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THE OKLAHOMA Observer



VOL. 41, NO. 9

An Independent Journal of Commentary

MAY 10, 2009

Obesity And Diabetes Epidemic Suffer The Little Ones

By Frosty Troy

People look surprised that childhood obesity is the single greatest threat to Oklahoma's economic future, contributing to an epidemic of diabetes.

Do you doubt it? Obesity and poverty are linked to high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, heart disease, joint failure, some forms of cancer and social isolation.

Nutrient iron deficiency in childhood lowers IQ an average of nine points, accounting in part for poor test results in the public schools.

Not all children are overweight – poverty also leaves many as skin and bones. Oklahoma kids are entering poverty 56 times faster than in any other state.

Vision, bone and muscle maladies due to a lack of essential vitamins and minerals are running up the state's health bill.

Obesity leads to attention problems and higher rates of drug abuse, absences from school and dropouts.

Oklahomans with less education have fewer financial resources; socioeconomic inequalities in mortality rates are increasing.

Children from poor homes often show aggression, psycho-social dysfunction and poor social skills.

Obesity is a learned behavior – half of Oklahomans are overweight, ranking 45th for overall health.

Rising poor health numbers not only represent a threat to our economic security, diabetes alone costs Oklahoma \$2 billion a year.

Obesity has doubled in Oklahoma since 2000. Death from diabetes ranks Oklahoma 11th nationally. There were nearly 2,000 amputations last year. Hardest hit are American Indians and African-Americans.

Poverty is a way of life for 23% of the state's 900,000 children.



More than 28% of all Oklahomans are overweight, ranking the state eighth nationally. More than 1.2 million Oklahomans live below the federal poverty rate – including 192,000 children.

Poverty is linked to more than diabetes – child abuse, incarceration, hospitalization and the need for special education also are products.

Repeated studies have shown that poverty is one of the most powerful predictors of psychiatric and functional problems in children. Diabetes can strike both the poor and affluent but poor kids pay a huge price in education.

There is the matter of a lack of money to pay for the basic needs of family life. Adding to the stigma, poverty is also associated with higher rates of

marital discord, single parenthood, family dysfunction, family and neighborhood violence, and parental psychopathology.

Hungry poor kids are more likely to become adults who raise costs for the community and give back less.

As one report states: "Just as a lean child isn't always an unhealthy malnourished child, obesity is not a guarantor that a child is receiving plenty of essential nutrients. Many obese children are, in fact, suffering with full blown malnutrition."

Children suffering even brief periods of hunger are at enormous risk for poor brain development, particularly in the first three years of life.

Greg Critser in his book *Fat Land* wrote: "How is it that we better-off Americans, perhaps the most health-conscious of any generation in history, have come to preside over the deadly fattening of our youth and their future?"

Oklahoma is not alone. A third of U.S. kids are overweight, obese or at risk. Obesity in kids has doubled in the last 20 years. The increase in overweight children is twice the rate

of adults.

Taxpayers are already carrying a heavy burden. Hospital costs related to child obesity have tripled in the past 20 years.

One-third of all kids under 18 are at high risk for Type 2 diabetes. Most obese children become overweight or obese adults. Children from minority groups show an even higher prevalence of obesity.

Among some population groups, adolescents account for up to half of the new diagnoses of Type 2 diabetes caused by excess weight.

Oklahoma City Public Schools now have 80% of students on free and reduced lunches. Some districts are feeding children when they come to school. A consistently hungry child learns little.

Food stamps are a lifesaver for more than a half million participating Oklahomans – a 60% rise in recent years.

Facts and figures spell out an awful condition, but consider the children who are hungry, overweight and already suffering from Type 2 diabetes.

Some of the homeless poor include more than 5,900 children – shadows in our cities and towns, small outlines against abandoned buildings, park benches and sidewalks. They are Oklahoma's untouchables.

More than 650,000 Oklahomans have no health insurance. President Obama's support for expanding the Children's Health Insurance Program [CHIP] means 55,000 more Oklahoma kids qualify for health care.

Oklahoma's Malnutrition Coalition has done yeoman's work. Numerous churches and other organizations aid the shelters.

One legislative drive has been to remove sugar snacks – pop and candy bars – from schools and introduce more physical activity.

State Rep. Richard Morrisette, D-OKC, introduced legislation requiring schools to do a BMI [Body Mass Index] analysis and send the results home. It was foiled by the ruling GOP faction.

The most precious gift to bestow on children in the dawn of their lives is good health – sad to say it isn't freely given in Oklahoma.

Observations

Sour Grapes

Republicans continue to rant against anything President Obama says or does – the political equivalent of whistling past a cemetery.

Two-thirds of Americans approve of Obama's job performance, according to a New York Times/CBS News poll.

By contrast, only 31% of respondents said they have a favorable view of the Republican Party, lowest in 25 years of the poll.

Are their criticism and their tea parties changing minds? Hardly. Sixty-three percent think Obama is most likely to make the right decisions for the economy, versus 20% who said Congressional Republicans were more likely.

The poll also indicates that patriotic Americans know the election is over and the President deserves support – or at least silence until his program is a success or a failure.

Religious folk would do well to pray for him and for the future of America.

The Uninsured

Oklahoma's businesses and families are finally feeling the squeeze of tough economic times brought on by their adored hero, President George W. Bush.

One in three Americans lack health coverage. More than 600,000 Oklahomans are uninsured, with more workers losing their jobs and the health insurance that they rely on with each passing week.

For too long, the story has been the same: Health reform is the topic of much political and policy discussion, but meaningful action to cover the uninsured fails to occur.

To find out how many people are affected by being uninsured, Families USA commissioned The Lewin Group to analyze data from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey [CPS] and its Survey of Income and Program Participation [SIPP], as well as from the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey [MEPS].

This analysis found that 86.7 mil-

lion people – one out of every three Americans under the age of 65 – was uninsured for some period of time during 2007 and 2008.

These Americans had to pay medical care out of their own pockets, or delay needed care altogether.

Who are the uninsured Oklahomans? No one is protected from the risk of no insurance. People in all age groups, of every race and ethnicity, across all income ranges, are affected – especially the poor.

Four out of five uninsured Americans are from working families, many at great risk today as more and more workers get laid off and lose their ability to retain health coverage.

This report offers a closer look at the number of uninsured Americans, who they are, and how long they are uninsured. Also examined was the major underlying reasons for the growth in the number of uninsured.

America won't join every other nation in the world in granting access to medical care until the insurance lobby is silenced once and for all.

Bravo!

In March President Barack Obama signed an Executive Order approving federal funding of research projects using human embryos.

In signing the order, the President said: "For the past eight years, the authority of the Department of Health and Human Services, including the National Institutes of Health [NIH], to fund and conduct human embryonic stem cell research has been limited by Presidential actions."

The purpose of his order was to remove limitations on scientific inquiry, expanding support for the exploration of human stem cell research and in so doing to "enhance the contribution of America's scientists producing new discoveries and new therapies for the benefit of humankind."

Republicans like Nancy Reagan have praised President Obama's Executive Order. But the Catholic Church and



other fundamentalists went berserk.

In Oklahoma the House approved HB 1326 making it illegal in Oklahoma to allow stem cell research.

Gov. Brad Henry vetoed it and his veto was sustained in the House.

The Oklahoma embryonic stem cell legislation is an extension of the national abortion debate that pits those doing scientific research with human embryos against those who object based on their religious beliefs.

The Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation is one of the leading research organizations in America, doing cutting edge research on AIDS and Parkinson's Disease. HB 1326 would have negatively affected its ability to do such research.

All but one Republican [Rep. Doug Cox, an MD] voted to override the veto. Too bad they don't have a conscience when it comes to helping the poor and suffering children already born.

Black Men

It's a well know fact that black men are underrepresented and under-served in higher education.

The now-common practice of curbing remedial education at four-year institutions may be further harming their participation.

At a recent meeting of the American College Personnel Association, Ivan L. Harrell II, a student affairs coordinator, cited the statistic that in 2006, only 4.3% of all students enrolled in college nationally were black men – the same percentage as in 1976.

He contends that black men are disproportionately subject to disciplinary action in high school and discouraged from attending college.

Because of this, matriculating black men are more likely to enroll in remedial courses than students from other backgrounds and more likely to be affected as more institutions eliminate such programs because of cost or perceived lack of effectiveness.

According to Harrell, at least 22 states have either reduced or eliminated remedial coursework from their public, four-year institutions – including some historically black colleges and universities.

Recent research shows these remedial programs are essential for student persistence and confidence. The snob factor is in play in too many colleges.

What is most important – trying to become a more prestigious institution or offering remedial education that enhances the chance of getting a degree?

Non-Believers

A new study reveals that 15% of Americans consider themselves "non-religious," up from 8% in 1990.

As a point of comparison the stigma surrounding the nonreligious in politics is vast and deep.

When secular organizations do speak out, such as the billboard recently put up by Humanists of Idaho, they are portrayed as un-American bullies.

The nonreligious are often reduced to advocating for themselves through the judicial system because of the public derision they face.

It is high time for non-religious Americans to have more of a voice in the political process.

Early statements coming from the White House Office of Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships are a good start, but the inclusion of atheist, agnostic, humanist and similarly non-theist groups is far from complete.

America guarantees freedom of religion AND freedom from religion.

George Will

A tip of the hat to the Washington Post for hammering its own columnist, George Will, for depicting climate change as a "hypothetical" calamity.

He argued that because global sea ice remained near its 1979 levels, global warming is not occurring.

Despite Will's widely documented errors, the Post's editorial page editor, Fred Hiatt, did not believe Will's column merited any corrections.

In a subsequent article on new Arctic sea ice data from NASA, Post reporters Juliet Eilperin and Mary Beth Sheridan corrected the record.

They wrote: "The new evidence – including satellite data showing that the average multiyear wintertime sea ice cover in the Arctic in 2005 and 2006 was nine feet thick, a significant decline from the 1980s – contradicts data cited in widely circulated reports by Washington Post columnist George F. Will that sea ice in the Arctic has not significantly declined since 1979."

The Oklahoma Observer was the first state paper to run Will's column. We fired him for unethical conduct after he briefed a presidential candidate the night before he was on the panel questioning him!

The Daily Disappointment carries his column. Given the fetid editorial page headed by J.E. McReynolds, they deserve each other.

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

www.okobserver.net

FOUNDING PUBLISHER • Helen B. Troy [1970-2006]

[ISSN 0030-1795]

The Oklahoma Observer [USPS 865-720] is published the 10th and 25th of each month, except July 25th and Dec. 25th, by AHB Enterprises LLC, 13912 Plymouth Xing, P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275. Periodicals postage paid at Oklahoma City, OK 73125.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Oklahoma Observer, P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: 1-Year [22 issues] \$40. Send check to The Oklahoma Observer, P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275. Online: Visit www.okobserver.net to use a credit card.

UPDATE ADDRESSES: Please notify us at least two weeks before your move to ensure uninterrupted service. E-Mail to subscriptions@okobserver.net or mail to P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275.

LETTERS TO EDITOR: E-mail to letters@okobserver.net or mail to P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275.

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

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

PUBLISHER

Beverly Hamilton
bhamilton@okobserver.net
405.478.8700

EDITOR

Arnold Hamilton
ahamilton@okobserver.net
405.478.8700

FOUNDING EDITOR

Frosty Troy
ftroy@fullnet.net
405.525.5582

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

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

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

Observerscope

Laurel: To State Supreme Court Justice Rudolph Hargrave, celebrating 60 years as an attorney.

Talk about ignorant rednecks – 11% of Americans say President Obama is a Muslim. [Pew Forum Poll]

Dart: To Fox News, the first and only network to refuse a President time to address the nation. All other networks carried President Obama's remarks on swine flu. Fox is the closest thing to fascism in America.

Wonder why Oklahomans earn only 80% of the national average? The decline in unions has hit state paychecks hard, with unions declining to 6.4% of the workforce. Right-To-Work is a joke.

Laurel: To the 30,000 men and women who will graduate from an Oklahoma college this month. More than 4,200 earned master's degrees.

Chesapeake's Tom Price Jr. praises the GOP state legislative leadership for more "incentives" for the oil and gas industry. Democratic U.S. Rep. Dan Boren has introduced a bill in Congress promoting more corporate welfare for the oil and gas crowd.

Dart: To Rep. Pam Peterson for comparing stem cell research to the Holocaust. The new Oklahoma breed of Republicans makes a mockery of public service.

Despite a \$900 million budget shortfall, House Budget Committee Chairman Ken Miller, R-Edmond, was pushing more tax cuts for the rich and super rich. Even Speaker Chris Benge, R-Tulsa, rained on his parade.

Laurel: To Gov. Brad Henry, wielding his veto pen to kill atrocious bills emanating from one of the worst legislative sessions in living memory.

OSU spent more than \$1 million on Washington lobbyists from 2006-2008. OU spent roughly \$466,000 during the same period. U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn said universities are not being held accountable on what the money bought.

Dart: To the state's political leadership, announcing a private sector \$100 million campaign for work on the 100-year old State Capitol. Our "leaders" were busy passing tax cuts knowing the building was in acute disrepair.

It is no surprise that Oklahoma's charter school law was ruled constitutional by Oklahoma County District Judge Carolyn Ricks. The Tulsa School District will appeal, but it's a waste of money.

Laurel: To Rep. Doug Cox, R-Grove, for one of the finest legislative orations in years, citing nothing but facts on a stem-cell bill vetoed by the governor. The House sustained his veto.

Tulsa and Oklahoma City public schools have among the worst graduation rates in the nation, averaging 53%. That's where real reform should take place, not via vouchers or charter schools, but for all of the students.

Dart: To Rep. Dan Sullivan, R-Tulsa, pushing legislation to lock the courthouse door for ordinary Oklahomans. He defends doctors accused of malpractice – a clear conflict of interest.

Do you suppose that old FBI file will surface if J.C. Watts decides to run for the Republican nomination for governor? Will word leak out concerning fathering a child out of wedlock whom he didn't support?

Laurel: To two-thirds of Americans who think the new President is doing a good job. Critics who want to judge him on his first 100 days have an acute case of simplemindedness.

All but three of the Democratic members of the Oklahoma House walked out when the Republican leadership refused to allow an amendment to require insurance companies to cover autism.

Dart: To U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe, blistering the Obama Administration for the omnibus budget bill. How many Okies know Inhofe ranks eighth nationally in pork barrel earmarks? Can you spell hypocrite?



Laurel: To Sen. Patrick Anderson, R-Enid, for his hand in shaping a decent English Only bill.

The BBC, in a series of interview in Oklahoma, laid bare the truth that Barack Obama failed to carry a single county due in large part to pure racism.

Dart: To Oklahoma oilman Harold Hamm for his attack on President Obama's budget. Oil and gas freeloaders who collected lots of corporate welfare under George W. Bush better get used to the fact that there's a new sheriff in town.

The latest count shows 5,952 Oklahoma children are homeless. The National Center on Family Homelessness ranks Oklahoma 31st. In America one in 50 children is homeless.

Laurel: To Sen. Jonathan Nichols, R-Norman, for his fight for a bill to allow greater access to dental care for needy Oklahomans. The Oklahoma Dental Association will provide the "missions of mercy."

No wonder Oklahomans have trouble communicating. The Rand Corporation reports that 119 languages are spoken in Oklahoma – not counting Okie. Nationally 300 languages are spoken.

Dart: To the fat cats making up the so-called Oklahoma Business & Education Coalition, issuing a lying report attacking public education. Members include the Daily Disappointment, the State Chamber, Oklahoma City and Tulsa Chambers. Google them to see who else belongs.

It's a sad commentary on America when the highest rate of child mortality for children up to four years of age is in our nation's capital. Oklahoma ranks 11th.

Laurel: To reporter Heather Caliendo for her outstanding Journal Record story on our looming health care crisis. In 2008 more than 3,000 seeking nursing and allied health programs were turned away for lack of faculty.

One in three new teachers is leaving the profession within five years. Over the next four years more than a third of 3.2 million teachers will reach retirement. – National Commission on Teaching

Dart: To the corporate-owned Republicans celebrating their first 50 days in control of the Legislature, producing the worst legislation we've ever seen. Even the rural Old Guard was not that bad.

No wonder Catholics are leaving in droves, given "shepherds" Archbishop Eusebius Beltran and Bishop Edward Slattery. The Notre Dame student body ignores the critics and wants to hear President Obama's commencement address.

Laurel: To Tulsa, ranking fifth as the "Most Livable City" by Forbes Magazine. Obviously the judges had not driven on Tulsa streets.

Legislative Republicans, a wholly owned subsidiary of corporate Oklahoma, are determined to neuter the non-political Workers Comp Court.

Dart: To OKC Engineering Club for disinventing luncheon speaker Vic Hutchison, the distinguished OU zoology professor emeritus, after creationists pitched a fit.

Sen. Randy Brogdon, R-Owasso, has entered the race for governor. If elected, the Governor's Mansion will be remodeled into a squirrel cage.

Laurel: To House Democrats, selecting state Rep. Scott Inman of Del City as their leader-in-waiting. A sharp debater and tireless worker, Inman often provides a voice of reason against the GOP's right-wing, theocratic cacophony.

Ben Fenwick is leaving the Oklahoma Gazette to serve as Rose State College's PR director. He infiltrated the John Birch conclave in OKC earlier this year, producing a remarkable glimpse into their demented world.

