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VOL. 41, NO. 14

An Independent Journal of Commentary

AUGUST 10, 2009

## Ssshhh! Somebody's Listening Conspiracy Theorists

By Frosty Troy

His name was Joe C. Phillips and his goal in life was to convince The Oklahoma Observer that the government was the enemy and anti-Americans were determined to create a New World Order.

Joe was a nice guy and I didn't want to hurt his feelings. He wanted to take me to a Little Dixie compound where the "real Americans" would marshal to battle the New World Order.

He said our paper money was worthless and, true to his word, he paid for his renewal with silver dimes.

Joe was not as daffy as the woman who called, and in a whispered voice, told me she was hiding in a closet in her home because the FBI was shooting electronic waves into her brain.

After 9/11, conspiracy theorists multiplied astronomically overnight. The Minutemen, KKK, Neo-Nazis and others had no trouble winning recruits, some in Oklahoma in an infamous compound on the Arkansas border.

After the Murrah Building bombing in Oklahoma City, many pinned the action on a conspiracy hatched by a group of super patriots operating out of upper Michigan. In reality it was a conspiracy of three and all paid the price.

How could intelligent Americans swallow obvious fictions? They are not alone. The daffy History Channel specializes in giving comfort to all sorts of wild beliefs. A visit to the Internet suggests that such beliefs are common.

In the months before Sept. 11, Yahoo.com listed 231 websites devoted to "conspiracy," 59 of them detailing government conspiracies.

AltaVista.com boasted nearly

350,000 pages. "Conspiracies" involving the death of one-time Clinton aide Vince Foster accounted for more than 20,000 pages.

Borders.com showed 1,000 matches for "conspiracy," including 239 videos or DVDs. Among the book titles displayed were *Black Helicopters Over America: Strike Force for the New World Order* and *The Virtual Government: CIA Mind Control Operations in America*.

Not even the world of sports is immune. USA Today published two ar-



ticles about sports conspiracies. One recalled the charge by a star NBA player that the league was conspiring to allow the opposing team to win a playoff series.

The second was that Dale Earnhardt Jr.'s win at the Daytona track [where his father had been killed] was arranged by NASCAR officials.

Gallup surveys revealed that almost a third of Americans believed a spacecraft from another planet had crashed in Roswell, NM, in 1947. Only 25% accepted the government's denials.

Similarly, aided by the History Channel, 48% believe UFOs exist and 12% professed to have seen them. A whopping 71% said the government is covering up information about them.

A caller breathlessly exclaimed that she had learned that the federal government had opened concentration camps in Alaska for dissidents. The address was a secret.

Only 44% in 1999 bought the finding of government investigators that the crash of TWA Flight 800 was the

result of mechanical failure. More than a fourth insisted the plane had been felled by a U.S. Navy missile.

And in January 2002, even with trust in government apparently surging and President George W. Bush's approval rating soaring to 82%, a CBS News/New York Times poll showed two-thirds believed Bush was lying about dealings with Enron executives prior to the company's bankruptcy.

No doubt many of these notions are subscribed to by only tiny minorities of Americans. Credible surveys offer evidence that tens of millions inhabit a mental world teeming with conspirators and government cover-ups.

Pollsters were startled by the worldwide reaction to 9/11. For example, Gallup polling in Pakistan noted nearly half adult Pakistanis claimed Israel was responsible for the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon – four times as many as attributed the attacks to Osama bin Laden.

Never mind that Osama bin Laden himself had praised the attackers.

Mere facts can't shake conspiracy theorists. Months later, following the release of another bin Laden video, Gallup still found large minorities in Indonesia, Iran, Kuwait, Lebanon and Pakistan denying that the attack had been carried out by Arabs.

Many conspiracy theories are accepted by clear majorities of adult Americans.

John F. Kennedy's assassination spawned thousands of conspiracy theorists. Numerous books dealing with the assassination have been published and more than a million pages of government documents released as a result of several official investigations.

Most Americans doubted Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone, and – except for a brief period following the issuance of the Warren Commission Report – dozens of surveys have shown increasing majorities doubting the official version.

CBS polls showed two-thirds to three-quarters concluded that there had been "an official cover-up to keep the public from learning the truth."

See LISTEN! Page 18

# Observations

## Thank You!

Because The Observer is a human institution and not solely a money-making enterprise, we pause to tell you how much your support means.

Skipping an issue in July gives us time for reflection. We hope The Observer is your source for commentary on the vital issues of the day. We're imperfect but we try our best in each and every issue.

Even though we may never get to know each of you personally, our columns are open to you – especially your letters – either pro or con. There are no water-walkers here.

Our journey has been made possible by you, especially in this era of failed newspapers. We hope our web presence connects with younger readers [www.okobserver.net].

We are all travelers on the road of life, knowing it's difficult to maintain one's sanity in such a divided country. Don't let being the reddest state obscure your commitment to good government and real family values.

When The Observer was launched the skeptics were legion, but we persevered. Although we have never entered any contest, we have received numerous local, state and national journalism awards – more than any other Oklahoma publication.

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

## Not Our Gang

As long as it is open, Guantanamo Bay remains a black eye on America's reputation and hampers our ability to pursue our national security interests. Only a handful of fanatics believe otherwise.

A bipartisan group of five former Secretaries of State – including Colin Powell, Henry Kissinger and James Baker – agree that it should be closed. Condoleezza Rice and Defense Secretary Bob Gates urged President Bush to close it.

The Obama Administration is forg-

ing ahead despite the critics.

Don't be misled by the Oklahoma Legislature's resolution proclaiming that housing prisoners on American soil would be a threat to the American people.

The federal prison system safely holds or has held for extended periods of time a large number of convicted terrorists. We mention a few:

Ramzi Yousef, mastermind of the 1993 World Trade Center bombings was convicted and sentenced in 1998 by the Federal District Court in Manhattan and is being held at the Supermax prison in Florence, CO.

Zacharias Moussaoui, convicted for his role in the 9/11 attacks, is currently serving a life sentence at Supermax.

The East African embassy bombing perpetrators – Wahid el-Hage, Mohammed Sadiq Odeh, Mohammed Rashed al-Owhali and Khalfan Khamis Mohammed – are all serving time in Florence.

Richard C. Reid, the so-called "Shoe Bomber," was convicted for trying to blow up an airliner over the Atlantic with explosives in his shoe. He is currently serving a life sentence at Florence.

