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# THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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JUNE 10, 2009

## 2009 Legislative Performances

# Ten Best & Ten Worst

By Frosty Troy and Arnold Hamilton

The best thing that can be said about the 2009 Oklahoma Legislature is that it adjourned early.

With Republicans in control of both houses for the first time, a red light shone brightly over the Capitol, beckoning big money special interests to indulge their passion for corporate welfare and religious zealots their proclivity for prying into people's bedrooms.

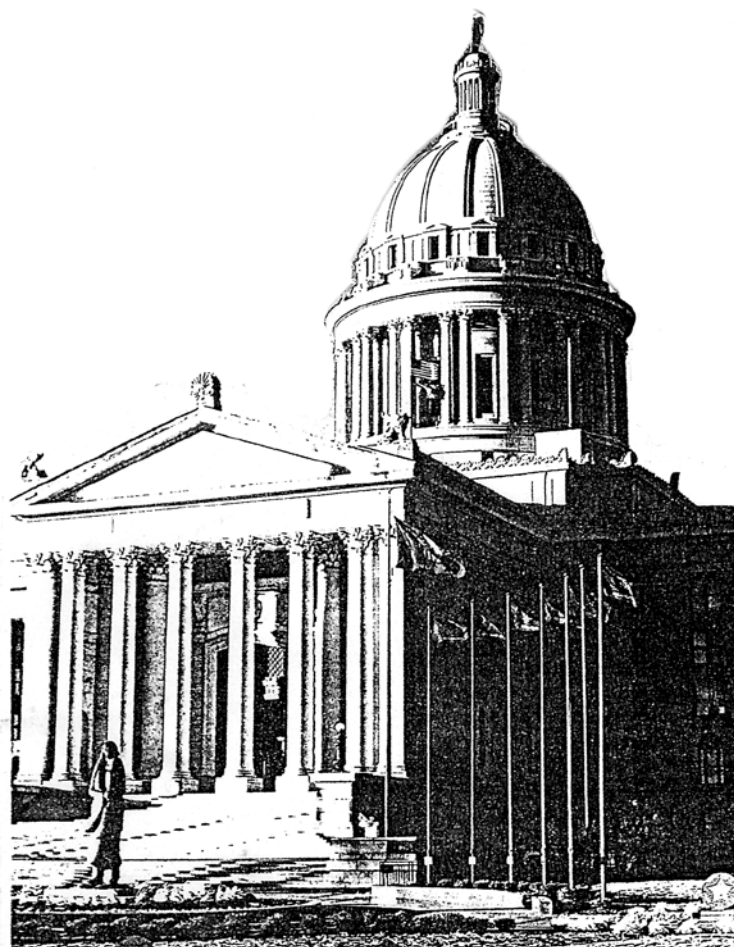
All that prevented a complete disaster was a united Democratic minority and Gov. Brad Henry's veto pen, though in the end he, too, cratered – not only approving a Ten Commandments monument for the Capitol grounds, but also signing a punitive anti-abortion bill that requires doctors to report patient data to the state, where it then can be viewed publicly.

The assault on public education by the pro-voucher, homeschooling crowd was slowed only by gubernatorial veto.

The campaign to cripple trial lawyers also was sidetracked by veto, resulting in a tort reform compromise that protects everyone except the taxpayers.

No one, however, could break the insurance industry's stranglehold on a GOP majority that refused to require insurers to cover treatment for autistic children. Twelve states – including Texas – now mandate such coverage. The last mandate imposed by Oklahoma lawmakers? Mammography – before Republicans took control of the House in 2004.

This year, already starving state services were starved some more, thanks to the economic downturn and \$720 million in recent tax cuts. It was a glorious scenario for the Grover Norquist cult devoted to shrinking government as much as possible – then drowning



the rest in a bathtub.

The only thing that saved public schools and other essential state services was federal stimulus money – \$630 million that probably won't be around next year.

The GOP majority followed the Tom DeLay-Karl Rove, scorched-earth script to near perfection: In the House, committee chairs were given absolute power over legislation and rules were repeatedly fudged for partisan advantage. In the Senate, committees were

stacked to ensure Democrats with expertise on specific issues weren't in position to derail the Republican agenda.

Despite the chicanery, some legislators seized the day, soaring above their colleagues and turning in virtuoso performances. Others, sadly, reinforced the all-too-familiar stereotype of the venal, redneck Oklahoma politician out for one thing only: himself.

Herewith, the Best 10 and Worst 10 performances of 2009:

### Senate Best

**Sen. Richard Lerblance**, D-Hartshorne, is an oddity – apparently one of the few senators who reads all the bills on the agenda, then asks meticulous questions, causing considerable heartburn. On more than one occasion an author has “laid over” a bill due to holes punched by Lerblance. The Republican leadership despises

him so much he went the entire session without being appointed to a conference committee.

**Sen. Jonathan Nichols**, R-Norman, has no peer when it comes to defending families, authoring legislation to bring to justice those guilty of domestic abuse. Oklahoma, the so-called buckle on the Bible Belt, leads the nation in domestic abuse and child murder. He authored Julie's Law, adding new misdemeanor crimes to those that can result in harvesting DNA. It convicted a man who murdered OU ballet student Julie Buskin in 1996.

**Sen. Harry Coates**, R-Seminole, is one-of-a-kind, refusing to march in lockstep with the majority Republicans when it's a matter of integrity, such as the last-minute bill to give unlimited power to a yet-to-be-named “information officer” over state computer tech statewide. He authored the study to help at-risk youth – 60,000 18- to 24-year-olds with only a high school diploma – dropouts, youth criminals and more than 1,700 homeless youth just in the capital.

**Sen. Debbe Leftwich**, D-OKC, is the widow of the late, great Sen. Keith Leftwich but she doesn't stand in his shadow. Not only has she authored major legislation, she's the fiercest debater among the minority senators. She routinely challenges the GOP's best, telling one Republican member, “relax, I only have 30 questions.” Her take-no-prisoners stance has emboldened some of the more sheepish Democrats.

**Sen. Kenneth Corn**, D-Poteau, is education's top advocate in the Legislature. He's no rubber stamp. The public education-hating GOP majority seeking to destroy public schools ran up against Corn's fact-filled debate. While some members were browsing through their computers, Corn was on his feet, detailing bills by Republican miscreants. Term limited, he's running for lieutenant governor. He will be sorely missed.

### Senate Worst

**Sen. Glenn Coffee**, R-OKC, blew it as the first Republican president pro tempore in state history. Not because  
See PERFORMANCES Page 19

# Observations

## Backfire

The Legislature approved House Joint Resolution 1014 which they hope will prevent the Oklahoma Education Association from forcing a vote of the people mandating regional average salaries for teachers.

House Joint Resolution 1014 sends to a vote of the people a resolution they hope will prevent the Legislature from being forced to come up with an estimated \$850 million.

OEA circulated an initiative petition that drew far more valid signatures than necessary to send it to a vote of the people in the next election.

Senate Majority Floor Leader Todd Lamb sponsored HJR 1014, saying citizens in other states should not determine how the Legislature spends taxpayer dollars.

He said, "The people sent us here to do a job," which is laughable since more than a half dozen of the governor's vetoes are being sent to a vote of the people for reversal.

OEA officials noted that despite Republican promises to elevate teachers out of the regional cellar – even below Arkansas – Oklahoma ranks 48th in teacher salaries and 47th in what is spent on a student's public school education.

Will the referendum be challenged in court? At press time, nobody knew. If both go to a vote of the people, who prevails?

## Whodunnit?

Despite Republican posturing, it was Democratic Gov. Brad Henry's veto that resulted in a fairly good tort reform bill.

The GOP version would have locked the door for ordinary Oklahomans, a nasty gift for corporate Oklahoma.

Henry signed into law a rewritten HB 1603 that will help improve the legal process without impeding a citizen's access to the courts.

The measure, which may yet wind up in the courts, is aimed at curbing frivolous lawsuits and reducing costs

associated with the justice system.

The Legislature overwhelmingly approved the improved measure in a bipartisan vote. Legislative Democrats, badly outnumbered, fought furiously against the original, GOP-created bill, guaranteeing that the veto would stick.

Only glitch in HB 1603 is a provision that when the cap of \$400,000 is exceeded, taxpayers will pick up the tab unless an insurance policy can be found to cover up to \$20 million.

Contrary to the State Chamber and their clones in Tulsa and OKC, there is no jackpot justice in Oklahoma, no epidemic of frivolous lawsuits. The state has one of the most conservative judiciaries in America.

HB 1603 will become effective on Nov. 1, 2009.

## A Miracle!

You mean somebody is saying something positive about public education? Whew!

State Superintendent Sandy Garrett said Oklahoma's online testing program has achieved an all-time high of administering 214,000 Achieving Classroom Excellence Act [ACE] state high school exams.

On May 6, the total number of on-line ACE exams taken this school year by Oklahoma middle and high school students – among the seven, ACE End-of-instruction [EOI] exams – topped an unprecedented 200,000.

The ACE exams are Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, U.S. History, Biology, English II and English III.

Let the Republican legislators know the state didn't rig the results. Pearson Inc. is the testing vendor with the state of Oklahoma's current contract for development, administration and scoring of its end of course ACE exams.

This is an accomplishment for Oklahoma and for schools complying with online testing mandates at significant expense of time and financial



resources.

"We heard from local officials that schools might not be able to implement online testing without significant state funding being appropriated to schools for this purpose. Yet school leaders have been innovative in maximizing all hardware and staffing resources," Garrett said. "We have proved we can do this."

Achieving Classroom Excellence Act of 2005, Gov. Brad Henry's major education initiative, required the state of Oklahoma to develop and administer high school exams in seven subject areas, and to administer all of the exams on-line by 2008-09.

This required the development of three new exams and a realignment of high school curriculum and state assessments.

The Act also mandates that beginning with the Class of 2012 – this year's high school freshmen – that all high school students pass four of seven exams in order to earn a high school diploma. Two of the four exams must be in Algebra I and English II.

The Republican-controlled Legislature sought to yank all testing from the education department and put it under a pet board – creating yet another bureaucracy from a GOP that mouths "smaller government" but had already enlarged state government.

## Puff, Puff

Let's hear it for some of the bravest among us – they have quit smoking. If you've never smoked you have no idea how hard it is.

Smoking is Oklahoma's leading preventable cause of death, killing more Oklahomans than alcohol, auto accidents, AIDS, suicides, murders, and illegal drugs combined.

Smoking costs Oklahoma more than \$2.7 billion in medical expenses and lost productivity each year – or an average of \$750 per Oklahoman.

State health officials announced that the adult smoking rate in Oklahoma dropped in 2008 to a historic low of less than 25%. Also, for the first time, there are as many former smokers in Oklahoma as current smokers.

The adult smoking rate in Oklahoma dropped from 28.7% in 2001 to 24.7% in 2008.

During the same time period, the proportion of former smokers in Oklahoma increased from 22.1% to 24.7%. Last year marked the first in which Oklahoma had an equal proportion of

former and current smokers.

The successes are attributed to several major actions including Master Settlement Agreement [MSA] signed with tobacco companies [1998]; a voter-approved constitutional amendment creating the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust [TSET] for investment and protection of most MSA dollars [2000]; smoking is banned in most Oklahoma workplaces [2003]; the Tobacco Helpline [2004] launched along with the Communities of Excellence program [2005]; voter-approved state tobacco tax increase [2008]; TSET launches Tobacco Stops With Me campaign.

Oklahoma is the only state to constitutionally protect the majority of the Master Settlement Agreement funds in an endowment to ensure a growing source of funding dedicated to improving health.

A new Oklahoma State Plan for Tobacco Use Prevention and Cessation calls for reducing tobacco use rates in Oklahoma to below the national rate of 20% by 2012.

Keep your fingers crossed.

## Duck Lady!

Bigots are out in force to oppose Supreme Court nominee Sonia Sotomayor, with that Oklahoma embarrassment Sen. Jim Inhofe leading the pack.

She is supremely qualified [no pun intended]. As a federal judge appointed by the first Bush, out of 3,000 rulings she has been reversed three times.

Her crime? She's a person of color. Worse yet, she's a woman!

In the dark corners of America, including Oklahoma, that means everything from anti-Americanism to inferiority. Look at the beating Hispanics have taken in the Oklahoma House of Representatives.

If you think Oklahoma is the reddest state in America by accident, guess again. President Obama was pounded here because he's black or because religious fundamentalists vote the pulpit, not qualifications.

Leading the hate parade is the Daily Disappointment, featuring nasty cartoons and quotes from the likes of "humorist" Jimmy Fallon.

J.E. McReynolds, editor of the Disappointment's editorial page, never misses an opportunity to preach bigotry, hatred and ignorance. Has he mastered all three?

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

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

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

# Observerscope

Tulsa's Republican Congressman John Sullivan has checked himself into the Betty Ford Center for treatment of acute alcoholism.

Dart: To Gov. Brad Henry, picking an ultra-conservative Republican, Mike Hunter, as executive director of the School Land Commission. Guess he couldn't find a qualified Democrat.

Oklahoma County DA David Prater has charged Jerome Ersland with murder. He shot the would-be robber in the head, leaving him unconscious. Then he went for another gun and shot the 16-year-old five times in the stomach. Self-defense?

Laurel: Our thanks to the Oklahoma Democratic Party for giving Frosty Troy the 2009 Carl Albert Award, which he shared with the late, great Congressman Mike Synar.

Republicans, controlling the State Legislature for the first time in history, took credit for everything but the Second Coming. Thanks to Gov. Brad Henry's veto pen, we give the session a "C."

Dart: To Glenn Coffee, R-OKC, lousiest Senate leader we've ever covered, telling the Guv to withdraw Reggie Whitten's appointment to the Regents for Higher Education because Whitten is a Democrat who raised funds for his party. Gag. Gag.

Folks better quit underestimating Sen. Randy Brogdon, R-Owasso, in his race for governor. His new web page immediately attracted nearly 1,000 volunteers statewide. He could be the spoiler.

Laurel: To Gov. and Mrs. Henry for co-chairing this year's Campaign for Justice, annual fund drive for Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma. The Legislature never adequately funded this vital program.

When he died in Tulsa at 44, Wayman Tisdale was working with his foundation to provide artificial limbs for those who can't afford them. Basketball was the least part of his greatness.

Dart: To Rep. Daniel Sullivan, R-Tulsa, for his vetoed bill to change the law that lets 10 citizens file a taxpayer demand against a city, county or school district. He would make it a percentage of the population. Sullivan could prance sitting down.

Republican Sen. Tom Coburn is seeking a second term – hardly a surprise. The most dangerous place in Washington is between Dr. Tom and a TV camera.

Laurel: To Sen. Debbie Leftwich, D-OKC, for her fierce debate against Sen. Todd Lamb's bill requiring a long questionnaire by a woman seeking an abortion.

Ouch! One of the first scandals we broke at the Capitol in the '60s involved corrupt loans by the School Land Commission. A new OSBI probe revolves around a huge sum of commission money allegedly missing.

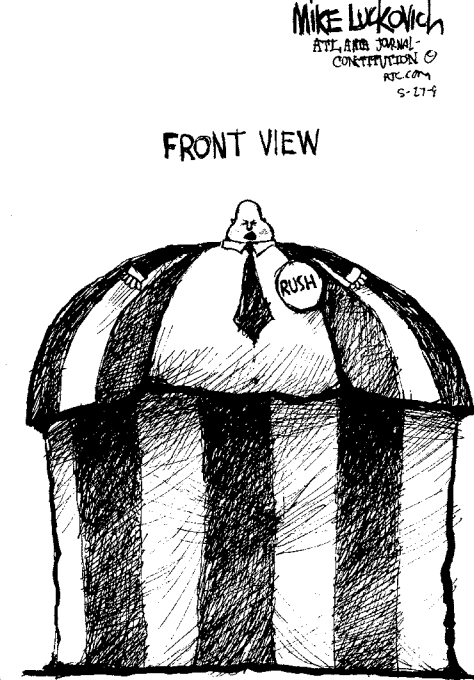
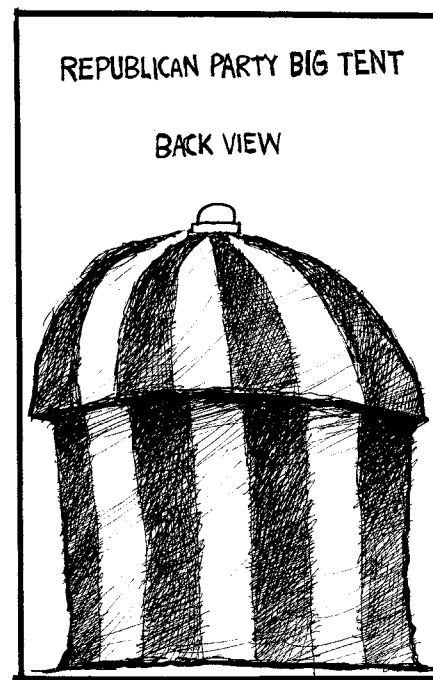
Dart: To never-ending loon Rep. Sally Kern, R-OKC, for her bill to prohibit teachers from hearing "political" speakers. Schools routinely invite local legislators for updates. The governor vetoed it.

U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe is furious at the Obama Administration for canceling a U.S. Army canon to be partially assembled in Elgin. He's an expert on canons, being a loose one himself.

Laurel: To Todd Goodman, 36, new chairman of the Oklahoma Democratic Party. His tireless work will include bringing more young people into the party.

Sen. Jonathan Nichols, R-Norman, is a quiet, effective legislator, winning passage of bills to protect children, including Julie's Law, enlarging the DNA base to include murder, rape and molestation of children.