Dart: To House Republicans David Derby, Marian Cooksey and Lee Denney. They mugged for photos with the Flaming Lips, then voted against honoring the group's "Do You Realize?" as official state rock song – faux patriots offended by bassist Michael Ivins' hammer-and-sickle t-shirt.

You have until May 11 to reserve seats for this year's Carl Albert Award dinner, honoring our founding editor, Frosty Troy. Call state Democratic HQ [405.427.3366] for details on the May 15 event in OKC.

THE OKLAHOMA Observer


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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

An open letter to state Rep. Pam Peterson, R-Tulsa:

I am appalled that you are supporting the banning of stem cell research in this state. Are you not aware that one of the most prestigious and cutting-edge institutions in the area of stem-cell research in the country is located here in Oklahoma? The Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation is a national leader in stem-cell research, and with this politically-motivated bill, you are going to shut down that research, endangering the possibility of finding a cure for numerous diseases. [Gov. Henry vetoed the bill.]

You are legalizing a death sentence for people afflicted with these disorders. Shame on you for being more concerned about a one-cell embryo than you are about the lives of people with families, loved ones, jobs, and strong community connections.

Your values are totally warped. It is apparent that you are working harder to get re-elected than you are to help the people you are supposed to be serving. You and your colleagues need to wake up and join the 21st Century!

You are a disgrace to Oklahoma!

Barbara Santee
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Maybe I am biased since I stand to gain much better health through its successful research, but the lessons about God and Jesus that I learned in both the Baptist and Methodist churches back in the Dirty '30s are entirely different from what the NO party is forcing down our throats now. They would have been pleased for the embryos' role in doing good for Their mankind, rather than being ground up in a garbage disposal and washed down the sewer.

Iris Lochner
Edmond

Editor, The Observer:

I can't help wondering where all the "tea party" protestors were when George W. Bush was squandering the Clinton budget surplus and running up \$2 trillion in debt. Where were they when George W. Bush lied to us about the weapons of mass destruction that Iraq never had? Where were they when George W. Bush was getting over 4,200 Americans, and God knows how many Iraqis, killed in a mismanaged, unnecessary war? Where were they when the citizens of New Orleans were drowning and George W. Bush was in California at a birthday

party? Eight long years of Republican rule drove this country into the ground – and not a word! Where was your outrage then?

When Bush was president anyone who questioned any of his horrible policies was called unpatriotic and told love it or leave it! But now everything has changed, according to the Fox News minions. Suddenly, dissent is patriotic. Really? Why wasn't it patriotic when Bush was president?

Those tea parties are just a thinly veiled disguise for their real issue, which is racism. President Obama has only been in office for three months and they are not even willing to give him a chance. They could care less about what is best for this country. All they care about is causing as much trouble as possible to try to sabotage our black president. The color of Obama's skin is the real issue with these people. You fool no one.

Deborah Lewis
Garland, TX

Editor, The Observer:

I read in the Oklahoma City paper where Gov. Henry said he was "impressed" with the 5,000 people that showed up complaining mostly about federal spending.

Well, I wasn't "impressed" or fooled. These people were racist rednecks who were complaining about a black Democratic president in the White House. There is no two ways about it.

I love your paper. Keep it up.

Tom Magdalena
Tecumseh

Editor, The Observer:

Democratic Rep. Rebecca Hamilton has demanded the disclosure of private donors to Dr. Richard Dawkins's recent appearance at OU as well as the sources of any public money spent in connection with his appearance. Evidently she wants some of GOP Rep. Todd Thomsen's spotlight created when he introduced two resolutions condemning the spirit of free inquiry and the right of free speech in connection with Dr. Dawkin's speech for which he waived his regular fee since he was speaking before a largely student audience.

There is nothing illegal or immoral about private donations being made to bring any speaker to an Oklahoma public school campus whether one supports or disagrees with the ideas being presented.

However, it IS morally and legally abhorrent for legislators like Hamilton and Thomsen to use the inquisitorial police power of the state to intimidate

TRUTH COMMISSION



the future funding and appearances of speakers who don't kow-tow to the same belief system.

James Nimmo
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

An open letter to Congress:

I have read the torture memos and if you can forget this after going after Bill Clinton for oral sex, then you have no morals. Both parties need to go after these writers and anyone who justified this, including the former president.

If you let this go, you are saying it is all right to do anything under orders. You are giving permission for any country taking our soldiers to do whatever they see fit.

Karen Webb
Moore

Editor, The Observer:

My colleague Leuren Moret has found the U.S. Expeditionary Forces in Afghanistan greatly increase bombing with weaponized ceramic uranium oxide gas during the Monsoon.

That guarantees the genocidal ceramicized uranium aerosols will spread to India and indeed, the rest of the world.

There appears to be little reason for this except a war against civilians.

It remains a war crime that the U.S. political and military leaders pursue to this day.

U.S. Rep. Dan Boren, D-OK, brags that 99% of all munitions used in the U.S. Central Asian Wars are shipped from the Army Ammunition Plant in McAlester.

The whole supply chain is guilty of War Crimes Against Humanity.

Bob Nichols
San Francisco

Editor's Note: Bob Nichols, who grew up in Oklahoma, is a Project Censored Award Winner and correspondent for the San Francisco Bay View.

Editor, The Observer:

I am concerned about the content of the illustration that accompanies the white supremacist article on page 16 of the [4.25.09] Observer. Why is a Boy Scout hat on the rack with a KKK hood and a Nazi cap? I didn't see a link in the article and I'm sure I don't agree with the implication.

I certainly understand opposition to BSA for their stand on gay leaders and discrimination based upon religion [they don't care which one, just have one]. But does The Observer wish to

convey that Boy Scouting is developing white supremacists?

Bob Melton
Oklahoma City

Editor's Reply: We flat-out missed the Boy Scout insignia in the artwork selected to illustrate white supremacists' new recruiting efforts since President Obama's election. Clearly, the BSA's positions on gay scoutmasters and religion are quite separate from the facts detailed in this article. In no way did we intend to link them.

Editor, The Observer:

I am writing concerning a fundraiser for U.S. Sen. Blanche Lincoln, held in Oklahoma City May 3. The reason I am concerned is because she recently announced that she will not support the Employee Free Choice Act.

I am sure you know what this legislation is all about – that it is supported by both houses of Congress and President Obama, as well as countless fair minded people and organizations. You are surely also aware that it does not take away the right of workers to a secret ballot, and those who say otherwise are blatantly lying. It is probably the most important legislation for American workers we'll see in our lifetimes, and her support [or lack of it] is crucial to overcome a filibuster by the opposition in the Senate.

In my heart I know this legislation will eventually pass because it is right. Those supporting it will be honored for helping American workers obtain a better life. Those not supporting it will be remembered as serving the cause of corporate greed at the expense of those struggling. It's as simple as that.

While she holds this position I cannot in good conscience contribute to her campaign or recommend for others to do so. I am hoping that someone she will listen to can urge her to change her mind, and be counted among those who want to do what's right for a better America for working families.

Victor Gorin
Oklahoma City

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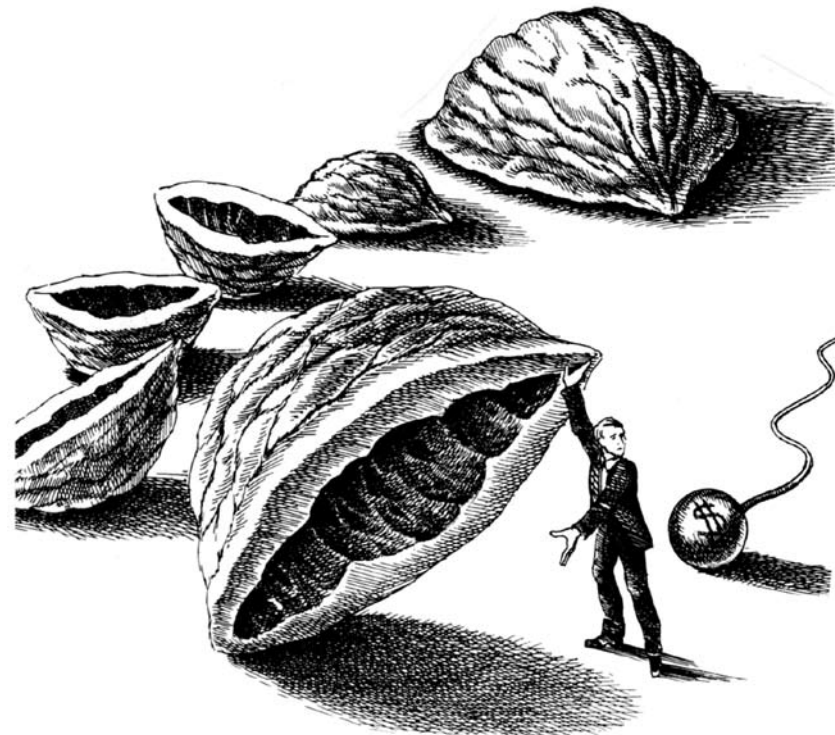
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Frosty's Notebook

Deregulation



Want deregulation of public education? Look what it did for business.

Proponents of deregulated public schools are pushing hard to bring the questionable wisdom of that philosophy to public education. Thankfully, Gov. Brad Henry was expected to veto it.

If Senate Bill 834, the worst bill of the session, had passed it likely would have done for public education what deregulation has done for American business.

The Republican proponents say the way to go is charter schools because they perform better, governed by a group of private citizens who are not required to adhere to the regulations that govern the operation of public schools.

They theorize that unregulated charter schools would try all kinds of new and different ways of educating children and disseminate these learnings to public schools.

The result would be that all schools will perform better. A look at some independent studies of charter school performance finds that they often perform at a lower level than the schools they are chartered to replace. Few do better.

In addition, the risk of fraud and misuse of funds is also higher in these schools. Often they drain money from public schools without decreasing the cost to the school districts.

Inevitably the success of the education experience is determined by what goes on in a classroom between the individual student and a teacher.

The best prepared teachers of any country are found in America's public schools – half have masters degrees.

Education of a diverse student population calls for experimentation and innovation which requires that professional teachers take risks to improve teaching and learning.

Each autumn doors to the public schools are flung open for all – brilliant, average, slow, mentally and/or physically disabled. That doesn't happen in private schools.

Reliance on standardized tests as the primary metric for measuring teacher and school effectiveness has chilled teachers' willingness to try new approaches.

Students, like adults, have different gifts and respond differently to the same stimuli. America needs all of these diverse gifts. All countries have them if they are lucky.

It does not mean that all students will not learn. It means that some students will learn more rapidly than others and understand the concepts differently.

Some will understand certain concepts but they may be unable to retain them long enough to use on a standardized test.

Some schools aren't as successful in ensuring that all students achieve to the maximum extent of their readiness and academic capabilities.

Too often the gaps between achievement and student capabilities occur in identifiable racial, ethnic and economic groups.

Eliminating these deficiencies takes gifted leadership committed to effective pedagogy, extraordinary resources and consistently focused work. It also takes experimentation without fear of failure.

Public education is arguably America's most regulated public service. The laws, rules and regulations are restrictive, to be sure. Still they ensure some consistency of opportunity for a high quality education for all boys and girls.

Relaxation of regulations is not needed in the fundamental elements of the institution but rather in the grip that is kept on those who are expected to generate its success.

We noted during the debate the SB 834 author, Sen. John W. Ford, R-Bartlesville, resorted to gibberish in replying to penetrating questions.

Excellence and stability in any worthwhile pursuit result at least in part from consistent adherence to well-tested principles.

Excessive deregulation of business violated every principle that kept our economic system fairly stable. It honored irresponsible risk-taking and protected everyone but we the people.

We hear that SB 834 will be back. We hope it meets the same fate. We will do our part to assure its failure. So should all thinking Oklahomans of either party.

Expand Your Vocabulary

Here is the Washington Post's Mensa Invitational which once again asked readers to take any word from the dictionary, alter it by adding, subtracting, or changing one letter, and supply a new definition. The winners:

1. Cashtration [n.]: The act of buying a house, which renders the subject financially impotent for an indefinite period of time.

2. Ignoranus: A person who's both stupid and an a--hole.

3. Intaxication: Euphoria at getting a tax refund, which lasts until you realize it was your money to start with.

4. Reintarnation: Coming back to life as a hillbilly.

5. Bozone [n.]: The substance surrounding stupid people that stops bright ideas from penetrating. The bozone layer, unfortunately, shows little sign of breaking down in the near future.

6. Foreploy: Any misrepresentation about yourself for the purpose of getting laid.

7. Giraffiti: Vandalism spray-painted very, very high.

8. Sarchasm: The gulf between the author of sarcastic wit and the person who doesn't get it.

9. Inoculatte: To take coffee intravenously when you are running late.

10. Osteopornosis: A degenerate disease. [This one got extra credit.]

11. Karmageddon: It's like, when everybody is sending off all these really bad vibes, right? And then, like, the Earth explodes and it's like, a serious bummer.

12. Decafalon [n.]: The grueling event of getting through the day consuming only things that are good for you.

13. Glibido: All talk and no action.

14. Dopeler Effect: The tendency of stupid ideas to seem smarter when they come at you rapidly.

15. Arachnoleptic Fit [n.]: The frantic dance performed just after you've accidentally walked through a spider web.

16. Beelzebug [n.]: Satan in the form of a mosquito that gets into your bedroom at three in the morning and cannot be cast out.

17. Caterpallor [n.]: The color you turn after finding half a worm in the fruit you're eating.

The Washington Post has also published the winning submissions to its yearly contest, in which readers are asked to supply alternate meanings for common words. And the winners are:

1. Coffe [n.]: The person upon whom one coughs.

2. Flabbergasted [adj.]: Appalled by discovering how much weight one has gained.

3. Abdicate [v.]: To give up all hope of ever having a flat stomach.

4. Esplanade [v.]: To attempt an explanation while drunk.

5. Willy-nilly [adj.]: Impotent.

6. Negligent [adj.]: Absent-mindedly answering the door when wearing only a nightgown.

7. Lymph [v.]: To walk with a lisp.

8. Gargoyle [n.]: Olive-flavored mouthwash.

9. Flatulence [n.]: Emergency vehicle that picks up someone who has been run over by a steamroller.

10. Balderdash [n.]: A rapidly receding hairline.

11. Testicle [n.]: A humorous question on an exam.

12. Rectitude [n.]: The formal, dignified bearing adopted by proctologists.

13. Pokemon [n.]: A Rastafarian proctologist.

14. Oyster [n.]: A person who sprinkles his conversation with Yiddishisms.

15. Frisbeetarianism [n.]: The belief that, after death, the soul flies up onto the roof and gets stuck there.

16. Circumvent [n.]: An opening in the front of boxer shorts worn by Jewish men.

Cat Quotes

"There is no snooze button on a cat who wants breakfast."

"Thousands of years ago, cats were worshipped as gods. Cats have never forgotten this."

"Cats are smarter than dogs. You can't get eight cats to pull a sled through snow."

"As every cat owner knows, nobody owns a cat."

"Dogs come when they're called; cats take a message and get back to you later."

"Cats are rather delicate creatures and they are subject to a good many ailments, but I never heard of one who suffered from insomnia."

"People who hate cats will come back as mice in their next life."

"There are many intelligent species in the universe. They are all owned by cats."

"I have studied many philosophers and many cats. The wisdom of cats is infinitely superior."

"Dogs believe they are human. Cats believe they are God."

Coffee's Creative Financing Detailed

By Wanda Jo Stapleton

Over the past decade Senate President Glenn Coffee has had a problem: the money flow into his campaign coffers just wouldn't stop!

How could he keep those coffers from overflowing when he really didn't need the money for campaigns? In fact, his first primary election in 1998 was his one-and-only contested campaign. And because he is term limited at the end of next year, there will be no future campaigns.

After becoming Minority Floor Leader [2004-06], his campaign checks came thick, fast, and fat. By Jan. 1, 2006, Coffee's excess campaign funds totaled \$101,756. Add to that another \$118,180 that he collected from 2006 through 2008, and Coffee had accumulated a \$220,000 campaign fund with no campaign in sight!

CREATIVE FINANCE 101

So what could he possibly do with all that money? But Coffee then, as Coffee now, was nothing if not creative.

Coffee cleverly devised a phrase that transferred over 57% [\$126,827] of those funds – shazam! – straight to his own pockets.

With the magical phrase “travel, meals, lodging – reimbursement” he collected up to \$10,000 at a time. Happily, with the exception of three times, he listed only dollar amounts, so he didn't have to worry about those pesky cents. The more cynical might think that he just slapped down whatever rounded number came to mind.

Nobody is perfect, of course, but Coffee really should have thought to coordinate his appointment schedule with his draw-downs for “travel, meals, and lodging” during the last two months of the 2008 legislative session.

SCHEDULING AROUSES SUSPICION

It arouses suspicion when lobbyists buy Coffee's food, and then he pockets even more campaign money for food. For example, on May 20, 2008, Coffee answered roll call at 9:30 a.m. then voted sporadically throughout the day at 10:19, 10:59, 11:01, 11:08, and 11:12 a.m., also at 1:56 and 4:05 pm.

During the day, the American Academy of Ophthalmology paid \$23.28 for his lunch and the Joint Industrial Foundation paid \$89.82 for his “food and beverage.” Nevertheless, he pocketed another \$500 reimbursement from his campaign funds for “travel, meals, and lodging,” yet answered roll call the next morning at 9:30 a.m.