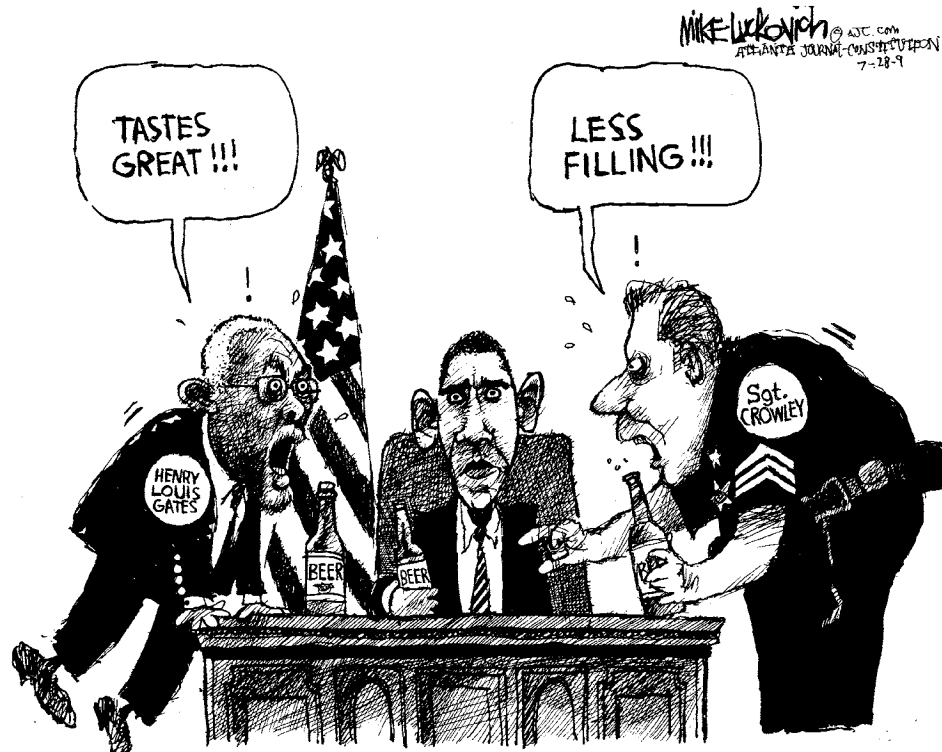
Don't forget the worst domestic terrorist in American history, Timothy McVeigh, convicted of killing 168 people by blowing up the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, was held in Florence until his execution on June 11, 2001.

Of course Oklahoma's corrections system couldn't be used – thanks to legislative lack of action, the decrepit system is \$500 million short of meeting minimum facilities needs.

It is an insult to America to believe we can't hold the worst in the world. After all, we tolerate Congress.

## Get Out

President Bush repeatedly insisted that the United States had "no desire for permanent bases" in Iraq. He lied



again.

The AP reports that the Pentagon is backing a \$5 billion plan to "transform the U.S.-protected Green Zone from a walled fortress into a centerpiece for Baghdad's future," resulting in "big paydays for early investors."

For taxpayers it means a \$1 billion permanent U.S. Embassy. Think how many public school textbooks that would buy, not to mention the thousands of teachers who have been laid off due to the Wall Street collapse.

The AP notes that a huge majority of Iraqis oppose our presence. That's exactly what a majority of Americans voted for when they elected Barack Obama.

## Lazy Voters

Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin helped draw unprecedented attention to female voters. Unfortunately, too many men just stay home on election day – including Oklahomans.

New York University professor Rogan Kersh, an expert on voting patterns, said over the past 40 years, the voting rate for both men and women tumbled – but much more steeply for men.

In 1964, a record 72% of voting-age males made their mark for president. By 2006, that figure had slipped to just 56%, or 16 million fewer men than if the rates had stayed level.

That's a turnout gap roughly the size of Michigan and Indiana combined.

Some politicians say that the Democratic Party has suffered more from the male malaise, since its base of white working-class men has eroded.

The shift cuts against the GOP, too. Strong female majorities and sluggish male turnout helped elect Bill Clinton to two terms. This election, the missing male vote sunk John McCain.

His choice of Palin – whose favorability rating was four points higher among men than women, according to a Pew poll – didn't pay off.

Barack Obama was going where the boys were, buying ad space in video games such as NBA Live and Grand Theft Auto. It worked!

Men are less likely than women to attend church, consume news, trust

authority and believe that people are generally good, according to the University of Michigan's General Social Survey, a biannual tracking of attitudes and behaviors.

Chris Cox, 32, a systems administrator from Omaha, said voting is like choosing "between a douche bag and a turd sandwich." This is patriotism? This is love of country?

Higher education is the top predictor of voting, and increasingly men aren't as schooled as women. In recent decades, male enrollment has dropped below that of women at the undergraduate level.

Add the fact that 5.3 million convicted felons are barred from voting in this country, more than 80% are men. That number has steadily swelled since the 1980s.

Not voting is a guy thing – mostly a single-guy thing. Married men are not only more likely to vote than their bachelor counterparts, but according to gender sociologist Michael Kimmel, they are frequently swayed by their wives about who gets their votes. Wise decision.

## No Fireworks

Remember all the dire forecasts when President Obama was to meet the Pope? Not only was the reception cordial, it was downright friendly as both stressed that abortion is only one thread in the human social fabric.

Pope Benedict XVI applauded Obama's vow to reduce the number of abortions in America. A Vatican spokesman said the Pope eschewed confrontation and stressed where they could work together.

We hope America's hierarchy was listening – especially Oklahoma's two bishops. Abortion, abortion, abortion is all many of them preach, forgetting that the church's definition of social justice consists of a seamless garment – all life is important, including those facing capital punishment.

Oops! The best way to hush a Catholic going on and on about abortion is to ask their position on executions. The church does not mince words – except in the case of heinous crimes such as the holocaust – every life is to be protected.

THE OKLAHOMA  
**Observer**

www.okobserver.net

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

[ISSN 0030-1795]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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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

Our founding editor, Frosty Troy, has won the Oklahoma Labor Council's Friend of Labor Award. Henceforth it will be named for him. Wow!

Laurel: To federal attorneys fighting Terry Nichols' lawsuit over the quality of prison food. For his part in bombing the Murrah Building he's lucky he's not on bread and water for the rest of his life.

Watch his nose zoom out of the room when Sen. Tom Coburn is asked if he was involved in the \$95,000 in hush money for adulterer Sen. John Ensign. Sen. Jim Inhofe and ex-Rep. Steve Largent also belong to that eerie DC cult known as The Family.

Dart: To a woefully errant Legislature for refusing to fund sex offender treatment for those doing time. Today there is room for only 55, with dozens on a waiting list.

We are delighted that Langston University is on the fast track to excellence - 700 incoming freshmen have grade point averages of at least 3.0. The administration and faculty need to concentrate on the students - nothing else.

Laurel: To the Associated Press for challenging those who call the inheritance tax the "death tax." In fact, it only kicks in at \$3.5 million - and only a handful of the very rich pay it if they were dumb enough not to create trusts.

The U.S. Chamber has piled up \$100 million to stop President Obama's proposal to end predatory lending practices of major banks and credit card companies. Guess where they got most of the money? Big banks.

Dart: To the Oklahoma Republican Party, referencing God 22 times in the 2009 platform. If Jesus had been a delegate he would have thrown up. Read your Bible - it's not by word but by deed.

Ten million Americans live with an unmarried partner, about 8% of U.S. couples. Most are 25 to 34. It's illegal in seven states but not Oklahoma.

Laurel: To the Baptist Messenger for owning up to their mistake and printing a retraction after printing a Sally Kern "morality" resolution erroneously carrying Gov. Brad Henry's signature.

Prenatal care for impoverished teen mothers has been terminated by Oklahoma City and Tulsa alternative schools. Incredibly, the Legislature gutted funding for the program.

Dart: For the budget cut of the Oklahoma School of Science and Mathematics - only education agency cut. Grads include 300 engineers, 65 physicians, 40 PhDs, two veterinarians, two dentists, 25 lawyers, three ministers and 40 members of the armed forces.