Dart: To critics of U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn for his amendment allowing guns in national parks. Sounds terrible? Last year there were 41 rapes, 92 robberies, 16 kidnappings and nearly 6,000 other felonies in U.S. national parks.



MIKE LUKOVICH  
ART AND JOURNAL  
CONTRIBUTION  
OKC.COM  
5-17-9

In his quiet, brilliant way, Oklahoma-born Bill Moyers is helping change the social landscape of America with his insightful Friday night show on PBS.

Laurel: To Rep. Lee Denney for her winning – and factual – support of funding for the arts and public television. The Cushing Republican nailed House know-it-all Rep. Mike Reynolds, R-OKC.

At last! Oklahoma is No. 1 in one category. Tulsa leads the nation in erectile dysfunction. OKC is sixth. We know for a fact that Tulsa's GOP legislators can't get it up when it comes to public education.

Dart: To Sen. Ron Justice, R-Chickasha, for a lying press release accusing Democrats of playing politics with funding for senior citizen centers [REAP]. Wrong! The GOP leadership had zero funded it but had to restore it.

Neuro Night held at OKC's Fountains included a lecture on how the brain communicates with the bowels. Tell us Rush Limbaugh wasn't the speaker?

Laurel: To the forced compromise producing a passable tort reform bill. Only problem: The real loser is the Oklahoma taxpayer who will foot the bill for large judgments.

It would be funny if it didn't make Oklahoma look like a collection of squirrels – the Legislature passed a GOP resolution decrying the U.N.'s Convention on the Rights of Children.

Dart: To House Republicans, sitting on a slush fund of nearly \$7 million while grossly underfunding Legal Aid of Oklahoma, only hope of the penniless facing court action.

Reminder: The Catholic hierarchy is not The Church – the people in the pews are The Church. Clergy are servants. Only a minority of white Catholics voted for Obama – Hispanics put him in office. Barack Obama's speech at Notre Dame proved who the Christian is.

Laurel: To Sen. Jim Wilson, D-Tahlequah, for this gem during debate: "They [welfare moms] could have a husband who is no good or perhaps in the Legislature."

We have a mantra ready for the 2010 election featuring more than half a dozen power grabs by legislative Republicans: Vote No! Vote No! Vote No!

Dart: To OCU law professor Andrew Spiropoulos, criticizing the new tort reform law. He's the "lawyer" who wasn't licensed until the media unmasked him. He passed the bar? Make ours a double.

Huge overweight trucks have been pounding our highways to pieces while the Legislature looked the other way. New state of the art truck scale stations include three now and six more later.

Laurel: To Louis McGee, retiring after 35 years with the Corrections Department. On May 13, 1988, when he and seven other guards were taken hostage at Stringtown, he negotiated their way out after three days.

The Sooner Survey poll: Gov. Brad Henry wins approval of 80% while an identical 80% favor English-only, voter photo ID, term limits on statewide offices and school consolidation and 80% favor consolidation of school superintendents – whatever that means.

Dart: To the Black Helicopter crowd pushing a Sovereignty Resolution claiming the Feds have overstepped their bounds.

Rep. John Wright, R-Broken Arrow, term limited in 2010, will run for lieutenant governor. Sen. Kenneth Corn, D-Poteau, also is seeking the office. J.C. Watts took his name out of gubernatorial contention.

Laurel: To Consumer Reports for rating hospitals nationwide, noting that among Oklahoma's 124 hospitals "there is considerable room for improvement." Lawton's Southwestern Medical Center and Tahlequah's City Hospital, scored the lowest.

Among those at the ceremony when President Obama signed the credit card relief act was Janne O'Donnell of Norman who has worked for 10 years fighting to reform the way credit card companies operate on college campuses.

Dart: To the depraved critics of Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Change her sex and most of it would go away. Even some Democrats will never forgive her for being a successful woman.

**THE OKLAHOMA Observer**


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# Letters

Editor, The Observer:

An open letter to state Rep. Sally Kern:

You must be clapping and smiling these days to think that the Ten Commandments may be put on the Capitol grounds. But what for?

The Ten Commandments should be lived and carried in the hearts and minds of people, but not as a symbol of our government. More to the point of historic significance, for the efforts of those who "represent" us, would be a replica of the Mayflower, which brought people to our shores that they might have a voice; or the Statue of Liberty – give me your tired, your poor, your hungry; or even the Pioneer Woman [in Ponca City] for love and courage. I also find it interesting that we put a very artistic replica of an Indian atop our Capitol dome, and then you want to remind people of the commandment "you shall not kill."

Please consider spending more of your time in the House debating issues to care for our state in ways of security and education for all – not just those who profess your personal agenda.

Annette Payne  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Re: Talking Points Memo's mention that "For the first Catholic to serve on the court, you've got to go all the way back to Chief Justice Roger Taney [appointed by Andrew Jackson]."

Interesting judge, that one. Taney [rhymes with "brawny"] was the justice who handed down the infamous Dred Scott decision in 1857, with its pro-slavery message that put us on a collision course with the Civil War. Incidentally, the only county in America that honors him as its namesake is Taney County, MO, in the heart of John Ashcroft country [http://www.co.taney.mo.us].

So the next time some dog-whistling anti-choicer brings up the Dred Scott decision, we ought to ask why its issuer is honored in supposedly pro-life Taney County, home of Branson and Silver Dollar City.

Eddy W. Collins  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

It's a sorry mess for the remaining, and dwindling number of Republicans that the two poster boys for their party are Rush Limbaugh and Dick Cheney, two of the most nationally unpopular and polarizing figures in America. Rush has to continue his daily rants and divisiveness, he's got a multi-million dollar contract to do

just that, but Dick Cheney?

When Cheney left office he had an approval rating hovering around 13%. It's doubtful his "Torture is Good Tour" is doing much to improve on that mark.

The same shadowy, fearful man, who spent eight years in "an undisclosed location," now is splashed across the media on a daily basis spinning his version of his terms. It's a great puzzle that he would think he'll be effective. It's challenging to find anyone that has less credibility than Dick Cheney. Volumes have been written, and proven, about his flawed logic, his false claims, his absurd predictions, and now he wants to be taken seriously.

It's understandable that he'd like to re-define the policies he helped create, supported, and played a direct role in. After all, it was Dick Cheney that led the charge to start a needless war based on 100% false claims, that's caused over 4,000 American deaths. It was Dick Cheney that pushed for sacrificing our moral standards and lowered America into the sewer of torture as an official policy. He'd like to put a smiley face on his role in those acts, but creating a label like "enhanced interrogation" is like calling a bank robbery a "forced withdrawal." It is what it is.

His daily arrival on our television sets only serves to remind us what was wrong with our nation, which was given a course correction in the 2006 and 2008 national elections. Smarter leaders in the GOP realize this, but their party is in such disarray they can't find a way to simply tell Dick Cheney to return to his "undisclosed locations" and let us get on with fixing these messes. So a man with a 13% approval rating and zero credibility will continue to show up on our television sets. I suspect Americans would rather see more Billy Mayes than Dick Cheney.

Kenny Belford  
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Black curly-haired dog B.C. [Black Cloud] once lived at a college town until owner-son's graduation. Suddenly, the son's parents had a new dog.

Before leash laws, very-smart-mutt B.C. daily accompanied his new Pa to the post office two or three blocks away. Along the way, inside a chain-link fenced residence, resided four or five dachshunds. B.C. would casually trot outside the fence, maybe barking once, while inside the yap-yapping long-doggies were going bonkers.

These days, a very smart ex-Veep,



Dick Cheney, is strolling from retirement to the political fence, making sounds that have caused talk-show hosts to yammer and wrangle in response to Mr. Cheney's utterances. 'Tis fascinating watching political show hosts and their pro and con guests all talking at once; closed caption providers just freeze the words until order has been restored.

Mr. Cheney's main concern – President Obama's measures for national safety from terrorists – is a win-win situation. If America is once again attacked, the Veep can say, "OK, you didn't heed my warning to take steps of prevention." If the U.S. is not attacked, Mr. Cheney can say, "OK, you heeded my warning to take steps of prevention."

Does this political dialogue bode well for America's political atmosphere, much ado about something? Or is it little about little?

Newspaper Publisher Horace Greeley [1800s] was a stickler: "News" should be considered a plural word. A reporter asked, "Is there any news." Greeley: "Are there any news." The reporter was ready: "Not a new."

Americans observing the press and politicians can sing the Roaring 1920s vibrant, zesty song, "Ain't We Got Fun."

Cecil Acuff  
Perkins

Editor, The Observer:

Well, Frosty, you've gone and done it. You've become part of the problem instead of being part of the solution. [Frosty's Notebook, Guns Out Of Control, 5.25.09]

I'm not a friend of the NRA, and when they lie about the percentage of guns in Mexico that have their origin in America, that lie gets repeated in the barber shops, coffee shops, etc., around the country. The last time the NRA sent me a membership application I returned a note in their postage paid envelope stating that as long as they used fear to achieve their goals I would not consider membership. But Frosty, when you cite guns as the source of problems that obviously have other more direct sources, you play into the hands of the NRA.

For example, you state "Would that father [Washington state case] really have been able to kill his four young daughters and his young son without a gun?" Give me a break!!! If a father

decides to kill his kids he doesn't need a gun. A gun is not the problem, the father is. When you tell about your brother Johnny, breaking into a gun cabinet and shooting off the hand of his friend Pat while practicing fast-draws, you are describing a parenting and behavior problem.

Maybe you should get on your soapbox to ban TV and movie shows that glamorize fast-draw shooting, which as I understand it never happened in real life in the old west. Real people aren't that dumb. Poor Matt Dillon wouldn't stand a chance against your pen.

If, for example, a mother leaves a child in a running car while she dashes into a store, and the child gets behind the wheel and puts the car into drive and runs over an old lady in the parking lot, would you blame the "car culture" or the car itself? Of course not, but that is exactly what you are doing with some of the gun examples you cite.

Why don't you take a look at those countries that have a higher percentage of gun ownership than the U.S., and then look at the level of gun-related problems in those countries, and then come back and convince your readers that gun culture problems are directly related to the number of guns in the population. Even you are not that convincing.

Lee Matthiesen  
Grove

Editor, The Observer:

Recent news releases indicate that the Republicans have a new name for Democrats: Democratic Socialists. I don't think it's quite fair for them to usurp what should be the prerogative of U.S. Democrats, but if they insist on renaming my party, we should [fair is fair] be able to rename their party.

My choice for their new name is Republican Nazis. Of course, they will scream bloody murder, claiming that there is no justification for this. However, if one looks up the definition of Nazi, it states that it is a coalition of government and industry.

Does anyone in their right mind seriously doubt that the Republicans work hand-in-hand with Wall Street and large multi-national corporations? Also, industry is anti-union; so are Republicans. 'Nuf said!

Jerry Gowman  
Oklahoma City

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## Frosty's Notebook

# Autism

Autism is a condition that defies everything considered as normal in the development of children.

Lives are wasted. Families are devastated. Public schools are overwhelmed. How can this menace be addressed?

In one of the most sickening acts of the Republican-led state Legislature, Oklahoma autistic children were not only told no but hell no.

In the 1980s it was estimated that five children in 10,000 were diagnosed with autism. Today that figure is one in 150, not because of better reporting. It is an absolute increase.

Sen. Jay Paul Gumm, D-Durant, wouldn't take no for an answer, continually shaming what passes for leadership in the State Senate. He warned that the issue isn't going away: "I will be back."

The House leadership even shopped around for an "expert" who said it would be too costly to insurance companies. In fact, it would be less than a 2% added coverage.

What is autism? Children that seem to be growing normally, meeting the developmental milestones, suddenly begin to lose the skills they have acquired and their budding vocabulary.

Toddlers begin to push away from bewildered parents. Most develop repetitive behaviors that seem totally unrelated to the real world. Some children develop diarrhea and must be changed six to 10 times a day.

Sometimes they can't sleep at night. Sometimes they develop seizures. Symptoms vary but whatever they are, they persist to the dismay of parents and teachers alike.

I paid little attention until autism invaded my own extended family, a handsome boy whose treatment would have bankrupted his young parents had not a kind physician said he would keep billing their insurance for treatment of symptoms.

Why wouldn't Republican legislative leaders approve Gumm's legislation requiring coverage? On this and other issues the GOP proved that it is owned body and soul by the insurance industry. Check their campaign contributions – it's pay for play.

Rep. Mike Brown, D-Tahlequah, noted sarcastically that these same insurance companies cover erectile dysfunction.

What causes autism? Some experts believe it results from neurological damage to the brain caused by a run-away inflammation cycle.

Others say that autism begins in the gastrointestinal tract with only secondary damage to the brain.

A third possibility? Still others say that children's bodies lose the capacity to detoxify and are overwhelmed with the poisons of modern society.

There is no known cause, thus no cure as research continues. What is known: beginning medical care early can greatly reduce symptoms.

Oklahoma parents of children with autism haunted the halls of the State Capitol to no avail. Some brought their autistic children, hoping to force Republicans to acknowledge the problem. No such luck.

Autism was first identified in 1943. Then so-called experts said it was caused



by "refrigerator moms" – emotionally-cold mothers who didn't show babies the intimacy they needed.

We've come a long way since then in understanding the causes of autism. It's not a mental illness to be treated behaviorally, it's a medical problem with behavioral overtones.

When we say autism is a medical problem, we know that 70% to 80% of autistic children have gastrointestinal complications. Gastritis and esophagitis are common.

Today we know that diets and food supplements benefit children with autism.

In the 1980s physicians found that gluten free/casein free diets benefit autistic children. Vitamins can also help, especially vitamin B12, a detoxifier that fights a build-up of toxins that cause symptoms of autism.

My research on the Internet revealed that Colostrum from cows improve the body's immune system which fights that vicious cycle of inflammation in the brain and bowel.

Fresh foods that are less processed benefit because they have less of the toxins that compromise the immune system.

Psychoactive medications are used when behaviors can't be controlled otherwise.

Applied Behavior Analysis [ABA] is a means of attacking the symptoms of autism through controlling behaviors.

Parents despair as they watch their children slip away into a different world. The wall of silence seems impenetrable.

If you vote Republican, for autistic children's sake oust those heartless legislators who worship at the shrine of insurance.

– *If you or someone you know faces autism, please read Changing the Course of Autism by Bryan Jepson.*

## New Breed Of Republicans

Oklahomans who are paying attention realize that the unlamented Republican Legislature is owned body and billfold by the insurance industry.

Unfortunately, half the households in Oklahoma don't take a daily newspaper or they would know that the politics of corruption, payback and retaliation are registered trademarks of the Legislature's new Republican majority.

Senate Minority Leader Charlie Laster, D-Shawnee, put together a list. It is by no means complete:

- A rule change that specifically protects insurance companies in the Senate by requiring senators to jump through bureaucratic red tape to have a bill heard that would reform the insurance industry.

- Removing Sen. Tom Ivester, D-Elk City, an Afghan War veteran, from a task force that studies the education needs of Oklahoma military families, days after GOP Senate President Pro Tem Glenn Coffee called Ivester an "alarmist" for speaking out about possible public prison closings in his district.

- Removing veteran Sens. Kenneth Corn, Richard Leblance and Tom Adelson from committees which they previously chaired, calling them "obstructionists."

- Refusing to hear legislation that would require insurance companies to cover the diagnosis and treatment of autism; routine medical care for Oklahomans who choose to participate in life-saving clinical trials; the right for injured workers to choose their own doctor and putting doctors, not insurance company executives in charge of patient's health care needs; and legislation that would have allowed Oklahomans to sue insurance companies for arbitrarily raising insurance rates.

- Failure to meet the "Fund Education First" April 1 deadline, leaving thousands of Oklahoma teachers to wonder if they will have a job next school year.

- Legislation that protects insurance companies and giant corporations by making Oklahomans travel out-of-state to seek justice for negligent acts that caused them harm.

- Passing legislation that would bring divisive Washington, DC-style politics into Oklahoma by requiring Worker's Compensation judges to be confirmed by the State Senate.

We've covered some thoroughly rotten Democratic leaders, including an out-

ed Speaker of the House, but none equal today's GOP leaders.

These are not Henry Bellmon or Dewey Bartlett Republicans. Most are meaner than snakes, flaunting their support of religion and family values – neither of which they follow.

Please don't take our word for it – do your own research. By all means, follow the money.

## Rightwing Attack

Focus on the Family, James Dobson's political operation, and his pals in the Republican Party relish weakening unions, thereby crippling the Democratic Party.

Dobson is publicizing a lawsuit he hopes will pave the way for more rightwing Christians to opt out of paying union dues – especially to the National Education Association.

When a worker in Indiana expressed his religious objections to paying dues to the United Auto Workers [UAW], the union refused to allow him to opt out. Attorney Brad Dacus, who heads the Pacific Justice Institute, is representing the worker in a lawsuit against the UAW, alleging a violation of the Civil Rights Act and the First Amendment.

"If we prevail in this case, which we expect to, we hope to liberate literally millions and millions of Christian workers from having to compromise on their faith in the future and have to support causes and candidates for office that they don't agree with through their unions," Dacus said.

"Instead, their union dues will be given to a ministry [Focus on the Family?], a church, even a charity that they believe in that does indeed comply with their religious beliefs and convictions."

One of the beliefs they hold is the right to scab – living off the fruits of collective bargaining without paying their share for those successes.

# Republicans Ignore Conflict Of Interest

After refusing to hear legislation that would have afforded health care services and consumer protections for hard-working Oklahoma families, the Oklahoma House Republican leadership granted special treatment to one legislator serving special interests.