With that kind of overindulgence for food [also found in other places in his Ethics Report], I'm concerned that Coffee will have difficulty slipping under that

Too Many Villages Missing Their Idiots

By Edwin E. Vineyard

Many years ago we visited in my mother's church back in the home country in eastern Oklahoma. We were relative strangers there, of course. Across the front bench in their customary position sat a row of six or eight mentally challenged youth of some 10 to 20 years of age. We were in the next occupied row, which was the third row.

Unaccustomed to strangers, we were apparently the most interesting sight around for these young people, since they spent part of the sermon time completely turned around in their seats looking at us. This was a bit disconcerting to us and may have been a little distracting to some in the congregation.

During Sunday lunch, my stepfather, a part-time minister and ordinarily quite reluctant to make any sort of unkind remark about any person at the church, made a comment that we shall always remember. “Sometimes,” he said, “It seems like we have more than our fair share of those.”

His remark was accurate, I'd imagine, since that bench did indeed accommodate most of that entire sub-population existing in town.

MORE THAN OUR SHARE

Looking at our Oklahoma Legislature, and the bills introduced, debated, or passed this session, it seems to us that “we have more than our fair share of those.” As one might say, “There are a lot of villages in Oklahoma missing one of theirs.” They sent them to the Legislature.

This has been a terrible year for dumb legislation being introduced, and a bad year for divisive and governmentally irrelevant issues being put into legislation and pushed. Time and energy has been wasted, while important matters dragged on.

First, we had the bill authorizing gun-toting on college campuses in a manner even prohibited by Wyatt Earp back in old Dodge City. Then we had a school deregulation bill, which as drafted would have sent our schools back into the academic dark ages. Two or three anti-science education bills would have substituted religious dogma for the teaching of science in schools.

Legislators have made their usual attempt to undermine the interests of their constituents with one-sided workers' comp and tort “reform” proposals. Fair proposals might fly. They have pursued their animosity toward their nemesis

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annoying Ethics Commission's radar, as he has done in the past.

– The author, a former Democratic state representative, lives in Oklahoma City

Editor's Note: Senate Democrats demanded that Coffee resign if he doesn't make public more details of a loan he took out to resolve a federal tax lien. They also raised questions [as does this article] about Coffee taking money from his campaign account in large, round numbers for travel, meals and lodging without providing specific documentation.

Coffee recently told the Tulsa World he disclosed everything required of him, adding, “Once again, the minority caucus is resorting to the lowest-level, partisan politics to achieve what they could not achieve at the ballot box. They and their cronies have engaged in a relentless and expensive campaign of gutter politics for over a month now, and they are clearly frustrated that the Republican agenda continues to move forward unabated.”

It's uncertain whether Coffee can survive as Senate President Pro Tem beyond this year or whether he'll face a formal Ethics Commission investigation. But this much is clear: Coffee's dream of higher office [attorney general?] is DOA.

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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Theocrats' Dream

Sooner Secession Plan Is Now Ballot-Ready

By James Nimmo

The Oklahoma Legislature shall pass to put on the November ballot, 2009, a state question in order to preserve public tranquility and censor the ungodly remarks of "Dr." Richard Dawkins concerning the blasphemy of "evolution:"

Shall the State of Oklahoma secede from the Union of the United States of America?

Enacting Legislation:

Upon certification of the majority vote this secession shall take affect on January 1, 2010. Thereupon, the contiguous borders of the Republic of Oklahoma shall be closed to all incoming vehicular traffic, commercial and private, except upon the presentation of a valid Oklahoma driver's license from the operator of said vehicle.

Any passengers shall also be required to present identification showing that said presenter is a valid resident of the Republic of Oklahoma.

SECURING THE BORDERS

Border checkpoints shall be protected by the Republic of Oklahoma National Guard under the exclusive command of the President of the Republic of Oklahoma.

All members of the Republic's Legislature shall be required to carry one handgun and sworn to protect the Republic's borders upon immediate call from the President.

There shall be but one political party, known as Republican, available to voters.

Elections shall be called replenish the Legislature as needed due to infirmity or death.

TERM LIMITS, MAYBE

Elected officials may serve only one four-year term, but this restriction shall be waived upon a majority vote from the Republic's Legislature.

The Department of the Judiciary shall be composed of judges appointed by the Republic's President, subject to the approval of the majority of the Legislature. Their term of office shall be subject to the pleasure of the Legislature.

The Department of the President shall consist of one man elected by a majority of the Legislature, who shall serve at the pleasure of the Legislature, renewable at four-year intervals, but subject to review upon request from a majority of the Legislature.

Taxes shall be levied on reported personal income at no higher than 10%.

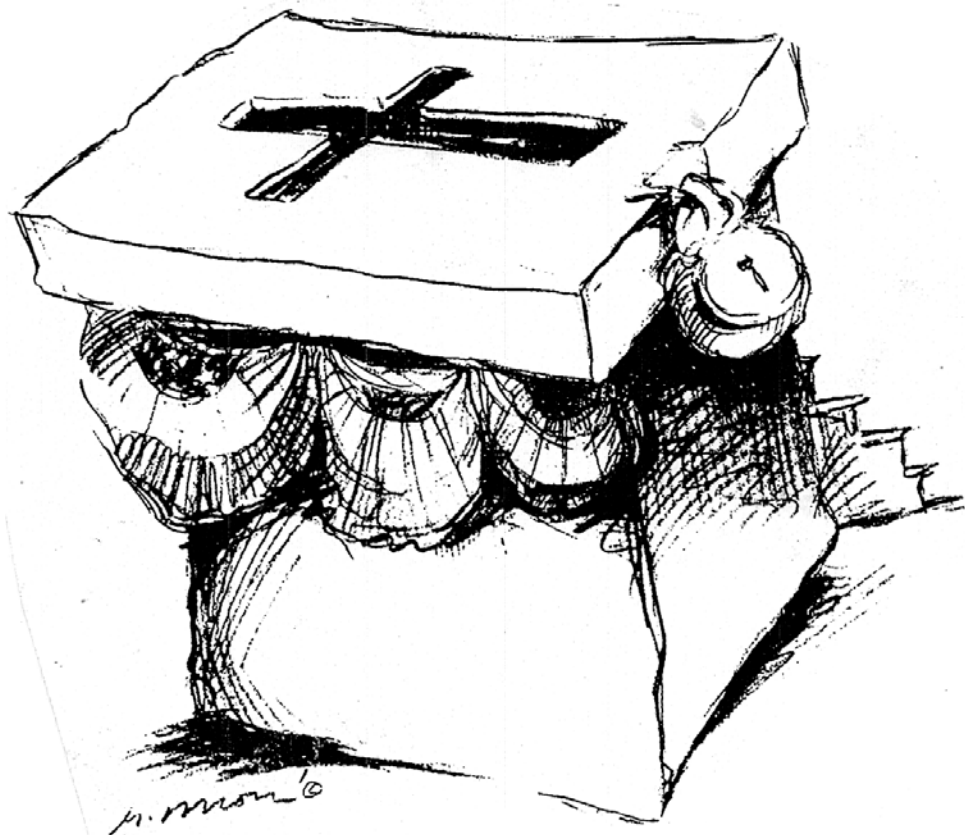
Any annual budget deficits of the Republic shall require an increased levy on groceries, housing, and educational fees until the deficit is reduced to zero.

OFFICIAL RELIGION: SOUTHERN BAPTIST

The official religion of the Republic shall be Southern Baptist as described by the Southern Baptist Convention. All valid citizens of the Republic of Oklahoma shall be tithe-paying members. No other religious denomination shall be recognized as equal nor tolerated in public.

All educational days shall begin with the pledge to the flags of the Republic of Oklahoma and Christianity as defined by the Southern Baptist Convention.

Marriage shall be held as the highest commitment obtainable by one man and one woman committed for the lifetime of either spouse. Both spouses shall be of



the same ethnicity, educational level, and income.

It shall be enforced by appropriate law that children should be born within but not less than a window of nine months after the marriage which shall be sanctified by a Southern Baptist minister after marriage counseling of not less than six months at weekly intervals certified by the Southern Baptist Convention.

BACK TO THE KITCHEN, LITTLE LADY

After birth of the first living child the mother shall not work outside of the home except for such short intervals deemed permissible by the Southern Baptist Convention.

The perversion of homosexuality shall not be tolerated and shall be punishable by appropriate law as written in consultation with the Southern Baptist Convention.

Media, whether, print, audio, video, or electronic, but not limited to the Internet, shall be subject to inspection before dissemination to the public by officials of the Southern Baptist Convention. Said Convention shall be the final arbiter of what is decent and informative to the Republic's citizenry.

LIMITED RIGHTS TO PURSUE GRIEVANCES

The right of the public to petition the Legislature for redress of grievances shall be acknowledged on two days per year when the Legislature is adjourned and shall be subject to waiver should a majority vote of the Legislature decide such observance should prove to disrupt the public peace and tranquility.

Educational standards shall be set by a joint Committee of the Republic's Legislature and the Southern Baptist Convention for both public lower and higher schools. These standards shall not apply to home-schooled students who shall be allowed to devise their own standards in recognition of the freedom of religion and conscience that shall be the ultimate law of the Republic of Oklahoma.

Additional enacting legislation shall be subject to the needs of the Republic as the Legislature deems necessary in order to assure a peaceful, respectful continuity of government in the best interests of the Republic's citizenry.

- The author lives in Oklahoma City

LEGISLATURE

From Page 6

[lawyers] with other measures thought to be unconstitutional.

The presiding officer of the Senate, himself an apparent offender of tax law, introduced a bill which would take away the retirement benefits of other state officials or employees found with legal violations. A righteous crusade, no doubt.

Legislative proposals which will duplicate functions of the department of education and politicize the medical examiners' office have been pushed, carrying out political vendettas by creating unneeded changes. Time has been wasted on an unnecessary state-issued photo ID requirement for voting, seeking to disenfranchise elderly, poor, and minority voters who lean Democratic. This is a party agenda item.

ENGLISH-ONLY A RED-HERRING

There was that red herring of a harsh, likely unconstitutional "English only" bill contesting with a more reasonable bill, and with some moderation now headed for an unnecessary, distracting, "show" vote of the people.

Then there is the matter of the bill authorizing the placing of a monument on Capitol grounds displaying the Ten Commandments, leading us to wonder if we will have Capitol grounds over-run with such. A resolution addressing Congress admonishing that body as not staying within their constitutional authority and calling for rejection of federal funds, vetoed by the governor, has taken unnecessary time for futility. Both appeal to a right-wing base, of course.

There has been the push for sending inmates to private prisons. The idea seems to be to warehouse them there for the private profit of political friends, although they will be getting few of the services needed to prevent recidivism.

TAX-CUT INSANITY CONTINUES

As usual, we have a crazy tax cutting measure that would reduce state income tax rates by 20%. This was in the face of a budget shortfall of \$900 million, of which \$700 million was due to the fiscal foolishness of past tax-cutting the

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last three years. Only the new, "dreaded," "abominable" federal stimulus money coming to the state will save us from utter disaster in education, some social services, and roads.

There was the usual measure seeking to restrict access to medical abortion. This time it required that doctors and clinics report all abortions performed for a master "scarlet list" record at the capital. Intimidation of women seems an appropriate description. Maybe all this pleased the Religious Right constituency.

One of the more offensive pieces of legislation introduced and passed has been the one criminalizing those doctors and other researchers at the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation, other private institutes, and our universities for their work for human cures using medical waste in the form of embryonic stem cells. Fortunately, this was vetoed by the governor.

OKLAHOMA: AN INTELLECTUAL BACKWATER?

Such a measure places Oklahoma in the intellectual backwater of civilized society. As one friend said, "This confirms the common stereotype of 'dumb Okie' that is held in some quarters around the country." Criminalizing science reeks of the superstitious religious zealotry of the dark ages in history prohibiting study of a real human body.

Could it be that these "village idiots" are only faking it? Are they just playing the role that their financial supporters, right wing, and single-issue voters sent them to do?

That is always a possibility. If so, then they are the most despicable of elected officials, hypocrites playing politics with the welfare of the state and its people - the present day equivalent of fiddling while Rome burns.

Either way, the circumstance of this Legislature does not speak well for those Oklahoma voters who sent them there.

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

Follow The Money

Look Who's Pulling Private Prison Strings

By Wanda Jo Stapleton

The governing policy of Republicans in the Oklahoma Legislature has been to outsource, deregulate, and privatize at every opportunity.

Senate President Glenn Coffee's latest obsession is to privatize more prisons in Oklahoma. Arnold Hamilton, Oklahoma Observer editor, asked in the April 25 issue, "Why are Oklahoma's legislative leaders hell-bent on outsourcing corrections?"

Following the money usually answers tough questions like that one. So I analyzed campaign contributions given by the private prison industry and its lobbyists from January 1, 2006 through December 31, 2008. My figures are documented in writing from the Oklahoma Ethics Commission's records.

AVALON CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

Oklahoma-based Avalon Correctional Services runs what it calls "community corrections operations" – Carver Center in Oklahoma City plus three facilities in Tulsa: Turley Correctional Center, Avalon Correctional Center, and Riverside Intermediate Sanction Facility.

Avalon's Chairman Donald E. Smith, his wife, and the company's attorney gave \$91,425 in campaign contributions – 86% to Republicans and 14% to Democrats.

Of the money to Republicans, \$47,375 went to candidates for state office, mainly for the Legislature; and \$31,000 to Republican committees so that the committees could choose their own candidates.

Of the \$13,050 to Democrats, \$7,550 went to Democratic committees, \$4,500 to a statewide candidate, and \$1,000 to a state senator.

CORRECTIONS CORPORATION OF AMERICA [CCA]

Nashville-based Corrections Corporation of America operates the Cimarron Correctional Facility in Cushing; Davis Correctional Facility, Holdenville; Diamondback Correctional Facility, Watonga; and the North Fork Correctional Facility, Sayre.

CCA's Political Action Committee [PAC], one board member, and two company managers contributed \$25,700 – 63% to Republicans and 37% to Democrats.

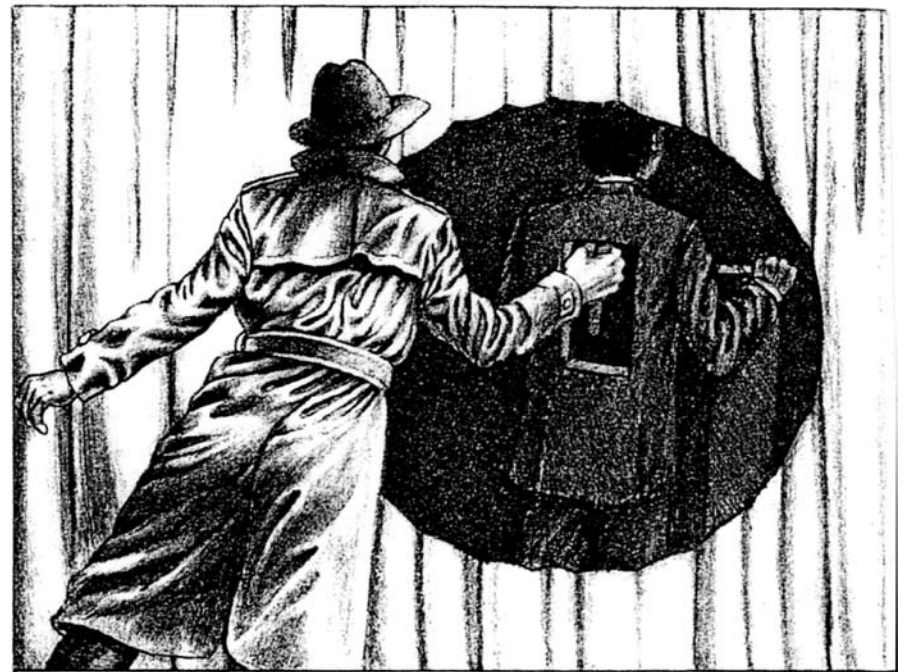
From the \$16,200 to Republicans, \$11,000 went to committees, \$4,700 to candidates for the Legislature, and \$500 to a statewide candidate.

From the \$9,500 to Democrats, \$6,000 went to statewide candidates, \$2,000 to legislative candidates, and \$1,500 to a committee.

According to the Ethics Commission's records, CCA's PAC has not contributed anything since the third quarter of 2007. Could it be that this company is on the "outs" with the Oklahoma Department of Corrections? Is this why Senate President Coffee filed a proposal "to abolish the state Board of Corrections, giving the governor authority to appoint the corrections director"?

GEO GROUP INC.

Boca Raton, FL-based GEO [formerly known as Wackenhut] and the warden at GEO's only correctional facility in Oklahoma [at Lawton] contributed \$7,200 – 67% to Republicans and 33% to Democrats.



Of the \$4,800 to Republicans all except \$100 [which went to a committee] went to legislative candidates.

Of the \$2,400 to Democrats, \$1,800 went to statewide candidates, \$400 to legislative candidates, and \$200 to a committee.

SAVVY LOBBYISTS

The 10 lobbyists for private prisons, as well as for dozens of other clients, are some of the best. Although six of the 10 are Democrats [one is a former state representative], they're interested in political power, not party politics.

They virtually "hid" \$14,525 by donating it to Republican committees with non-partisan sounding names – like Doc's PAC, Great State PAC, Grow Oklahoma, New Centennial PAC, New Leadership PAC, Oklahoma First, A Positive Solution, Prosperity PAC, and State Opportunity PAC.