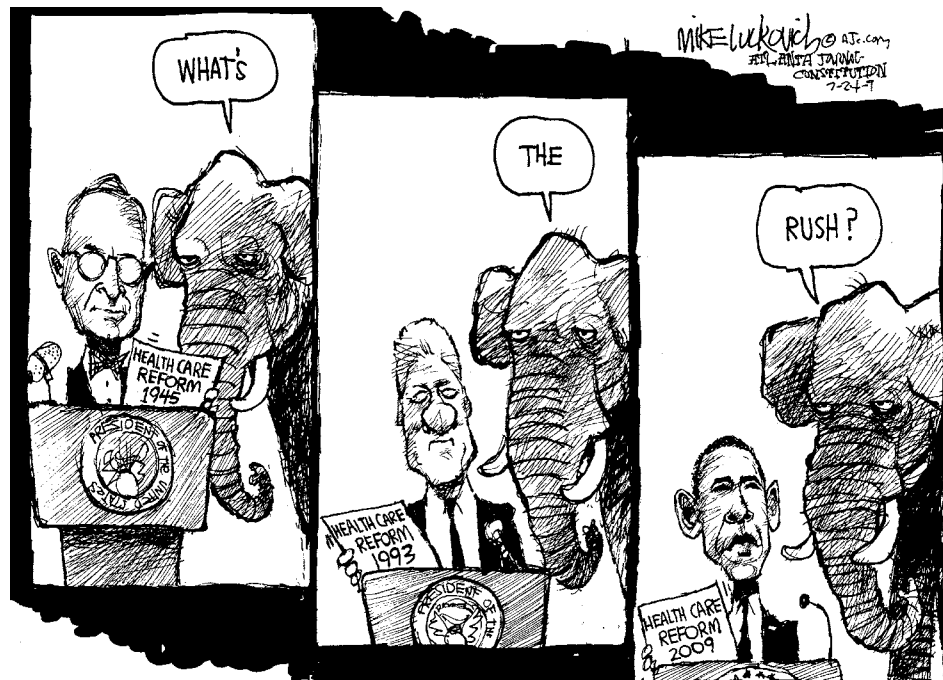
Did you hear about the Republican who was weed-eating his yard and accidentally cut off his cat's tail? He rushed his cat, along with the tail, over to Wal-Mart. Why Wal-Mart? He said he had read that Wal-Mart is the largest RETAILER in the world!

Laurel: To a federal appeals court, reversing a decision that would have awarded Indian tribes \$455 million instead of the estimated \$47 billion owed them for stolen mineral and land rights. The suit has been going on for 13 years.

A nationwide poll shows that 20% of constituents think members of Congress vote their way but 60% think they vote the way political contributors want them to. - The Tarrance Group Poll

Dart: To GOP legislative leaders for blasting a professional audit of the Corrections Department. More than \$500 million is needed to upgrade crumbling facilities and address understaffing. They preferred cutting taxes for the affluent.

It was heartening to read Michael Brose's Oklahoman op-ed, calling for return of school counselors' function of helping students - especially troubled youth. Brose, executive director of the Mental Health Association of Tulsa, is preaching off our page.



Laurel: For the AP's exposure of Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-AL, relentless critic of Supreme Court nominee Sonia Sotomayor. He was turned down for a federal judgeship because he was a rabid racist - and obviously still is.

The Oklahoma History Center was host this year to the Good Ole-Fashioned Liars Contest. The contest excluded politicians - no professionals were allowed.

Dart: To what passes for our "moral values" leadership in Congress. We now have 37.2 million impoverished people - 18% of the population. Poor women have abortions four times the rate for women above the poverty level. - Census Bureau

We had high hopes when Gene Christian took over at the Office of Juvenile Affairs. Now he leads the board in studying a facility to be built and operated by a private vender. More expensive outsourcing.

Laurel: To the Obama Administration for \$24 million to weatherize homes of Oklahoma's poor and low-income families. Our Legislature preferred to cut taxes for the affluent.

Michael Jackson's death should be a wake-up call for Oklahoma and all Americans - leading cause of fatal overdoses is prescription drugs, more than heroin, meth and cocaine combined.

Dart: To probably the worst TV commentator we've ever watched, Lou Dobbs, who still claims Barack Obama isn't a citizen. CNN rebuked his claim.

Thankfully, the 2009 Oklahoma Legislature didn't sign on to Speaker Chris Benge's legislation to start work on a \$9 billion nuclear reactor - at taxpayer expense. Check France - 14 of their 19 nuke plants are out of service.

Laurel: To state Rep. Richard Morrisette, D-OKC, calling for a halt to legislative travel due to severe budget cuts. He noted that the House by mid-July had already spent \$132,880. Higher ed travel is budgeted \$60 million and state agencies \$35 million.

Norman Republican Sen. Jonathan Nichols is considering the race for attorney general. He's one of the quality GOP members of the Legislature.

Dart: To Rep. Dan Boren, D-OK, and several other U.S. House Blue Dog Democrats for helping kill labor's card-check reform.

Only the Pentagon could up with these definitions: water intrusion instead of flooding; combat replacement evacuator for a shovel; a portable hand-held communicator inscriber for a pencil.

Laurel: To OU Assistant Professor Amy Cerato, recipient of the Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers, highest U.S. government honor for outstanding early career scientists and engineers.

GOP Sen. Jim Inhofe didn't know which lie to tell. Asked about The Family, a DC cult, he said he'd never heard of it. Later he told another reporter, "It's a great place!" He is a member.

Dart: To Rep. Tom Cole, R-OK, denouncing the Bush Administration and calling for a "new direction for the party." Cole voted for the disastrous Bush agenda all the way and never ever spoke up.

The level of violence today is historic. Example: More than 200 murders in Chicago by July 1 - including 40 children.

Laurel: To the Pew Research Center for an honest poll showing 49% of evangelical Christians approve of torture. Among white evangelicals it's 62%. Approval increased among those regularly attending church.

Oklahoma finally had a bit of good news - confirmed cases of child abuse and neglect were down a third, fewer than 3,000 from last year. That's still fewer than 3,000 too many.

We were the original media cheerleader for Feed the Children, but we later exposed what a ripoff it had become. Their ownership of \$1.2 million home in Burbank, CA, doesn't surprise us. Instead, support OKC's Jesus House or Tulsa's Neighbor for Neighbor.

## THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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# Letters

Editor, The Observer:

Did anyone ever ask U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-OK, for his birth certificate? Was he born on Earth or is he some alien Jonah marooned here by space-farers trying to avoid cosmic catastrophe? Surely he ain't no real Okie - we've never been that backward.

I hope you have space enough, if you're inclined to do so, to take that oil puppet to task. Keep on 'em - they're grasping at straws.

Mike Rogers  
Moore

Editor, The Observer:

Some of you who actually know U.S. Rep. Dan Boren, D-OK, could you call him and give him a clue? Remind him he represents the people, not the insurance companies that fill his bank account.

I believe it is time for taxpayers to stop paying for health care coverage and lucrative pension benefits for elected officials. I am particularly interested in stopping taxpayer money from funding health care and pensions for members of Congress.

Our elected officials in Washington have never met a bomb they couldn't beg, borrow or steal the money to buy. And yet, they tell the American taxpayers their families aren't important and there isn't enough money to help them with their health care. Still taxpayers foot the bill for Congress and their families. Now that would be a real "tea party" subject.

Congress' oppressive use of our money to keep themselves and their families well cared for - while telling the American taxpayer that there is no money for American families - is nothing more than politics and greed. Since there is no money, Congress could save a lot of money by not paying for elected officials to have health care and pensions. Let the insurance companies pay for Congress' health care. The problem would then be solved, I betcha.