"The speaker was using the rules to expand his power by making special exceptions," said Democratic Floor Leader Mike Brown, D-Tahlequah. "It seems as though all the exceptions they were making were designed to push through laws for special interest groups."

Brown raised a question on the House floor, challenging a Republican legislator. Rep. Dan Sullivan, R-Tulsa, authored 14 bills that passed through committee.

## EIGHT BILLS IS HOUSE LIMIT

According to House rules, no legislator can author more than eight bills unless the speaker makes an exception.

"I can't think of any other time this kind of exception was made and certainly not for legislation designed to protect special interest groups," Brown said.

"This demeans the duties of the House. We're here to serve the people of our state, not just the people who can pay for an exception to the rules."

Sullivan, an attorney who represents doctors, was a thorn in the Democrats' side during the unlamented session. His so-called tort reform bill was vetoed by the governor. A genuine reform bill then passed and is law.

## CONSTITUTION IS IGNORED?

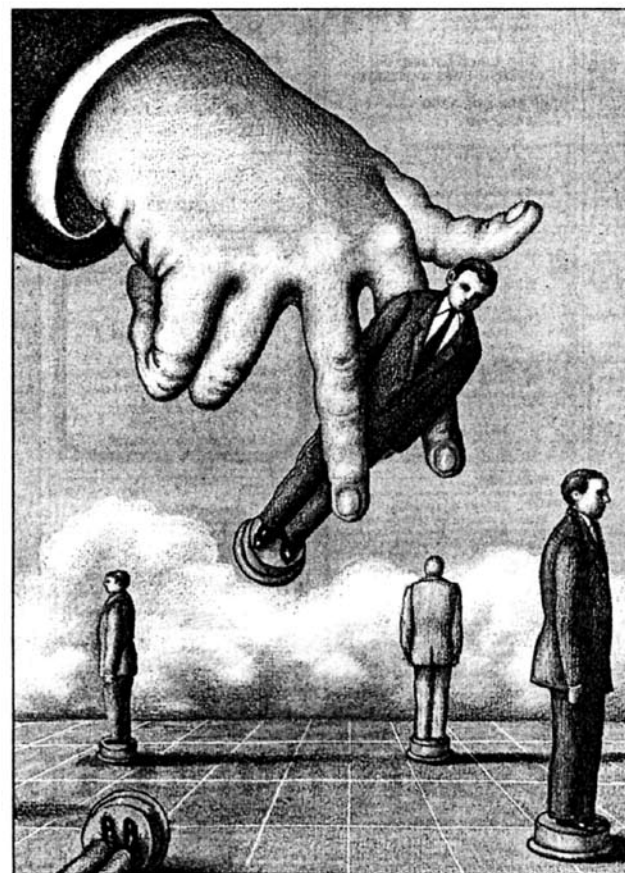
The state Constitution addresses conflict of interest, requiring a member to stand and declare the conflict and refrain from voting on the bill. It has seldom been honored through the years.

Among the bills Speaker Chris Benge, R-Tulsa, granted special authorization were those to create an accountant-client privilege to protect corporate executives, legislation to expand immunity for insurance companies and legislation to lessen accountability standards for negligent corporations.

"It's more important for Speaker Benge to hear a bill that would stack the deck even more in favor of negligent corporations than to consider solutions important to everyday Oklahomans," Brown said.

## CORPORATE IMMUNITY BILLS

"Republican leadership expanded their power over legislation so more corporate immunity bills get heard, but they killed a bill to make prescription drugs



more affordable."

The House Republicans killed legislation to help small businesses keep costs down by adding their numbers to the Do Not Call List. They killed a bill to give consumers greater choices in energy costs.

"It's obvious to me that the Republican leadership is more interested in protecting corporations than fighting for everyday Oklahomans. It's disappointing, but it's obvious," he said.

Brown pointed out that Speaker Benge refused to designate on paper which bills have been granted an exception and which have not, making it unclear when he's choosing to exercise his power and when the rest of the rules apply.

"Unless we are notified when the Speaker is willfully making an exception, we have no idea where this will stop," Brown said.

"Will Speaker Benge simply allow everyone in his caucus to author as many bills as they want? If so, we may as well just throw out the rule book."

# Ethics Commission Short-Changed Again

Lawmakers are nothing if not consistent when it comes to the Oklahoma Ethics Commission.

They've never properly funded it. And they weren't about to start this year.

The commission's budget was cut 7% - the same imposed on many other agencies in this tight budget year. But wait, legislators assured, it wasn't that bad: It actually was less than 7% if you consider that lawmakers permanently built last year's one-time \$50,000 appropriation into the commission's budget.

Classic legislative double-speak.

The truth is, the Ethics Commission - the public's watchdog - is being starved to death.

Even though the workload has increased five-fold since it was created as a statutory agency in 1986, the commission still only has seven employees. And a \$657,000 budget for 2009-10 isn't going to give it the freedom to grow enforcement fangs.

Which is just how lawmakers like it.

The now-constitutional agency is so shorthanded and underfunded it cannot afford to prosecute civil penalties in district court, leaving it with no alternative but to slap an offender's wrist by issuing a reprimand.

Legislators from both parties want the illusion of a watchdog agency ensuring a pristine political system, but they don't want one with any real bite.

How do we know? First, there's a long tradition of underfunding the agency. Second, look at this year's legislative action: The Senate approved the miserly budget on a 44-0 vote, the House by a 93-4 margin.

Interestingly, all four votes against the budget appropriation were from Republicans: Reps. Mike Reynolds of OKC, Paul Wesselhoft of Moore, Doug Cox of Grove and Mike Ritze of Broken Arrow.

Only Reynolds urged the House to bolster the Ethics Commission budget, noting that with this year's appropriation, it "will even have less ability to properly do" its job.

Here's an idea: Maybe it's time for those interested in good, clean, fair government - Common Cause? League of Women Voters? Are you listening? - to band together and circulate an initiative petition, spelling out a permanent and secure funding source that will ensure the Oklahoma Ethics Commission has adequate resources.

Oklahomans voted loud-and-clear nearly 20 years ago to elevate the Ethics Commission to a constitutional agency, beyond the reach of legislative whims. Given the chance, the voters most likely would take the commission's funding out of the Legislature's hands as well.

# THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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# At-Risk Youth To Be Scrutinized

Senate Concurrent Resolution 32 by Sen. Harry Coates creates the Task Force on Youth Transitioning Into Adulthood to look at why so many of Oklahoma's children are falling through the cracks.

"Oklahoma does a great job of helping at-risk youth under the age of 18 through various programs including educational, drug treatment, mental health, rehabilitation and medical services," said Coates, R-Seminole.

"The problem is that these services stop when they turn 18, and a majority of them aren't able to make that important transition to independent living. Therefore, all the millions we spent on them as children are wasted because they continue to be wards of the state since they don't know how to support themselves."

## COSTS CAN SOAR WITHOUT EARLY WORK

The senator explained that depending on the level of care, the financial investment by the state can range from \$8,260 for a young person in foster care for one year to over \$108,000 for one in juvenile institutional care.

He fears that without help with the transition into adulthood, the state's money will be wasted.

"These children have no positive influences in their lives to teach them about right and wrong, how to work hard to achieve their goals in life, or just the basics of how to be an independent, productive citizen," said Coates.

"It's a problem that costs the taxpayers millions every year in public assistance simply because they've never been taught what they're supposed to do as adults, and that's why it's imperative that this task force find a solution to this growing problem."

## YOUTH GOING UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

The task force will study those youth who are currently in or are preparing to exit the juvenile justice or foster care system or who experience conditions in their daily lives that place their physical and mental health and safety at risk.

They will look at policies and programs to assist these youth through education, behavioral health, social services, housing, and employment services.

According to the Oklahoma Institute of Child Advocacy [OICA], which requested the legislation, Oklahoma has a tremendous problem with at-risk youth transitioning into adulthood as do other states.

## 60,000 TROUBLED YOUTH

There are over 60,000 young Oklahomans, ages 18-24, who have only a high school diploma and who are neither in school or the military, and are unem-



played.

Fewer than 43% of youth exiting the juvenile justice system return to school after their release, and another 16% drop out within five months.

The Oklahoma City Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force reported there are at least 1,700 homeless children in Oklahoma City Public Schools.

## TRAGIC STATISTICS QUOTED

The OICA also conducted a study of youth aging out of foster care in the Midwest and found that:

- Fewer than one-third were enrolled in an education or training program, and only 11% were enrolled in college.
- Fewer than half were employed, and for those who were, employment was sporadic, rarely providing financial security.
- Less than half received independent living services and only 50% received education services.
- Twenty-five percent didn't have enough to eat and one in seven has been homeless.
- Nearly half of the females were pregnant by age 19 and were more than twice as likely to have at least one child.
- Thirty-three percent had been arrested in the last year and 23.7% spent at least one night in a correctional facility.

- For more information, contact Sen. Coates at 405.521.5547

# Rural Oklahoma Is Big '09 Session Winner

Rural Oklahoma made out like bandits in the 2009 session of the Legislature.

By working together in a tight budget year, rural legislators were able to accomplish agenda items that strengthen rural Oklahoma. The Rural Economic Action Plan [REAP] was adequately funded, but only after an outcry from legislative Democrats.

Increased funding for improvement of county roads and bridges was accomplished thanks to Uncle Sam's stimulus money.

Many areas of the state will receive road money, strengthening Oklahoma's public safety.

Legislation, signed by the governor, provides for the repair of obsolete and structurally deficient county bridges.

## PRIVATE PROPERTY RIGHTS

Rural legislators vowed to protect private property rights, thanks to HB 1482 protecting farmers and ranchers from nuisance actions if the farm or ranch has been in place for two years or more.

HB 2154 strengthens penalties for trespassing on certain lands.

Oklahoma's trucking permit system will be more efficient as the result of a bill allowing the Department of Public Safety to issue an annual vehicle permit for the movement of oversize and overweight loads that cannot be reasonably

dismantled.

Access to healthcare professionals and facilities was won by passing legislation saving the Oklahoma State University Medical Center in Tulsa.

## MEDICAL SHORTAGE ADDRESSED

With the continual shortage of doctors and other medical professionals in Oklahoma, the new law assures health care access for rural Oklahomans statewide.

A compromise tort reform bill became law while the Legislature also worked to enhance access to ambulance and fire services in rural Oklahoma thanks to the hard work of Rep. Paul Roan, D-Tishomingo.

SB 1166 stabilizes and enhances Oklahoma's 911 system.

Rural legislators succeeded in reauthorizing the previous bond funding for conservation structures, with the \$25 million in bonds to be sold. The money will go for repairs on structures such as flood-control dams throughout rural Oklahoma.

Also protected were agricultural tax exemptions to ensure agricultural productions and contributions will effectively continue throughout the state.

In a tight budget year, the Rural Republican Caucus also took credit for "protecting public schools from forced consolidation..."

# Flood Control Dams Worth Investment

The heavy rains that hit the state in late April and early May again showed the importance of Oklahoma's 2000 upstream flood control dams.

Trey Lam, president of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, said without the flood control protection system over \$20 million in additional flood damage would have occurred.

"These huge rain events again show the benefit our state receives every year from our flood control structures," Lam said.

"Oklahoma has more flood control dams built under the USDA watershed program than any other state in the union."

Designed to stop the dangerous flash floods, Lam said that these dams, in both rural and urban settings, have for over 50 years protected Oklahomans from the ravages of out of control water, saving countless lives and billions of dollars.

"Each year the state of Oklahoma is saved over \$70 million in damage that doesn't happen because these dams are in place," Lam said.

"We should be proud of this vital piece of public infrastructure that does so much to protect our state. Often we don't think about the benefit these dams provide."

While the system works as designed, Lam said that over 1,000 of these flood

control dams will be past their design life in the next 10 years and will be in need of rehabilitation.

In addition, over \$25 million in operation and maintenance needs are on hold due to funding levels at the State Conservation Commission.

Many dams were also damaged by the heavy flooding that hit Oklahoma in 2007.

In an effort to help address these and other issues the Legislature and Gov. Brad Henry have authorized the \$25 million bond issue for conservation repair that was signed into law last year.

Of this bond, over \$15 million will be dedicated to the rehabilitation, repair and maintenance of flood control structures. These state dollars will also go to match over \$14 million in federal rehabilitation dollars that were included in the recently passed federal stimulus package.

According to Clay Pope, executive director of OACD, while this represents "a huge shot in the arm" for conservation, concerns still remain about funding to maintain our state's flood control structures.

"They showed real leadership and foresight in reauthorizing the \$25 million bond issue for conservation repair," Pope said.

# **Who Did The GOP 'We Love Coffee' Ad?**

*By Karen Webb*

An ad says shadowy groups are attacking Republican Senate leader Glenn Coffee. He didn't pay over \$28,000 in taxes owed. We do not know how he managed to owe that much on the salary he had. Then we found out he files contribution reports at the Capitol when he feels like it.

Coffee can't afford his taxes, but there is a group that can afford a lot of airtime on his behalf. They claim shadowy groups are attacking Coffee because he wants tort reform.

I have seen no evidence in any of these commercials that there is a problem with frivolous lawsuits in Oklahoma, but they passed a bill for voter ID and there has been no documented voter fraud in Oklahoma – and the list just goes on and on.

Talk about your shadowy groups: Who or what is Action Plan Oklahoma? They are paying for all the ads. Of course they aren't the first shadowy group to come to the aid of Glenn Coffee.

Well, folks, Action Plan Oklahoma claims to be nonpartisan, not for profit and dedicated to enhancing Oklahoma's economic and political future.

I haven't found out who donates to the group, but I did find out something about the group. They claim to have assistance from around the country.

## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Charles "Chip" Mullens. He is the general counsel for Crusader Energy Group, but he is a good corporate attorney and not one of those trial attorneys mentioned in the ad that are out to get Glenn Coffee.

"However, given the significant decrease in commodity prices and resulting actual and forecasted cash flow and financial results for 2009, management anticipates that the Company may not be able to remain in compliance with financial and other covenants under its credit facilities."

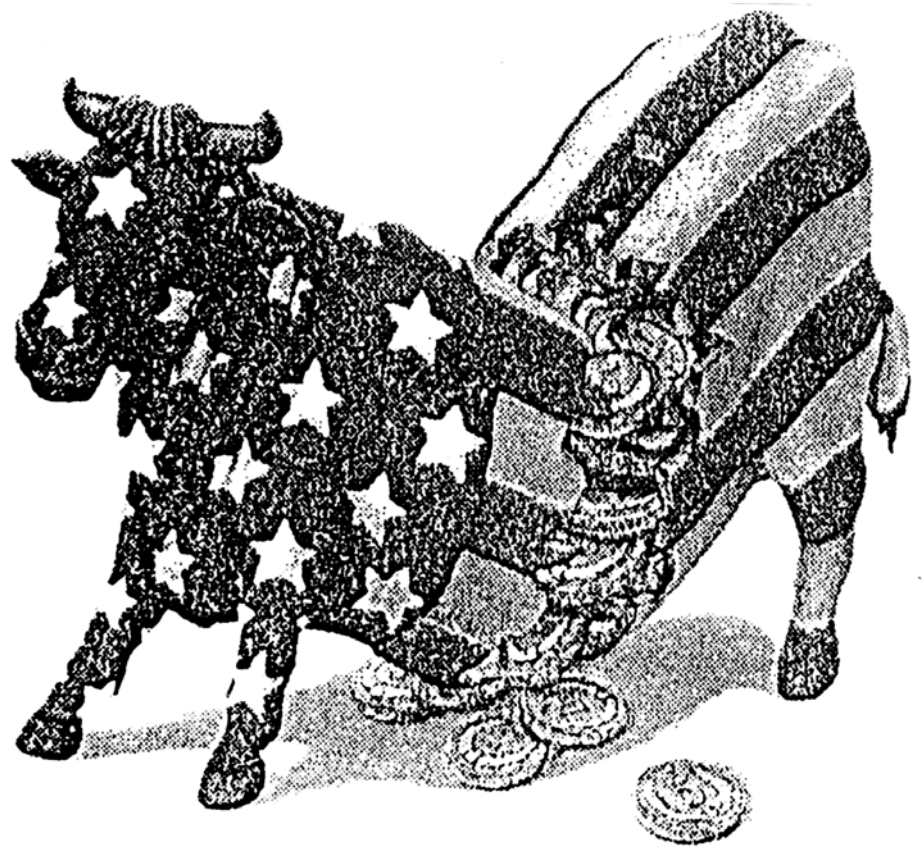
In fact they may be going Chapter 11, but they aren't giving up hope. In their press release they have "forward-looking statements" within federal securities laws and regulations.

They have predictions which use words like will, should, could, plans, expects, likely, anticipates, intends, believes, estimates, may and similar words. Now doesn't that remind you of the ad? Do you suppose Chip wrote any of this?

"There is no assurance that the estimates and predictions contained in our forward-looking statements will occur or be achieved as predicted."

## **DESCRIBED UNDER RISK FACTORS**

"Further information on risks and uncertainties affecting our business is described under Risk Factors and are available in our reports filed with the SEC



which are incorporated by this reference as though fully set forth herein. We undertake no obligation to publicly update or revise any forward-looking statement."

We will not revise any forward-looking statement? Now for the non-partisan evidence from OpenSecrets.org: Sen. Jim Inhofe \$1,580, George W. Bush 2004 \$1,000, RNC 2004 \$500.