Even the politically astute would not know this without days of digging into records, but Republican insiders like Glenn Coffee knew and helped distribute this money.

In contrast, the lobbyists contributed only \$3,250 to Democratic committees called Advancing Oklahoma and Okla House PAC.

In addition, these lobbyists gave another \$132,953 – 61% to Republicans, 39% to Democrats. They followed the same patterns as the prison industry with the most money going to Republican legislative candidates and Democrats in statewide races.

MONEY THAT COSTS TOO MUCH

Avalon, CCA, and GEO are all listed on the stock market. Every quarter the CEOs of these private prison companies are severely pressured to show the most profit possible for their officials and stockholders.

Lots of crime and long prison sentences become "virtues." Prisoners become profit-making commodities. And Oklahoma legislators who take the "private prison" money are expected to vote accordingly.

What a sad, depraved situation.

– The author, a former Democratic state representative, lives in Oklahoma City

Bethany's Search For A Real Family

By Diana Sullivan

Recently, this old worker took a trip with Bethany to another adoption party. I have been in Child Welfare for more than 13 years.

I have not been as inspired lately, not as much as I have been in the past – think I am getting a little worn, maybe the computer is beating me down.

However, Ms. Bethany re-inspired me with some very special thoughts. I felt this needed to be shared so you could see what a wonderful young lady she is growing up to be in spite of many odds, but also to say thank you to each of you for your commitment to children and as the dedicated adoption workers at DHS.

So here's my story guys – sorry I am always so long winded.

SEARCHING FOR A FAMILY

We were driving to the adoption party, visiting about her looking for new parents.

Something was said about how much her current foster parents love her but for some reason they cannot adopt her. It is difficult because they do not understand why she wants to keep looking for someone to adopt her.

They think she should age out of the system and stay with them in their home because they do want her with them.

Bethany said she tried to explain to them that even though she knows they love her, she needs more than that.

A PERMANENT HOME

She said she told them she needs to know that she will be there and not moved again. That she will have the adoptive parents' name and belong to them as a family. She said she wanted a permanent home.

Bethany said as she was explaining to them how she felt, that the foster dad, not meaning to offend her, said she had already been adopted twice and both failed so how could she look at adoption as permanent.

Bethany told me with a sweet and wonderful look on her face, "But Diana, they don't understand ... I still believe."

I remembered a thought that I maybe had almost forgotten – this is why we keep trying when we are so drained, this is our inspiration once again revealed by a child.

SHE STILL HAS HOPE

At 14 years old, having been abused and removed, in foster care more years than not, starting at the age of three or four years old, this child can sit there and honestly say she believes in families and there is a healthy family out there for her that she is willing to continue looking for, even after more moves than anyone can imagine.

She went on to tell me she wants to be in the family circle. That if something happens in the home she wants to be included, no matter her sacrifice.

She does not want to be looked at as someone needing to be moved in the future, because an aunt got sick or a brother ran away, or a wart started growing on someone's nose.

She does not want to have to get a travel form signed by a judge or county director before she can go on vacation with her family.

She is sorry the first families she got were not healthy in ways that cannot be fixed but that does not stop her from believing if she starts off with a healthy family that does not need to be fixed, then she will get the permanency that she so desires.

A PACT TO FINISH THE JOB

We made a pact that day – we will find that healthy family with the help of everyone else, and she will be adopted before I retire.

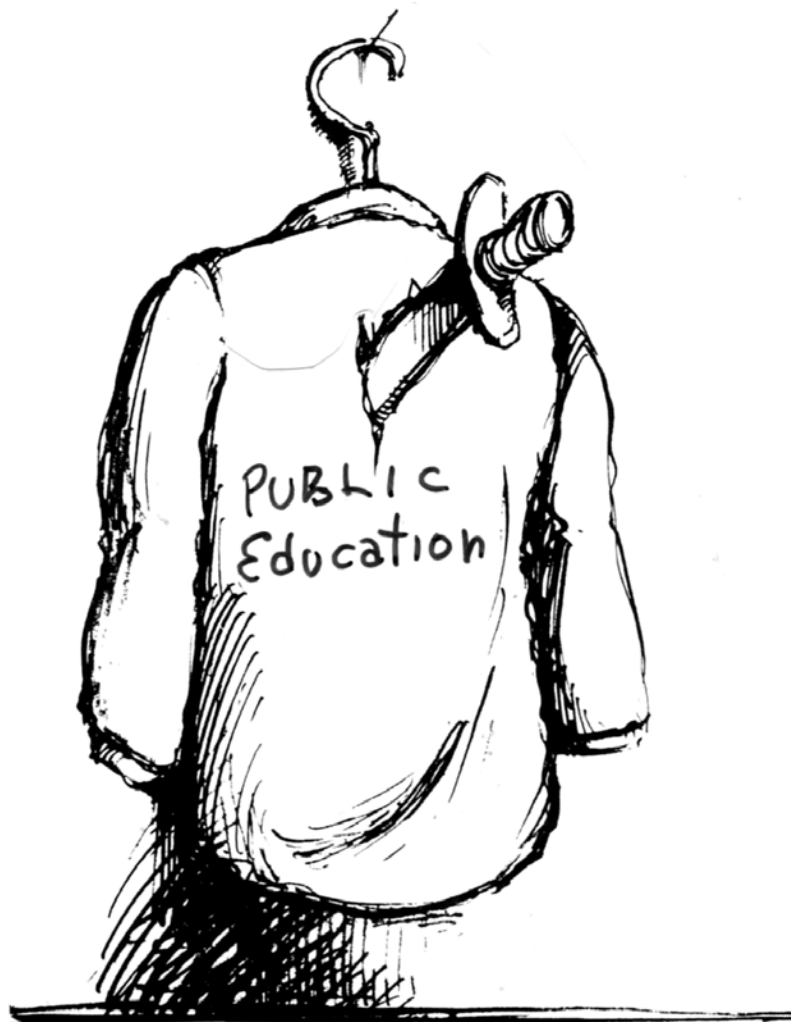
We went on to the adoption party to check everyone out and found out from Kari that a family was there looking for Bethany. Pretty sweet.

We met and it was great! We will see where it goes and pray it goes well. But if not, we know with the team that you all have and the spirit that Bethany has, it won't be much longer before the search is over. I sincerely thank you.

– The author is a Child Welfare Specialist III in Kay County

Assault On Public Education

Editor's Note: As The Observer went to press, Gov. Brad Henry was deciding the fate of SB 834, the so-called "school district empowerment program" that would all but put the final nail in former Gov. Henry Bellmon's marvelous HB 1017 reforms. Even if the governor vetoes the measure, as expected, anti-public education Republicans are working overtime to find a way to keep alive the proposals that include eliminating collective bargaining and class-size limits. The unprecedented assault has awakened many teachers and public ed supporters to the lawmakers' real goal: the destruction of public education. What follows are essays from two educators who recognize what's at stake:



Don't Let Down Future Students, Past Teachers

By Michael Ross

Our failure to move beyond such a low ranking in pay and benefits has less to do with the failure of collective bargaining or the union and more to do with our unwillingness to make waves within our communities or in our state.

What little we do enjoy comes not from the generosity of the state Legislature or the demands of the general public, but from the moments when educators have actually realized that there is power in numbers and have stepped up to fight for our share.

Our profession as a whole has been browbeat into believing that, if we attempt to use what leverage we really do have to improve our collective situation in our schools and in our homes, we are "bad teachers" who don't really care about kids or are "only in it for the money" or some nonsense.

NO SIN TO FIGHT FOR LIVING WAGE

It's not the tools, it's the operators. We need to realize that, in this state, we're already stigmatized – demonized by some – and that it's no sin to stand up for a living wage.

Bills like SB 834 strip us of what meager tools we have left to defend ourselves against the sort of bullying that we're apt to endure in this line of work.

By stripping teachers of the right to collective bargaining and eliminating the need for certifications [which, if I understand the language in the House version of the bill and in the laws regarding charter schools, is allowed], our Legislature is feeding a raging anti-intellectualism and, ultimately, creating public schools that are little more than glorified daycare centers.

BULLIES IN SHIRTS AND TIES

If we're supporting this bill, we're endorsing something that is, essentially, a shakedown being stuck to us by bullies – bullies in shirts and ties and smart haircuts, briefcases in hand, but no less bullies than a thug shaking a kid down for his lunch money.

See STAND UP Page 15

Schools Hurt By Non-Stop Merry-Go-Round

By Whitney Allen

Senate Bill 834 is harmful to public education. Public education is the cornerstone of democracy. We are still part of a democracy aren't we?

Between the special interests and ideological discourse I sometimes question this. Hubris as this may seem, Oklahoma politics are synonymous with the term "oxymoron."

Education must be a priority. Education enriches society. We cannot take a myopic or color-blind approach to the critical needs of education. Education is routinely treated with malice and contempt.

Why? Frequently Oklahoma experiences economic downturns because of revenue shortfalls. It might be because the majority of our revenue comes from oil and gas, ya think? Education in some form or fashion goes on the cutting block routinely because of these fluctuations.

FIRST TAX CUTS, NOW SB 834

If it's not in the form of line-item reductions, it's in the form of harmful legislation such as SB 834! I may be getting on the bandwagon a little too late as I understand this bill has already passed the Legislature; and, keeping up with the number of bills is challenging. After all, there were some 2,552, according to my resources, pieces of legislation for this legislative period with some 100 dealing with education alone.

Nonetheless, I am writing to voice my concern over this piece of legislation. The \$720 million in tax cuts that the legislators have managed to cut over the past three or four years would certainly be much needed revenue now. Unfortunately to reinstate tax cuts, a super-majority is required which would prove difficult because these tax cuts represent the revenue needed to support corporate welfare.

Those tax cuts, by the way, haven't helped me as a common everyday citizen. But, they do help pay for education, road and bridge improvements [which now will apparently come in the form of federal stimulus money], prisons, and other pertinent social programs like DHS. Go figure!

MERRY-GO-ROUND LEGISLATING

Have you noticed Oklahoma used to have only two state fairs, Oklahoma City and Tulsa, and county free fairs usually in the fall? Today you see these small, traveling amusement park companies pop up in small cities routinely. Such is the fiscal practice of Oklahoma, i.e. a merry-go-round approach.

Think I'm exaggerating? As a sophomore at Oklahoma State University in 1982-83, we were taking tests off of overhead projectors because there was no money for paper! My professors would announce to the class for all students to ask their parents to contact their legislators because OSU had no money for paper!

Instead of discussing stale issues like cutting requirements for class size limits, cutting ancillary services such as counselors and librarians, unions and collective bargaining, tenure and merit pay, unfunded mandates, achievement tests – which, by the way, did you know that the 6th, 7th and 8th grade reading tests this year were each 100 minutes long? – or consolidation which we've beat like a dead horse, let's talk about adopting a progressive posture.

Infusing schools with technology must be the dialogue if our students are going to be competitive in the 21st Century.

Karl Springer, superintendent of Oklahoma City Public Schools, said on a radio talk show on KOMA a couple of weeks ago that we must move from a fact-based curriculum to a knowledge-based curriculum.

Thomas Friedman masterfully describes the flat-world concept. We live in the info-verse in a world that is globally connected in an economy that is driven by technology. The factory jobs that sustained our livelihoods for the past 100 years are no longer a viable source of employment.

In the book *Tough Choices or Tough Times*, written by the National Center on Education and the Economy, it says we used to see high wages for high skills.

BEING A LIFELONG LEARNER

We are now seeing, because of technology and the outsourcing and offshoring, high skills and low wages. Economic growth no longer means investing in physical plant improvements. It means investing in technology.

As our Baby Boomers are retiring, they are being replaced with a smaller workforce; a smaller workforce means fewer people paying into Social Security and more taking out of it; but we all know Social Security is severely compromised so that's probably a mute issue.

The only way a person today can be competitive is to continually upgrade one's skills; be a lifelong learner and learn to learn. The only way the low skilled worker can be competitive is to drive down wages. We're already working [our median wages] at wages comparable to 1974 wages – that is, if you're lucky to be

See MERRY-GO-ROUND Page 15

BOOKS

A Modern Expedition Into The Great Plains

By Derrek Belase

GREAT PLAINS

By Ian Frazier

Picador

214 pages, \$15.00

If you have lived on the Great Plains for very long, you will have encountered a tumbleweed. Maybe one has hit your car when you are driving down the road or you've seen a bunch settled against a fence on a piece of farmland. Did you ever think that these plants might have been brought to this part of the country by groups of people escaping religious persecution? Neither had I until I read *Great Plains* by Ian Frazier.

He suggests that the seeds for tumbleweeds, also known as Russian thistle, might have been brought here by German Catholics, Mennonites, Hutterites, Amish and other groups that settled on the Great Plains in the 1870s after escaping Czar Alexander II's insistence that these German-speaking peoples become Russian citizens. When these groups immigrated to America, they brought with them the seeds for tumbleweeds.

This is just one of the many stories Frazier tells in this gripping narration of life on the Great Plains. All of the stories in the 214 pages come from his travels across the country, stopping by forgotten places and talking to the people who will probably never be featured by *People* magazine.

'A COOL DRINK OF WATER'

One of the most beautiful stories is about his time in Nicodemus, KS. Nicodemus is a historically African-American community that, like many communities on the Great Plains, is much smaller than it once was. Frazier tells about attending the "Founders Day" celebration and with very descriptive language, he

details a fashion show and a break dance competition and finishes with his impassioned thoughts about the gathering. He wrote, "The sight of so many black people here on the blue-eyed Great Plains was like a cool drink of water."

He also spends lots of time talking about Native Americans and their place on the Great Plains. For example, he devotes an entire chapter to Crazy Horse. He tells stories about the Cheyenne and the Sioux, Fort Union, and trading. He details his own search for Sitting Bull's cabin and how he came to find where it once stood.

He brings a sharp focus to the interaction between Native Americans and those who settled the Great Plains when he tells about a conversation he had with a man at a black powder competition. "The fur-trade period was fascinating for lots of reasons. The trappers who came West brought technology to the Indians, but the Indians gave the trappers spiritual and survival knowledge in return. The fur-trade period was an opportunity for us to learn from Native Americans, and in the end we turned down that opportunity." Sad, but true.

MUCH TO CELEBRATE

I grew up and have spent my entire life living on the Great Plains. You will not often see this part of the United States depicted by Hollywood, save old TV westerns or a few movies like "Twister" or "Rainman." For those of us who live here, we know that there is much to be celebrated about this beautiful area of our country.

The book has other great features like 65 pages of extensive end notes and an index for looking up something that you want to read again. Some of the chapters consist almost entirely of his travel notes. He recalls what was on the radio as he drove across the Plains or simply recalls conversations with everyday, ordinary people including some hitchhikers. He writes in an inviting, narrative style that makes the book hard to put down.

If you are looking for a travel book, this is not it. I am sure Frazier leaves out as much as he puts in. But if you are looking for an introduction to the Great Plains that you will not find in textbooks or travel guides, this treasure-trove is for you. No wonder it is a national bestseller.

- The author is pastor of Highland Park United Methodist Church in Stillwater

'Band Of Brothers' Unforgottable Stories

By Mike Nobles

IWO JIMA

World War II Veterans Remember The Greatest Battle Of The Pacific

By Larry Smith

W.W. Norton & Co.

345 pages, \$17.95

It is fitting that this book was published during the month in which this country pays tribute to the men and women of the military and remembers those true heroes that paid the ultimate price for liberty.

This book tells the story of nearly two-dozen veterans in what many historians consider the greatest battle of the Pacific theater. It puts a human face on war and tells the almost unbelievable story of a battle by American Marines - most were teenagers - that resulted in approximately 28,000 soldiers from both sides losing their lives. The number wounded totaled in the thousands. While the numbers are staggering it is the personal stories of the participants, now in their 80s, that humanize the war experience and make this such a compelling read.

The battle began on February 19, 1945, and for the next 36 days some of the most extraordinary heroism, valor and courage were displayed in the face of unspeakable carnage. There were some 27 Medals of Honor awarded, most posthumously, and the stories of their heroism as well as a number of others are vividly told in this rich oral account of their experiences.

Who can forget the contributions of Samuel Tso, a Navajo code talker from Black Mountain, AZ, and his quiet, unassuming efforts to implement a code system based on Navajo language the Japanese were never able to break and that resulted in the saving of numerous lives. His loyalty to his country and the Marine Corps, despite and the unfair treatment he received because of his American Indian heritage, is remarkable and inspiring.

The story of Medal of Honor winner Hershel Woodrow "Woody" Williams will remain with me forever and reminds me how much we owe those that stepped forward and laid their lives on the line so that we may enjoy the benefits of America.

The story of Patrick Mooney and the duties of the Graves Registration Unit is a little-known aspect of the battle that indicates the dignity and respect afforded the dead in the face of unbelievable hardship and tragedy.

In reading these oral histories I was struck by the modesty and "I was just doing my job" attitude of these special heroes. Without fail they brush off accolades and refer to their colleagues as the heroes. I was also forced to face the old question of how would I react under similar circumstances and only hope I would be as brave and unwavering in my devotion to duty as these true heroes. I doubt I could do it but perhaps not wanting to let these guys down would be enough for me to at least not run and hide. I truly hope so. To be counted as one of the "band of brothers" would be humbling and a high honor. They are mostly gone now but thanks to this book they will not be soon forgotten.