Milas Alagood  
Altus

Editor, The Observer

Lori Grof's article in the 6.25.09 edition states, "In a capitalist, laissez-faire economy, wealth is created," but goes on to blame leftists for the fall of America through converting the country to socialism, although few people consider America a socialist state. Worse, she does not mention corporations having bought our government and freely taking money from others and distributing it as they wish. Now they are directly taking funds out of

the taxpayers' till and they are the ones "guzzling buckets of caviar and champagne while the people starve" - not socialist leaders here.

Grof complains that we are now only making advances in technology but fails to add that the corporations have moved all the other fields to poor countries in pursuit of the cheapest labor. She is upset with the mediocrity of the country but remains oblivious to the harm caused by anti-intellectualism and anti-science of the right.

Grof sees the problems but not the causes and chooses to blame those she hates.

Chadwick Cox  
Norman

Editor, The Observer:

In a story published in the Tulsa World, they reported, "According to the 2009 State of America's Brain Health Report, Oklahoma ranked 49th in the country for brain health, above only Alabama and Louisiana. The District of Columbia was also included in the study."

Well that explains a whole lot of things.

Kenny Belford  
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

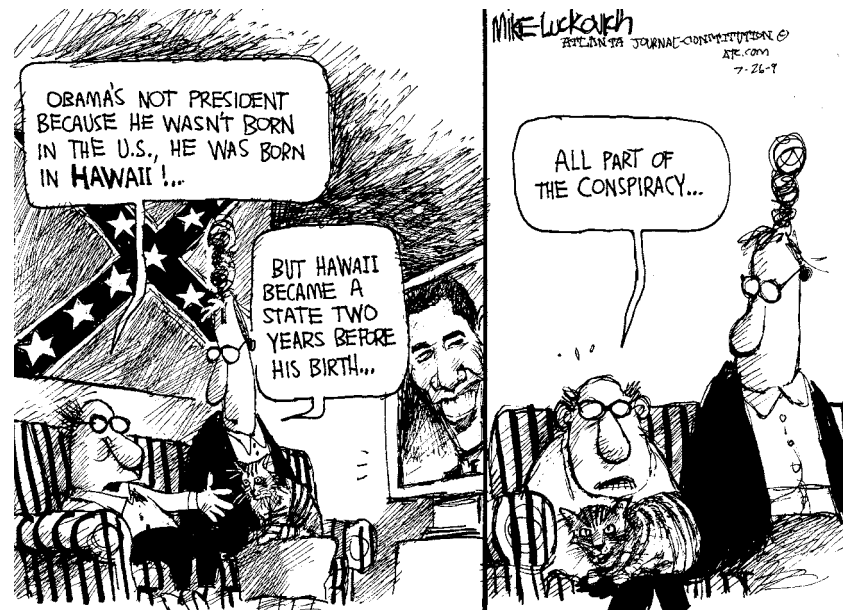
Although state Rep. Sally Kern claims that the gay community is a major factor for our nation's economic troubles, it's important to remember that throughout history focusing on a scapegoat is nothing new. Only 70 years ago, when the German economy collapsed, their leadership likewise used propaganda to misdirect the anger of the workers towards Jews, homosexuals and other groups from those truly responsible for their misery.

American workers are struggling with low wages, job insecurity and lack of access to health care primarily because of corporate greed. Anger directed at the gay community or anyone else for this is misplaced and won't help working families. The gay community doesn't deserve it, and the working people of Oklahoma deserve a better life. We owe it to ourselves, our state and our country to do better.

Victor Gorin  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

GOPer Rep. Sally Kern's recent "morality proclamation" consists mainly of religious divisiveness. The First Amendment requires our government



- local, state and federal - to make no law respecting religion.

No religious belief need be respected if it is advocating that certain citizens who have broken no law must be separated from their civil rights.

Just because the religion has a dogmatic disagreement with other people who are NOT members of that religion is no reason gays/lesbians must be subjected to religious opprobrium and denial of the benefits and privileges that hetero people enjoy only because of the accident of their birth.

James Nimmo  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

The Tulsa World headline [7.8.09] "Tribes give state \$105 million." Wouldn't this headline have been more descriptive: "OK gamers give state \$105 Mil"?

Those who know gaming say that most gamers are those who can't afford to lose, but who dream of "Luck be my Lady."

People paying the price are families and their children; gambling losses mean less food, education, and health care - a lower standard of living.

Why are the younger ones so often saddled with the consequences of unwise decisions and the debts of the older ones?

Cecil Acuff  
Perkins

Editor, The Observer:

Just finished re-reading The Observer [July 10/25] and must thank you for one of the best issues from front page to back page! Bellmon's article was excellent, the Observer letters interesting, darts to U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn needed and the remaining articles right on!

Thank you for all the work!

Mary Virginia Ozier  
Lawton

Editor, The Observer:

Geezers don't like change. I know first hand because I am married to one of these eccentric old gentlemen.

So, I was not surprised when another geezer, Oklahoma's 74-year-old U.S. senator, Jim Inhofe, had a cow when Minnesota elected Democrat Al Franken to the Senate.

"The clown from Minnesota," huffed Republican Inhofe.

Franken ripped it with Inhofe when he made fun of the Republican talk show king in his best-seller, *Rush Limbaugh Is A Big Fat Idiot and Other Observations*.

Here are the other things that make Franken "Public Enemy No. 1" to Inhofe's right-wing gang:

1. He can be the 60th vote to permit Democrats to stop Republican filibusters.

2. He's a liberal

3. He loves to debate Inhofe's No. 2 hero, talk show host Sean Hannity.

4. He's from a lower middle class family. His daddy never made more than \$8,000 a year.

5. He wrote for NBC-TV's hit series Saturday Night Live.

6. He does funny and fearless monologues that can make him a Senate star.

7. He supports government-mandated universal health insurance.

8. He adds a sense of humor to a humorless Senate.

The late Okie Admiral William J. Crowe Jr. said, "As you progress, nothing will stand you in better stead than a sense of humor. In a perfect world this would not be so important. We would be serious about every subject without harm. But, unfortunately, life does not meet that criterion."

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner  
Wagoner

Editor, The Observer:

I live to love and I love to live and I love to teach.

Children have an innate radar that picks up love signals or feeling. A smile, a hug, a word, a gesture. They automatically detect its presence or absence. A smile is my stock and trade. I can turn it on or off at will, but most of the time it's spontaneous. When children misbehave, I turn it off. That is a signal they understand. Sometimes it takes a stern look and a word or two of admonishment.

I loved preschool. I had the greatest preschool in the world. It was in a tropical paradise, in front of a beach, palm trees, trade winds; can you imagine [Puerto Rico]? Nature was very much an integral part of our curriculum.

Kindergarten was fun, too. But first grade was more work, less play. All my children exceeded expectations; some even read all the second grade books. There was one exception to my success as a first-grade teacher: I failed to reach Jason. He was, what we describe today, an autistic child. Autism is a spectrum syndrome. The child was focused on his world. He had artistic talent. I wish I was his kindergarten teacher. I wish I had the experience about autism then that I have today.

In summary, teaching is a labor of love and a good teacher, like a good shepherd, will do everything within his/her power to regain a lost soul.