Terry Simonson, Tulsa. Simonson is also an attorney, but not one of those evil ones in the ad. He has run for mayor of Tulsa and he is a Republican, but I didn't find any donations. He was a chief deputy to a county commissioner who lost the office, but apparently Simonson doesn't want to leave and has kept his salary of \$93,000. The new commissioner isn't keeping him but, "Terry [Simonson] is still an employee of the board and his duties and responsibilities are still being considered," said County Commission Chairman John Smaligo [ex-GOP House member].

"Simonson's annual salary is \$93,059, the same amount paid to Paul Wilkening, who serves as chief deputy for all three commissioners. Simonson, who is an attorney, continued to do private legal work while serving as Miller's chief deputy, according to court documents obtained by the Tulsa World in December.

"Simonson has insisted that his private legal work was done after hours and on weekends and that he had other attorneys making court appearances for

See COFFEE Page 9

# **Ritze's Capitol Monument Hardly A Certainty**

*By Walter Jenny Jr.*

Well, here we go again. The Republican-controlled Oklahoma Legislature, knowing what's best for us, has approved the installation of the Ten Commandments on the State Capitol grounds and persuaded Gov. Brad Henry to silently approve it.

Republican Rep. Mike Ritze of Broken Arrow has pushed this idea since discovering that Oklahoma was not displaying the Decalogue like Texas does. He took it upon himself to right this wrong, even going so far as to pay for it himself so no tax dollars would be used.

First, a little background. A group called the Fraternal Order of Eagles had been distributing paper copies of the King James Version of the Ten Commandments since 1951 as part of a program to fight juvenile delinquency. Apparently Cecil B. DeMille, who directed the movie *The Ten Commandments*, decided to have their artwork carved in stone and donate them to communities around the country. The project turned into a promotion for the movie, as actors from the movie appeared at dedications of some of the markers, and FOE members were encouraged to sell tickets to the movie.

## **MARKERS IN 34 STATES, CANADA**

At least 145 of the markers were erected in 34 states and Canada between 1955 and 1985. Many remain, including one at the Texas State Capitol. After four decades, a Texas lawyer challenged its presence on public land.

On June 27, 2005, the Supreme Court ruled 5-4 in favor of the Texas monument and 5-4 against a related Kentucky display, with Justice Stephen Breyer changing his vote. Understanding the subtle distinction between the two cases may help explain why an Oklahoma monument is on shaky constitutional footing.

In the Kentucky case, county officials posted copies of the Ten Commandments in two county courthouses. After being challenged, they twice added other religious documents, and defiantly passed resolutions affirming the importance of the Ten Commandments to Kentuckians.

To favor one faith over another, or adherence to religion generally, clashes with society's demand for "tolerance that respects the religious views of all citizens," the Court wrote in declaring the display unconstitutional. By showing a purpose to favor religion, the government "sends the... message to... nonadherents 'that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community, and an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members....'"

In contrast, the Texas FOE marker stood for four decades with 17 secular monuments and 21 historical markers on 22 acres around the Capitol building commemorating the "people, ideals, and events that compose Texan identity."

Rep. Ritze says his display will be constitutional because the same display was approved in Texas. Not so fast. If the purpose is to promote religion, it's unconstitutional. If the purpose is historical or secular, part of a broader educational context, it may pass muster.

Where are the other secular monuments to the rule of law in Oklahoma? What about the Iroquois Confederacy that gave us three branches of government? Where is the educational nature? What of the long-standing acquiescence by the community, or the FOE involvement?

The 2005 cases did not reference their state constitutions, but in Oklahoma our Constitution may pose a problem. Article II Section 5 is pretty clear: "No public money or property shall ever be appropriated, applied, donated, or used, directly or indirectly, for the use, benefit, or support of any sect, church, denomination, or system of religion, or for the use, benefit, or support of any priest, preacher, minister, or other religious teacher or dignitary, or sectarian institution as such."

## **WARS FOUGHT, CHURCHES SPLIT**

Ritze says his monument will quote the King James Version of the Bible, because that 1611 translation was used on the Texas marker approved by the Supreme Court. Will it be limited to the commandments set forth in Exodus 20, or will it include the laws in chapters 21 through 23 that were written by God's finger on the stone tablets? Or will it be the summary in chapter 34 after Moses broke the first pair of tablets? If the purpose is to educate, why leave out the synopsis at Deuteronomy 5:6-21, or Christ's new covenant recorded in Matthew? Should we prefer the Catholic, Lutheran, Jewish, Evangelical or Methodist version, or even Islam's 10 moral stipulations in the Quran?

Wars have been fought and churches have split over lesser issues; now one politician, not even ordained, will make that decision for all of us.

James Madison wrote, "The Religion of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man; and it is the right of every man to exercise it as these may dictate." Maybe that's the message we should carve in stone at the state Capitol.

– The author lives in Edmond

# Oklahoma Choctaws Supporting Troops

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma earned Oklahoma's Committee of the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve's highest honor – the Pro Patria Award.

The award was presented to the Choctaw Nation for superior support of its Guard and Reserve member employees.

In addition to providing pay differential, 30 days paid military leave per year, and continuing insurance, they provided a special knife to Guard members serving in Afghanistan and Iraq for the express purpose of slicing through packing and harness straps in emergency situations.

Walkie-talkies were also sent to the 95th Reservists so that transport teams could communicate during low visibility.

## CARE PACKAGES AND PHONE CARDS

They also provide "care" packages and phone cards to their serving members, friends and employees and purchased an ultrasound machine for detecting embedded shrapnel in wounded soldiers.

The Choctaw Tribal Council funds a Veterans Advocacy Program, an annual Veterans Ceremony, and provided property and funding for a Veterans Cemetery.

The 2008 Pro Patria Award was presented to Chief Gregory E. Pyle in the Durant Tribal Complex auditorium.

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma also received the 2008 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award last year.

## HIGHEST AWARD POSSIBLE

It is the highest recognition given by the U.S. government to employers who have shown outstanding support for the Guard and Reserve.

The tribe was chosen from more than 2,100 nominations last year and is the first tribe ever to receive the award. They have been willing to support those serving in the military, whether their role is in the National Guard, Reserve, or any other branch of armed services.



They provide emergency assistance for families while military members are deployed, making a substantial donation to the family support group of the 120th Engineer Battalion, their adopted military unit.

## THE TRIBE PROVIDES OTHER SERVICES

They also provide mailing service, complete with paid postage, to Guardsmen and Reservists and other military personnel on active duty overseas.

Equipment to make Internet connections possible was provided to some of the troops in Iraq in order to stay in touch with their families.

Last year they chartered 14 buses for Christmas to provide round-trip transportation for Oklahoma National Guard members serving at Fort Bliss, TX, so they could be home for the holidays.

The 2008 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award was presented to Chief Pyle in Washington, DC.

– From a State Senate resolution commending the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma for its support of the National Guard and Reserve

# Inhofe Introduces 'Official' English

That hurrah that just thundered through Oklahoma came from the redneck population cheering Sen. Jim Inhofe for introducing English Only – the National Language Act of 2009.

His bill would make English the national language of the U.S. government. It declares that there is no entitlement to receive federal documents and services in languages other than English unless required by statutory law, recognizing decades of unbroken court opinions that civil rights laws protecting against national origin discrimination do not create rights to government services and materials in languages other than English.

He was joined by a handful of Republican senators, including Tom Coburn of Oklahoma.

"I am especially pleased to be introducing these bills today," he said, "because just hours ago in my home state the Oklahoma State Legislature passed a joint resolution in support of English as the official language. This resolution passed the Oklahoma House of Representatives by an overwhelming vote of 89 to 8 and

the Senate by a vote of 44 to 2.

"It will allow the people of Oklahoma to vote on a statewide ballot for a constitutional amendment to make English the official language of Oklahoma."

Gov. Brad Henry vetoed the legislative version, noting that it was wholly unnecessary. It amounted to political pandering at its worst since it included only official documents.

In polling, 86% of Oklahomans favor making English the official language; 87% of Americans support making English the official language of the United States; 77% of Hispanics believe English should be the official language of government operations.

More than 82% of Americans support legislation that would require the federal government to conduct business solely in English; 74% of Americans support all election ballots and other government documents being printed in English.

OMB estimates that the annual cost of providing multilingual assistance required by Clinton Executive Order 13166 is \$1 billion to \$2 billion annually.

# COFFEE

From Page 8

him." [Tulsa World]

"The whole point of having the practice is I still have a lot of overhead from my practice, [so] how do I pay for that?" Simonson said at the time.

Linda Gragg, Muskogee. Linda was appointed by Gov. Frank Keating to the new Oklahoma Commission for Teacher Preparation and she resigned in 2003 after Brad Henry became governor. She is now the Muskogee County Republicans State Committeewoman. I am wondering where the non-partisan part comes in.

## ADVISORY BOARD

Michael A. Arrington, President/CFO, OK Fabricators LLC [Tulsa]. At first glance OK Fabricators sounds like a good name for the Action Plan Oklahoma bunch, but it is a firm that makes metal stuff. I have found no contributions for this guy, but there are a couple of other Michael Arringtons in other states.

Jeff Bashaw, Managing Director, X Corp. Jeff Bashaw donated \$2,500 to the Oklahoma Leadership Council, a GOP outfit, and \$800 to former Sen. Don Nickles in 1998.

Todd Holder, Alva State Bank. There are donations by people named Holder from Alva, but no Todd.

Patrick D. Lester, MD, chairman of Advanced Imaging Resources Companies. This guy writes stuff about Native Americans, I think, and is a pediatrician. He has donated a lot of money to a variety of individuals and groups: Mary Fallin, John Sullivan, Cathy Keating, Jim Inhofe, Don Nickles, John Tune, Tom Coburn, Steve Largent, Andy Ewing, George W. Bush, J.C. Watts, Kirk Humphreys, the Republican National Committee, Republican Majority Fund, Cole PAC and ... and ... and \$4,500 to Dan Boren, DINO [Democrat In Name Only].

Paula Marshall-Chapman, CEO, BAMA Companies. The pie lady has donated to George W. Bush, Fallin, Sullivan, the Oklahoma Leadership Council [GOP], and \$1,000 to Obama.

David Ostrowe, 180 Business Solutions. This guy ran for treasurer of the OKC Boat Club and for Nichols Hills Ward 1 Council seat, but lost. He has donated to George W. Bush and John McCain.

I think I need more proof on that non-partisanship since the ad is pure GOP crapola.

– The author lives in Moore. Her commentary also appears regularly on-line at [www.okobserver.net](http://www.okobserver.net).

## There Is A Difference

One day a florist goes to a barber for a haircut. After the cut he asks about his bill and the barber replies, "I cannot accept money from you. I'm doing community service this week." The florist was pleased and left the shop.

When the barber goes to open his shop the next morning there is a "thank you" card and a dozen roses waiting for him at his door.

Later, a cop comes in for a haircut, and when he tries to pay his bill, the barber again replies, "I cannot accept money from you. I'm doing community service this week." The cop is happy and leaves the shop.

The next morning when the barber goes to open up there is a "thank you" card and a dozen donuts waiting for him at his door.

Later that day, a college professor comes in for a haircut, and when he tries to pay his bill, the barber again replies, "I cannot accept money from you. I'm doing community service this week." The professor is happy and leaves the shop.

The next morning when the barber opens his shop, there is a "thank you" card and a dozen different books, such as *How to Improve Your Business* and *Becoming More Successful*.

Then, a Congressman comes in for a haircut, and when he goes to pay his bill the barber again replies, "I cannot accept money from you. I'm doing community service this week." The Congressman is very happy and leaves the shop.

The next morning when the barber goes to open up, there are a dozen Congressmen lined up waiting for a free haircut.

That, my friends, illustrates the fundamental difference between the citizens of our country and the members of our Congress.

## BOOKS

# In Hard-Scrabble Era, Socialism Flourished

By Mike Nobles

### MEAN THINGS HAPPENING IN THIS LAND

*The Life and Times of H.L. Mitchell, Co-Founder of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union*

By H.L. Mitchell

University of Oklahoma Press

384 pages, \$19.95

"I always believed that if you raised enough hell, something would be done about a problem. And I always tried to do that."

I have always regretted that I did not know H.L. Mitchell. He was one of those rare individuals who truly believed in social and economic justice for working men and women and spent his entire life in that endeavor.

Mitchell was born into a sharecropper family in 1906 in Halls, TN. He worked at various jobs including running a one-pump gas station and sharecropping. In 1920 he heard his first socialist speech while living in Moscow, TN. He later read many of the Socialists' tracts and became an ardent believer in Socialism, going so far as to help organize a local chapter of the Socialist Party and supporting its goals his entire life. In 1928 Mitchell moved to Tyronza, AR, to run a dry cleaning business in his father's barbershop and the rest, as they say, is history.

During the Depression Mitchell observed first hand the plight of the sharecroppers and tenant farmers in east Arkansas and throughout the South. The passage of the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 was especially damaging to sharecroppers and eventually led Mitchell to co-found with 10 other white men and seven black men the Southern Tenant Farmers Union [STFU] in July 1934. It is believed to be the first racially integrated labor union in the United States and became the voice and advocate for sharecroppers. Mitchell was named executive secretary and helped organize tenant farmers throughout the South and led numerous strikes during his career. He witnessed unspeakable acts of violence, threats, intimidation, lynchings and other efforts by the planters and local law enforcement officials to silence the workers and discourage their organizing activities.

The book is rich in details about the goals, tactics and activities of Mitchell and the STFU from its founding in 1934 until his death in 1989. There are sto-

## Bierce's Sampler

### ESSENTIAL BIERCE

*A Selection of Ambrose Bierce's Best Writings*

Edited with an Introduction by John R. Dunlap

Heyday Books

240 pages, \$11.95

**ACCOMPLICE**, n. One associated with another in a crime, having guilty knowledge and complicity, as an attorney who defends a criminal, knowing him guilty. This view of the attorney's position in the matter has not hitherto commanded me assent of attorneys, no one having offered them a fee for assenting.

**CHRISTIAN**, n. One who believes that the New Testament is a divinely inspired book admirably suited to the spiritual needs of his neighbor. One who follows the teachings of Christ in so far as they are not inconsistent with a life of sin.

**SENATE**, n. A body of elderly gentlemen charged with high duties and misdemeanors.

Well, the above quotes pretty much cover every taboo in this politically correct century.

We have politics, religion, and lawyers exposed to the wit and wisdom contained in *The Devil's Dictionary*. If you have never been exposed to quotations from it, this is your opportunity to read excerpts in an inexpensive edition and probably become another of Ambrose Bierce's fans. If you are familiar with Bierce then you know that his cynical, pithy writings are close to 100 years old and still worth their weight in gold. Indeed, none are safe and little is sacred.

Bierce [1842-1914] was a critic, journalist, short-story writer, satirist, editor, and poet. For almost 20 years he was the chief editorial writer for the San Francisco Examiner. He became a feared literary critic while at the Examiner and his reviews could, and did, make and break the careers of many an aspiring author.

This all-too-short but worthwhile anthology provides the reader with a generous helping of excerpts from *The Devil's Dictionary*, which alone is worth the price of the book. But there is more, much more. Many readers may not be aware that Bierce is regarded as one of the finest storytellers of the 19th Century. He penned 90-plus short stories dealing with tales of war, horror, and tall tales. His stories of the Civil War are especially riveting and rank with the best ever done. This book contains eight such stories covering all three categories. There is also a sprinkling of his essays and samples of his journalistic endeavors. The essay about William Randolph Hearst is typical of Bierce's unflinching insistence on straightforward writing and provides the reader with an unvarnished insight into the man and his habits. In addition the book contains selections of Bierce's poetry and correspondence.

This is a wonderful, must-have volume for the legion of Bierce fans as well as a great way for readers unfamiliar with Bierce to become acquainted with this unique man of letters. — Mike Nobles

ries of the tenant farmers strikes led by Mitchell in Tennessee and Arkansas in 1935. While unsuccessful at the time, the strikes focused national attention on the plight of the sharecroppers and helped in the creation of the Farm Security Administration in 1937 that ultimately allowed some estimated 50,000 Arkansas tenant farmers to secure their own farm land.

The union had an estimated 30,000 members by 1937 and advocated the collectivization of land through agricultural cooperatives as their ultimate goal. That stated philosophy was to cause Mitchell and the union to be labeled as communists and dupes of the Soviet Union.


The book is replete with stories and antidotes that make fascinating reading about a time not long ago when men and women were struggling for a voice in their lives against poverty, their own government and especially the southern planter class. Mitchell tells of his meetings with Eleanor Roosevelt, Ronald Reagan, and the Socialists' candidate for president, Norman Thomas. The story of Odis L. Sweden, an Oklahoman and member of the Cherokee tribe, and his proposal to blow up the Mississippi River levees to punish Arkansas plantation owners is a must read. Sweden's efforts to bring about land redistribution in Oklahoma attracted some 7,500 members into the STFU.

In later years Mitchell organized for other unions including the National Agricultural Workers Union, the Farm Workers Union [issuing Cesar Chavez his first union card], the Amalgamated Meat Cutters, and sugar-cane workers in Louisiana.

Mitchell died on August 1, 1989. He was perhaps one of the most colorful Southern radicals and activists in U.S. history. Regardless of the reader's political or philosophical leanings this book will give one pause to reflect on where we have been in this country and where we are at present. At the very least it provides a first person insight into why so-called radical proposals were seriously considered not so very long ago.

OU Press is to be commended for republishing this volume at an affordable price.

