and uneasy over sharing a room, they were both very tired and fell asleep quickly, he in the upper bunk and she in the lower.

At 1:00 a.m., the man leaned over and gently woke the woman saying, "Ma'am, I'm sorry to bother you, but would you be willing to reach into the closet to get me a second blanket? I'm awfully cold!"

"I have a better idea," she replied. "Just for tonight, let's pretend that we're married."

"Wow! That's a great idea!" he exclaimed.

"Good," she replied, "Get your own damn blanket!"

GOP Anti-Gun Control **100,000 Murders In Past Six Years**

By Bob Herbert

In Newark, three young friends whose lives and dreams vanished in a nightmarish eruption of gunfire in a rundown schoolyard were buried.

The next day in a small town in Missouri, a pastor and two worshipers were murdered by a gunman who opened fire in a church.

Murder, that darkest of American pastimes, celebrated in film and song and fostered by the firearms industry and its apologists, continues unabated.

It has been almost six years since the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, when the nation's consciousness of terror was yanked to new heights. In those six years, nearly 100,000 people – an incredible number – have been murdered in the United States.

No heightening of consciousness has accompanied this slaughter, which had nothing to do with terrorism. The news media and most politicians have hardly bothered to notice.

YAHOS GETTING GUNS AND BULLETS

At the same time that we're diligently confiscating water and toothpaste from air travelers, we're handing over guns and bullets by the trainload to yahos bent on blowing others into eternity in armed robberies, drug-dealing, gang violence, domestic assaults and other criminal acts.

Among those who have noticed the carnage are the nation's police chiefs, and they are alarmed. Surges of homicides and other violent crimes in many cities and towns over the past couple of years have prompted Bill Bratton, police chief in Los Angeles, to warn of the possibility of a "gathering storm" of criminal violence in the U.S.

"Philadelphia and Baltimore are having horrendous problems," he said in an interview. "You just had that awful shooting in Newark. What we'd like to do is bring this issue of crime back into the national debate in this election year. What you don't want is to let it get out of control like it did in the late '80s and early '90s."

LAW ENFORCEMENT TRACKING GUN CRIMES

Bratton is past president of the Police Executive Research Forum, a group based in Washington that is composed of the heads of some of the largest state, county and local law enforcement agencies in the country.

The group's report on crime trends in 2005 and 2006 tracked disturbing increases in robberies, aggravated assaults and murder.

The report described violent crime as making a comeback, not to the same degree as the crack-propelled violence of the late-'80s and early '90s, but in frightening numbers, nevertheless.

Chuck Wexler, the forum's executive director, offered a particularly chilling statistic. The number of cases of aggravated assault with a firearm is about 100,000 a year. In some cases, the gunman misses, but each year roughly 60,000 people are actually shot.

NAPOLEONIC

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talents, expects to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements];

2. Preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, etc.; believes that he or she is "special" and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people [or institutions];

3. Requires excessive admiration;

4. Has a sense of entitlement, i.e., unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his expectations;

5. Is interpersonally exploitative, i.e., takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends;

6. Lacks empathy; is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others;

7. Is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him or her;

8. Shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes.

There is no purpose served by illustrating point by point how the conduct of this president fits the definition of at least five symptoms of NPD. The examples are there day after day, and coffin after coffin. Read a daily paper, watch a nightly news show, or a re-run of George W. Bush strutting around on the deck of the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln. You'll see and hear for yourself many of the symptoms listed above.

Credentialed mental health experts are challenged to rebut the assertion that the President of the United States is suffering from the mental illness, Narcissistic Personality Disorder. His illness has cost the American people their loved ones and treasure. It has cost Iraq its entire infrastructure and untold numbers of dead and wounded. It has cost the United States prestige throughout the civilized world. It has strengthened terrorist networks and added vast numbers of suicide bombers to the arsenal of the jihadists. It has cost us the capture of Bin Laden.

George W. Bush, the man initially appointed to the presidency by the U.S. Supreme Court, and who has conversations with a God, and who referred to the war on terror as another Crusade, is running the ship of state aground. Can America afford to retain him in office until the end of his term?

– *The author lives in Edmond*

THE OKLAHOMA OBSERVER, SEPTEMBER 25, 2007, PAGE 14



"Over the past five years," said Wexler, "more than half a million people have been the victim of an aggravated assault with a firearm. We have become numbed in this society."

LATEST WAVE MORE VICIOUS, DEADLY

Law enforcement officials believe there is something more vicious and cold-blooded, and thus more deadly, about the latest waves of crime moving across the country. Robberies involving juveniles with little regard for the lives of their victims are becoming more prevalent.

Individuals with cellphones, iPods and other electronic devices are particular targets.

In the forum's report, Chief Heather Fong of the San Francisco police described a phenomenon called "rat-packing" in which robbers using cellphones call in fellow assailants to surround a victim.

Ex-Police Chief Nanette Hegerty of Milwaukee noted that in a number of hold-ups a cooperative victim was shot anyway.

Local authorities need help coping with violent crime. Huge numbers of criminals were locked up over the past 10 or 15 years, and they are leaving prison now by the hundreds of thousands each year.

RETURN TO CRIME INEVITABLE

With few jobs or other resources available to them, a return to crime by a large portion of that population is inevitable.