Wilfredo Santos Rivera  
Oklahoma City

## Frosty Troy's

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# Frosty Troy

## What Media?

No news is good news? Watch network TV in disgust as the “news” is car chases, grass fires and celebrity breakups, ignoring vital issues at home and abroad.

Listen to an endless stream of AM radio talk show hosts polarizing ordinary Americans who believe if it's on the radio it must be true.

Pundits shout about political horse races and poll numbers rather than discuss hard facts, especially those that leave listeners feeling uncomfortable. Mental health. Public health. Corrections, etc. Ouch!

There is little doubt the U.S. media are in crisis when a scientific poll commissioned by Time magazine shows journalists at the absolute bottom of the professional totem poll.

Newspapers across America are folding or cutting back on staff and the news hole. Don't look for TV news to fill the void.

In Oklahoma the best newscast is 6:30 in the evening on OETA. If you're not watching it, you are missing hard-hitting factual news coverage.

A handful of massive corporations control network TV, radio, and newspapers. They slash newsroom budgets, cozy up to advertisers, cluttering America with cheap, mindless entertainment and faux journalism.

Newspapers are hurting? Just a few years ago the operating profit margin for newspapers averaged 19.3% – exceeded only by commercial banks [32.4%] and pharmaceutical firms [24.2%].

What irony! Newspaper profits and circulation plummet and network viewership is down. The media have left us with an America that is generally misled and misinformed.

Nearly every political problem we face today can be linked to the lack of media coverage – the war in Iraq, eroding environmental protections, soaring budget deficits, disappearing civil liberties, the collapse of urban public education, and an unprecedented health care crisis.

Where are the probing questions? Newspapers have always challenged the status quo. Where is the coverage that the First Amendment was designed to ensure?

Gov. Brad Henry abandoned regularly scheduled news conferences, opting for the occasional dog and pony show. Why aren't the media protesting?

The mess in the media is partially the fault of government policies – massive tax cuts for the affluent, monopoly broadcast licenses, government subsidies, and lack of regulation. Well-heeled lobbyists fashion legislation behind closed doors.

The media are supposed to be the eyes and ears of ordinary citizens. Who else holds government accountable? Remember the softball questions and cozy relationship of the White House press corps and George W. Bush?

One of the G.W. Bush Administration's proposed budgets would have slashed \$157 million from public broadcasting over two years – America's lonely fountain of facts and insight.

Don't say we weren't warned. More than three million people spoke out against efforts by the White House and FCC to let Big Media get even bigger in 2003. The courts rejected weaker media ownership rules.

More than 500,000 Americans protested airing of the anti-Kerry film “Stolen Honor” by Sinclair Broadcast Group – the nation's largest owner of television stations – just before the 2004 election. The company backed down.

Where were reporters when Swift Boat liars, funded by the likes of T. Boone Pickens and the brass at Chesapeake Energy, raised millions to buy TV time to spread deliberate lies about John Kerry? They have cranked up again to oppose the Obama health care initiative.

## Pity The Poor Taxpayer

How does that old saw go? Physician heal thyself. Tort reform is here at last. Winners include trial lawyers, doctors and insurance companies. Losers? The taxpayers.

Among other things, the measure called for a \$400,000 cap. If your daughter loses the wrong leg in surgery, is \$400,000 enough? If it is a catastrophic injury, the cap can go up to \$20 million-plus – to be paid from an indemnity fund.

Guess who funds the indemnity fund? Yes, the poor taxpayer will pick up the cost for some miscreant malpractitioner.

Surprise! More than 41 cases of wrong limb surgeries have been racked up in Oklahoma in recent years. The bill says they will try to find an insurance policy at \$1 million a year or more. Who pays? The taxpayers.

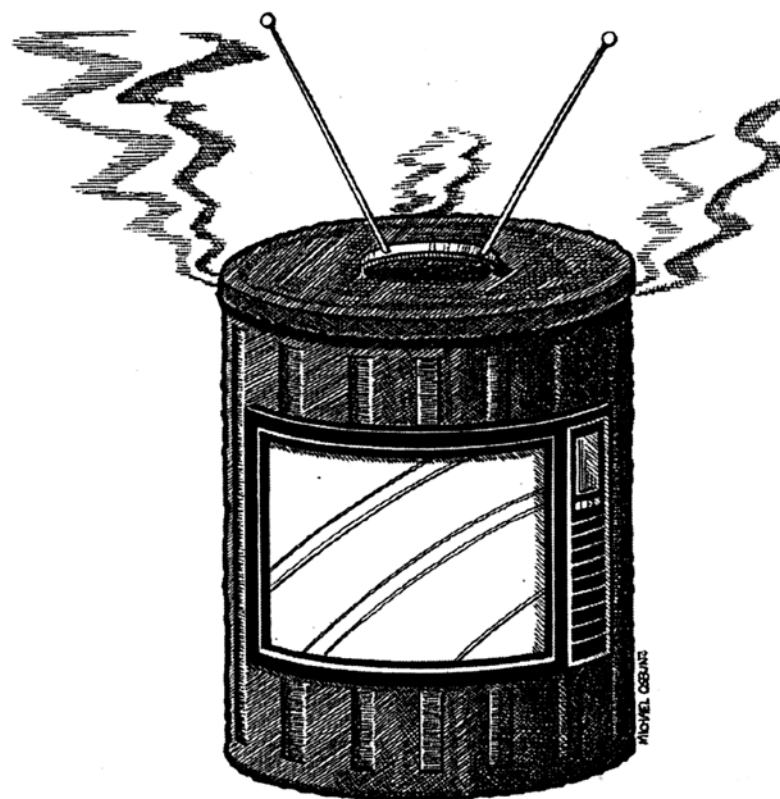
According to the American Medical Association in a letter to the governor, liability premiums for Oklahoma obstetricians/gynecologists [OB/GYNs], internists and general surgeons have increased by over 60% since 2004.

That's an insurance problem, not a consumer problem. In fact, the U.S. spends more per capita on health care than any other country in the world – double the average among industrialized nations. Our medical outcomes are among the worst.

Thousands of Americans are going abroad – specifically to India – for major surgery due to the prohibitive cost in America. We have 47 million without any health insurance. The No. 1 cause of bankruptcy? Medical bills.

We feel for the physicians hit hard by greedy insurance companies, but there was no epidemic of frivolous lawsuits, no jackpot justice, no runaway juries. Clueless doctors were fed a pack of lies.

The ultimate answer? National health insurance, preferably the single payer



Rush Limbaughs and Glenn Becks are among the talking heads earning millions as faux commentators spreading rightwing propaganda. No equal time. Thanks to Ronald Reagan.

Thankfully, millions cherish NPR and Public Television. Time and again a bevy of statehouse Republicans and congressional Republicans have sought to cut or eliminate funding. An anti-OETA bill this year was shelved.

Don't kid yourself – the switch to digital TV is enriching a handful of broadcasters. More than two million homes in rural America are now without television and face little hope of ever receiving it again.

Most of the dailies in Oklahoma are chain-owned, milking the local community but few contribute to the commonweal. Some uncritically publish the bitter anti-Oklahoma propaganda cranked out by the far right Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs.

Only OETA TV staffs the State Capitol. A single commercial radio station, KTOK, and public radio's KOSU represent radio.

State Legislatures magazine surveyed the nation to report that coverage of the statehouse is rapidly deteriorating.