— The author, co-founder of *A Gathering of Writers*, lives in Tulsa




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## PUBLIC FORUM

# Past Time To Repeal Don't Ask, Don't Tell

By Rev. Dr. Stephen Johnson

I was and am proud and honored to serve in the armed forces because I'm old-fashioned enough to believe that everyone has a duty to serve and give something back to this great country. That is part of what repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" is about: a group who ask only to be allowed to do their duty for their country. I think we've lost a lot of that, and allowing gay men and women to serve openly can be a springboard to regaining something that we've lost.

There are those who think repealing "Don't Ask Don't Tell" would cause us to lose something, that it can't be made to work, that it's not American. I respectfully disagree.

It will help us regain much of what makes us America. For you see, America is a bold experiment. Other countries and cultures want everyone to be same: one ethnic group, one language, one culture. It's easier, it keeps us in our comfort zone, it doesn't challenge us.

### AMERICA IS ALL ABOUT DIVERSITY

Despite the difficulty of it, our country is about diversity. We believe that differences make us stronger; the terrorists in our world don't understand that. They fear it. We have no reason to fear. We need all Americans to have an all-American armed services.

Allowing gays to serve openly will give us a renewed sense of the American ideal that all men and women are created equal. That is the only gay agenda: to have the same rights as every other minority – no more and no less. The core American value is, barring compelling social need, to be left alone. Not only is there no compelling social need to exclude gays, there is a compelling need to let them serve openly: national security.

### NO REASON TO FEAR CHANGE

Those who support DADT say we can't do it; it will weaken unit cohesion. In my lifetime, they said we couldn't integrate African-Americans into the service; it will weaken unit cohesion. They were wrong; it made us stronger. They said we couldn't integrate women into the military but we needed them because too



many young men – without a draft – did not choose to serve. We integrated women and it made us stronger.

When people ask me what I did in the Army, I always give a soldier's answer: I did what they told me. They say we can't do it and yet more than 20 of the 26 countries in NATO have done it. As of July 2007, 22 countries fighting with us in Iraq and Afghanistan allowed gays to serve openly. They made it work; how can you say to me, it can't be made to work? I refuse to believe that they are better than the American soldier. It's the same way in this issue; the American soldier will do what their country tells them and they will make it work. The Army can and will do this, and it will make us stronger.

There are never enough good soldiers. So many of those we are discharging are the best and brightest; we need them. It is not a question of "may they;" it is a compelling national security issue.

In the name of America and for America, we must let them serve.

– The author, using the pen name Rev. Dr. Stephen Johnson, lives in Oklahoma. He requested anonymity because of concerns his employer would use his views against him.

## More Troops, Occupation 'Not The Answer'

By Nathaniel Batchelder

Issues we should all be raising about the "surge" into Afghanistan include the following:

The administration received a healthy mandate from the American people who voted NOT for John McCain and a Republican Congress, but for Obama and a Democratic Congress – in large part a vote repudiating GWBush's Middle East war policies.

Now we must remind the President and Congress of our mandate!

Is there another way? The U.S. must consider alternatives to military solutions. If the Taliban could be persuaded to cooperate with the government and parliament in exchange for guarantees of non-aggression and significant financial investment in infrastructure in Afghanistan, the whole picture could change.

### COMMON SENSE PRESCRIPTION

Needed is a sustained, well-funded, multi-lateral, multi-nation police effort to identify and root out terrorist networks, which is NOT accomplished by invading and occupying countries.

The U.S. does not appear to have any exit strategy. Do we even know our objective so that we can discern if it is achievable, or when it has been accomplished?

How much will all this cost? Another \$1 trillion? Two trillion dollars? There is so much waste, so much inefficiency and absurdity in what is going on now. Enormous funding is going to contractors who subcontract, and subcontract again, so that less than 50% of funding never reaches the ground after profit-taking.

### NIGHTMARE: DESTABILIZING PAKISTAN

Pakistan is a most dangerous country, nuclear armed and highly unstable. Efforts to project military force into Afghanistan through Pakistan could well have the unintended consequence of further destabilizing Pakistan – a catastrophe insufficiently considered while U.S. drone planes bomb and strafe into Pakistan already. Destabilizing Pakistan is the worst nightmare in the world, breaking it up into some Pashtunistan controlled by the Taliban.

Additional U.S. forces in Afghanistan are fueling anti-American suicide attacks. Before the US invasion in the fall of 2001, Afghanistan never experienced a suicide attack in its history. Now they are common, as anti-American extremists from around the Middle East flock to Afghanistan and Iraq to kill Americans [with tragic civilian casualties as collateral damage].

See AFGHANISTAN Page 12

## What U.S. Media Could Learn 'Down Under'

By Joe Carter

As a newsman for 17 early years of my career, my interest in local print media while visiting 13 Australian and five New Zealand cities was piqued. My conclusion: American dailies could learn much from "Down Under."

Aussie coverage is wide; the discourses are vividly written in Frosty Troy style and reporters spare no rod for the miscreants political or business leaders.

As father of a major Oklahoma equine doctor and breeder, I was amazed to see that the best of all Aussie papers, the Sydney Morning Herald, used nearly half of its sport pages covering horse racing. Race results, line-ups and compelling features on the economics, sports figures and industry are included.

Oklahoma's major dailies, in contrast, seem to ignore this vital sector of the economy.

### WIDE RANGING OPINIONS

Editorial pages across the "Down Under" are filled with tough opinions and superbly written and finely edited letters from a wide span of concerned citizens. Persons of experience and knowledge are provided ample space to espouse wide and diverse views and criticism. Left, right and down the middle outlooks seem to be equally divided into one-third parts. Fairness prevails.

In the back half of the daily business section of the Sydney Herald are the sports pages. Certainly, if a major athletic happening occurs, its seemingly earns equal consideration for page one coverage along with politics, disasters, economics, and other signs of victory or defeat. So amply, I concluded, yesterday's most

important history was chronicled on page one of the many area newspapers.

As for the ads, there seems to be no lacking. During my tour of the region, I detected not a word about editorial staff cutbacks, newspaper closures nor disaster in the publishing business. Like merest of Planet Earth, "Down Under" is equally feeling the pangs of recession and fears inflation. Prosperous China lurks as a buyer of major industries. But newspapers seem unthreatened by take-over or sell-out.

### ADS DOWN LESS THAN 1%

"Ad fall at papers is less than 1%," read one headline over this lead: "Australia's four largest publishers have gone on the offensive against those predicting the death of the industry ... most of the fall [in advertising income] came from employment classifieds; national and retail advertising increased." Vigorous print media reporting and horse racing coverage seemed unaffected.

Mainly, from a family that had prizes and even raised horses for the five generations I have investigated where my equine oriented son has excelled and my granddaughter is a new vet. I was most taken by the sprite and rich coverage of horse racing – the sport of kings – down under. Beyond the excitement of races in places like Remington Park and Will Rogers Downs, I am keenly aware of the economic importance and the great potential that legalized racing [thanks to Mike Williams] and the growing equine industry holds for Oklahoma's threat-

See MEDIA Page 12

# On Gay Marriage, Cheney, Coffee And OK Dems

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](http://www.okobserver.net).

**MAY 27, 2009**

The Proposition 8 decision by the California Supreme Court is so Bush-like in its scope. Kind of GOP/wishy-washy, let's make both sides sorta-kind of happy ...

Gay marriage is completely wrong, like torture, but all of those who have actually done it are all right – kind of a “my gay brother is fine, but yours is a pervert” kind of thing.

That's it, California Prop 8 people say, this is the limit – if you have 36,000 gays with equal rights that should be enough. You just can't have too much of that sort of stuff or marriage won't be protected ...

Take it from me, I have been married for almost 33 years and will continue to stay married, but some of that 33 years has been torture. At least 50% of marriages in Oklahoma end in divorce. I fail to see why gay marriage could be worse.

– KAREN WEBB

**MAY 26, 2009**

The Darth Vader of the Empire of the American Galactic Era [otherwise known as the Bush Imperial Administration] has returned. Banished into outer oblivion in the last clash of titans [known as an election], Darth has returned with vengeance. It is almost as if he were Satan arising from the burning pit into which he was tossed.

The evil scowl still present on his countenance, Dick Cheney continues his attempts to frighten the American people who rejected him and his cronies just last November. Frantically he tries to defend the evil that he and his gang perpetrated not only on the American people but also the world.

Can we not rid ourselves of this man? Why are we giving him free air time to spew his venom upon us?

## AFGHANISTAN

From Page 11

Courageous veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan went to Capitol Hill to testify before Congress. They urged Congress NOT to approve the \$92 billion supplemental wartime spending bill until policymakers answer all the critical questions regarding the war in Afghanistan.

While innocent Afghan civilians are dying as “collateral damage” from U.S. air strikes and bombings, the vets tried to convince Congress not to sign a massive blank check for more military operations until the questions were addressed.

Watch the short videos on [RethinkAfghanistan.com](http://RethinkAfghanistan.com) to understand these pressing questions. A veteran of both Iraq and Afghanistan, Rick Reyes, testified before Congress. A former Marine corporal, Reyes was powerful and truthful as he told Sen. John Kerry and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, “I urge you on behalf of truth and patriotism to consider carefully and rethink Afghanistan. More troops, more occupation is not the answer.” [This video intersperses clips of a young John Kerry testifying as a soldier against the Vietnam debacle.]

Reyes's testimony raises critical concerns that Congress should have addressed before approving a massive supplemental war-funding bill. Let's work to halt war funding by contacting our representatives, and urging them to stop supporting Afghan war funding until all the questions raised in these hearings have been answered.

Go to [RethinkAfghanistan.com](http://RethinkAfghanistan.com) and click on their short videos [there are six]. Each is crucial in its own right. Visit the Peace House website at [PeaceHouseOK.org](http://PeaceHouseOK.org).

– The author is director of the Peace House in Oklahoma City

Why? Is it “the news media” who seem to like any controversy, the nastier the better? Or, is the answer related to that reasoning which pays Rush Limbaugh millions of dollars to fill us daily with his bilious utterings? ...

It is no credit to the American public that some 35% appear to be swallowing Darth Cheney's three false premises – that illegal torture was necessary, that it was successful, and that anything is OK if done for a good cause. Cheney is Machiavellian, so watch out for his shotgun! Heaven help us if we sell out our basic values so readily.

[President] Obama's revision of the military tribunals, giving prisoners rights previously denied, may be the proper thing for some prisoners. Others for whom we have little or nothing admissible should be returned to authorities in their own nation or region. The Saudis have been effective with such. The hardcore terrorists remaining should be tried and put into our federal maximum-security prisons.

It is too bad that [Guantanamo] was misused and abused by Cheney and his crowd. In the type of world conflict we find ourselves entangled, there is a need for a detention center of that nature for persons taken in combat situations.

Now, could somebody tell Darth Cheney to go back into his undisclosed location under his galactic rock?

– EDWIN E. VINEYARD

**MAY 22, 2009**

He can spin it any way he wants, but today's Senate standoff was one final public relations disaster for President Pro Tem Glenn Coffee in a session full of public relations disasters.

The inability to round up the 25 votes necessary for passage of SB 980 – Coffee's much ballyhooed Oklaho-

ma Information Services Act – was a microcosm of a session in which land mines seemed to be detonating all around the OKC Republican.

It even forced the Senate to renege on its pledge to wrap up the session a week early – an important PR marker for a first-year GOP majority intent on proving it could manage legislative affairs far more efficiently than the long-entrenched Democrats.

Coffee's problems through much of the session were self-generated: taxes paid late, ethics reports filed way past deadline, more than \$100,000 in campaign fund expenditures unexplained ...

My guess is Coffee can't wait for this session to end.

– ARNOLD HAMILTON

**MAY 20, 2009**

Earlier this month, Democratic legislators in the Oklahoma House of Representatives tapped 30-year-old Rep. Scott Inman to lead the caucus after the next Legislature is elected. Not even two weeks later, delegates to the Oklahoma Democratic Party Convention elected 36-year-old field director Todd Goodman as their chairman.

Naysayers might cast aspersion toward these prominent youthful Democrats, saying that we are all that's left of a party surrounded by red votes. Not true.

Democratic values are based on the foundation of progression. Stagnation need not apply. Who better, then,

to revitalize our waning influence in the state than these two political dynamos?

Inman is known for his sermon-like series of floor debates against asinine Republican legislation, aptly named “Hypocrisy.”

Goodman is a great public speaker in his own right, and he's one of the hardest workers I know.

But what sets these men apart from their more senior Democrats is the realization that we need something different in Oklahoma. Oklahoma was one of the few states where young people voted for John McCain. Typically, Democrats can expect to lock up that demographic, but here, where all 77 counties went red, young voters need to see someone new who can empathize with them.

We've got college issues and for the ones who don't, finding work is a problem. Those who've started a family worry about healthcare and if they're lucky enough to have it, worry whether insurance will cover the bills.

Inman and Goodman understand these issues, as well as the issues we will face decades down the line. This is why I'm most excited about our new leaders. As they set goals and policy priorities, they do it understanding that they will be the recipients of the laws passed during their tenure for many, many years. Knowing you still have 50 or 60 years left to live under the ripples of government you create is a powerful force.

– DALE DENWALT

## MEDIA

From Page 11

ened economy. Why isn't the industry covered richly?

**WHY DO WE IGNORE THE HORSE?**

The Sooner State's very foundation was written on horseback in the storied land runs that opened the region to diverse settlement and enhancement as a state of the world's greatest nation, the U.S.A. Why isn't the horse – and great runners – sought out and praised by Oklahoma sports pages?

Despite America's achievements and Oklahoma's promise, the lessons to be learned from Australia and New Zealand are many. “Green” is a proud symbol sought by both the left and right. While corruption exists, its discovery is pounded on by alert and fearless daily newspapers. Investigative reporting is the norm – not the exception.

While my tour of “Down Under” was short, it was impressive. So much is obvious. The streets of all of the 18 cities we visited fail to collect the quantity of litter that is commonly expected to appear overnight in even a small Oklahoma town. The highway departments obviously save money that American road managers must spend on roadside cleanup. Amazing how often trash lands only in Aussie-New Zealand litter barrels.

**THUMBS UP: WATER, BEER, WILDLIFE**

The water is pure in every hydrant I tasted. The beer meets civilized standards. The wildlife is abundant and foreign to my Oklahoma-trained eyes. Both animals and aborigines are treated with respect and provided their just space. The major of folks we met quickly called us “mate,” without claim to our autonomy.

And when the horses ran, the media were present and wide numbers approved. C-Span showed American basketball during “March Madness” but rugby and cricket are heartily preferred down under. American-style football is not widely appreciated or understood – unique to American tastes. No multi-millionaire college gridiron coaches are evident in these climes.

The ocean seems boundless; the seafood terrific; neighbors seem collegiate; freedom is beloved; and a healthy journalistic atmosphere abounds “down under.” The long, tiring trip south is worth the pain and the lessons are invaluable.

– The author lives in Monkey Island, OK

# American Fatherhood: The Sobering Truth

By Cecil Acuff

About 65 million fathers can thank Sonora Smart Dodd of Spokane, WA, for their "Day." Sonora felt that fathers deserved recognition, just as U.S. mothers receive. Dodd's widowed Civil War veteran father, William Smart, raised Sonora and her five siblings after their mother died in childbirth.

The first celebration was held in Spokane in 1910. President Coolidge supported the idea, but it was only a dream until President Nixon declared a permanent holiday in 1972.

American Pop's deserve kudos, and it may be a Hap-Hap-Happy Day for Ma-Pa-Kid families, but the fact that half of marriages end in divorce means millions of Father's Day celebrants are in single-parent homes.

Absence of one parent in U.S. homes has wrought untold sadness, anger, frustration, and slang terms – i.e. Deadbeat Dads [a failure, idler, down-and-outer, deceiver, sponger, or malingering, ca. mid 1880s] – and under-funded Departments of Human Services [DHS].

## BAD CHOICES AFFECT KIDS

The ones who suffer from this DDD [Deadbeat Dad Disease] are youngsters. Adult bad choices affect the kiddies in so many ways: abuse, abandonment, or the burden, when they become adults, of assuming their parents' debts.

There may be Deadbeat Dads, but in 2005, 31% of custodial fathers were due child support from the mother. Custodial fathers were owed \$3.3 billion, but received \$2.4 billion, a deficit of \$900 million. Custodial mothers were owed \$34.7 billion, and received \$22.4 billion; \$12.3 billion of support payments were not made.

These statistics show the father's family importance [they are reports of organizations, associations, and agencies]; all refer to young people in fatherless homes. They are likely to have 63% of suicides, 90% of runaways, 85% who exhibit behavioral disorders, 80% of rapes motivated by displaced anger, 72% of adolescent murders, 71% of high school dropouts, 70% of juveniles in state institutions, and 85% of all youths in prison.

Fatherless-home youngsters are 6.6 times more likely to become teen-aged mothers, 24.3 times more likely to become runaways, and 6.6 times more likely to drop out of school.

## 'NO' IS A COMPLETE SENTENCE

These comments are partly amusing, so they are partly true. Why so many divorces, and more parents running away than children? One reason for juvenile misdeeds, many parents are using remote control. The hardest job is to convince kids that "No" is a complete sentence.

The frightening thing about heredity and environment is that parents provide both. One father called the IRS, "May I deduct my daughter's wedding as a total loss?"

Memorial Day speakers honoring America's Vets know it would be far better

# Death By Pot Pie Isn't Stuff Of Sci-Fi

By Jim Hightower

Out in Arizona, an old tombstone bears an epitaph for a young gunslinger: "I was expecting this/But not so soon."

Gunslinging, of course, is a high-risk business. But today, some of us can expect to have the following marker on our graves: "Here lies a guy/Killed by a pot pie."