The federal government played a big role in the effort that reduced crime substantially in the 1990s.

Much of that federal support has since vanished, in part because of the tremendous attention and resources directed toward anti-terror initiatives, and in part because the Bush Administration and much of the Republican Party have held fast to the ideological notion that crime is a local problem.

A similarly rigid ideological stance is undermining the effort to control the flow of guns and ammunition into the hands of criminals.

We have not returned to the bad old days of the late-'80s and early '90s, but the trends are ominous.

"We have to get the feds back into this game," said Chief Bratton. "They have the resources. They can help us."

© *The New York Times*

Pope Is Supporting God And Evolution

Pope Benedict XVI said the debate raging in some countries – particularly the United States and his native Germany – between creationism and evolution was an "absurdity," saying that evolution can coexist with faith.

The Pontiff, speaking as he was concluding his holiday in northern Italy, also said that while there is much scientific proof to support evolution, the theory could not exclude a role by God.

"They are presented as alternatives that exclude each other," the pope said. "This clash is an absurdity because on one hand there is much scientific proof in favor of evolution, which appears as a reality that we must see and which enriches our understanding of life and being as such."

He said evolution did not answer all the questions: "Above all it does not answer the great philosophical question, 'Where does everything come from?'"

Benedict also said the human race must listen to "the voice of the Earth" or risk destroying its very existence.

"We all see that today man can destroy the foundation of his existence, his Earth," he said in a closed door meeting with 400 priests.

"We cannot simply do what we want with this Earth of ours, with what has been entrusted to us," said the pope, who has been spending his time reading and walking in the scenic landscape bordering Austria.

The Pope, leader of some 1.1 billion Roman Catholics worldwide, said: "We must respect the interior laws of creation, of this Earth, to learn these laws and obey them if we want to survive."

"This obedience to the voice of the Earth is more important for our future happiness ... than the desires of the moment. Our Earth is talking to us and we must listen to it and decipher its message if we want to survive," he said.

Last April, the Vatican sponsored a scientific conference on climate change to underscore the role that religious leaders around the world could play in reminding people that willfully damaging the environment is sinful. – *Reuters*

Baptists Should Return To Roots

An evangelical Christian scholar gave an impassioned speech in which he urged "true Baptists" to rediscover their roots and once again become "watchmen on the wall of separation between church and state."

Randall Balmer, a professor of history at Columbia University, addressed an event sponsored by the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty [BJC] in Washington, DC.

Balmer, author of the recent book *Thy Kingdom Come: An Evangelical's Lament*, said too many Baptists in America have "lost their way," and he criticized their support for the Religious Right.

"They have been seduced by leaders of the Religious Right into thinking that the way to advance the gospel in this country is to abandon Baptist principles," Balmer said.

SOME ADMIRE LAW BREAKING JUDGE

The Associated Baptist Press reported that Balmer listed as an example support for Roy Moore, former Alabama chief justice. Moore lost his spot on the bench after he defied a federal court order to remove a massive Ten Commandments monument from the state judicial building.

"Why not post the Decalogue in public places?" asked Balmer. "Because, quite simply, it trivializes the faith and makes the Ten Commandments into a fetish. What Roy Moore was peddling was idolatry, pure and simple – a conflation of the gospel with the American political order."

Balmer also criticized the Religious Right for its partisanship.

"The identification of the Religious Right with the Republican Party has deprived the faith of its prophetic voice," he said.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE BAPTISTS ON SCIENCE?

"Where are the Baptist voices of conscience decrying this administration's immoral war in Iraq, the relentless assault on civil liberties and the abomination of torture?"

"In too many cases," Balmer continued, "the answer is that those voices have been co-opted by the promise – often the mirage – of access to political power. It is hard to escape the conclusion that the Religious Right has abandoned the



faith for a conference call with Karl Rove in return."

Baptists worked with Enlightenment-era thinkers such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison to build the church-state wall in the post-Revolutionary period.

SBC TAKEN OVER BY FUNDAMENTALISTS

But the Southern Baptist Convention, now under the sway of fundamentalists, has abandoned its support for church-state separation and works with the Religious Right.

Balmer called on Baptists to return to their roots.

"Every true Baptist understands that any attempt to baptize the faith with the imprimatur of the state ... ultimately diminishes the integrity of the faith," the scholar said. "I'm asking Baptists to reaffirm their heritage."

Earlier that day, pro-separation Baptists gathered near the U.S. Capitol to commemorate a famous speech on religious liberty delivered in 1920 by Baptist minister George Truett.

U.S. Rep. Chet Edwards, D-TX, remarking that he was greatly influenced by Truett's speech, told the crowd, "Our religious freedom must be protected by each generation. There are politicians in each generation, in the name of religion, who would do it great harm."

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What Liberal Press? Check Out The Truth

By Media Matters

This project did something that has never been done before: It amassed data on the syndicated columnists published by nearly every daily newspaper in the country.

While a few publications, most notably Editor & Publisher, cover the syndicated newspaper industry, no one has attempted to comprehensively assemble this information prior to now.

Because the syndicates refuse to reveal to the public exactly where their columnists are published, when Media Matters for America set out to make a systematic assessment of the syndicated columnist landscape, we had no choice but to contact each paper individually and ask which syndicated columnists are published on their op-ed pages.