In Oklahoma where there were three Tulsa World statehouse staffers, there is one. Where there were three Oklahoman statehouse reporters there are two.

Intelligent Oklahomans who bother to track vital issues of the day shake their heads in wonder at some of the rightwing clowns elected to the Legislature and the Seven Dwarfs we call a congressional delegation.

Voters are the ultimate victims. Nearly half have given up on home delivery of a daily newspaper, once a staple in every home – urban or rural.

The cost-cutting Oklahoman summarily cut daily delivery to 7,000 homes in western Oklahoma and booted 152 of its employees, eliminating its pension system.

It's hard to imagine an America without daily newspapers. The First Amendment is alive and well but folks who want to be informed will have to dig for the facts.

The Observer may be small but no daily covers the vital issues of the day better. We encourage all Oklahomans to take a daily newspaper. If the editorial page irks you, skip it.

plan already endorsed by the American Medical Association.

Our hat is off to Rep. Paul Wesselhoft, R-Moore, for his outstanding debate which he flung into the teeth of the bill's author, Rep. Dan Sullivan, R-Tulsa, for sticking the taxpayers with a future big bucks tab.

## Never Too Old

A guy with time on his hands decided to do a bit of research about old age. David Sargent of Mobile, AL, noticed that some folks dread old age because it is often associated with loneliness, physical decline, and a retreat to inactivity.

However, history records that many people made some of their greatest contributions to society after age 65:

The Earl of Halsburg was 90 when he began preparing a 20-volume revision of English law.

Galileo made his greatest discovery when he was 73.

At 65, Winston Churchill became British Prime Minister for the first time, and started the epic struggle against Hitler.

At 72, Golda Meir became Prime Minister of Israel.

At 80, Grandma Moses, who had started painting in her late 70s, had her first one-woman exhibit.

At 81, Benjamin Franklin skillfully mediated between disagreeing factions at the U.S. Constitutional Convention.

At 80, Winston Churchill returned to the House of Commons as a member of parliament and also exhibited 62 of his paintings.

## Conference Stirs Fear Of Diversity

# Ill-Educated, Brainwashed And Scared

By James Nimmo

Did you feel the earth move? The fourth annual Reclaiming Oklahoma for Christ conference was held in late July on the campus of Oklahoma Christian University.

I attended the Saturday morning session, and judging from the program, once was enough. The same speakers were there for both sessions and spoke in reverse order from Friday.

Why not entice the star-struck, adoration-starved featured speakers with two audiences and get the most for your speaker fee? I've seen enough of show business from the performer's side of the stage to spot the hams right away.

### FEAR OF DIVERSITY

For me, the take-away from the four hours of sitting through well-practiced, shop-worn speeches is this: There are a good many people who are ill-educated, brainwashed, and plain scared that an acknowledgment of diversity, regardless how that word is framed, will be considered by their god to be a turning away from the "natural truth."

Over and over was repeated the mantra that the chosen have always been a minority against the ungodly majority, but with perseverance to their god's power to do "everything" and with sufficient physical effort on their part, The Remnant [their word, not mine] will triumph as it did in Old Testament Days.

The Remnant are the true minority patriots as I wasn't able to spot a single person of color or non-Anglo birth.

### INSPIRING VIOLENCE?

I got the impression that by physical effort they did not mean putting their hands on tools of agriculture and industry, but rather putting their hands on some rather deadly products of industry. Now that I've attended one of the far right's inspirational conclaves on a prominent college campus, I'm not surprised that progressive churches, health clinics, and national museums are attacked by inspired followers.

The military-style theme of the morning, complete with repetitiously expectant music, a la Jaws was "Many Have Underestimated" with a montage of war images of American military involvement around the world from colonial to the present

## Sally Kern Upholds Abuse Of Children?

By Wallace Collins

I can't hold it any more! I have to speak out about Rep. Sally Kern and her resolution. In the resolution she contends that our country is engaged in all kinds of debauchery, including child pornography and child abuse. I would not argue that with her, but when she had the opportunity to do something positive about it, she declined.

Republican Rep. Sally authored HCR 1033 which condemned a United Nations resolution, No. 5, entitled "The Rights of the Child."

The UN resolution has about 42 articles in it, which all pertain to children worldwide, and seeks to protect them and guarantee children freedom from child labor, slavery, being used for child pornography, child prostitution, child abuse, etc.

### THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

It states for all the world to see that all children are entitled to decent housing, adequate food, clothing, safety, education, health care, and most things we take for granted.

Kern's resolution condemns the UN resolution on the grounds that it takes away states rights, and that it would overrule the U.S. constitution.

I, among others, pointed out that she was mistaken in this belief, but to no avail. Kern's resolution also specifically said that "parents had the right to punish their children with usual and regular punishment, which included whipping, spanking, and paddling."

I may not have the exact quote, but I didn't miss it far. I pointed out during my questioning that this is nearly the exact defense used by convicted child killers Bertha Coffman and Donald Gipson, after the death of Shane Coffman in Little Axe, OK. Little Axe is in House District 45.

### TOO MANY COWERING DEMOCRATS

I was embarrassed that so many of my colleagues either voted for her resolution or missed the vote. It passed 61-28, with 12 excused.

To me, this was a chance to stand up for children, but instead, Oklahoma got another "black eye" before the entire nation.

Incidentally, the only two nations that have failed to sign the UN resolution are the United States of America and Somalia! I guess we are in good company.

I have railed about this to many groups and organizations, but no one seems to think it is important, and Sally continues to gain much publicity about her "values."

If you would like a copy of the UN resolution and HCR 1033 and the vote, I'll be glad to forward it to you. And, by the way, the Senate showed their courage by passing it with a voice vote so there is no record.

In the House, I made sure there was a recorded vote, and I believe if any senators had opposed the terrible idea, they would have done the same.

- The author, a Democrat, represents House District 45 and lives in Norman

day, though there was nothing I could identify as Vietnam since that war was a resounding failure and would refute the power of the god of "everything."

Curiously interspersed with the photos were paintings of George Washington crossing the Delaware and praying in the snow, the latter painting particularly remarked on as factual by one speaker, Janet Porter, as if the painter were guided by the heavenly hand, just like the Bible was dictated by the heavenly voice to the earthly stenographer.

### FALLIN, OTHER REPUBLICANS ATTEND

In attendance and acknowledged from the podium were 5th District U.S. representative and gubernatorial candidate Mary Fallin, as well as Oklahoma legislators such as Sen. Randy Brogdon [also running for governor]; Sen. Todd Lamb [seeking to become lieutenant governor]; Rep. Sally Kern and Rep. Paul Wesselhoff - all Republicans.

If you're interested in public library censorship, pro or con, Carolyn Cornelius, vice-chair of the Oklahoma County Metropolitan Library System was spotted in the audience.

Anita Bryant of orange juice and beauty queen fame was there Friday night. You DO know she lives in Edmond and has an office in Bricktown, an entertainment district in Oklahoma City?

For me the biggest bang for the buck came from Peter LaBarbera, a professional homo-hater, as were all of the four speakers, who insisted that Christians are nicer to homosexuals than the Muslims because Christians only want to love homosexuals, not kill them like the Muslims do.

### AMATEURS VS. PROFESSIONALS

[You can always spot the amateurs from the professionals because professional homo-haters never use the word "gay" - it's always "homosexual" in order to make us sound like a disease and that's the sense I have used the word in this article.]