America's pot-pie threat lurks in an ingredient that today's producers of frozen foods don't list on their packages: salmonella. In just one salmonella outbreak in 2007, the Banquet brand of pies sickened an estimated 15,000 people in 41 states.

The true culprit in such poisonings, however, is not the little deadly bug, but the twin killers of corporate globalization and greed. Giant food corporations, scavenging the globe in a constant search for ever-cheaper ingredients to put in their processed edibles, are resorting to low-wage, high-pollution nations that have practically no food-safety laws, much less any safety enforcement.

## SALMONELLA-TAINTED POT PIES

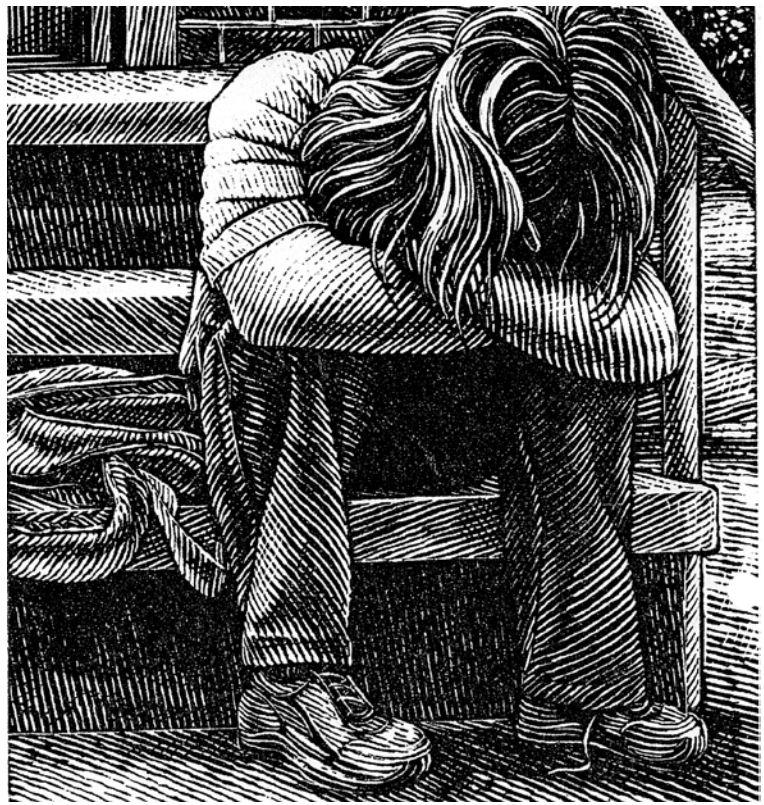
Consider the case of ConAgra Foods, a massive conglomerate that sells 100 million pot pies a year under its Banquet label. Each pie contains 25 ingredients sourced from all over the world – often from subcontractors who don't report their sources.

Until the 2007 salmonella contamination of its pies, ConAgra did not even require suppliers to test for pathogens, nor did it do its own tests. Since poisoning one's customers turned out to be a bad strategy for earning repeat business, the conglomerate now runs spot checks – but even when it detects contamination in a pie, it has not been able to determine which ingredient is the bad one.

In fact, as The New York Times recently reported in an extensive expose, food giants concede that their supply chains are so far-flung that they "do not even know who is supplying their ingredients, let alone if those suppliers are screening items for microbes."

## GROCERS FIGHT OVERSIGHT

Meanwhile, the industry's lobbying front, the Grocery Manufacturers of America, has aggressively fought federal efforts to require a tracking system. "This information is not reasonably needed," the GMA curtly responded when such a



for society to find ways to prevent wars so there would not be millions who have had their lives taken. People should use "an ounce of prevention is worth more than a pound of cure."

Cher said, "The trouble with many women – they get all excited about nothing, then marry him." Natalie Wood: "The only time women really change men – when they're babies."

## VETTING COUPLES THAT WANT TO MARRY?

America should reverse marriage-divorce scenarios. Couples marry after several months; divorces may take two or three years. States should deny licenses to couples until they have been "vetted" by officials. The divorce procedure would become a speedy one; all the dirt is already known.

[Disclaimer – this is a dream, it won't happen, sadly.]

Fathers are important. Clarence Kelland: "My father didn't tell me how to live; he lived, and let me watch him do it." Theo Hesburgh: "The most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother."

Wouldn't that also apply to moms? "The most important thing ... love their father?"

Jimmy Valvano was head basketball coach for North Carolina State for 10 years. NC State won the 1983 NCAA men's basketball tournament when a last-second air-ball was caught and dunked. Jimmy V is best remembered for running around the court looking for someone to hug; players hug players, cheerleaders hug cheerleaders ... Valvano's memory is also cherished for his ESPY Awards speech, given shortly before he died of cancer in 1993.

Jimmy V is the guy who said, "My father gave me the greatest gift anyone could give another person, he believed in me."

– The author lives in Perkins

rule was proposed.

ALARMING CONSUMER ALERT: Today, contamination has become so widespread that major frozen food purveyors admit they can no longer ensure the safety of their products!

Perhaps you're thinking that, surely, this self-indictment of the reckless globalization process has prompted corporations to change their systems and suppliers in order to ensure you and me that their foods are safe to eat. Ha! What a silly dreamer you are. That could squeeze their profits, so instead they've come up with a much more corporate-friendly solution: They're shifting their contamination problem to you and me!

You'll notice that frozen food packages now contain precise, almost frantic instructions [complete with illustrations] on "kill steps" that we must take to keep their products from poisoning us. Banquet, for example, has a four-step diagram on the back of its pot-pie packages, directing consumers to make sure that the pie is heated to an internal temperature of exactly 165 degrees "as measured by a food thermometer in several spots."

## ARROGANCE AND INDIFFERENCE

Do such directives actually make frozen foods safe? An official with the Blackstone Group, the Wall Street equity firm that owns Swanson and Hungry Man brands, curtly states that the level of risk to consumers depends on "how badly they followed our directions."

His snotty attitude aside, following corporate cooking instructions to a "T" doesn't do the trick. The New York Times tested the directions on various brands of pot pies – and all failed to achieve the magic level of 165 degrees. "Some spots in the pie heated to only 140 degrees even as parts of the crust were burnt," wrote reporter Michael Moss.

This is absurd. Frozen foods are supposed to be a consumer convenience, not a risky science experiment. Instead of trusting faulty instructions at us on how to avoid "death by pie," how about just requiring conglomerates that profit from these products to accept their responsibility to put safe ingredients in their pies?

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## More Power To Rich

# Rich-Poor Voting Gap Greater Than Ever

By Lee Drutman

In the 2008 election, lower-income Americans voted at significantly lower rates than higher-income Americans. This was not, in itself, news. Just as in 2004, more than 60% of voters came from families above the median household income of \$50,000. That family income is a significant predictor of individual voting is a long-standing and oft-lamented fact of American political life.

But over the last several decades, inequality in the United States has worsened. Between 1973 and 2000, the richest one-fifth of Americans saw their family income grow by 66.9%, while the poorest one-fifth saw their income increase by only 12.1%. At the same time, poverty has become more geographically concentrated. In 1970, the average poor family inhabited a census tract where only 13.6% of the other families were poor; by 1990, it was double that – 27.9%.

Joe Soss and Lawrence Jacobs, professors of political science at the University of Minnesota, were curious to understand how these two trends, which have typically been studied in isolation, related to each other. What they found was that over time, while the probability of voting has declined for all Americans, the declines have been the steeper among people living in low-income counties, and steepest for low-income people living in low-income counties.

As Americans have become more segregated by class, the trend seems to have exacerbated the participatory balance in politics.

### A 'STUNNING ... PATTERN' EMERGES

Soss said it was “stunning ... to see the pattern emerge over the course of a couple of decades. We've gotten to a point where there are completely different relationships with class and voting patterns, and that's a pretty remarkable change.”

In the 1970s, whether an individual came from a low-, medium- or high-income county didn't seem to have any predictive effect on whether or not that person voted, though rich people still voted at greater rates than poor people. But over the past three decades, as the nation became more segregated by wealth, the effect of living in a poor county, independent of one's own wealth, became a significant predictor of whether an individual voted or not.

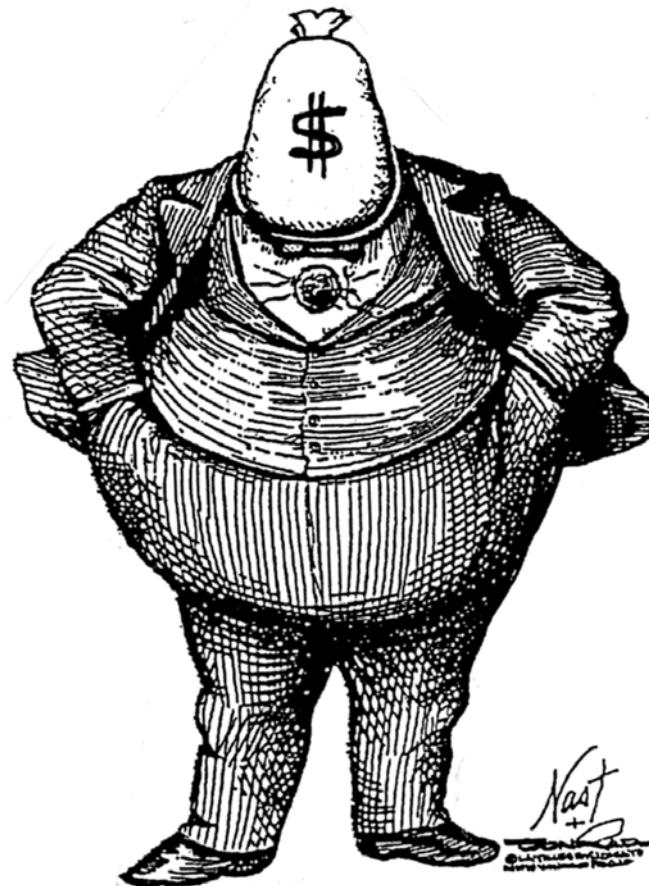
In other words, while individual-level poverty has always been associated with less civic engagement, increasing class-based segregation is widening the participatory gap between rich and poor even further. The results are published in the spring issue of *Political Science Quarterly*.

“Our argument is to say, look, it's not just enough to look at changes in income and wealth,” explained Soss. “These have been bundled with really profound changes. ... We've become far more class-segregated in residential neighborhoods, and as this has happened, it has acted kind of like a force multiplier.”

### OBSTACLES FACING POOR VOTERS

In general, scholars know that poor voters suffer from a number of obstacles to political participation. They tend to have weaker civic ties. Candidates are less likely to speak to their needs or to try to mobilize them. Workday voting, felony disenfranchisement and bureaucratic registration rules all reduce turnout.

But several trends have exacerbated these obstacles, Soss and Jacobs note in their article. The rate of incarceration has increased sixfold over the past three decades. Unions and fraternal civic associations that once plugged lower-income individuals into politics have declined significantly. Meanwhile, the role of money in politics has greatly increased, and the civic groups of old have been replaced by checkbook issue groups that tend to cater to the concerns of those who write the checks.



A second set of trends involves the changes in public policy and the messages that these policies send to the less well-off. “There are more get-tough programs,” said Soss. “They are more focused on discipline. They are treating the poor as people who have suspect behavior that needs to be changed.”

### A DESPAIR THAT VOTING MATTERS

Changes in law enforcement, welfare police and a general drying-up of social services and public assistance, argue Soss and Jacobs, have sent a message that government doesn't really empathize with the plight of poor people – so why should poor people care about government or even bother to vote?

“In the most disadvantaged neighborhoods,” Soss and Jacobs write, “voting is more likely to be seen as a sham.”

And over time, all of this feeds on itself. As poor people in poor neighborhoods vote less, politicians become even less responsive to them, paying attention instead to the concerns of their wealthier constituencies, who vote more reliably and attend fundraisers. The better-off get money for schools and other institutions to help them develop civic skills. The worse-off just get more cause for cynicism.

### EVEN WEALTHY FRET OVER INEQUALITY

And yet, there is an increasing concern among all Americans [even the most well-off] that inequality in the U.S. has gone too far and something needs to be done. That is one of the main findings of *Class War? What Americans Really Think about Inequality*, a new book by Jacobs and Benjamin I. Page, a professor of political science at Northwestern University.

“Majorities of Americans – majorities of Republicans as well as Democrats, and majorities of the affluent as well as middle- and lower-income earners – see inequality in the United States having become excessive,” Page and Jacobs write.

For example: 72% of Americans [56% of Republicans; and 60% of high-income Americans] think that “differences in income in America are too large.” Even 56% of Americans [39% of Republicans; and 53% of high-income Americans] say that “our government should redistribute wealth by heavy taxes on the rich.”

But Page and Jacobs also find a strong conservative streak in American public opinion.

See POOR Page 16

## Church Bloopers: A Smile A Minute

These gems appeared in church bulletins or were announced in church services:

The Fasting & Prayer Conference includes meals.

The sermon this morning: “Jesus Walks on the Water.” The sermon tonight: “Searching for Jesus.”

Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale. It's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Bring your husbands.

Remember in prayer the many who are sick of our community. Smile at someone who is hard to love. Say “Hell” to someone who doesn't care much about you.

Don't let worry kill you off – let the Church help.

Miss Charlene Mason sang “I will not pass this way again,” giving obvious pleasure to the congregation.

For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.

Next Thursday there will be tryouts for the choir. They need all the help they can get.

Irving Benson and Jessie Carter were married on Oct. 24 in the church. So ends a friendship that began in their school days.

At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be “What Is Hell?” Come early and listen to our choir practice.

Eight new choir robes are currently needed due to the addition of several new members and to the deterioration of some older ones.

Scouts are saving aluminum cans, bottles and other items to be recycled. Proceeds will be used to cripple children.

Please place your donation in the envelope along with the deceased person you want remembered.

The church will host an evening of fine dining, super entertainment and gracious hostility.

The ladies of the Church have cast off clothing of every kind. They may be seen in the basement on Friday afternoon.

This evening at 7 p.m. there will be a hymn singing in the park across from the Church. Bring a blanket and come prepared to sin.

Ladies Bible Study will be held Thursday morning at 10 a.m. All ladies are invited to lunch in the Fellowship Hall after the B. S. is done.

The pastor would appreciate it if the ladies of the congregation would lend him their electric girdles for the pancake breakfast next Sunday.

Low Self Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday at 7 p.m. Please use the back door.

The eighth-graders will be presenting Shakespeare's Hamlet in the Church basement Friday at 7 p.m. The congregation is invited to attend this tragedy.

Weight Watchers will meet at 7 p.m. at the First Presbyterian Church. Please use large double door at the side entrance.

The Associate Minister unveiled the church's new campaign slogan last Sunday: “I Upped My Pledge – Up Yours.”

– Thanks a bunch to LeAnn Troy for passing along these chuckles

# Health Care Providers Afraid Of Competition?

By Dean Baker

The boys running the show at Blue Cross in North Carolina are running scared. They're worried that President Obama is going to treat them like the auto brass and make them actually compete in the market. The Blue Cross boys think that they belong in the same league as the Wall Street bankers and should just be allowed to collect their multi-million-dollar salaries without being forced to worry about things like competition.

The basic story is that Blue Cross of North Carolina decided to jump the gun on President Obama and Congress and start running television ads telling people how awful a public health care plan would be. According to the ads, people enrolled in the public health care plan wouldn't have a choice of doctors, would face long waiting periods for appointments and procedures and would not even be able to get a clerk to answer questions on billing.

That sounds pretty awful, but if it were true, you have to wonder why Blue Cross of North Carolina is so worried. After all, President Obama is not proposing that anyone would be forced to join a public plan. He just proposed that people have the option to buy into a public plan.

## AFRAID OF COMPETITION?

Is Blue Cross of North Carolina really that terrified that it will be unable to compete with a public plan that doesn't let patients choose their doctor, subjects them to long waits and doesn't answer questions about billing?

Of course, if the ads being planned by Blue Cross of North Carolina were accurate, then it would not be concerned about a public plan. The reason that Blue Cross of North Carolina is running the ads is that it knows the ads are not true.

There is no reason to think that a public plan will offer less choice, require longer waits or provide poorer service than a private plan, like Blue Cross of North Carolina. And there are reasons for believing that a public plan might cost considerably less.

Specifically, the administrative expenses of a public plan like Medicare are far lower than the expenses for Blue Cross of North Carolina. According to its Annual Report, Blue Cross of North Carolina spent almost 15% of its premiums on administrative expenses in 2008. That came to more than \$1.8 billion. This money would have been enough to cover the costs of insuring almost 600,000 kids through the State Children's Health Insurance Program [CHIP]. Just five years earlier, Blue Cross of North Carolina spent more than 22% of premiums on administrative expenses.

## MEDICARE'S OVERHEAD 2%

By comparison, Medicare spends only about 2% of its revenue on administrative expenses. Unlike Blue Cross of North Carolina, Medicare doesn't earn profits and doesn't pay high salaries to its top executives.

According to the Raleigh News and Observer, Robert J. Greczyn Jr., the chief

# Bank On It! Wall Street Bankers Greedy

By Jim Hightower

No doubt you're going to feel terrible about this. Top executives of Goldman Sachs, the Wall Street powerhouse, are in a pout about how they're being treated by you and me - i.e., the public.

These execs are used to being revered as financial geniuses, but having taken a \$10 billion bailout from us taxpayers last fall, they're now widely viewed as ... well, as welfare recipients. Like other welfare checks, the big one that Washington doled out to Goldman Sachs came with some strings attached, causing the chieftains to get all huffy. Especially galling to these princes of privilege is the limit on salaries and bonuses that bailed out banks are allowed to give to those in the executive suites.