CONSERVATIVE COLUMNISTS DOMINATE

The results show that to paper after paper, state after state, and region after region, conservative syndicated columnists get more space than their progressive counterparts.

As Editor & Publisher paraphrased one syndicate executive noting, "U.S. dailies run more conservative than liberal columns but some are willing to consider liberal voices."

Though papers may be "willing to consider" progressive syndicated columnists, this unprecedented study reveals the true extent of the dominance of conservatives:

- Sixty percent of the nation's daily newspapers print more conservative syndicated columnists every week than progressive syndicated columnists. Only 20% run more progressives than conservatives, while the remaining 20% are evenly balanced.

THEY REACH THE MOST READERS

- In a given week, nationally syndicated progressive columnists are published in newspapers with a combined total circulation of 125 million. Conservative columnists, on the other hand, are published in newspapers with a combined total circulation of more than 152 million.

- The top 10 columnists as ranked by the number of papers in which they are carried include five conservatives, two centrists, and only three progressives.

- The top 10 columnists as ranked by the total circulation of the papers in which they are published also include five conservatives, two centrists, and only three progressives.

- In 38 states, the conservative voice is greater than the progressive voice – in other words, conservative columns reach more readers in total than progressive columns. In only 12 states is the progressive voice greater than the conservative voice.

PROGRESSIVE COLUMNISTS OUTNUMBERED

- In three out of the four broad regions of the country – the West, the South, and the Midwest – conservative syndicated columnists reach more readers than progressive syndicated columnists. Only to the Northeast do progressives reach more readers, and only by a margin of 2%.

- In eight of the nine divisions into which the U.S. Census Bureau divides the

country, conservative syndicated columnists reach more readers than progressive syndicated columnists in any given week. Only in the Middle Atlantic division do progressive columnists reach more readers each week.

Though they have suffered slow but steady declines to readership over the last couple of decades, newspapers remain to many the most important of all news media.

The Newspaper Association of America estimates that each copy of a weekday paper is read by an average of 2.1 adults, while each Sunday paper is read by an average of 2.5 adults, pushing total newspaper readership for daily papers to more than 116 million and Sunday papers to more than 134 million.

GEORGE WILL REACHES 50 MILLION

This means that some columnists reach tens of millions of readers, and one, conservative George Will, actually reaches more than 50 million.

Furthermore, newspapers are the preferred news medium of those most interested to the news. Sixty-six percent of those who say they follow political news closely regularly read newspapers, far more than the number who cite any other medium.

An almost identical proportion of those who say they "enjoy keeping up with the news" – more than half the population – turn to newspapers more than any other medium.

These more aware citizens are in turn more likely to influence the opinions of their families, friends, and associates.

Syndicated newspaper columnists have a unique ability to influence public opinion and the national debate. Whether examining only the top columnists or the entire group, large papers or small, the data presented in the report make clear that conservative syndicated columnists enjoy a clear advantage over their progressive counterparts.

Charter Schools Looted

The founder of one of California's largest charter school networks was indicted on 113 felony counts and accused of siphoning \$23 million in public school funds, prosecutors said.

C. Steven Cox, founder of the now-defunct California Charter Academy, was indicted on 56 counts of misappropriation of public funds and 56 counts of grand theft.

The audit charged that Cox routinely looted millions from public schools to enrich his friends and family, leading to the academy's collapse. Auditors wrote that California Charter Academy and its private management firm, Educational Administrative Services Corp., spent millions on hefty executive salaries, perks and questionable contracts awarded to Cox's friends and family.

At their peak, Cox's four schools enrolled 4,500 children and 7,000 adults at 50 satellite campuses from Gridley, north of Sacramento, to near the Mexican border.

Rich Getting Richer

Unprecedented Fall In Workers' Income

By Stephen Lendman

Over the past 30 years, most people have seen an unprecedented fall in their standard of living. Adjusted for inflation, the average American worker now earns less than in the mid-1970s.

The minimum wage was unchanged at \$5.15 an hour since 1997 until the 110th Congress raised it in pathetically small steps.

Beginning July 24, it rose to \$5.85, will go to \$6.55 July 24, 2008 and to \$7.25 July 24, 2009. Until the increase, minimum worker pay was at the lowest point relative to average wages since 1949.

It got many states, comprising over half the population, to raise their own, but it's not enough.

A recent study released by the Center for Economic Policy Research [CEPR] shows the dire state of things. It reported about one in three jobs in the country, about 47 million of them, pay low wages [defined as two-thirds the median wage or \$11.11 per hour or less] with few or no benefits like health insurance, pensions or retirement accounts.

POVERTY LEVEL WAGES

It's barely enough for a family of two adults and two children to exceed the official understated poverty level of \$20,444 in 2006 [or \$9.83 an hour], and by this definition one in four workers [35 million] only, earned poverty-level wages.

Millions of others fall below it because official statistics way understate the problem, and workers earning around \$11.11 an hour in cities like New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and other large ones can't get by if they have to support a family on it.

These growing millions now comprise a permanent underclass in a nation unwilling to admit what census data and private research now show.

America is a rigid class society by design with extreme wealth at the top, a declining [maybe dying] middle class, and a growing underclass of low-paid workers and poor, many desperately so.