Further points that were popped out by LaBarbera in his scattered, shotgun style of delivery:

- Gay - excuse me, homosexual - propaganda is protected by the media and this is proved by the falling of moral standards, the promotion of Pride Parades, and the annual National Day of Silence [http://www.dayofsilence.org/] where sup-

See RECLAIMING Page 7

## THE OKLAHOMA Observer

THE INSIGHT AND ANALYSIS YOU'VE COME TO EXPECT ...

... NOW DELIVERED THE WAY YOU WANT

The screenshot shows the Oklahoma Observer website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for HOME, ABOUT US, CURRENT ISSUE, SEARCH, OBSERVERSCOPE, SPEAKERS BUREAU, BLOG, CONTACT, and COLUMNISTS. Below this is a search bar and a "Subscribe Now!" button. The main content area features "LATEST HEADLINES" with several article teasers, including "Just Say No" and "Remembering Bush-World". There are also sections for "RECENT POSTS" and "LINKS".

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The image shows the cover of the Oklahoma Observer magazine. The headline is "Land Of The Red Voter" by Arnold MacLean. The cover features a photograph of a person and some text. The magazine is dated 10.20.09.

# CareerTech Students Take National Honors

By Connie Lewis

Oklahoma's largest delegation in history to attend the national HOSA [Health Occupations Students of America] conference brought home top honors and recognition to the state. The 32nd National HOSA Leadership Conference was held at Opryland in Nashville, TN.

HOSA is a national student organization working to enhance the quality and methods of health care and to promote career opportunities in the health care industry.

It is an integral part of CareerTech's Health Careers Education Program and can be found on high school and technology center campuses across the state. Nationally, HOSA has nearly 107,000 members in 44 states, with more than 4,600 members in Oklahoma.

Some 259 members of Oklahoma CareerTech Health Careers' student organization HOSA qualified at the state conference to advance to the national level, according to Debbie Shumaker, Oklahoma HOSA state advisor.

## SPECIAL RECOGNITION

In addition to multiple top awards, the state was nationally recognized for an increase in membership and the most active National Technical Honor Society chapters.

Shaina Manuel, Tulsa Tech, Owasso High School, represented Oklahoma on the HOSA National Nominating Committee with Oklahoma local chapter advisors responsible for running the Parliamentary Procedure event and the Veterinary Assisting event.

Northwest Technology Center, Fairview, Health Careers Instructor and NTC HOSA chapter advisor Debra Button serves on the National Leadership Events Committee.

Steve Nguyen, Tulsa Technology Center's HOSA advisor and Emergency Medical Technician coordinator, serves on the National Emergency Preparedness Events Committee.

## OUTSTANDING CHAPTER AWARDS

In addition, six local HOSA chapters received the Outstanding Chapter Award and five HOSA members qualified for membership in the National Association of Parliamentarians.

Eight Oklahoma high school students placed in the top 10 for competitive events in addition to four winning third place.

Adult students brought home 17 first place, nine second place and seven third place winners with 10 ranking in the top 10.

In non-competitive events, several Oklahoma students and local chapters met the criteria to be awarded nationally for their work.

These awards include Outstanding State Leader, Outstanding Newsletter, Na-



tional HOSA Week, National Recognition Program, Barbara James Service Award [a volunteerism award], National Service Award-Certificate of Merit, National Service Award-Certificate of Recognition and Outstanding HOSA Chapter.

"HOSA members are set apart from other students by their preparedness for the workforce," said Debbie Shumaker, state HOSA advisor. "They gain confidence and critical thinking skills that are demonstrated during competitive events."

## OKLAHOMA'S HEALTH DEFICIT CITED

"With the health care shortage that we have here in the state of Oklahoma, HOSA is a wonderful opportunity for students to grow, become more prepared for the work environment and to learn soft and technical skills."

HOSA is one of seven CareerTech student organizations affiliated with CareerTech programs. The other six include FFA and Agricultural Education, DECA and Marketing Education, TSA and Technology Engineering, BPA and Business and Information Technology Education, FCCLA and Family and Consumer Sciences Education, and SkillsUSA and Trade and Industry Education.

"Students involved with our career education courses and student organizations are better prepared for future employment," said Phil Berkenbile, CareerTech state director. "They have a smoother transition from school to career because of the skills and leadership activities provided through CareerTech training."

For more information about Oklahoma Career/Tech Education and CareerTech student organizations visit [www.okcareertech.org](http://www.okcareertech.org). For more information about HOSA contact Debbie Shumaker at 405.743.6843. For national winners visit <http://okcareertech.org/health/HOSA/>

# How To Know If You're 100% Okie

You are 100% Oklahoman if:

You can properly pronounce Eufaula, Gotebo, Okemah, Hartshorne and Chickasha.

You think that people who complain about the wind in their states are sis-sies.

A tornado warning siren is your signal to go out in the yard and look for a funnel.

Your idea of a traffic jam is 10 cars waiting to pass a tractor on the highway.

You've ever had to switch from "heat" to "A/C" in the same day.

You know that the true value of a parking space is not determined by the distance to the door, but by the availability of shade.

Stores don't have bags, they have sacks.

You see people wear bib overalls at funerals.

You think everyone from a bigger city has an accent.

You measure distance in minutes. ["I'm about five minutes away."]

You refer to the capital of Oklahoma as "The City."

It doesn't bother you to use an airport named for a man who died in an airplane crash.

Little smokies are something you serve only for special occasions.

You go to the lake because you think it's like going to the ocean.

You listen to the weather forecast before picking out an outfit.

You know cowpies are not made of beef.

Someone you know has used a football schedule to plan their wedding date.

You have known someone who has had one belt buckle bigger than your fist.

A bad traffic jam involves two cars staring each other down at a four-way stop, each determined to be the most polite and let the other go.

You know in which state "Miam-uh" is and in which state "Miam-ee" is.

You aren't surprised to find movie rental, ammunition, and bait all in the same store.

Your "place at the lake" has wheels under it.

A Mercedes Benz is not a status symbol. A Ford F350 4x4 is.

You know everything goes better with Ranch.

You learned how to shoot a gun before you learned how to multiply.

Finally, you are 100% Oklahoman if you have ever heard this conversation:

"You wanna Coke?"

"I'd druther have a beer."

# RECLAIMING

From Page 6

portive, "brainwashed" students are encouraged to hand out homosexual propaganda and not talk during the school day.

- Gender confusion can be caused by momentous events happening in your life such as the loss of a parent, especially the father, in early childhood or your parents giving you a name such as Gene or Jean, that has a homo-phonic sound even though spelled differently. Get it? HOMO-phonic?

- Oprah promotes deviance. Oprah comes from Chicago. Obama comes from Chicago. Chicago has a Pride Parade. Ergo, deviance comes from wherever Oprah and Obama are from. Ergo, deviance is defined by whatever Oprah and Obama happen to like.

- Comparing homosexual family love with Christian family love is a perversion and telling children such things is psychological abuse.

## READING NAUGHTY TID-BITS

LaBarbera loves to read to his audience the naughty bits he's gleaned from THE OKLAHOMA OBSERVER, AUGUST 10, 2009, PAGE 7

his research, which he then thoughtfully makes a big show of self-censoring because there are children in the room. And now I know who GOPer Rep. Sally Kern parrots for her speaking style.