- The author, cofounder of A Gathering of Writers, lives in Tulsa



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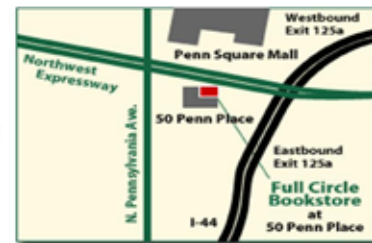
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Attacking Grade Inflation

Colleges Must Accept Failure As An Option

By Jeff Cox

A friend of an acquaintance, some decades ago, dealt with plagiarism by asking everyone in class to “raise your hand if you think you’re going to pass – but not you, Smith. You better sit on yours.”

Life in the not-so-ivory towers has changed. A student was in my office last semester as a result of plagiarism. He cut and pasted from an Internet source, without attribution. I told him the normal penalty would be an “F” for the class, but since he apologized and took responsibility, I was willing to let him rewrite all the assignments for the class and take whatever grade he could earn. His astonished response was immediate, “All of them?”

The student’s first rewrite was also plagiarized. Some people cannot learn even the hard way.

The public humiliation of the past has given way to student entitlement. Being held to account in a private meeting, with a chance for redemption, my student still felt bold enough to negotiate – and to press his luck, again.

TEACHERS AS BILL COLLECTORS

What has taken place is mere grade inflation, gone one step further. English teacher Christian Morgan says students now look at teachers as bill collectors, people to ignore and put off and finagle.

Neither grade inflation nor shirking shows any abatement. Stuart Rojstaczer, in a 2003 article for the Washington Post, said he quit using Cs, “the mark of Cain on a college transcript.” Rojstaczer merely adds to the trend he reported, noting the average grade has risen steadily since the early 1990s, when grade inflation was already a problem.

The early 1990s were about the time regional college accrediting agencies, like the North Central Association, started worrying about grades. Faced with the reality that grades no longer showed evidence of learning, North Central began requiring member schools to report “course-embedded assessment.” In a process fundamentally like returning to the same doctor for a second opinion, teachers are now verifying that grades reflect classroom value.

Almost no students pass the “Assessment” quiz at the first of a class. A larger number pass at the end. The statistics supposedly show someone learned. Common sense would suggest anyone passing a test at the first of a class might not need the class, but a statistical measure of common sense is not foremost on the North Central agenda.

CLEAR MESSAGES NEEDED

Of course, the easier way to control grade inflation would be clear messages from college administrators that students must not pass with mediocre efforts or mediocre knowledge. Instead, schools that depend on tuition revenue – or state funding that connects to enrollment – have a financial interest in not running off any lazy students.

Some colleges make matters worse by referring to students as “customers,” as in always-right customers.

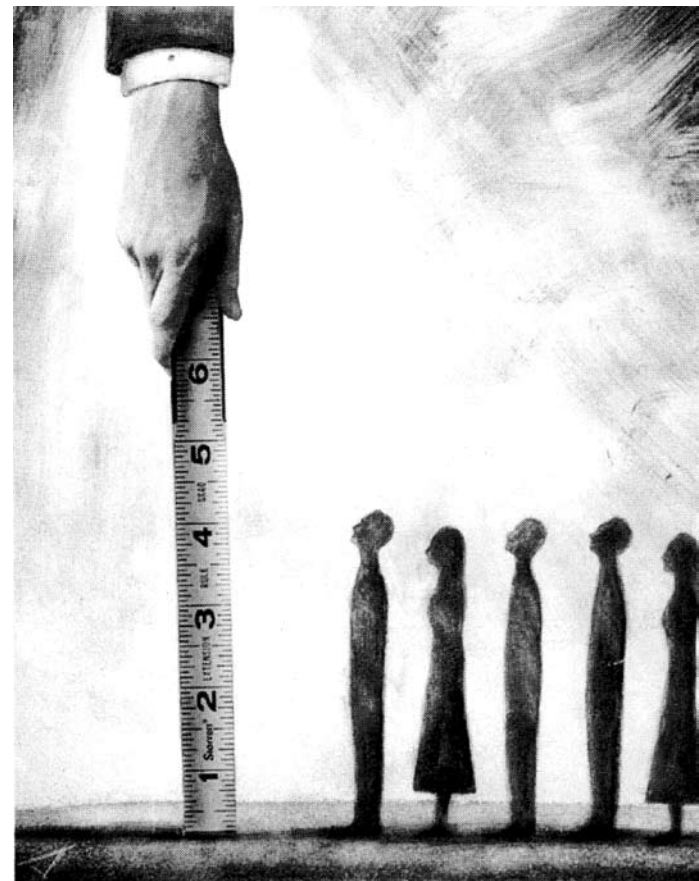
As a result, we now work with students whom one colleague, Chris Calvin, described as disciples of Fred Rogers. They have grown up believing they are special, “just the way you are.”

Calvin says students are not special, that they are all like every other group of college freshmen. “Furthermore, they’re ignorant,” he says. Calvin means no insult with his group assessment. He professes a willingness to like students after they learn something.

SAVING STUDENTS FROM THE DRAFT

Grade inflation may have started innocently enough. One theory suggests kindhearted and well-meaning instructors were reluctant to expose marginal students to the draft boards of an earlier generation.

“Assessment” likewise might have innocent enough beginnings. Perhaps accreditors, wanting not to embarrass too-lenient teachers, gave them a push to-



ward seeing the obvious.

All of this student and teacher entitlement is important because college teachers were once the unquestioned masters in the most traditional field remaining. The college classroom grew out of the master-apprentice trade guild model. At one time, college teachers ruled their classrooms by fiat. Now, bureaucracy inserts a foreign and unhealthy presence, a virus that drains strength and energy.

Education by formula, by numbers, by “Assessment,” is no education at all. Students and colleges define goals and expect the classroom to produce numbers that fall within statistical ranges. Both students and teachers should object: the teachers lose the vote of confidence, and the students lose the empowerment of deciding for themselves what they want to learn. Common sense suffers.

GET WITH IT OR GET OUT

When we use common sense, we know how to make schools better. We should encourage more teachers to spend more time with good students, and we should encourage poor students to become good students or leave.

Teachers’ time is not cheap. Wasting teachers’ efforts on accreditation book-keeping is counterproductive. “Assessment” might be innocent enough in its intentions, but any new trends toward honesty cannot start with the accreditors, and they cannot start with the students – who have their own pressures to appear to be succeeding. Teachers need the authority and the encouragement to practice a brutal triage. Students can progress or they can try again later. Colleges cannot provide new challenges without also allowing some people to fail. A world which keeps speeding up cannot afford slackers. “No child left behind” does not work if every child is challenged less.

SELF CONFIDENCE WOULD INCREASE

Holding students responsible has an upside in the increased self-confidence of students who know every “A” or “B” – or “C” – is earned. We don’t have that now.

Students should not look to their teachers for unconditional love, just as teachers should not look to mass-produced numbers for affirmation. Part of a teacher’s job is to be the authority on a subject. Abraham Flexner said as much in his groundbreaking accreditation work of the early 20th Century.

Students have other sources for support and encouragement. Grandmothers and Labrador retrievers should give the support students need in tackling tough challenges. College should help provide the challenges.

– The author teaches English at Seminole State College, where he is chairman of the Language Arts and Humanities Division

Public Schools And The American Dream

By Athanasios Bayiates

My father, Emmanuel Bayiates, was born on the island of Limnos in 1934, a small and rocky Greek Island with poor soil, few farms and subsistence fishing.

Limnos was a place that held little promise for my father. Public education on the island ended in the fifth grade. For children like my father who belonged to poor families without the money for a private school, further education and the opportunities it embodies did not exist.

My father later immigrated to the United States at the age of 23. Like many immigrants to our country, he came with little but the hope of creating a better life for his children. He struggled so that his children would have the opportunity to live the American Dream.

Our nation’s commitment to provide an equal opportunity for every child regardless of their background or socioeconomic status is embodied in the promise of a free public education for every child in our public schools.

That promise made it possible for me, like many children of immigrants, to have the opportunities not available to our parents in their countries of origin.

The promise and commitment to the ideals of common public schools have been undermined: “In the 19th Century, the common school was not to be a

school for the common people, but a school common to all the people,” according to Charles Taylor, co-author of *United Mind Workers: Unions and Teaching in the Knowledge Society*. “If we continue to become a nation of two people, the promise of equal opportunity for all children would be at risk.

“Teachers are in a position to advocate for children and to assist parents and families in building safe, decent communities,” he writes.

Teachers in greater numbers, to a greater extent than any other adults, spend time with the nation’s children. They are in a position to help bridge the now widening gap between the “I and we in America.”

As members of the Tennessee Education Association, we have the responsibility as respected leaders in our community to work toward the ideals that made our country the land of opportunity.

Working collectively we can educate and advocate for the children in our classrooms – to insure every child, regardless of his or her family circumstances, is given an equal opportunity to be included in the American Dream. We can choose to work to renew the promise of a great common public school for every child.

– The author is president of the Knox County, TN, Education Association

Tortured Logic Unacceptable, Outrageous

Editor's Note: The Oklahoma Observer blog offers readers an up-to-the-minute take on the day's news. What follows are recent excerpts from our bloggers. To read blog postings in full, visit www.okobserver.net.

APRIL 30, 2009

Am I perfectly clear on this, Mr. President: ignorance might be no excuse for me, but for the president and leaders of this nation it is an excuse? May I use that if I am ever charged with a crime?

You can excuse the highest ranking lawyers in the country, those advising the president for not checking case law or precedents when concocting torture instruction memos and then excuse CIA operatives even if they go way beyond the okie dokie to the torture?

Am I clear that if I can get an attorney to write me a memo saying that whatever I have done or am planning to do is legal that I am completely excused from culpability? Or does it have to be the president's attorney, the top law guy in the nation, who gives me the permission slip?

So waterboarding is torture, but it might not be criminal if it is the CIA doing it and George Tenet and others can claim they were ignorant of the notion that the Sere program isn't an offensive program, but is designed to aid someone who might be tortured?

Texas sheriffs can be convicted and Koreans, Germans, Chinese, Vietnamese, Japanese and Pol Pot, but anyone in the leadership of the United States can claim ignorance and do whatever they please? The Red Cross and everyone else can agree it is torture and they can go after every other country in the world, but not this one?

I was on a federal grand jury for a year back in the 1980s, and if anyone

had tried to force-feed me this crap, I would have voted to indict just on the basis of being so stupid as to assume I would swallow this dung heap of moral flim flam.

Exactly which Constitution were you teaching? As far as I am concerned this is the darkest day in the history of the United States and I am including all of those other dark days. The day the United States of America accepted the idea that we can just give torturers a pass if we promise we won't let anyone do it again.

How is it that we came to this point in history? We had a president who could excuse anything because we were attacked on 9/11. He can take about all kinds of civil rights and do anything while saying he was protecting us.

Now we have a president who can excuse the same activity because the previous guy created two wars and an economic collapse and he doesn't have time to worry about the past.

- KAREN WEBB

APRIL 28, 2009

As promised, House Democrats returned to their seats today, a day after walking out en masse to protest what they viewed as heavy-handedness by the Republican majority.

Dems had hoped to revive "Nick's Law" that would require insurance companies to cover treatment for autism. But the GOP - with Rep. Don Armes of Faxon ruling from the speaker's chair - thwarted the parlia-

mentary maneuver.

It's hardly unprecedented in state history that the House majority arbitrarily and capriciously applies its rules - a variation of situational ethics.

This episode was so egregious, however, that even normally mild-mannered Rep. Joe Dorman, D-Rush Springs, came unhinged, likening the ruling to "totalitarian government."

What shouldn't be overlooked is this fact: Legislative opposition to Nick's Law reflects not the will of the people, but the financial power of the insurance industry.

The GOP majority isn't about to cross one of its chief underwriters. Instead, it hopes to bamboozle a majority of Oklahoma voters into thinking it is seriously addressing the autism problem [by approving SB 135].

It's certainly reasonable to help train more doctors to diagnose and treat autism, but what good does it do if rank-and-file Oklahomans can't afford to be diagnosed or treated? ...

This fight is far from over. Can you imagine the fun in the next election cycle? The legislative majority is OK that insurers cover Viagra - but not children with autism?

Maybe it's time to resurrect Bob Dole and his little blue friend.

- ARNOLD HAMILTON

APRIL 24, 2009

Stop.

Don't listen.

Don't talk. Don't even think about it.

While you're at it, don't even show up.

If I had to summarize the actions of Republicans in the Oklahoma House of Representatives this year, I would only have to write those 18 words. In just three short months, we've seen several attempts to diminish freedoms of ordinary Oklahomans. Here's their gameplan:

Step One: Constrain yourself. The very first day of session saw the passage of the House Rules, which should be a rather innocuous action. Those in charge, however, slipped in a clause that allows a single committee chair to kill a bill until after the next election. That way, even if a good bill like Nick's Law finally gets support of Republicans, they can't hear it.

Step Two: Lock the courtroom doors. Despite failing to show one case of lawsuit frivolity in Oklahoma, the House GOP keeps spinning the ol' broken record of tort reform. Their "reform" would grant immunity to corporations that hurt consumers by making it harder to bring a lawsuit to court.

Step Three: Keep registered voters from voting. In what I can only assume is a tactic to keep Democratic voters from the ballot box, Republicans approved a state question that, if passed by Oklahomans next year, would keep citizens from voting unless they bring along a photo ID. The most ludicrous thing about this resolution is that the government, which is supposed to protect the minority, would allow a majority to limit the right to vote.

- DALE DENWALT

Mega-Bankers Already Up To Old Tricks

By Jim Hightower

I'd like nothing more than to give the bailout scandal a rest - but the bankers won't let me! They just keep coming at us with ever-more-clever inventions of greed and deceit.

Their latest bit of hocus-pocus, accompanied by big puffs of smoke, is a dazzling show of profits. Yes, Goldman Sachs, Citigroup, Bank of America, JPMorgan Chase and other financial giants that only yesterday were insolvent basket cases now report that - poof! - in the first quarter of this year, they magically produced blockbuster profits.

Absolutely A-mazing!

Of course, it's a con job. After all, magicians don't perform magic. They create illusions.

Hoping to con investors and the public into believing that the wizards running Wall Street have quickly and brilliantly restored these banks to financial health, the wizards did exactly what they've done in the past: They goosed up their books with accounting tricks and sleights of hand.

IT'S THE TAXPAYERS, STUPID

First - and most obvious - the "profits" are made possible only because you and I have stuffed the banks with massive infusions of tax dollars. Indeed, they wouldn't even be standing without our money. I don't mean merely the \$700 billion straightforward bailout approved by Congress, but also the nearly \$2.5 trillion in such backdoor subsidies as dirt-cheap loans and government guarantees quietly extended by the Federal Reserve and the Treasury Department.

Second, the banks lobbied for and won a regulatory break that lets them pretend that all of those bad housing investments weighing down their books like a load of toxic waste are worth ... well, worth whatever the bankers say they're worth. So - Shazam! - huge losses are wiped clean by banker fantasy.

Then there are special little puffs of smoke used by particular banks. For example, Goldman Sachs [which has us taxpayers on the hook for more than \$50 billion in its bailout package] breathlessly announced a dazzling profit of \$1.8 billion for the first quarter.

The dazzle dimmed, however, when it was learned that Goldman had altered its definition of "quarter," shifting its normal December-to-March quarter ahead one

month, thus disappearing December. That was a month in which the bank lost \$1.5 billion, so scrubbing it gave the revised calendar a neat banker buff job.

BOLSTERING EXECUTIVE PAY

Meanwhile, these same bankers are using their miraculous profit numbers as an excuse to - guess what? - bulk up executive pay checks!

While the Obama Administration has imposed some limits on the pay of the very top executives of bailed-out banks, the CEOs expect to be out from under these restrictions before long.

So, to take care of themselves - and to restore Wall Street's sense that investment bankers are the most deserving people on the planet - they are now setting aside billions of dollars to be distributed at the end of the year as executive compensation, including the return of outlandish bonuses.

Goldman Sachs leads the pack, having reserved \$4.7 billion to cover such compensation just for the first three months of this year. "We need to be able to pay our people," barked a Goldman spokesperson. Well, yes, but at the rate of nearly \$5 billion per quarter, every banker in the firm would average \$569,000 - and, of course, top executives would draw many times that average.

THE WORD IS O-U-T-R-A-G-E-O-U-S

Can these guys [and they are mostly guys] even spell "outrageous"? These set-asides would return Wall Street to the bloated 2007 level of gilded greed that perverted its ethics and led to the crash that has swamped us all.

Meanwhile, every billion dollars snapped up by the self-absorbed bankers is a billion that doesn't go into loans to help our economy, doesn't go to repayment of the federal debt run up by the bailout and doesn't go to shareholders who've lost huge sums thanks to these very bankers.

As Chaucer once said about goats: They "stinken."

This is proof that Wall Street bankers have learned nothing. It's also proof that Barack Obama's present bailout policy of saving the bankers must go, and that the bankers themselves must go. Otherwise, they'll just keep robbing us.

To connect with a grassroots campaign to bring real structural change to Wall Street, go to www.anewwayforward.org.

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Politics Present In Combat Stress

By Tyler Boudreau

I am a veteran of the war in Iraq. Like many, I came home bearing an unexpected skepticism toward our operations there and a fresh perspective on America's use of military power. And also like many, I found myself emotionally and psychologically harried by my experiences on the battlefield. But unlike many, I landed after discharge in a community where criticism for the war was both socially acceptable and, in fact, quite common, leaving me free to process a distress which was directly connected to U.S. foreign policy.