POOR NOW NUMBER 37 MILLION

In its most recent State of Working America - 2006/2007, the Economic Policy Institute [EPI] reports the official poverty level in 2004 stood at 12.7 % or 37 million people, including 13 million children.

It also showed for the first time ever, poverty in the country grew in the first three years of an economic recovery. In its study, EPI cited factors today they call "historically unique." Factors include:

Increased globalized trade; low union membership; more low-skilled and high-skilled immigration; and fewer favorable social norms guiding employer behavior to provide "adequate safety nets, pensions, and health care arrangements."

EPI noted the biggest challenge in today's "new economy" isn't [macro] growth but how benefits get distributed with such a high proportion skewed upward.

16 MILLION LEFT OUT ENTIRELY

Left out entirely are the 16 million 2005 census figures show are on the very bottom living in "extreme" poverty that's defined as a family of four with an annual income of \$9903 or less.

Even more disturbing is how fast the poverty rate is increasing. The numbers of those worst off grew by 26% from 2000-2005 or 56% faster than for the total poverty population.

The Oakland Institute policy think tank recently reported its disturbing assessment of things, saying 10% of the U.S. population [around 30 million] "experiences hunger or is at risk of going hungry."

A December 2006 Helsinki-based World Institute for Development Economics



Research study also reported disturbing findings.

They showed the richest 1% of adults owned 40% of global assets in 2000, and the richest 10% held 85% of them.

HOW WEALTH IS BEING DISTRIBUTE!?

EPI reported the top 1% controls more than one-third of America's wealth, the bottom 80% has 15.3%, and the top 20% holds 84.7% of it.

In contrast, the poorest 20% are in debt and owe more than they own. Globalization, automation, outsourcing, the shift from manufacturing to services, weak unions, deregulation, and other harmful economic factors all add to the problem.

Other data show an astonishing generational shift of well over \$1 trillion of national wealth annually from 90 million US working class households to for-profit corporations and the richest 1% of the population.

It created what economist Paul Krugman calls an unprecedented wealth disparity getting worse that shames the nation and is destroying the bedrock middle class without which democracy can't survive.

TOP ONE-TENTH OF ONE PERCENT

The top one-tenth of 1% [about 300,000 people] did best of all, to no surprise. It got as much income to total as the bottom 150 million Americans combined. In addition, while total reported income rose almost 9% in 2005, average incomes for the bottom 90% of the population dropped .6 from the previous year.

The Bush administration tax cuts for the wealthy greatly widened the income gap between rich and poor - that was the whole idea behind them with a healthy piece of the benefits going to big corporations

In the 1950s, they contributed an average of 28% to federal revenues. That dropped to 21% in the 1960s and about 10% and falling since the 1980s.

It's happening with the corporate tax rate at 35%, but few of the giants pay it. According to the Government Accountability Office [GAO], 94% of major corporations now pay less than 5% of their income to taxes, and corporate tax payments overall are at their lowest level to 60 years.

In addition, many large companies pay no tax, and some end up with sizable rebates on top of huge corporate welfare subsidies under a system of socialism for big corporations and the rich and "free market" capitalism for the rest of us.

The IRS acknowledges it can account for only about 70% of business and investment income, most, of course, going to high-income earners. What's missing is \$300-\$400 billion a year that adds up to trillions of untaxed dollars for the rich with the rest of us having to make up for it.

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Right To Unionize Key To Democracy

By Dean Baker

For the last quarter century, corporate America has been at war against the labor movement. After a long period in which unions were an accepted part of the economic and political landscape, most corporations adopted a much more hostile attitude toward unions.

Where unions already were present, employers sought to weaken or break them. In workplaces without unions, employers were prepared to do whatever was necessary to prevent workers from organizing.

This anti-union drive has largely enjoyed the support of governments at all levels - especially Republicans. Consequently, organized labor is in sharp decline.

For example, it is now a standard practice for employers to fire workers engaged in an organizing drive.

FIRING WORKERS ATTEMPTING TO ORGANIZE

A study by John Schmitt and Ben Zipperer of the Center for Economic and Policy Research found one in five organizers will be fired during an average organizing drive.

Such firings are illegal, but enforcement is sufficiently slow, and the penalties sufficiently small, that most employees eagerly embrace this effective anti-union tactic.

Government policies have also supported anti-union practices in other ways. A main purpose of trade agreements like NAFTA was to make it as easy as possible to relocate factories overseas.

The high dollar policy Robert Rubin initiated in the Clinton era also put U.S. manufacturing, and its unionized workers, at a huge disadvantage.

WHAT AN OVER-VALUED DOLLAR MEANS

A 30% over-valued dollar effectively imposes a 30% tariff on goods exported from the United States, while providing a subsidy of 30% on goods imported into the United States.

As a result of these policies, much manufacturing has, in fact, been moved overseas in the last quarter century, giving the country a trade deficit of more than \$700 billion annually.

The jobs lost in manufacturing have been disproportionately union jobs. While the unionization rate in manufacturing was more than 40% in the 1960s, in 2006 it was just 11.6% - less than the 12 average for all workers, although still somewhat higher than the 7.4% average for the private sector as a whole.

The weakening of the labor movement is not just bad news for the workers who lose union jobs. According to polling data, there are tens of millions of workers who would like to be represented by a union at their workplace, but don't currently have the option.