Thus, Goldman recently threw a little hissy fit and haughtily declared that it will pay back our \$10 billion to get the blankety-blank government out of its private business. Bold move! At last, Wall Streeters are reasserting their rugged, free-enterprise ethic, right?

Uh, not exactly.

## STILL CLINGING TO LIFEBOATS

What Goldman officials fail to mention is that they'll still be clinging to several other lifeboats floated to them by those skinflint meanies in Washington. For example, when insurance giant AIG was given some \$200 billion last year to save it from total collapse, \$12 billion of it was actually a pass-through payment to Goldman Sachs. Best of all, this quiet handout did not come with any of those nasty restrictions on executive pay - so Goldman is happily hanging onto this backdoor subsidy.

Then there's another \$28 billion that was slipped to these hardy free-market-ers in the form of special low-interest loans guaranteed by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. - a subsidy that Goldman's chief financial officer concedes is vital to its survival.

Far from foregoing this government underwriting, the bankers say they expect to ask for \$7 billion more of it.

Additionally, Goldman has taken many more billions' worth of low-cost loans from Federal Reserve funds. How many more billions? The Fed and the bank say this is "proprietary" information, not for public disclosure, even though it is



executive of Blue Cross of North Carolina, earned \$3.2 million in 2007. That's enough to pay for a year's worth of SCHIP for 1,000 kids. Other top executives also drew salaries well in excess of \$1 million, a pay range that exceeds the top levels in the public sector by an order of magnitude.

Given the high salaries that Blue Cross of North Carolina pays its top executives and the other administrative expenses that it bears as a result of being a private sector plan with high overhead, it is not surprising that it would be afraid of a public plan.

## FEWER CUSTOMERS, LOWER PROFITS?

A public plan would likely charge much lower prices, thereby pulling away a large share of Blue Cross of North Carolina's business. Insofar as it was able to hold on to its patients, Blue Cross of North Carolina would probably be forced to lower its prices - slashing its profit margins - in order to be able to compete. This is not a happy picture for any business: fewer customers and lower profit margins.

The answer, of course, is tough love. We just have to tell Blue Cross of North Carolina that it will have to learn to compete. If it can't beat out a public plan in market competition, then the public and the economy would be better served if it went into another line of business.

Bankers may have enough political power that they can milk the government without limits. However, this may not prove to be true for the health insurers.

If President Obama continues to push for a public plan, the good folks running Blue Cross of North Carolina and the other insurers may actually have to work for their paychecks.

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public money.

## THEY WANT MONEY - WITHOUT STRINGS

So, while these golden ones are loudly repudiating the \$10 billion public subsidy they took from us, they are coyly retaining at least \$40 billion of our dollars to stay afloat - a tidy sum that does not include any restrictions on pay levels. Coincidentally, Goldman has since announced that it is setting aside nearly \$5 billion to be distributed at the end of the year as compensation for its executives, including payments for outlandish bonuses for those at the top.

Saying that such-and-such is the greediest bunch of bankers on Wall Street is like someone claiming to have the biggest hairdo in Dallas - the competition is fierce. But that's quite a head of hair atop Goldman Sachs. Well, sniff the executives, we merely play the game according to the rules we're given.

Sure, and the Mafia plays its game strictly according to Hoyle. The difference is that the Mafia must actually break the rules, while Wall Street simply hires lobbyists and politicians to write the rules.

## ULTIMATE GOVERNMENT INSIDERS

Indeed, Goldman Sachs has been nicknamed "Government Sachs" by its rivals, for it always seems to have at least one of its top officials strategically placed inside government to bend federal financial rules to its benefit. In the 1990s, for example, two Goldman foxes - Robert Rubin and Larry Summers - were inside the Clinton Administration henhouse, where they helped craft the deregulation scams that enriched their former banks, before the scams caused the crash of our economy.

Following that crash, up stepped Hank Paulson, who had been Goldman's CEO before George W. plucked him off the Street to run the very bailout that has now deposited so much of our money in his bank. With Bush's demise, Hank is gone, but not Goldman. That sly Goldman Fox from the Clinton years, Larry Summers, is back, this time in Barack Obama's henhouse, where he's top economic advisor.

Not surprisingly, our gold keeps flowing to Goldman Sachs - but don't expect the bankers to be grateful to you.

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## Public Sector Exception

# Report: Anti-Union Bullying Intensifies

By Seth Sandronsky

Opinion polls say that the majority of U.S. workers want to be in a labor union, according to Kate Bronfenbrenner, a professor and director of Labor Education Research, New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University.

So why are just 12.4% of American workers union members? In brief, they fear what their bosses will do to them. Such fear is real. Employers more than doubled their use of anti-union tactics against employees attempting to form unions between 1999 and 2003 versus Bronfenbrenner's three earlier research periods.

Meticulously, she details this rising anti-labor trend in a new study, *No Holds Barred: The Intensification of Employer Opposition to Organizing*, published by the Economic Policy Institute of Washington, DC, and released May 20.

### WIDESPREAD INTIMIDATION

The study analyzes a random sample of 1,004 National Labor Relations Board union election campaigns, and in-depth surveys with head union organizers in 562 of these campaigns. For workers, her findings are fearful. Sixty-three percent of employers use mandatory one-on-one, anti-union meetings with employees. Further, 57% of employers threatened to close the workplace, 47% of employers issued threats to slash benefits and wages, while 34% of employers fired workers during union organizing drives.

For workers who successfully formed a union through the NLRB election process, one year later less than half, 48%, gained a collective bargaining agreement. Two years later 63% of workers had a labor agreement in place, with the new agreement rate for them rising to 70% for the third year after an election.

Rite Aid workers at its distribution center in Lancaster, north of Los Angeles in the Mojave Desert, know a thing or two about employer stalling after winning a NLRB-supervised election, which they did on March 21, 2008. Yet the 500 Rite Aid employees there are in their second year with no collective bargaining agreement in place.

### FUNDAMENTAL FLAWS IN NLRB PROCESS

Bronfenbrenner's study methodology combines Freedom of Information Act request data from the NLRB for every unfair labor practice [ULP] document tied to union elections in the survey samples. She minces no words assessing how federal labor law protects American workers' legal rights to organize:

"Both the intensity and changing character of employer behavior, as well as the fundamental flaws in the NLRB process, have left us with a system where workers who want to organize cannot exercise that right without fear, threats, harassment, and/or retribution."

It is worth noting that unions that do file ULP documents face a lengthy process in fighting employers' anti-union tactics. Bronfenbrenner writes:

"Filing charges can hold up the election for many months if not a year or more. Thus, except in the case of the most egregious violations [e.g., serious harassment, threats of referral to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, multiple discharges, or violence], unions typically wait until after the election to file charges."

### WHAT FREEDOM OF SPEECH?

Under the NLRB election process, 276,353 workers organized in 1970. By 1999, the year that Bronfenbrenner's new study begins, 106,699 workers won union representation through elections. In 2003, 71,427 workers organized. According to Bronfenbrenner's findings, the decline is due to employer behavior: threats, interrogation, promises, surveillance and retaliation for union activity.

How free is the freedom of speech for American workers? She writes:

"Under the free speech provisions of the NLRA [National Labor Relations Act of 1935], employers have control of the communication process. In today's organizing climate they take full advantage of that opportunity to communicate with their employees through a steady stream of letters, leaflets, emails, digital electronic media, individual one-on-one meetings with supervisors, and mandatory captive-audience meetings with top management during work time."

To this end, employers have developed a pre-emptive control system to neuter union campaigns. The emphasis is on "interrogation and surveillance to identify supporters." If that fails, according to Bronfenbrenner, "threats and harassment" follow "to try to dissuade workers from supporting the unions."

### COERCION, THREATS, FIRINGS

Labor unions attempting to organize union-free workplaces can file ULP charges against employers with the NLRB. Bronfenbrenner analyzed a total 926 ULPs in survey samples and 1,387 ULPs in NLRB elections. Her findings show consistency in reported employer behavior between the two categories. Employers' coercive statements and threats [i.e., job loss, wage and benefit cuts, sexual harassment] towards employees topped the list of ULP allegations, followed by allegations of worker firings.

Bronfenbrenner's analysis of NLRB ULP documents shows that workers filed 23% of all ULPs before the filing of the NLRB election petition. Breaking that down by category, workers filed 29% of interrogation ULPs and 16% of surveillance ULP allegations prior to the election petition.

All is not doom and gloom for the American labor movement. An alternate model of union organizing exists in the U.S. public sector. There, nearly 37% of workers are union members versus fewer than 8% in the private sector, where most Americans labor.



Why is the union election win-rate for public-sector employees [84%] nearly double that of their private-sector counterparts [45%]? Private employers, Bronfenbrenner found in her study, used nearly five times the number of anti-union tactics as public employers. According to her, "in 48% of the public-sector campaigns, the employer did not campaign at all - no letters, no leaflets, no meetings."

### PURPOSELY MIXING APPLES, ORANGES

The Center for Union Facts declined a request to comment on Bronfenbrenner's study. However, on the group's web site, J. Justin Wilson posted a critique: "According to her own generous analysis of data from the National Labor Relations Board [1999 to 2003], only 6% of elections have an employee illegally fired."

The Center for Union Facts is "very consciously mixing apples and oranges," Bronfenbrenner said. "That [data of 6%] refers to the percent of elections where at least one allegation was filed and at least one allegation upheld." According to the survey responses, 34% of workers involved in union campaigns were fired.

"The reason they decided to distort the findings is that for years they have argued that my findings on discharges, wage cuts, etc. have no basis and are not upheld in the ULP data," she said. "Now I actually have hard ULP data to back me up and I'm going to make them available in [Cornell's] Industrial and Labor Relations Catherwood library to anyone who wants to look at them, as soon as I get the money and staff to set up a system to protect the documents."

### EFCA AWAITS CONGRESSIONAL ACTION

Bronfenbrenner's new study is not peer reviewed yet, as her past studies have been. However, she is planning to turn *No Holds Barred* into a journal article that will go through the peer review process. In the meantime, however, she "wanted to get the data out there."

Why? Consider the Employee Free Choice Act before Congress [H.R. 1409, S. 560] now, an amendment to the NLRA. EFCA would make it easier for employees to join unions by allowing a majority of them to check a union card or cast a secret-ballot vote. The election option would be the choice of employees, in contrast to the current NLRB practice. Further, EFCA would impose fines of up to \$20,000 per violation on employers who abuse employees' legal right to organize, and establish a 120-day, binding timeline for reaching a first-year contract.

American Rights at Work Education Fund provided financial help for Bronfenbrenner's study, along with six other foundations and 26 unions, she said. The Center for Union Facts ignored a request for its donors' names.

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## POOR

From Page 14

Even Democrats and low-income people are strong believers in the free-enterprise system and the importance of private property, and are willing to tolerate some disparities in income, which they think are necessary to motivate people. Page and Jacobs reconcile this seeming schizophrenia by describing Americans as "conservative egalitarians." What this means is that Americans are much more likely to support redistributive policies that provide equal opportunities.

Soss and Jacobs' research suggests that it's going to take a whole mix of policy changes to reverse the slide of inequality and the participatory imbalance. "All of these effects are at the margins," said Soss. "There is no silver bullet."

More fundamentally, it may also take a change in the way we think about political participation.

"Some of the problem here is that we think of politics as divorced from the rest of life, and that it's just its own thing," Soss added. "Part of what we're arguing is for a more ecological perspective. Patterns emerge from the way we live together in society. If you want to change patterns of participation, they're not likely to change as long as we live our lives more separately and more unequally."

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# Tackling The Black Obesity Epidemic

By Makani Themba-Nixon

Michael Harrington's timeless expose *The Other America*, provides white suburbanites a glimpse of what black folk had known for centuries – that there is a deep chasm between the rich and the poor. All too often, class lines and color lines converge.

York, AL, is like many predominantly black towns in the “other America.” With a shrinking a tax base, few jobs, and fewer skilled workers to go after them, the town seems redlined by virtually every measure of opportunity.

In fact, state-imposed redlining through the designation of a “waiver county,” essentially marginalizes the Black Belt from economic development and job creation.

A part of a “welfare reform” deal with local industries in the mid 1990s, waivers allow under-developed counties to issue welfare without work requirements. Fewer jobs and larger surplus labor pool mean lower wages and more social control.

## ALABAMA SOCIAL CONTROL

Alabama specializes in social control. From voter suppression, hate violence to limiting labor rights, the region has locked most African-Americans on the margins for more than two centuries.

When the black majority of York had the “audacity” to elect its first black mayor in the 1980s, the white elite choked off public resources in retribution. All services – save the post office and a small health clinic – were moved to the county seat about 10 miles away.

I am in York to help bury my father-in-law, who like too many African-Americans, has met an early death from the triple killers of diabetes, high blood pressure and stroke.

## BIG MAMA'S HOUSE

In the place my children call Big Mama's house, neighbors drop by bearing covered dishes and envelopes to help my mother-in-law get through this loss.

They bring fried chicken and pies and cakes and banana pudding – all of the things that helped my father-in-law to an early grave and threaten my mother-in-law.

It would be easy to judge them with my good job and easy access to Whole Foods. In fact, much of the talk about obesity is heavy on blame and thin on solutions that change the conditions that got our communities here in the first place.

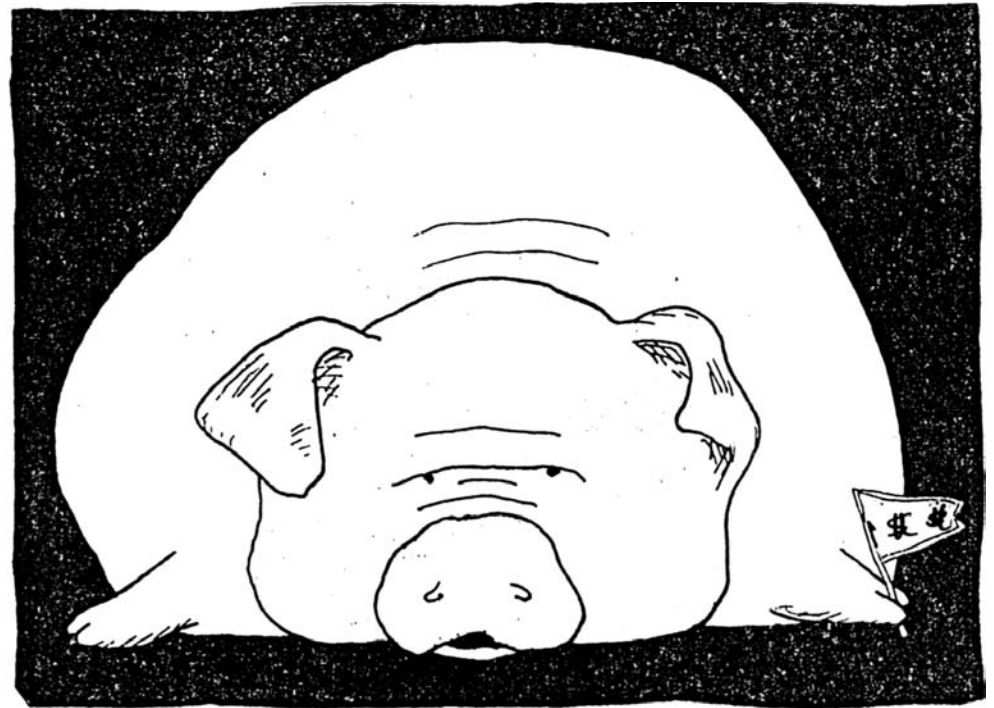
Pull back the lens from individual behavior to social context, and York is a classic example of how conditions create disease.

## PEDDLING DISEASE AS FOOD

York's two “supermarkets” stock visibly decaying produce and high sodium, high fat and commercially prepared food. Church's Chicken is the main restaurant in town.

Although folk with cars can drive more than 20 miles to Meridian, MS, for most of what they need, high unemployment and low wages make buying food [much less healthy food] a real challenge.

The hot term for a place like York is “food desert.” Yet, desert does not do it



justice. We often think of deserts as natural phenomenon; something that happens to a place and cannot be stopped. The lack of healthy food and safe places to play are often racialized and by design.

Wedged between the intersection of bad public policy and market neglect, they are the result of what policymakers and private providers believe a community deserves at its most basic level of need – food.

Bad policies and practices have meant bad health for millions. Seniors depend on the often unhealthy entrees provided by government agency meal delivery services.

## NO PARKS, NO RECREATION

Policymakers do not ensure equitable access to parks and recreation. Kids are often cooped up in the home where parents who cannot “pay for play” at least know their children are safe.

High profit requirements of traditional markets render low-income communities off limits. Quality produce is hard to find in the neighborhood store. Even many of our churches reinforce the worst of eating habits in traditional repasts.

Good policies and public investments can bring dramatic change. In places like Louisville, KY, the Healthy Corner Store initiative unites neighborhood markets with the local health department's Center for Health Equity to increase healthy food options in historically marginalized communities.

Chicago's Institute for Community Resource Development is turning neighborhoods green with urban farming and sustainable development.

The National Black Church Initiative joins a new wave of church leadership to encourage institutional policies that support members in leading healthier lives.

Tackling the obesity epidemic demands this kind of innovation because turning it around will require nothing less than the fundamental restructuring of our communities from places designed for our neglect and abuse to spaces where we thrive.

– The author is executive director of The Praxis

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# Too Poor To Parent? Blacks Losing Kids

By Gaylynn Burroughs

When a recurrent plumbing problem in an upstairs apartment caused raw sewage to seep into her New York City apartment, 22-year-old Lisa called social services for help.