I was, literally and figuratively, right at home.

So, I couldn't help noticing how the political dissent of my community was facilitating my mental healing. That has given me reason to consider all the ways in which politics has corresponded with and influenced the understanding and acceptance of combat stress. And while combat stress survivors have, in some ways, benefited from this relationship, they have suffered from it as well.

Combat stress has a stigmatic heritage, well-recognized now, but that was not always so. World War I was an era in which distraught soldiers were often labeled "men of deficient character;" and yet, the unspeakable carnage of its battles seemed to have offered latitude enough in the aftermath for the painful expressions of its veterans. But after the infinitely more popular World War II, veterans became known more for reticence than effusion and for a stoical veneer beneath which [we know now] a growing tumult was quietly raging. With the country so steeped in enthusiasm, it is not surprising that their invisible wounds went largely unnoticed. After all, with whom, in such a climate, might a veteran have shared his horrible stories?

COMING TO GRIPS WITH COMBAT STRESS

Vietnam marked a new era for politics and for combat stress. The antiwar movement was never so vociferous, the veterans never so outspoken. And the term "Post-Traumatic Stress" was virtually nonexistent; it was not listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders [DSM] until 1980. Widespread criticism of the conflict changed all that.

The antiwar movement did not merely give veterans room to recover; it created space in the American consciousness for the possibility that the experiences from war could, in fact, be psychologically devastating. This consequently opened the door to the study of combat stress.

Today, after six years in Iraq [eight in Afghanistan], combat stress is nearly taken for granted as an innate component of war. And yet the stigma survives throughout the country, in the military, and even in the mental health field. Why?

MORALITY OF MILITARY ACTION

The trouble with combat stress [and the traumatic accounts that go with it] is its tendency to call into question the morality of military action. Regardless of the policies, the objectives, or the administrations that enact them, war's essence



is challenged outright by the mere existence of combat stress. Upon witnessing the sundered consciousnesses of so many returning veterans and hearing about all the horrible things they endured and committed, one finds it difficult not to conclude that the battlefield must truly be a horrible place.

Of course, the justness of war is not defined by its casualties alone, but when the moral compasses of young soldiers are spun to the point where they find it difficult to bear their own skins [as we've seen expressed in the record suicides of late], it leads to a natural suspicion about the moral direction of the war overall. And that is precisely the problem.

Like it or not, combat stress is, in its own way, a political statement. It is a silent judgment of war [and of society], and that is why the understanding and treatment of it remain perpetually stifled.

TOO MANY DIAGNOSED WITH PTSD?

For instance, there has been recent discussion within the psychiatric community about reducing the criteria for post-traumatic stress in the pending DSM-V or restricting the types of events that might be deemed traumatic. The "disorder," some psychiatrists feel, has become too broadly defined, which has contributed to imprecise data collection. Their claim, in other words, is that too many people

See **STRESS** Page 19

Combating An Epidemic Of Ignorance

By Joe Conason

In the turbulent imagination of the hard-core conservative, American foreign policy should be about telling off the rest of the planet.

According to the right-wing mind-set, a manly foreign policy would curtail any effort at seeking influence abroad, cut off assistance to developing countries, forget about improving our global image and, above all, withdraw from the existing international organizations, especially the United Nations, which is nothing more than a gargantuan waste of money and a hive of parasitic bureaucrats. Only if we brusquely and even violently dismiss the obnoxious foreigners who annoy us can we vindicate our political and moral superiority.

Then there is the real world, where we regularly encounter threats like swine flu – and where we must depend on the other people who live in this world to help protect our nation and our families. Certainly that is the outlook of America's new presidency, confirmed with profound urgency after 100 days by the sudden prospect of pandemic disease.

PARODIES OF CONSERVATISM

Every day, reactionary bluster is exploited for theatrical purposes by radio and television personalities, rustic politicians, frothing bloggers and all the other clownish extremists who regale us with parodies of conservatism. For simple minds, that's entertainment.

But for the past several years, powerful officials in the United States applied the right's bombastic prescriptions to policy, most disastrously on matters of war and peace and international cooperation. The last administration actually sent an ambassador to the United Nations who had publicly disparaged its existence.

So it is unsurprising that the open mind and extended hand of Barack Obama would infuriate the same figures who once applauded John Bolton and cheered for war with mouths full of "freedom fries." They cannot comprehend why the new president would take immediate steps toward repairing our reputation and our alliances. They would rather look for scapegoats than solutions.

BLAMING IMMIGRANTS FOR SWINE FLU

In the case of swine flu, that means attempting to blame immigrants from Mexico, who conveniently symbolize right-wing fears of a global future. At the

first news of the flu outbreak, all of the usual loudmouths on Fox News Channel and the Internet immediately started to spread panic and blame – including rumors that this illness could represent a bioterror attack launched from across the border.

"Could our dear friends in the radical Islamic countries have concocted this virus and planted it in Mexico?" asked one of the more demented radio yakkers. One well-known blogger, an offspring of immigrants, seized the opportunity to warn of "the spread of contagious diseases from around the world into the U.S. as a result of uncontrolled immigration."

As these commentators ought to know, the vector of swine flu into the United States had nothing to do with immigrants from any country, who so far have shown no sign of illness, and everything to do with ordinary travel and commerce.

A group of high-school students from New York City went to Cancún on spring vacation and on their return carried home the virus – which has traveled as far as Spain, Scotland, Israel and New Zealand via similar pathways.

WHO PROTECTS US

At moments of actual peril, such as now, it is important to remember that the World Health Organization [WHO] is humanity's bulwark against catastrophe. Many Americans may not even be aware that the WHO, which has succeeded in protecting us, eradicating disease and reducing suffering for more than six decades, is an agency of the United Nations.

As the worldwide coordinator for public health officials in every country when a pandemic looms, the agency plays an essential role – analogous to the Centers for Disease Control in the United States – that simply would not be performed otherwise. Without the WHO, this planet would be far sicker, poorer and more dangerous.

The same cannot be said of the demagogues who inhabit so much of the airwaves and cyberspace. On a planet where human survival will demand cooperation, tolerance, honesty and generosity, their persistent idiocy is not just embarrassing but potentially lethal.

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In The Office, Nice Girls Finish Last

By Tana Ganeva

Picture this: You're a young woman at your first job. You worked hard to get a decent education, believing it was the path to success. You also have a vague sense that the feminist battles of past years have left few political or legal barriers to workplace equality.

If pop culture is to be believed, the only thing left for feminism to do is finally determine whether "do-me" heels are concessions to the patriarchy or an expression of liberated female sexuality.

So, bright-eyed and optimistic, you embark on what you imagine will be a smooth rise to the top of your chosen profession, limited only by your own skills and dedication to hard work.

FIND YOURSELF LINGERING

Instead, you find yourself lingering in entry or midlevel positions, despite all your work and devotion to the organization. You figure everyone has to pay their dues – until you begin to notice that male counterparts are speeding past you with better work assignments, more opportunities for advancement and faster promotions.

If this sounds familiar, that's because it's quite common. Despite significant advances in recent decades, women continue to lag behind men in income and career advancement.

Regardless of class, race, educational level and profession, women make less money than their male counterparts – an average of 77 cents on the dollar.

SELDOM PROMOTED, PAID LESS

Women make up 2.4% of CEOs of Fortune 500 companies [and get paid less than those peers], less than one-fifth of partners in law firms [minority women fare significantly worse, accounting for 2% of law partners], and continue to be significantly underrepresented in politics.

Confronted with a complex problem that defies easy, sound-bite explanations, the media – and many experts – have taken the time-tested approach of pinning the blame on women themselves.

An array of myths, like "opt-out revolution," have sprung up to explain why women have yet to achieve true equality in the workplace. The general assumption behind these shortsighted ideas is that women can't "cut it" in today's competitive work environment.

WHAT STUDIES SHOW

However, a growing number of studies show that women are more likely than men to be devoted to their employers and to see hard work as the best way to get ahead.

Women, conditioned from an early age to be communal and "nice," are generally hesitant to boast about their efforts and are less likely than men to push for raises and promotions. In a workplace that rewards aggressiveness and self-promotion, women often go unrecognized for their contributions.

A 2006 study conducted by International Survey Research measured the attitudes and behaviors men and women displayed at the workplace and found a noteworthy discrepancy between the priorities of male and female employees.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEN, WOMEN

Female executives were primarily concerned with the well-being of the company, smooth employee relations and a well-run workplace. Men cared much more about getting ahead.

The study found that career development was the top priority for men, with "personal reward" as their second most-important goal. Women put "working relationships" first, "customer quality focus" second, and "communications" third.

According to Kim Morris, the study's project director, "[Women] tend to focus less than men on their advancement. They assume that focusing primarily on the health of the organization will result in recognition and promotions."

Women are also less likely than men to grease their career paths by touting their skills and bragging about their accomplishments.

A 2008 study by psychologist Shannon L. Goodson compared the office behaviors of professional men and women, drawing from an industry questionnaire about workplace attitudes.

WOMEN DON'T PROMOTE THEMSELVES

Goodson found that women were far less likely to draw attention to their achievements and promote their skills and abilities to co-workers and supervisors, whereas men had relatively little trouble bringing attention to their work.

At times, men even lied about their accomplishments, taking credit for contributions that were not entirely theirs.

"We found that women typically are concerned about being seen as pushy and intrusive, and they may hesitate to ask for the raise, ask for a promotion or do anything that makes them stand out and appear to be boastful," says Goodson.

In a culture that offers up sweet-voiced Disney princesses as role models for young girls, it's hardly surprising that many women have trouble being aggressive in the pursuit of advancement or blustering about their achievements.

According to career counselor Karyl Innis, who has seen this dynamic play out in her work, "you have to roll it all the way back to how little girls are brought up and often they're told to work hard; they're told nice girls don't do this, little girls don't do that. And largely they're being told, 'don't put yourself out there, don't brag.'"

MEN FAR MORE AGGRESSIVE

Meanwhile, men have been primed to pursue their self-interest from childhood.



Economist Linda Babcock found that men are far more aggressive when they negotiate raises and promotions.

According to Babcock, men "are encouraged to go for it growing up. The world is their oyster, they're in charge, they're encouraged to take risks, and they just have so much more practice initiating negotiations growing up and with so much more encouragement from our society that this is an acceptable thing for them to do. So they get more practice. It's not as if women are missing a negotiation gene or something!"

In fact, Babcock's research reveals that women are great negotiators – just not for themselves. "[Women] negotiate for their family members, they negotiate for the causes they believe in. So it's not that we don't have these skills. It's that society has told us that it's not appropriate for us to use them for ourselves – because that would be selfish or greedy."

ANOTHER SET OF PROBLEMS

Furthermore, women who buck gender expectations by engaging in what's considered "masculine" behavior face a whole other set of problems in the workplace.

When they shed the buffers of femininity, they risk being vilified as bitches. [See: the Hillary Clinton nutcracker, and all the other creative ways some male commentators vented their anxieties about what Clinton would do to their genitals.]

While aggressive self-promotion might make women appear more competent, it poses its own hazard. According to social psychologist Peter Glick, who has done extensive research on the subtle ways gender expectations affect workplace relations, "There's a very strong prescriptive stereotype that women should be nice."

A DOUBLE STANDARD

This double standard is not lost on women who perceive, in the behavior of coworkers and supervisors, that being aggressive does not pan out for them in the same way that it does for men.

One possible advantage of diversity in the workplace, of course, is that if more women held leadership positions, corporate work culture could become more sensitive to the particular problems women face as they attempt to scale the career ladder.

That's not only good for women but for companies, too, since organizations that lack the mechanisms to notice and reward hard work may end up filling their leadership ranks with underqualified individuals – "Heck of a job, Brownie."

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'Quiverfull' Aims To Rule

NPR's "Morning Edition" reports on a growing conservative Christian movement called Quiverfull, in which married couples do not use any birth control, "believing that God will give them the right number of children."

The name comes from the Bible's Psalm 127, which says, "Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them."

According to Morning Edition this conviction is part of a larger belief that having more children will help to "spread the message of Christ."

Followers of the Quiverfull movement are "a small group, probably 10,000 fast-growing families," mostly in the Midwest and South.

According to Kathryn Joyce, who wrote about the movement in the book *Quiverfull: Inside the Christian Patriarchy Movement*, members of the movement have high ambitions, including political and social change.

Joyce said members believe, "If everyone starts having eight children or 12 children, imagine in three generations what we'll be able to do."

"We'll be able to take over both halls of Congress, we'll be able to reclaim sinful cities like San Francisco for the faithful, and we'll be able to wage very effective massive boycotts against companies that are going against God's will."

Nancy Campbell, a leader of the movement and author of *Be Fruitful and Multiply*, said that if Christians do not begin to reproduce in large numbers, biblical Christianity will lose its influence.

"The womb is such a powerful weapon; it's a weapon against the enemy," Campbell said.

Public Universities' Degrees Cost More

By J. Nathan Glater

Should an undergraduate studying business pay more than one studying psychology? Should a journalism degree cost more than one in literature?

More and more public universities, confronting rising costs and lagging state support, have decided that the answers may be yes and yes.

Starting this fall, juniors and seniors pursuing an undergraduate major in the business school at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, will pay \$500 more each semester than classmates.

The University of Nebraska last year began charging engineering students a \$40 premium for each hour of class credit.

And Arizona State University this fall will phase in for upperclassmen in the journalism school a \$250 per semester charge above the basic \$2,411 tuition for in-state students.

HIGH SALARIES DEMANDED

Such moves are being driven by the high salaries commanded by professors in certain fields, the expense of specialized equipment and the difficulties of getting state legislatures to approve general tuition increases, university officials say.

"It is something of a trend," said Barmak Nassirian of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers.

Even as they embrace such pricing, many officials acknowledge they are queasy about a practice that appears to value one discipline over another or that could result in lower-income students clustering in less expensive fields.

"This is not the preferred way to do this," said Patrick V. Farrell, provost at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. "If we were able to raise resources uniformly across the campus, that would be a preferred move. But with our current situation, it doesn't seem to us that that's possible."

PRICE AFFECTS CHOICES

At the University of Kansas, which started charging different prices in the early 1990s, there are signs that the higher cost of majoring in certain subjects is affecting the choices of poorer students.

"We are seeing at this point purely anecdotal evidence," said Richard W. Lariviere, provost and executive vice chancellor at the university. "The price sensitivity of poor students is causing them to forgo majoring, for example, in business or engineering, and rather sticking with something like history."

Private universities do not face the same tuition constraints and for the most part are avoiding the practice, educators say, holding to the traditional idea that college students should be encouraged to get a well-rounded education.

Richard Fass, vice president for planning at Pomona, a private liberal arts college in California, said educators there considered it fundamental for students to feel part of the larger college, not segmented by differential costs.

"The entire curriculum is by design available to all students," he said.

Some public university officials say they worry that students who are charged more for their major will stick to the courses in their field to feel that they are getting their money's worth.

"I want students in the College of Engineering at Iowa State to take courses in the humanities and to take courses in the social sciences," said Mark J. Kushner, the dean of that college.

To address problems like climate change, he said, graduates will need to understand much more than technology.

"That's sociology, that's economics, that's politics, that's public policy."

Undergraduate juniors and seniors in the engineering school at Iowa State last year began paying about \$500 more annually, and the size of that additional payment is scheduled to rise by \$500 a year for at least the next two years.

Kushner said he thought society no longer looks at higher education as a common good but rather as a way for individuals to increase their earning power.

DIFFERENTIAL PRICING

Various universities have adopted different versions of differential pricing to try to fight the unintended consequences it may create. Colleges that charge higher tuition for a major like business, engineering or journalism generally allow students outside the field to take some courses in the subject without paying more.

"We do try to encourage crossing disciplines, to get a feel for the world," said Randy Kangas, assistant vice president for planning and budgeting at the University of Illinois, where students studying business, chemistry and the life sciences pay higher tuition.

Most universities with differential tuition use some of the money – 20% to 25% – for additional financial aid to offset some of the impact.

Officials at universities that have recently implemented higher tuition for specific majors say students have supported the move.

Students in the business school at the University of Wisconsin, for example, got behind the program because they believed that it would support things like a top-notch faculty.

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MERRY-GO-ROUND

From Page 9

working with an anticipated rate of unemployment 10% by 2010.

We must invest in human capital. Human commerce must be important. Teachers must also take a proactive approach.

21ST CENTURY TEACHING

Paulo Freire writes in his book *The Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage* that education requires teachers who because of their stature take their own education seriously and stay abreast of current issues and trends in order to maintain the authority their position represents.

Teachers need administrations and boards of education that stress integrating technology into the classroom. If we want our students to be prepared for the 21st Century we must start teaching in the 21st Century.

Administrators must encourage autonomy and activism. Administrators can't do everything! In an arena barraged with academic standards, 3,200 in all, they have their plates full. The answer to "How?" must be "Yes," as Dr. Robert Marzano refers to a book written by Peter Block.

Why technology? We are visual learners. We process a picture 60,000 times faster than text. We are anatomically programmed for interpreting visual imagery. Visually we are superior as opposed to auditory; there are 18,000 nerves from the ear to the brain yet over one million nerves from the eyes to the brain. It's a no brainer!