PUBLIC SECTOR UNIONIZATION IS BEST GUIDE

The best way to get a guide as to how many workers would be in unions if they could opt to do so - in the absence of employer threats and harassment - is to

See UNIONIZE Page 17

Liberals In The Minority **Dems Divide On Top Social Issues**

By Bill Boyarsky

Once the war is over Democrats will face the messy and so-far insoluble matters of race, class and the poor.

I'm not predicting peace, or some approximation of it, soon. It's unlikely the war will end quickly, even if the Democrats win the presidency.

Eventually, if a Democrat is elected president, we can count on the war dragging to a messy, painful conclusion. As John Edwards said, "Any Democratic president will end the war."

Opposition to the war has unified Democrats. It was the most important issue in the Democratic takeover of the Senate and House last year. The war will loom at least as large in next year's presidential and congressional races.

The Democrats have to start planning their postwar strategy now. If they win the election and stop the war, they will immediately be confronted with domestic issues that have no Democratic consensus, issues in which debate is charged with deep feelings about national, ethnic and racial identity.

The ideological split among Democrats was revealed in a poll by The Pew Research Center for the People & The Press.

LIBERALS ARE A CLEAR MINORITY

The survey found that 45% of Democrats and independents who lean Democratic say they are ideologically moderate, compared with 31% who say they are liberal.

In Oklahoma, Alabama and Arkansas, conservative Democrats outnumber liberals. Only 18% of Oklahoma Democrats say they are liberal. In Georgia, North Carolina, Texas and Missouri, there is a roughly even split.

One manifestation of this division seemed to come out in the national debate over the failed immigration bill. The bill's main feature was to offer illegal immigrants a long and difficult path to citizenship, a far cry from the amnesty that its opponents feared.

Democrats and Republicans killed the bill for a variety of reasons. But whatever their reasons for opposing the measure – introduced by Democrat Ted Kennedy and Republican John McCain – the ambivalent feelings of many Democrats toward immigrants played a part.

HOSTILITY TOWARD IMMIGRANTS

The Pew poll showed a certain Democratic hostility toward immigrants.

About half of Democrats who consider themselves moderate believe that the growing number of immigrants endangers American customs.

Last year's immigration rights marches, in which some demonstrators carried Mexican flags, intensified the hostility.

I got a taste of it earlier this year when I wrote a piece supporting the bill. I was surprised by the large number of critical comments, some of them noteworthy for their toxic attitude toward immigrants.

The issue will come up again. The Bush Administration's surprise raids on



workplaces certainly aren't a cure. Neither is building a border fence nor sending immigration agents to arrest people like Ovira Arellallo, an illegal immigrant and mother of an 8-year-old who is a citizen because he was born in the United States.

She took sanctuary in a Chicago church and then was arrested in Los Angeles, where she had gone to speak about immigration reform.

NO SPECIAL TREATMENT

African-Americans as well as Latinos will press for ways for the poor of their community to move up the economic ladder. It won't be easy. A total of 42% of Democrats disagreed with this statement in the Pew poll:

"We should make every possible effort to improve the position of blacks and other minorities even if it means giving them preferential treatment."

And 35% of Democrats said the nation has gone too far in pressing for equal rights.

Then there's an unscientific but powerful measure of public opinion – comments on the Internet and talk radio and in interviews on the street and in bars, malls and coffee shops.

It will take great leadership and guts for a Democratic president and Congress to find its way through the party's divided base.

NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE ISSUE

There's hope if the Democrats propose and push through a national health insurance program first thing in 2009. A national health insurance program would reach across the racial divide. True, it won't be a panacea.

Great Britain's national health care hasn't prevented that country's increasing racial tensions.

Medical care and health would improve in this country, and so would the quality of life. A healthy kid from a poor family has a much better chance of doing well in school than a sickly one who has suffered from scanty care in emergency wards.

A healthy kid has a better chance of graduating from high school and college, the best path in America for equality.

The Democrats pretty much agree on medical care. All they have to do is beat the insurance and drug companies. That may prove easier than smoothing over the great divide on emotional issues that touch on race and ethnicity.

UNIONIZE

From Page 16

look at the unionization rate in the public sector.

While public sector managers are not generally friendly to unions, they can't fire union organizers or use the other harsh anti-union tactics that are now standard practice in the private sector.

As a result, more than 36% of public sector employees are members of unions. Given the freedom to choose, it is likely a comparable share of private sector workers would also be in unions. This would imply an additional 30 million workers in unions.

In addition to directly benefiting the workers they represent, unions also benefit the larger workforce and society as a whole.

In an industry with a strong union presence, non-union firms know they must maintain comparable wages and benefits if they want to keep their workers from joining a union.

The decline of unions has undoubtedly been an important factor in the growth of inequality in the last quarter century.

WHAT UNIONS HAVE MEANT TO AMERICA

Unions have also been essential in a wide range of political initiatives over the post-war period. Programs like Medicare, Medicaid and Head Start would not have been possible without the strong support of the labor movement.

The same is true of the key civil rights legislation of the 1960s. More recently, the labor movement was at the center of the effort to prevent President Bush from privatizing Social Security.

It will be difficult to make much progress on a wide range of social and economic issues without the support of a strong labor movement.