She had repeatedly asked her landlord to fix the problem, but he had been unresponsive. Now the smell was unbearable, and Lisa feared for the health and safety of her two young children.

When the caseworker arrived, she observed that the apartment had no lights and that food was spoiling in the refrigerator.

Lisa explained that she did not have the money to pay her electric bill that month, but would have the money in a few weeks.

## CASEWORKER TAKES THE CHILDREN

She asked whether the caseworker could help get them into a family shelter. The caseworker promised she would help – but left Lisa in the apartment and took the children, who were then placed in foster care.

Months later, the apartment is cleaned up. Lisa still does not have her children.

It is probably fair to say that most women with children worry about their ability as mothers. Are they spending enough time with them? Are they disciplining them correctly? Are they feeding them properly? When should they take them to the doctor, and when is something not that serious?

## REMOVAL OF BLACK CHILDREN VERY REAL

One thing most women in the United States do not worry about is the possibility of the state removing children from their care. For a sizable subset of women, though – especially poor black mothers such as Lisa – that possibility is very real.

Black children are the most over-represented demographic in foster care nationwide. According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office [GAO], blacks

make up 34% of the foster-care population, but only 15% of the general child population.

## BLACK KIDS TWICE AS LIKELY IN FOSTER CARE

In 2004, black children were twice as likely to enter foster care as white children. Even among other minority groups, black mothers are more likely to lose their children to the state than Hispanics or Asians – groups that are slightly underrepresented in foster care.

The reason for this disparity? Study after study reviewed by Stanford University law professor Dorothy Roberts in her book *Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare* [Basic Books/Perseus, 2002] concludes that poverty is the leading cause of children landing in foster care.

## POOR FAMILIES IN WELFARE SYSTEM

One study, for example, showed that poor families are up to 22 times more likely to be involved in the child-welfare system than wealthier families. Nationwide, blacks are four times more likely than other groups to live in poverty.

When state child-welfare workers come to remove children from black mothers' homes, they rarely cite poverty as the factor putting a child at risk.

Instead, these mothers are told that they neglected their children by failing to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, education or medical care.

The failure is always personal, and these mothers and children are almost always made to suffer individually for the consequences of one of the United States' most pressing social problems.

## LEGAL SYSTEM OFFERS NO HAVEN

The legal system often provides no haven for these parents. Based on even the flimsiest allegations, they are essentially presumed guilty and pressured to participate in various cookie-cutter services that often do not directly address the

See POOR Page 19

## A Call To Boycott

# High Stakes Tests Hurt The Student

By James H. Nehring

It is now widely accepted across the scholarly community that the persistent use of high-stakes testing in public education is a potentially harmful practice.

The large and growing body of evidence is synthesized nicely in recent publications by Audrey Amrein and David Berliner, Deborah Meier and colleagues, and Wayne Au.

The opinions of leading scholars from a range of research traditions and political perspectives are appearing in the press with increasing frequency.

### TWO PROPONENTS CHANGE THEIR MINDS

Most notably, Chester E. Finn Jr. and Diane Ravitch, long associated with the politically conservative impulse that spawned the current testing movement, declared in an opinion piece in *The Wall Street Journal* last summer:

"We're already at risk of turning U.S. schools into test-prepping skill factories where nothing matters except exam scores on basic subjects. That's not what America needs nor is it a sufficient conception of educational accountability."

Joining these voices, the leading professional organizations in the field have for several years maintained formal positions on the use and abuse of high-stakes testing.

### TEST SCORES ALONE SHOULD NOT RULE

From the American Educational Research Association's statement: "Decisions that affect individual students' life chances or educational opportunities should not be made on the basis of test scores alone."

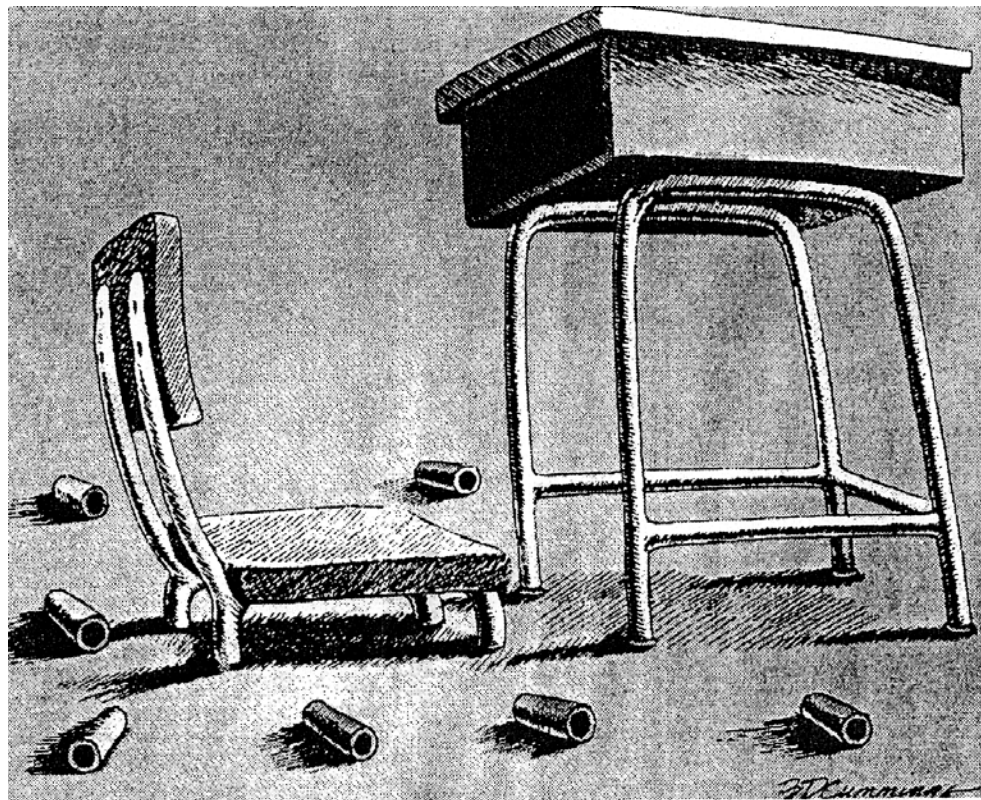
From the American Psychological Association's statement: "When test results are used inappropriately or as a single measure of performance, they can have unintended adverse consequences."

It is rare for scholars to reach such broad consensus. That it has been achieved on a matter of such immediacy and consequence raises an important question: If the persistent use of high-stakes testing in public schools is a potentially harmful practice, do researchers who draw on the results of such testing legitimize the practice and become complicit in its perpetuation?

### DETERMINES A PERSON'S LIFE CHANCES

A test is high-stakes if it is being used to determine a person's life chances or educational opportunities. This would include most state-sponsored exit exams [such as the new Oklahoma law requiring such a test].

Since becoming a university faculty member in 2006, after many years as a high school teacher and school leader, I have been struck by the volume of re-



search in education that relies on the results of high-stakes testing.

Sometimes, this research is by scholars who are themselves critical of such testing. I myself feel a growing tension in my work between the practical need for objective indicators of student learning and the ethical demands of my profession to do no harm.

So I have made a decision. From this point forward, to the best of my ability, I will not use the results of high-stakes tests as the sole or primary measure of student learning in research I conduct, unless a purpose of that work is to study the test itself.

I invite those whose work involves education research to take the same pledge I have. Imagine the positive impact we could have on educational practice if we college educators in particular boycotted high-stakes testing.

### NO LONGER USE THE SAME YARDSTICK

Whenever our work called for some yardstick of student learning, we would look somewhere other than the easily available and potentially harmful high-stakes tests.

Such an exercise would not only push our own practice constructively forward, but it might also lead to new ways of thinking about student assessment in general.

- The author, a former high school teacher, is now an assistant professor of education at the University of Massachusetts

# Teachers Shortage Is On The Horizon

By Sam Dillon

Over the next four years, more than a third of the nation's 3.2 million teachers will retire, depriving classrooms of experienced instructors and straining taxpayer-financed retirement systems, according to a new report.

The problem is aggravated by high attrition among rookie teachers, with one of every three new teachers leaving the profession within five years, a loss of talent that costs school districts millions in recruiting and training expenses, says the report, by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, a nonprofit research advocacy group.

"The traditional teaching career is collapsing at both ends," the report says. "Beginners are being driven away" by low pay and frustrating working conditions, and "accomplished veterans who still have much to contribute are being separated from their schools by obsolete retirement systems" that encourage teachers to move from paycheck to pension when they are still in their mid-50s, the report says.

### POLICY MAKERS OUGHT TO GET BUSY

To ease the exodus, the report says, policy makers should restructure schools and modify state retirement policies so that thousands of the best veteran teachers can stay on in the classroom to mentor inexperienced teachers.

Reorganizing schools around what the report calls learning teams, a model already in place in some schools in Boston, could ease the strain on pension systems, raise student achievement and help young teachers survive their first, often traumatic years in the classroom, it says.

"In the '60s we recruited many baby-boom women and men, and the deal we made was, 'You'll have a rewarding career and at the end, pension and health

benefits,'" said Tom Carroll, the commission's president.

### HALF READY TO COLLECT

"They signed up in large numbers and stayed, and now 53% of our teaching work force is getting ready to collect. If all those boomers walk into retirement, our teacher pension systems will be under severe strain, with the same problems as the auto industry."

This is not the first report to predict widespread teacher shortages unless policy makers took quick action.

In 1999, an Education Department study warned that the impending retirement of millions of teachers could lead to chaos.

The recession may help ease potential teacher shortages because the profession's relative job security and generous health benefits will probably attract more new college graduates and career-changers than when plenty of good jobs were available.

"Still, the authors make a credible case that the number of teachers who retire will rise in coming years," said Dr. Michael Podgursky, who studies teacher retirement at the University of Missouri, "and it makes a good deal of sense to develop phased retirement systems that permit retired or semi-retired teachers to mentor new teachers."

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# PERFORMANCES

From Page One

he didn't pay his taxes; not because he failed to file an ethics report; not because he was a lackey for the insurance industry and a puppet for the State Chamber. He is a bitter partisan, pushing through gag rules, avoiding honest debate. When Gov. Henry vetoed some of his worst bills, he worked with the GOP House to refer them to a vote of the people – pure political cowardice.

**Sen. Clark Jolley**, R-Edmond, is the Republican Senate's bad bill machine. A double-talking debater with a winning personality, one of his bills was creation of a CIO – chief information officer. One unnamed individual, starting at \$133,000, would be the final authority in consolidating the state's multi-million dollar computer technology. When the Senate tied up, final adjournment was postponed until a junketing GOP senator, Steve Russell, could vote. Why the hurry?

**Sen. John Ford**, R-Bartlesville, was author of the worst bill in a session notorious for bad bills. SB 834 would have turned every school district into an old plantation – no due process, no mandates such as class size, textbooks, certified teachers. The State School Board Association shamefully endorsed it. It passed on a virtual party line vote in both houses, with Democrats pointing out that it would wipe out Gov. Henry Bellmon's landmark reform, HB 1017. Gov. Henry promptly vetoed it.

**Sen. Steve Russell**, R-OKC, made one of the worst speeches in our memory. He attacked Oklahoma by name, denigrated our schools and said he could not understand why anyone would want to live here. We have our differences in Oklahoma but you won't find harder working educators and better neighbors anywhere in America. He's typical of the Republican legislators today – they aren't Henry Bellmon or Dewey Bartlett Republicans, they deplore the government many of us fought for.

**Sen. Todd Lamb**, R-Edmond, was our biggest disappointment when the GOP took over the Senate for the first time. As majority floor leader he was fair. As a legislator he was a disaster, supporting religious fundamentalist legislation and proposing that the state seal be changed to In God We Trust. Translated from Latin the seal is Labor Conquers All. It was a tribute to the hearty pioneers who settled

what became Oklahoma.

## House Best

**Rep. Ryan Kiesel**, D-Seminole, isn't afraid to speak truth to power. Gifted intellectually and oratorically, he deftly challenged one GOP sacred cow after another [examples: tort reform and Voter ID] and routinely spoofed the Black Helicopter crowd's one-world conspiracy resolutions. He's one of the few legislators confident enough to believe he can study the issues, vote his conscience and successfully explain his reasoning in the coffee shops back home.

**Rep. Doug Cox**, R-Grove, is an independent thinker in the all-too-often lockstep world of the House GOP majority. He was the only Republican to vote against Rep. Sally Kern's inane resolution condemning the United Nations Commission on the Rights of the Child. He opposed Speaker Chris Benge's plans to overhaul the state medical examiner's office. An emergency room physician, Cox also led modest efforts to encourage younger Oklahomans [ages 18-40] to purchase health insurance by making it possible to offer them less expensive, bare-bones policies that do not include coverages mandated by the state.

**Rep. Lisa Billy**, R-Purcell, blossomed into a first-rate legislator this session. Though we disagree with her on such issues as reproductive freedom, we were impressed with her bravery as she stood tall for public education and against her party's efforts to undermine it [example: SB 834]. A former Chickasaw Nation legislator, she often opens her remarks in native language – a delicious irony in a chamber where English-Only is the GOP mantra.

**Rep. Mike Brown**, D-Tahlequah, isn't a show horse, like some, but rather a workhorse who battled non-stop to keep House Democrats more united than at any time since the GOP takeover five years ago. At one point, he advised Gov. Henry that House Democrats could be counted on to uphold vetoes on 67 different measures, if necessary. He also fought valiantly to secure insurance coverage for autistic children – drawing attention to this absurdity: Insurance companies will cover treatment of erectile dysfunction in Oklahoma, but not autism.

**Rep. Ron Peters**, R-Tulsa, took on

## POOR

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concerns that brought them to court.

For example, after her children went into foster care, Lisa was asked to attend parenting classes, undergo a mental health evaluation, seek therapy and submit to random drug testing before her children could be returned.

Child welfare authorities did not assist her in repairing her home or finding a new apartment, nor have they gone after her landlord for allowing deplorable conditions.

Race and poverty should not be a barrier to raising one's children. In order to prevent the entry of poor children into the foster care system, state and federal governments must confront poverty-related issues.

Until this country comes to terms with its culpability in allowing widespread poverty to exist, poor black mothers will continue to lose their children to the state.

And we will continue to label these women "bad mothers" to assuage our own guilt.

– The author is staff attorney at the Bronx Defenders in New York City

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what was arguably the session's most difficult challenge: Enacting major changes in the state's long-underfunded Department of Human Services at a time of slumping revenues. There's still much work to be done, but the low-key Peters deserves credit for a serious first bite at the apple, working to reduce the number of children in state custody [twice the national average] and increase training for child welfare workers. He also carried legislation aimed at protecting children against abusive parents and helping create a new elite performing arts high school in Tulsa.

## House Worst

**Rep. Dan Sullivan**, R-Tulsa, is a walking conflict of interest. He represents doctors in malpractice cases and takes big campaign money from insurance companies, then works overtime to thwart the rights of Oklahomans to seek damages if they are wronged. He's also a finger-wagging moralizer in a Brooks Brothers suit: He routinely carries mean-spirited anti-choice legislation such as this year's HB 1595 requiring doctors to report patient data to the state – which then will be available for public view. The patient won't be named, but it'll be obvious to small-town busybodies.

**Rep. Mike Ritze**, R-Broken Arrow, launched his legislative career with a [big] bang, wrestling the unofficial title of Theocrat-in-Chief away from Rep. Sally Kern. Ritze is a nice, earnest physician and religious fundamentalist who often votes with the Liberty Caucus, a cabal that lives in perpetual fear of one-world government. He won approval for a Ten Commandments monument on the Capitol grounds, despite warnings it could cost the state dearly if challenged in court. He also tried to force all candidates for state or county office to provide proof of citizenship, a nod to conspiracy theorists that are convinced President Obama's Hawaiian birth certificate isn't real.

**Rep. Sally Kern**, R-OKC, continues to baffle, astonish and amuse. A former teacher whose anti-public education

screeds are legendary, Kern turned her focus this year to protecting America from one-world government domination. With visions of black helicopters whirring over the Capitol, she argued for her U.N. Commission on the Rights of Children resolution by claiming that Oklahoma parents were on the verge of losing authority over their children to an 18-member "tribunal" in Geneva. Seriously. She is a Religious Right diva who often takes to fundamentalist pulpits to preach her gospel that homosexuals are a bigger threat to America than terrorists.

**Rep. Rex Duncan**, R-Sand Springs, gave Oklahoma a black eye in October 2007 by refusing a complimentary copy of the Quran from the Governor's Ethnic American Advisory Council. This year, in response to reports a Muslim woman was allowed to be photographed for her driver's license wearing a hijab – a traditional scarf that covers the head but not the face – he renewed his ugly Americanism by pushing to ban headwear of any kind in driver's license photos. Duncan also is accused of selling his home in a sweetheart deal to a landfill company in exchange for not opposing the landfill's expansion plans. He often rules by fiat as House Judiciary Committee chair.

**Rep. Rebecca Hamilton**, D-OKC, irritated more than a few of her fellow Democrats this session. It's not that she switched sides on reproductive rights several years ago [other House Democrats also adhere to their church's teachings against abortion]. What's baffling is that she has sided with Republicans on party-loyalty votes – without bothering to alert her teammates in advance. Case in point: She moved to cut off questions on the pro-GOP, anti-Democratic Voter ID measure because she didn't want Republican author Sue Tibbs, who is battling cancer, to be forced to stand and answer questions at length. Hamilton then voted against the bill to make it appear she was a loyal Democratic soldier. She also voted for Kern's wacky U.N. resolution.

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