According to Will Richardson, children today, because of technology, have hypertexted minds. They can process simultaneously and in parallel as opposed to sequential. They are also heavily biased by television.

Jim Trelease says in his book *The Read Aloud Handbook* that the average kindergartner will have watched as many hours of television that it takes to get a bachelor's degree. Out of this, a media war is borne where children battle with the requirements of written text with very low developed or nonexistent attention spans.

APPEALING TO 'DIGITAL NATIVES'

Education needs to appeal to these digital natives as State Superintendent Sandy Garrett refers to them as. We are, indeed, digital immigrants working with digital natives as digital chaperones.

Approximately two million children between the ages of 6 and 17 have their own websites according to Will Richardson's book *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts and Other Powerful Tools for Classrooms*.

Paul Vallas, the superintendent who turned the Philadelphia school system around and who took over the New Orleans school district, according to *ESchool News*, believes technology simulates smaller class size and cuts down on behavior issues – spoken with authority from a school district where 40% of the students have at least one parent incarcerated.

If we're going to cut anything out, let's cut out the merry-go-round! This is

ridiculous! Education and government in Oklahoma is like being in an amusement park and the legislators are the carnies! They wake up in a different city every day and we keep buying tickets for the ride our lives! It's time to get off!

Let's change the landscape of Oklahoma! Instead of saying, "Will the last teacher to leave Oklahoma, please erase the board?" we should say, "What board? Tweet your thoughts on Twitter!"

Some of us are interested in staying and improving the standard of living in Oklahoma! We cannot achieve ideology with such inconsistencies. What constitutes ideology anyway? Paulo Freire said ideological discourse anesthetizes the mind, blurs the perception, and confuses the curiosity. Anesthetizes, blurs, and confuses because of the merry-go-round!

– The author is a certified library media specialist/teacher in Asher Public Schools

STAND UP

From Page 9

I don't like bullies much, and I like acquiescing to them even less.

During this session, my wife and I waged a dogged letter writing campaign, expressing our concerns to the committees reviewing the bill.

While some representatives were very open to our concerns, others responded with condescension – Rep. [Sally] Kern, whose daughter-in-law was in my wedding and has met Lindsay many, many times, essentially told Lindsay that she didn't know what she was saying and e-mailed another copy of the bill to her, though Lindsay was very clear in saying that she'd thoroughly read the bill prior to writing – while others wouldn't even acknowledge our messages.

THE POWER OF UNITED VOICES

One voice doesn't get the job done. Two voices might make a ripple. Thousands of voices, though? Thousands of voices, using the tools at hand, go a long way toward making things right.

If we let this Legislature – a Legislature more concerned with hanging on to funds for new leather chairs and oak desks in the House than funding the purchase of textbooks – get away with this, we're rolling over on an entire generation of students to come and we're letting down generations of professional educators who came before.

Understand that I respect your doubts regarding the importance of collective bargaining and organized labor as well as your fundamental right to disagree with me; however, I hope that what I've written will spur some reflection and re-consideration in regards to this issue.

– The author is a Choctaw-Nicoma Park educator

Our Delegation Opposed

Free Choice Act To Stop Union-Busting

By Joshua Holland

U.S. House Democrats have introduced the Employee Free Choice Act, a vitally important package of protections that would help restore working people's much denuded right to join a union if they so desire.

There's nothing more terrifying to corporate America and their political skills than the prospect of dealing with its workforce on an even playing field.

Oklahoma's entire congressional delegation is opposed to the legislation – even Rep. Dan Boren who calls himself a “bluedog” Democrat. [That's a code word for voting Republican.]

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, DC lobbyists, and firms that rely on cheap labor and a host of “Astroturf front groups have built a massive war chest they're using to try to defeat the EFCA and other efforts to put a check on corporate power and rebuild a declining middle class.

THEIR MESSAGE IS DISHONEST

The central message of their campaign is remarkably dishonest. America's professional union-busters have seized on a compelling talking point tailored to suit our political culture.

It is the “card-check” provision of the EFCA – which allows workers to form a union if a majority indicates they want one – which does away with “secret ballots” that Americans have come to expect when casting a vote.

It is, in short, a Big Lie. There has never been a “right” to a secret ballot for union elections; in fact, most union organizing in recent decades has been done via card check.

The issue is this: It is currently up to the employer to decide whether their workers choose to organize via majority sign-up – “card check” – or through a National Labor Relations Board election. Under EFCA, workers themselves would get to make that call, not their bosses.

UNION BUSTING NOW AN ART FORM

It's an important distinction. Union busting has reached a high art form in the United States. Companies no longer need thugs and gun-toting Pinkertons to keep workers from exercising their legal rights to organize; now they have high-priced, Armani-wearing lawyers, who simply brainwash workers into silence.

It happened right here in Oklahoma when employees of Hobby Lobby tried to organize. It happened years ago at the Daily Disappointment when mailers and truck drivers tried to organize.

The tactics are as subtle as they are insidious. A study by Cornell University labor scholar Kate Bronfenbrenner found nine in 10 employers facing a union campaign force employees to attend closed-door meetings to hear anti-union propaganda.

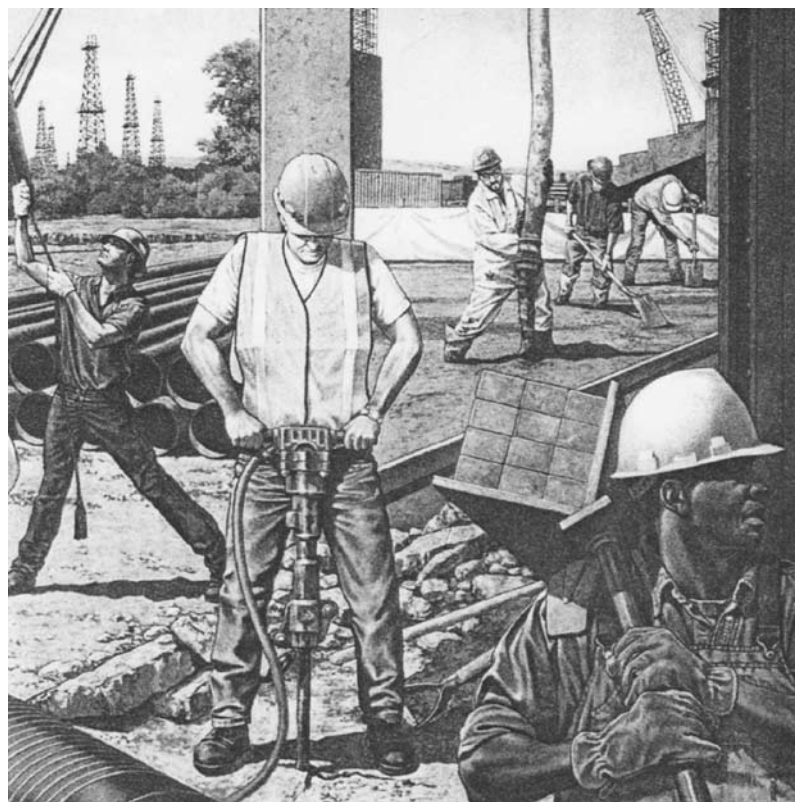
HOW TO ATTACK UNIONS

More than 80% train supervisors on how to attack unions and require them to deliver anti-union messages to workers they oversee.

Half of employers threaten to shut down the plant if workers unionize [only 2% actually do]; and three out of four hire outside consultants to run anti-union campaigns, “often based on mass psychology and distorting the law.”

Increasingly, cunning forms of intimidation are often enough to produce a “no” vote. But if workers do vote to unionize, management is then able to dispute the outcome, and the case can drag on, often for years. Wal-Mart is a good example.

While it's pending, pro-union workers lose their jobs. A study published last



year by economists John Schmitt and Ben Zipperer found that “almost one in five union organizers or activists can expect to be fired as a result of their activities in a union election campaign.”

REAGAN GUTTED LABOR LAW

That's illegal – workers are guaranteed the right to organize – but since the bitterly anti-union Reagan Administration gutted U.S. labor protections, companies that cross the line pay modest penalties that can be written off as part of the cost of remaining union-free.

Currently, under U.S. labor law, the penalty for an employer that robs someone of their job for expressing their right to join a union is just that they have to post a piece of paper saying they illegally fired an employee from their job.

That would change if EFCA passes. The bill beefs up penalties for union-busting campaigns and establishes an arbitration process that requires businesses to negotiate with their employees – all of which is obscured by the corporate right's relentless focus on a nonexistent “right” to a secret ballot.

RIGGED ZOGBY POLL

Big Business commissioned a Zogby Poll that's dangerously close to the political “push-polls” of campaign infamy. The questions were remarkably dishonest, and the results were what the pollsters and their clients were looking for.

To wit: “Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: Every worker should continue to have the right to a federally supervised secret ballot election when deciding whether to organize a union.”

Nine out of 10 respondents agreed, including 87% of Democrats. That's to be expected; the strategy is to depict management's assault on the ability to organize as protecting “workers' rights.”

Armed with their push-poll, the right's noise machine has been typically disciplined. They've taken that spin and synchronized it across the conservative communications infrastructure – from business-funded think tanks [such as the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs] to rightwing blogs; from the Wall Street Journal editorial page to lawmakers walking the halls of the state Capitol and Congress.

Labor went all out for Barack Obama's campaign. They await his commitment to help pass the measure.

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\$339 Million In Oklahoma Oil, Gas Rebates

Over the past five years, producers have claimed \$339 million in exemptions, or rebates, from the gross production tax, with almost three-quarters of the rebates claimed for deep well drilling and horizontally drilled wells.

The Oklahoma Policy Institute has released a fact sheet on Oklahoma's gross production tax that takes a specific look at the tax exemptions that are offered for different forms of oil and gas production.

Most gross production tax exemptions are set to expire on June 30. The Legislature is considering bills [HB 2026 and SB 313] that would extend the exemptions through 2012.

STATE SHOULD REVIEW EXEMPTIONS

“As the state begins to wrestle with what looks to be enormous and prolonged budget shortfalls, this seems to be the right time for policy-makers to carefully review the tax breaks being offered to oil and gas producers and to consider whether there should be some appropriate caps placed on the amount of tax rebates that can be claimed,” said David Blatt, OK Policy's director of policy.

The state currently caps the rebates that can be claimed for deep wells drilled below 15,000 feet at \$25 million per year. Most other exemptions are uncapped but can be claimed only when the average annual index price of natural gas is below \$5.00 per MCF or the price of oil is below \$50 per barrel.

Exemptions for horizontally drilled wells are subject to neither a cap nor a price trigger; the state paid out over \$35 million in rebates for horizontal drilling in FY '08.

CREATING BUDGET CERTAINTY

“Applying the cap that is currently in place for deep well drilling to other exempted production, or creating an overall cap on gross production tax rebates

would create greater budget certainty over the coming years,” said Blatt.

“We know that schools, social services, public safety and other vital areas of the state budget are looking at deep cuts. In this environment, limiting the tax breaks offered to producers seems a reasonable way to minimize the impact of cuts to core services and ensure that sacrifices are shared.”

A recent study by Oklahoma City University Business Professor Steve Agee found that state tax incentives ranked last among 10 variables cited by Oklahoma oil industry executives as affecting their decision to drill.

MAJORITY NOT INFLUENCED BY TAX BREAK

Less than half of the respondents said that the availability of a gross production tax incentive rebate was an influential part of their decision whether to drill or not to drill a well.

According to OK Policy's fact sheet, Oklahoma accounts for 8.8% of total U.S. natural gas production and 3.2% of crude oil production, ranking 3rd and 5th among the 50 states, respectively.

The state collected \$1.168 billion from gross production taxes in FY '08, of which \$808.2 million, or 69.2%, was from the gross production tax on natural gas, and \$360.2 million, or 30.8% was from the gross production tax on oil.

Gross production taxes represented 14% of total states taxes in FY '08, ranking behind only the personal income tax and the sales tax as a top source of state tax revenues.

Oklahoma Policy Institute is a new state policy organization committed to advancing policies aimed at promoting fiscal responsibility, expanding economic opportunity and reducing poverty. For additional information and analysis visit their web site, www.okpolicy.org.

The NRA Chief: Not Our Guns In Mexico

By Karen Webb

I watched the NRA's Wayne LaPierre claim that our easy gun laws are not the cause of more guns in Mexico. He thinks they are coming in on the coast and on the boarder with Central America.

Right, you can't load up at Brownsville, Galveston, Miami, New Orleans, half-way down Padre Island, or on the coast of California, and take them to the Mexican coast or Central America and get them to Mexico.

What a complete idiot.

There is proof that 90% of guns confiscated in Mexico are from the U.S. LaPierre and others like him can scream at Mexico being the source of our drug problems, employment problems, child abuse problems and everything else under the sun, but nooooooo, our extremely lax gun laws couldn't be a problem for Mexico.

NO GUN TRAFFICKING IN U.S.?

Some idiot gun shop owner in Brownsville says Mexico criminals have grenades but they didn't buy them here. Right, they are trying to say there is no gun trafficking, including grenades, in the U.S.

Get a grip - of course there is gun trafficking in the U.S. and there has been guns-for-drugs between the U.S. and Mexico for as long as I can remember.

When Congress cut down on giving President Reagan money for his adventures in Central America, a lot of money was made through drug trafficking and gun trafficking.

It just doesn't work that way. You can't blame Mexicans for forcing the U.S. to be hooked on drugs and then say the U.S. is completely innocent in gun trafficking.

Give it a rest! We transported enough guns to Central America during the Reagan years and Iran-Contra to arm several armies.

WE ARE THE TOP ARMS MERCHANT

We have armed the entire planet. We have more nukes than any other country. If Cuba gave up communism we would arm them.

We have armed half of Europe with missiles aimed at Russia, but we get really upset if someone puts missiles on our doorstep.

We are buddies with both Pakistan and India and both have nukes and hate each other and a lot of our military is close enough to be hit when they decide to go at each other.

Pakistan, India, China, Russia, Israel can all have Nukes, but Iran can't? Yet, they are between those we armed.

The idea that the U.S. isn't involved in arms profiteering anywhere on the planet is stupid. We are arming everyone and we have been doing it since before World War I.

If the arms industry, including planes, ships, tanks and anything anyone



wants, starts losing money then we declare war somewhere or actively promote war somewhere.

ARMS SALES ARE TOP EXPORT

The U.S. lives on arms sales. We trade them for oil, drugs, influence and everything else. If we don't make them, then we buy them from the Germans, Chinese or some other place and transport them where ever we can make problems.

The entire planet should be terrified of us. In 2003 we declared war on Iraq although they had nothing to do with 9/11.

We have started transporting prisoners to other countries. It looks like that won't stop and in fact we will probably transport those at Gitmo to Afghanistan.

The Obama Administration says we aren't going to torture them any more or pay anyone else to do it, but we will still keep them locked up indefinitely.

I wish President Obama felt the same way I do on this issue, but so far it seems he can't quite let go of the unitary power of the executive that Congress and George W. Bush gave him.

- The author lives in Moore. Her commentary also appears regularly on-line at www.okobserver.net

No Doubting That Thomas Is One Odd Duck

By Danny M. Adkison

Clarence Thomas may be our oddest Supreme Court justice. He recently spoke to a group of Washington, DC high school students who were being rewarded for having done well in an essay contest on the Bill of Rights. The students had the rare opportunity to ask a Supreme Court member a question.

The first student to do so nearly stumped the justice. The student's question was how the public viewed the Constitution differently since the Civil War and why? In describing the justice's reaction, the New York Times reported that the question "seemed to throw him off."

This event shouldn't surprise anyone who has closely followed Thomas' career. After all, in his first national appearance before the Senate Judiciary Committee during his confirmation hearings, he was asked if he had ever [ever, mind you] discussed the landmark 1973 Roe v. Wade decision on abortion. His answer was, "If you're asking me whether or not I've ever debated the contents of it, the answer to that is no."

COULDN'T CITE FIVE KEY CASES

After that incredible response Thomas was asked what he would consider to be the five most important cases decided in the past 20 years. Remember, it was 1991 and Bush 41 had nominated Thomas [then a member of the DC Court of Appeals, considered the most important federal court below the Supreme Court] to replace Thurgood Marshall on the Supreme Court.

The first words out of Thomas' mouth were, "Senator, I would have to go back and give it some thought."

Recently, Thomas had an answer for the high school student, too, although those present described it as a "rambling response." He referred to the 14th Amendment [a Civil War Amendment], which was all but suggested by the student's question, and a doctrine known as selective incorporation. [Remember, Thomas gave this answer after having served 18 years on the Supreme Court.]

THREATENED BY INNOCENT QUESTIONS?

Then, Thomas added this afterthought: "I'm sure there are other things that have happened, and I bet you someone is going to hear that and say well, no, it is the dormant commerce clause or something." In case you're wondering, the last definitive statement on the dormant commerce clause occurred in an 1851 Supreme Court decision.

One has to wonder why Thomas seems so threatened by such innocent ques-

tions. Thomas may have hinted why this is so later in his speech. He stated, "This job is easy for people who've never done it; what I have found in this job is they know more about it than I do, especially if they have the title 'law professor.'"

Another recent event concerning the Supreme Court also relates to Justice Thomas. President Obama announced that he would reinstate the practice of asking the American Bar Association to evaluate judicial appointments. President Bush had ended that long-established practice.