Congress is currently debating a bill that would take an important step toward re-establishing the right of workers to join a union.

The Employee Free Choice Act [EFCA] would require a company to recognize a union once a majority of workers have signed a card indicating they want to be represented by a union.

This gets around the election process, which gives employers a chance to intimidate workers and fire the leaders of an organizing effort. [Under the EFCA,

workers can still request an election supervised by the National Labor Relations Board.]

IT WOULD RESTORE SOME MEANING

The EFCA would restore some meaning to the right to organize. The bill that has been passed by the House is currently being blocked by a Republican filibuster in the Senate. [Both of Oklahoma's Republican U.S. senators are opposed.]

While the EFCA is not likely to become law under this Congress [President Bush would almost certainly veto the bill even if it did pass], progressives should recognize the importance of legislation.

The right to organize is not the concern of just a small special interest group; it is a basic right that should concern us all. In the same vein, all progressives have an interest in seeing a strong labor movement. For this reason, the EFCA and other measures that level the playing field between labor and management should be top items on the progressive agenda.

– The author is co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research [CEPR]

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The Little Boy Worried

A teacher observed that one little boy in her class was pensive and withdrawn.

"What are you worried about?" she asked him.

"My parents," he replied. "Dad works all day to keep me clothed and fed and sent to the best public school in town. He's working overtime to be able to send me to college.

"Mom spends all day cooking and cleaning and ironing and shopping for us."

"Well what to the world are you worried about? They sound like wonderful parents."

"I'm afraid they might try to escape."

Gay Republicans Stay In The Closet

By Richard Kim

What's up with Republican politicians getting arrested by undercover cops for soliciting sex in public restrooms?

First, Florida state Rep. Bob Allen, formerly John McCain's state campaign co-chair, was arrested in July after he offered a police officer \$20 for the privilege of performing oral sex.

Then news broke that Sen. Larry Craig, R-ID, long the subject of gay rumors, was arrested in a Minnesota airport by a plainclothes cop investigating lewd conduct in the men's bathroom. Both men are married – to women.

Craig, Allen, Mark Foley, Ted Haggard or Jim McGreevey have shown up to momentarily ripple the waters of public discourse on sex.

The moment is so thick with irony, I scarcely know where to begin. Let's start with the incredibly lame attempts at damage control.

Upon arrest, both Allen and Craig attempted to use their positions of power to escape charges [Craig handed over his Senate business card to the officer and asked, "What do you think about that?"].

HE MOUNTS A RACIST DEFENSE

Post-arrest, Allen, appealing at once to homophobia and racism, mounted a "black [gay] panic" defense. You see he wasn't really interested in sex, he was just trying to save his neck.

Apparently, the cop was "a pretty stocky black guy" and "there were nothing but other black guys around in the park."

Fearing he was "about to become a statistic," Allen did what any other, rational, straight [straight!], white man would do if he just so happened to find himself cruising a public restroom full of black men.

Less hysterical, but equally flimsy, is Craig's story. Through his spokesman, Craig said that the whole incident was just a "he said/he said misunderstanding."

Last year, when gay blogger Mike Rogers alleged that Craig had engaged in same-sex relations, Craig called the story "absolutely ridiculous, almost laughable."

WAS THE BLOGGER RIGHT ON TARGET?

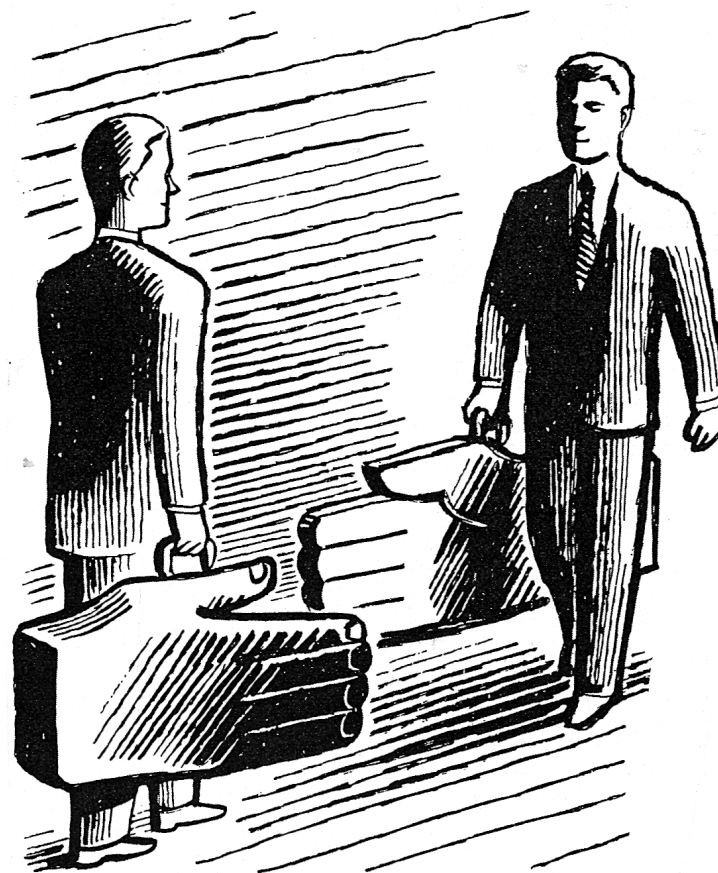
I wonder if Craig was laughing when he pleaded guilty to misdemeanor disorderly conduct charges in a Minnesota County Court.