LOW ABA RATING TOO HIGH

When Thomas was nominated for the Supreme Court in 1992 the ABA gave him a rating that was lower than any nominee had received in over 30 years. Actually, the ABA may have been too generous in rating Thomas.

What is the most important Supreme Court decision since Brown v. Board of Education [1954]? During his lecture circuit years Thomas gave his answer. Would it be the 1973 Roe v. Wade abortion case, the Pentagon Papers case, or striking down the death penalty? Nope. Thomas didn't cite any of these. His answer was the 1988 Morrison v. Olson decision. If you haven't heard of this case, don't worry, neither have most people. What made this decision so memorable to Thomas? Maybe it was the fact that his mentor, Justice Scalia, wrote the dissent in the case.

In any case, that is not the oddest part of the story. When Thomas was asked to explain that decision to the Senate Judiciary Committee during his confirmation hearings, he couldn't. How odd is that?

'I DON'T LIKE PEOPLE THAT MUCH'

About as odd as these additional facts given in David Savage's book on the Rehnquist court. In 1981 Thomas told a reporter that "he liked to go to church but not on Sundays." Savage quoted Thomas as stating, "I don't like people that much. God is all right. It is the people I don't like."

The New York Times also noted recently that Justice Thomas hasn't spoken in open court since 2006. I happened to be in the courtroom that day, and can report firsthand that the justice's demeanor oozed a latent anger.

The word "odd" keeps coming to mind.

- The author teaches constitutional law at Oklahoma State University. His essays also appear occasionally on-line at www.okobserver.net

Birth Control Denial Height Of Arrogance

By Dan K. Thomasson

A rape victim walks into a pharmacy with a prescription for a morning-after pill that will terminate a possible pregnancy and is told politely it will not be filled, and that she must go elsewhere, no matter how inconvenient.

That is, if the pharmacist has the decency even to return the prescription. The message is clear: Tough luck. If an unwanted child has been conceived in the violation of her body, it is the victim's sacred duty to have the baby.

Another woman, whose body will not support a pregnancy, submits a prescription for simple birth control pills and is also rejected.

Or a young man and woman in the throes of hormonal conflict seek a package of condoms but can't purchase one, and then end up victims of normal, post-pubescent passion.

THEY ARE NOT EXAGGERATIONS

Are those and other examples exaggerations? Hardly. They are manifestations of a real effort by a growing movement of political- and religious-based groups to withhold access to birth control and anti-abortion measures through pharmaceutical denial.

So when is a pharmacy not a pharmacy? Better yet, when can a licensed pharmacist not fill a legitimate prescription because of political or religious reasons?

Should a state licensing authority permit the dispensing of male-enhancement drugs but not those that permit a female to guard her own health?

IS IT A CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATION?

Doesn't a licensed pharmacist have an implied contractual obligation to honor all verifiable prescriptions from practicing physicians?

Those are health, ethical and legal questions that most state authorities now find themselves facing with a growing number of pharmacists who refuse to honor prescribed contraceptives or sell those available over the counter on grounds it violates their consciences.

Drugstores run by those who harbor strict beliefs about social issues are becoming more frequent, encouraged mainly by institutions – many religious based – that oppose any form of unnatural interference with pregnancy, be it wanted or not.

IT IS NO PROBLEM FOR MEN

On the other hand, it seems, prescriptions for recently developed drugs that alleviate male dysfunction are no problem.

Selling mechanical devices that do the same things as the "little blue pills" presumably is also acceptable. It is all right, then, to encourage male participation in a healthy sex life but not the woman's right to protect herself from unwanted conditions.

Realizing that I am about to bring down the wrath of those who see themselves as ordained guardians of our morals, I'm going to say it anyway: What unmitigated arrogance!

UNMITIGATED ARROGANCE

This kind of sanctimony has no place in a regulated and necessary business. Those who seek a right to dispense pharmaceuticals should never be allowed to pick and choose which prescriptions they honor based on extraneous considerations such as religious convictions or mere assertions that it violates their own

Military Rapes Rise, But Few Prosecuted

The Pentagon said it received 2,923 reports of sexual assault across the military in the past year, a 9% increase over the totals reported the year before, but only a fraction of the crimes presumably being committed.

Among the cases reported, only a small number went to military courts, officials acknowledged. More people came forward to report sexual assaults in the military last year, but a significant percentage wouldn't give crucial details needed for an investigation.

The Pentagon office that collects the data estimates that only 10% to 20% of sexual assaults among members of the active duty military are reported – a figure similar to estimates of reported cases in the civilian sphere.

The military statistics, required by Congress, cover rape and other assaults across the approximately 1.4 million people in uniform.

Kaye Whitley, director of the Pentagon's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, said most victims are women, most cases involve young people and alcohol is often involved.

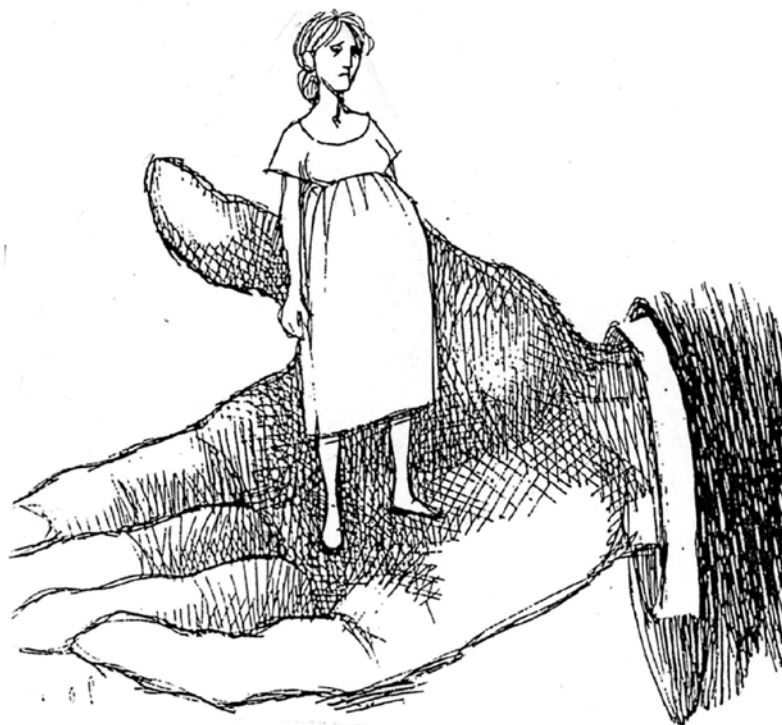
The yearly increase in reports is more likely due to larger numbers of victims being willing to come forward than to an overall increase in sexual violence, Whitley said.

That increase includes a jump in cases from combat zones in Iraq and Afghanistan, to 165 from 131 the year before.

U.S. Rep. Jane Harman, a congressional critic of the military's handling of sexual violence, said the statistics show the problem is still rampant.

"While the report shows modest improvement, we're far from Mission Accomplished," the California Democrat said in a statement. "Military women are more likely to be raped by a fellow soldier than killed by enemy fire in Iraq."

The latest figures include 2,280 cases in which a victim provided full accounts and physical evidence when possible, and 643 in which a victim sought care or



personal codes.

Whether they disapprove of the drug on moral grounds is completely beside the point. They should follow the doctor's orders unless they suspect some irregularity, and that is that. If they can't agree with that, they should find another profession.

STATES ARE PASSING LAWS

It will be up to the states to determine how far they will let this abrogation of responsibility proceed. Several states – California, New Jersey, Illinois and Washington – already have passed laws requiring a pharmacy to fill all prescriptions or help women get them elsewhere.

Lawyers representing Washington asked a federal appeals court recently to reinstate rules requiring pharmacists to dispense "morning-after" birth control pills. Last fall, a federal judge in Seattle issued a preliminary injunction allowing pharmacists to refuse to sell the pill, but only if they refer customers to a nearby source.

MAJOR CHAINS NOT INVOLVED

Ten other states are considering the same legislation. Fortunately, the major drugstore chains are not likely to follow this pattern and the scope will be limited to those stores sponsored by right to life groups.

This may be a serious problem in rural areas, even if they say they will help women get what they need someplace else, which seems contradictory to their mission.

It's all part of a sad trend to establish a strict religious-based social order, even in the health fields. Fertility doctors reportedly have refused to inseminate gay women and anesthesiologists have declined to participate in sterilization procedures such as vasectomies.

Personal convictions are fine unless they interfere with professional responsibility, especially when it pertains to treatments we don't endorse but that have been scientifically vetted as safe and legally prescribed. When that is denied, a pharmacy is not a pharmacy and a pharmacist not a pharmacist.

Would a Christian Scientist, who doesn't believe in doctors, refuse to put a tourniquet on the leg of a man who would bleed to death without it?

– The author is a former editor of the Scripps Howard News Service

made a report but refused to provide all the information necessary to pursue an investigation.

The Defense Department allows those limited reports on the theory that it encourages victims to at least seek care when they might otherwise keep silent.

Prosecution is slow and large numbers of cases are thrown out or dropped.

The most recent figures, which include cases left open from previous years, show that only 317 cases were referred for courts-martial, or military trials. Another 247 were referred for non-judicial punishment.

When I Get Alzheimers

When I get Alzheimers, if God
is just, I will forget the disappointments
and lies and the loss of dignity itself. Dear God, let me
remember the quiet holy snow that blankets our little
town – the first bold tulip of spring – the taste of a
very good watermelon that I grew myself and the
brilliant leaves of Autumn. When I lose my keys, forget
what day it is and set fire to the bedsheets and my
two loving sons sock me away in Grace Dying Center.
When time steals everything. Dear God, let me cling
to the memory that love is real, that life has worth
and E equals M C Squared. When I lose my mind and I
just can't find it anywhere, let me forget and forgive
others and myself and go gently into that good night.
– D.L. Mosher is Poet Laureate of Tahlequah, OK

STRESS

From Page 13

have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress. This must be the only epidemic in human history whose remedy is simply to eliminate the symptoms by which one is diagnosed, thereby normalizing the condition itself, which, in this case, is the psychological effects of war.

This is reminiscent, I think, of Freud's famous study of "hysteria," in which he concluded that the young women suffering from the said illness had been traumatized by sexual abuse. But in noticing the massive number of hysteria cases throughout society, he suddenly realized the dark implications of his findings. The epidemic was rape, not hysteria.

That was apparently too much to bear for Freud or for society. Shortly after publishing his conclusions, he recanted them all and drummed up a new theory: These women – the patients with whom he'd worked passionately for over a decade – were just plain crazy. The renowned doctor turned his back on his patients and on the truth, the hysteria was normalized, and the abuse carried on.

Combat stress appears to be heading in rather the same direction.

IT'S 'ABOUT VETERANS, NOT POLITICS'

The link between politics and combat stress is hardly subtle; it is intuitive. Articulated or not, people sense it. For example, across the country there have cropped up literally hundreds of grass roots organizations and projects formed to reintegrate veterans and help them through the process of coming home. And in nearly every one of them, you will find some disclaimer or note of vigorous neutrality. "This is about veterans, not politics!" they practically chant.

The very presence of this message reiterated ad nauseam is enough to let anyone hearing it know that this absolutely is about politics and that politics are inextricably bound to healing. These attempts at nonpartisan reintegration are fashionable – even admirable – but sadly destined to fail on a large scale because communalizing healing is not possible without first communalizing war. And the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are anything but communalized.

All the while that this effort to segregate the veterans from their wars goes on, the very same veterans will be searching for meaning behind their war experiences, and they will inevitably reach politics because, as Karl Von Clausewitz notoriously points out, "war is the continuation of politics by other means."

Whatever conclusions veterans arrive at in the aftermath, one can be sure they will be politically charged. To deny the ruminations of veterans on the grounds of "nonpartisanship" is, for one thing, to ignore the old adage that silence is consent; and for another, it is to prohibit those veterans from processing a major element of their torment.

On the other hand, to embrace their political outbursts too fervently or to focus too narrowly on the partisan weight of their every word is to lose sight of the central process underway. That is what is happening now across the country.

GAGGED BY PRO-WAR CULTURE

The insidious reluctance towards combat stress that one almost expects to find in the military has plagued the home front as well. In communities, which have adamantly supported the war in Iraq, returning veterans have found their ability to express pain often inhibited or even forcefully suppressed because it tends to sound too much like criticism.

Those whose distress results from the danger they experienced or the death they narrowly escaped find at least some level of acceptance. But for those whose angst comes specifically from their deeds in war – from the violence they inflicted or from the deaths they caused – those veterans face a much stiffer resistance.

Members of my former unit hailing from various parts of the country have found themselves practically gagged by the pro-war culture of their own hometowns, leaving them no way to process their pain and no way to heal. So strong is the intolerance for dissent, which their traumatic memories seem to represent, they are forced to process their pain through drinking, drugs, violence and a host of other illegal or self-destructive activities.

These veterans come to understand one immutable truth: It is better to break the law than break the faith.

If they turn reckless or criminal, they might do some jail time, but if they turn their backs on the war and on the troops, their former comrades, they will certainly face ostracism from their communities. And that is a far harsher penalty for anyone, let alone an unhinged combat veteran.

Such patterns of emotional oppression must seem rather obvious to members of the antiwar community, who generally take the phrases "recovering from war" and "opposing war" to mean the same thing. In many ways, the two terms can be, and indeed are, synonymous, although not inherently so.

The distinction may be slight, but I have found a great deal of misunderstanding can gather between them. Traumatic healing is not the same thing as political activism. They are driven by different forces, and so must be treated differently. This is a lesson that goes missed all too often.

MISUNDERSTANDING COMBAT STRESS

When I first came home, I got involved with some activism, and I remember a friend said to me, "Be careful." I asked him what he meant and he told me the story of another outspoken veteran who'd been invited to an antiwar rally. "He was talking about his time in war. He was screaming. His eyeballs were red. He was foaming at the mouth. Everybody loved it. They hooted, and hollered, and called out his name. And when he was done telling his story, they just let him go home – by himself – and stew in all those juices."

My friend shook his head disapprovingly and said to me, "Remember, the antiwar crowd cares about one thing – antiwar, not veterans." That may not have been an entirely accurate or fair assessment of the entire movement, but since coming home and having participated in a few rallies myself I've seen enough of the overzealous encouragement and standing ovations to confirm my friend's

suspicion.

On the other hand, having gotten to know so many of the people at those rallies, I suspect now that their oversight was usually not from being callous or manipulative, but from misunderstanding the nature of combat stress and the way it tends to surface itself.

OUTBURSTS REPRESENT PAIN

The crucial mistake being made, I think, by so many in the pro-war, antiwar and apolitical populations alike, is their assumptions that the outbursts of veterans are necessarily whole-hearted expressions of dissent. More likely, they are expressions of pain. It just so happens that their context is political and therefore their vocabulary is political as well.

And while these expressions may be more affirming to the Left than to the Right, they are, for neither side, exclusively political statements. I don't mean to invalidate the thoughtful contributions of veterans returning from war, including my own, just to point out that there is more going on in the consciousness of a combat veteran than politics.

The search, I would say, is foremost for some level of serenity. Any new ideology picked up along the way is a by-product of the process itself, and one which does not always endure. That's important to remember.

Veterans' experiences in war are extreme; their emotions are extreme; so their views will often come out extreme as well, initially at least. But their political destinations remain uncharted because until their pain has receded their maps are incompletely drawn.

For my part, I was reading a lot of radical texts when I came home from war and quoting a lot of radical thinkers. That's fine, I think, because radical politics is absolutely one of the products of war. It was an exercise of regurgitation, which had the cathartic benefit of purging a lot of my rage. But I wasn't doing any real thinking of my own.

COMPASSION IS REQUIRED

When I finally calmed down enough to contemplate the situation for myself, I found a place that was not exactly where I'd started out and not exactly where those of either political party might have liked to see me, but it was far more satisfying to me because it was a place of my choosing.

The antiwar community has done well in providing receptiveness and acceptance for veterans expressing negative reactions to war and to the politics which drove them there. What they could do better is to not take those expressions too much at their face. [The pro-war and "neutral" communities could probably stand to consider this point, too.]

For returning veterans, the healing process is the central activity on-going, not politics. They need time and room to speak their peace; they need the freedom to lash out verbally so they don't feel cornered into finding other, more destructive outlets. At some point most of them will emerge from the inner fray and be able to define more soberly their political disposition and place themselves in communities accordingly.

Until then, compassion is required from all – compassion, which includes both tolerance and restraint, both letting politics in and simultaneously keeping it out, and having both the courage to acknowledge the intrinsic presence of politics in combat stress and the wisdom to recognize the primacy of healing.

– The author is a former Marine captain and author of *Packing Inferno: The Unmaking of a Marine*

Church Boots Those Helping Nine Year Old Rape Victim

A 9-year-old girl in Brazil was impregnated with twins after being repeatedly raped by her stepfather. Doctors decided the child's uterus was too small to safely carry a baby, let alone two, and with the mother's permission performed an abortion.

The Catholic Church not only tried to stop the procedure, but also announced that all the adults involved in terminating the pregnancy will be excommunicated from the church – including the doctors and the girl's mother.

The Archbishop of Olinda and Recife, Jose Cardoso Sobrinho, told Brazil's TV Globo that the law of God was above any human law. He said the excommunication would not apply to the child because of her age, but would affect all those who ensured the abortion was carried out.

While the action of the church in opposing an abortion for a young rape victim is not unprecedented, it has attracted criticism from women's rights groups in Brazil.

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