Of course, both Republicans have a long history of support for anti-gay legislation – in Craig's case votes for the Federal Marriage Amendment, Allen filed a court brief against gay adoption and authored a failed bill to ratchet up penalties for "unnatural and lascivious acts."

I'm sure as the press digests the Craig scandal, you'll hear a lot about "hypocrisy," "repressed homosexuality" and "internalized homophobia."

Good enough, I suppose, for making a somewhat cheap political point and sweeping these undeniably creepy, tragic guys back into the Brokeback Mountain days from whence they apparently came.

I wonder if the GOP's burgeoning "bathroom problem" isn't reflective of something larger than just a bunch of conservative dudes who couldn't come out of



the closet.

There's something palpably sad to me about what happened to Allen and Craig, too, something oddly touching about their misplaced faith in the fading world of secret, anonymous gay sex.

THAT WORLD HAS BEEN SWEEPED AWAY

That world – once found in bathrooms, parks, piers and adult bookstores – has been swept away by so many police raids, privatization schemes, quality of life campaigns and Internet dating services.

Mostly, it's fallen away as gays have become increasingly integrated into the mainstream, and also, paradoxically, more marked than ever. "You're either gay or you're not" seems to be the equation.

These guys have problems, no doubt. But we might also pause to wonder if there's some cultural knot that gay liberation, despite its original and best intentions, has left in place.

At the very least the link between public power and domestic heterosexuality – with all the fetishistic displays of family life that entails – has yet to be completely severed.

That knot, perhaps best described as sexual propriety, is what fuels the moral campaigns against homosexuality that have become one of the Republican Party's identifying causes – loyally supported by the likes of Craig, Haggard, Foley, et al.

It's also what leads Bob Allen to the stunning and revealing calculation that it would be better to be seen in the public eye as an avowed racist than as someone who likes to have sex with men – sometimes.

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The Voice Of God Is Really Dick Cheney

Telephone logs recorded by the National Security Agency and obtained by Congress as part of an ongoing investigation suggest that the vice president may have used the Oval Office intercom system to address President Bush at crucial moments, giving categorical directives in a voice the President believed to be that of God.

While journalists and presidential historians had long noted Bush's deep faith and Cheney's powerful influence in the White House, few had drawn a direct correlation between the two until transcripts of meetings that took place in March and April of 2002 became available.

In a transcript of an intercom exchange recorded in March 2002, a voice positively identified as the vice president's identifies himself as "the Lord thy God" and promotes the invasion of Iraq, as well as the use of torture in prisoner interrogations.

THERE IS A CONSISTENT PATTERN

A close examination of Bush's public statements and Secret Service time logs tracking the vice president reveals a consistent pattern, one which links Bush's belief that he had received word from God with Cheney's use of the White House's telephone-based intercom system.

Officials privately acknowledged that there is reason to believe that the vice president, as God, urged Bush to sign legislation benefiting oil companies in 2005.

"There's a lot of religious zeal in the West Wing," said a former White House staffer who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "It's possible that the vice president has taken advantage of that to fast-track certain administration objectives."

An ex-Treasury Department official and longtime friend of Cheney was asked to comment on the vice president's possible subterfuge.

CHENEY DIDN'T PLAN IT

"I don't know. I certainly don't think it's something [Cheney] planned," he said. "I do know that Mr. Bush was unfamiliar with a phone-based intercom, and

I suppose it is possible that Dick took advantage of that."

A highly placed NSA official who has reviewed the information released Tuesday said Cheney masked his clipped monotone, employing a deeper booming voice.

Said the NSA source: "It sounded as though the speaker, who identified himself as God, stood away from the intercom to create an echo effect."

On Capitol Hill, sources are expressing surprise that Cheney, a vice president with more influence than any other in U.S. history, would have resorted to such deception.

CHENEY HAS A LOT OF SWAY

"The vice president has a lot of sway in this administration," said a former White House aide. "But perhaps when President Bush was particularly resolute and resistant to mortal persuasion, the vice president chose to quickly resolve disputes in his favor with a half-decent God impression."

For many, the revelation explains Bush's confusion in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

"I was very surprised by the president's slow response in New Orleans," political commentator Bill Kristol said. "The President told me that he was praying every day in his office, but had received no reply. I had no idea what he meant, but of course, it all makes sense now."

At the time of Katrina, Cheney was on a fly-fishing trip, from which he returned on Sept 1.

According to highly placed White House sources, Bush's senior advisers are trying to shield the president from the news. Aides are concerned that too harsh an awakening might shake Bush's faith, which has been a central part of his life for nearly 20 years.

"It's hard to tell the leader of the free world that he has been the butt of an elaborate and long-term ruse," a former staffer said. "Maybe it would be easier to take if it came from Cheney's God voice."

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RELIGIOUS RIGHT

From Page One

tice was founded by Pat Robertson and is headed by a Jew for Jesus, influential Religious Right attorney Jay Sekulow.

Sekulow files lawsuits and threatens litigation to try to roll back Supreme Court rulings upholding church-state separation. The ACLJ's 2005 budget was just over \$14 million.

Family Research Council, founded by James Dobson as a Washington, DC-based Religious Right lobbying group, has quickly become one the Religious Right's most prominent voices in the nation's capital.

Tony Perkins, head of the FRC, has secured numerous private sessions with some of the nation's most powerful politicians. The FRC raked in almost \$10 million in 2005.

Concerned Women for America, founded by Beverly and Tim LaHaye, strives to bring "biblical principles into all levels of public policy." Tim LaHaye is also

co-author of the best-selling Left Behind novels. CWA's budget for 2005 was \$8 million.

Traditional Values Coalition, headed by the Rev. Louis Sheldon, has offices in California and Washington, DC. Sheldon is a shrill critic of gay rights and the separation of church and state.

After Bush's re-election, Sheldon sponsored a "Christian" inaugural celebration that drew Karl Rove and the Republican National Committee Chairman Ken Mehlman. Sheldon's group raised \$6 million in 2005.

The religious right took heavy blows in the last election, but don't count them out. If the new Census is right, Republicans could still win back Congress in 2008.

The fundamentalists suffered a severe blow with the election of a Democratic Congress. They may be down but they aren't out.

Joining Fight Against The Religious Right

What can an ordinary citizen do to fight the religious right political bulldozer? First, be sure you're registered to vote and know where the candidates stand on church-state matters.

If you are not a member, join Americans United. Sign up with AU's Activist Network at www.au.org/register. Join an AU chapter if there is one in your area. If not, consider forming one, or contact David Morris, AU Chapters Coordinator, at dmorris@au.org for more information.

Attend voter forums and ask questions. Participate in voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives.

[Note: You may do what you want in politics as a private citizen, but remember that houses of worship and non-profit groups like AU may not intervene in partisan politics.]

Speak out in public to defend the separation of church and state. Respond to letters to the editor attacking church-state separation or spreading misinformation about the principle. Remember that many people are undecided about these issues and need to see both sides.

Mobilize the faith community. If you attend a house of worship, ask your religious leaders to publicly support church-state separation. When religious leaders speak out in favor of church/state separation, it debunks the Religious Right canard that separation is hostile to faith.

Support public education. Public schools are often the Religious Right's public enemy number one. Support public schools, even if you don't have children attending them.

Public education free from sectarian control is in everyone's interest. Oppose Religious Right efforts to starve our public education system by denying schools an adequate tax base.

Expose religious right extremism. Remind your friends and neighbors that the Religious Right holds extreme views, far outside the mainstream. Use Church & State magazine and AU's website, au.org, to demonstrate the theocratic goals of the Religious Right.

Educate the public. Find out if your local public library will accept a free subscription to Church & State. If so, go to AU's website to set up a gift subscription, or e-mail membership@au.org for more information. Also consider donating books that promote AU's point of view.

Contact your elected officials in Congress. If legislation is introduced that threatens the separation of church and state, speak out. Write a letter, send an e-mail or send a fax to your senators and representative in Congress. Let them know where you stand.

Speak to your local lawmakers. If there is a church-state controversy in your community or state, speak up. Address lawmakers at a public meeting. Gather supporters to your side.

Report a violation of church/state separation. If you are concerned that an action in your local public schools, local government, local pulpit or state government may violate separation of church and state, report it to the IRS and Americans United's Legal Department. Go to www.au.org and click on "In the Courts" and then "Report a Violation" for more information.

Loss Of Arctic Ice Stunning Experts

By David Adam

The Arctic ice cap has collapsed at an unprecedented rate this summer and levels of sea ice in the region now stand at record lows, scientists have announced.

Experts say they are "stunned" by the loss of ice, with an area almost twice as big as the U.K. disappearing in the last week alone.

So much ice has melted this summer that the Northwest passage across the top of Canada is fully navigable, and observers say the Northeast passage along Russia's Arctic coast could open later this month.

If the increased rate of melting continues, the summertime Arctic could be totally free of ice by 2030.

Mark Serreze, an Arctic specialist at the U.S. National Snow and Ice Data Center at Colorado University in Denver, said: "It's amazing. It's simply fallen off a cliff and we're still losing ice."

The Arctic has now lost about a third of its ice since satellite measurements began 30 years ago, and the rate of loss has accelerated sharply since 2002.

Dr. Serreze said: "If you asked me a couple of years ago when the Arctic could lose all of its ice then I would have said 2100 or 2070 maybe.

2030 IS A REASONABLE ESTIMATE

"But now I think that 2030 is a reasonable estimate. It seems that the Arctic is going to be a very different place within our lifetimes, and certainly within our children's lifetimes," he said.

The new figures show that sea ice extent is currently down to 4.4m square

kilometers [1.7m square miles] and still falling.

The previous record low was 5.3m square kilometers in September 2005. From 1979 to 2000 the average sea ice extent was 7.7m square kilometers.

The sea ice usually melts in the Arctic summer and freezes again in the winter. But Dr. Serreze said that would be difficult this year.

"This summer we've got all this open water and added heat going into the ocean. That is going to make it much harder for the ice to grow back."

Changes in wind and ocean circulation patterns can help reduce sea ice extent, but Dr. Serreze said the main culprit was manmade global warming.

"The rules are starting to change and what's changing the rules is the input of greenhouse gases."

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