"Man up!" sex-pert LaBarbera declared at one point in his remarks, and he closed with this challenge to the assembled Remnant: "Fight harder for the truth than the homosexual activists fight for their lies!"

These people mean business, and that's not just a Chamber of Commerce slogan. There is much more I could write about including Lt. Gen Jerry Boykin [Ret.] who can smell non-Christian evil like a bloodhound and reads the Bible like a pack of tarot cards, but that's for another article.

Negotiation, diversity of opinion, and bi-partisan dialogue are not in their Bible or dictionary. We progressives, moderates, and First Amendment advocates be-little The Remnant at our peril.

- The author lives in Oklahoma City

## PUBLIC FORUM

# Health Care Reform Not Partisan Issue

By Todd Goodman

Health insurance costs and access to health care remain out of reach for too many Oklahomans – and widespread demand for reform is building.

Across the state, community leaders and everyday Oklahomans are gathering in town halls and coffee shops to talk about how we can make health care in our nation more affordable and more accessible and how we can give people better choices and more control over their own well-being.

Because Democrats in Oklahoma and across the country have taken the lead on this issue, millions of Americans are taking part in a national discussion on how we can do better on health care. Because Democrats are giving working families a voice, everyday Americans are speaking up.

### **THIS IS A PERSONAL ISSUE**

But this is not a partisan issue – it's a personal issue, it's a moral issue, and reforming health care is the right thing to do for our working families.

Meetings are taking place in towns from Tahlequah to Noble because working Oklahomans know that all health care reform can't come from the top down – it has to start from the bottom up in our communities.

In Noble, Oklahomans for Healthcare Reform, a non-partisan group formed to give citizens a voice in health care issues, held a town hall meeting for Oklahomans to share their stories and discuss their concerns.

Five Democratic legislators from around the state joined them to talk about government's role in the reform process, while doctors, nurses, and other Oklahomans discussed how we can achieve real reform.

### **FAMILIES RALLY AT THE CAPITOL**

At the state Capitol, nearly 100 children and their parents held a rally to encourage state and federal lawmakers to make health care more affordable and more accessible for children.

Democratic state Sen. Connie Johnson joined the rally and encouraged the students to continue speaking up on the issue.

Democratic state Sen. Jim Wilson hosted a town hall meeting in Tahlequah so residents there can discuss how to make health care reform work on all levels – from national solutions to personal changes.

Solutions to America's challenges are being developed every day at the grassroots – and government shouldn't replace those efforts, it should support them.

### **REFORM GOOD FOR HEALTH CARE INDUSTRY**

More and more groups are realizing that reform is good for the health care industry, as well as for families and businesses.

Major hospital groups showed their support for the national plan for health care reform by agreeing to cut wasteful spending if it will help extend insurance



coverage to more Americans.

Both the American Medical Association and the American Nurses Association have given their full support to reforming our health care system.

Reforming health care is something we must do for ourselves and for future generations. Without reform, health insurance premiums will hit the stratosphere and will continue to erode American workers' and families' benefits, and even more Americans will be without coverage.

### **SPECIAL INTERESTS HAVE RULED THE ROOST**

Despite these grave realities, for years Washington has been beholden to special interests – politicians failing to make the tough choices, imperiling our economy, our security and the health of our fellow citizens in the process.

Make no mistake – achieving comprehensive health care reform will not be easy. Controlling cost growth cannot just be a lofty goal, it must become a reality.

We need reforms that reward prevention and wellness, that emphasize quality over quantity, and encourage patient involvement. These reforms are vital to our nation and Oklahoma's economic stability.

I hope you'll join the conversation and, like the folks participating in town hall meetings and rallies, speak up about what's most important to you in reforming health care.

This is truly a historic moment in our nation's history. Like many Americans across Oklahoma and our nation, I am excited for the opportunity before us to enact real and substantive change.

Together, we must look beyond the critics and supporters of the status quo to the brighter future that lies ahead. We can act. We must act. The future of our nation and our people depends on it.

– The author is the newly elected chairman of the Oklahoma Democratic Party

# Militant Moderate Asks: Who Represents Me?

By Edwin E. Vineyard

We are frequently advised by issue advertisers to write our congressman or senator about such and such a point. The newsletters we receive, both welcomed and unwelcomed, urge us to write our representative or senator. We have become accustomed to this sort of thing nationally.

As a matter of practicality, it normally makes little sense for a citizen in Enid, OK, to write his senator or congressman. Why? It is because all of ours already have their minds made up on nearly every issue, and nobody but their party leadership will change their position. If you write a letter, you get a response utilizing their version of their party line.

Regardless of its uselessness, this writer does on occasion write a letter to his congresspersons.

### **FORM RESPONSES TO MY LETTERS**

Several years ago when President Bush and the Republicans were pushing to privatize Social Security and invest our money in the stock market, I wrote a letter citing the distortion of statistics and scare tactics being employed and detailing reasons why privatization was a bad idea. In return, I received two-page form letters ignoring my points and giving me again the faulty statistics and faulty reasoning to which I had objected.

That Social Security issue is exemplary of the various issues about which we are told to write our congressperson. It is a useless activity because our senators and representatives do not listen to any opinions contrary to their party line.

Further, our congresspersons do not effectively represent consumers and average citizens. They represent pressure groups with axes to grind and money to lubricate the process. They represent the donor class of citizens. They represent voter blocs of single issue, special interest people with a desire to bend government for their own gain.

### **AVERAGE OKIE HAS LITTLE CLOUT**

The average Oklahoma citizen with no pressure group or lobbying affiliation, and with only a few dollars to drop in the campaign collection boxes, has little representation in Congress. Our pleas will turn no heads nor reach any receptive ears.

But please allow the drawing of certain exceptions to the rule just laid out.

If I am a hard-shell conservative with right wing tendencies, my congresspersons are representing me well. If I am a rich businessman, desirous of main-

taining tax loopholes, dispensations, or other ways of avoiding taxes, then our congresspersons represent me well. If I am a member of their party, and remain so in spite of obvious disregard of my personal interests, then they represent my views. If I have never stopped to think and analyze political agendas and actions, and was born into or sold the party line in the past, then they represent me.

### **CITIZENS WITHOUT REPRESENTATION**

But if I am a fiscally conservative but socially progressive citizen, nobody represents me. If I am a citizen with a social conscience who believes in caring for others in need through government, then nobody represents me. If I am one who doesn't scare easily by use of terms like "socialist" or "liberal," but who is concerned about the issues themselves, then I have no representation. If I am a "populist," who puts common people first, then I am not represented.

It is doubtful that anyone has ever made a study of the above characteristics and the proportions of those represented and those not, but one might well suspect that something over half of the people living in Oklahoma have no real representation in Congress – despite the vote tallies.

Finding this a probability, it gives cause for concern about democracy in our state and nation.

Money and special interests have corrupted our political system. Considering what a candidate must do, and how much of himself he must sell, in order to raise campaign funds, it is remarkable that we have an electoral system that works as well as it does.

But we could do better, and we must do better.

– The author, AKA The Militant Moderate, lives in Enid. His essays also appear regularly on-line at [www.okobserver.net](http://www.okobserver.net)

## Buying Experience

The nation's largest insurers, hospitals and medical groups have hired more than 350 former government staff members and retired members of Congress to lobby Capitol Hill. They hope to influence their old bosses and colleagues on health care legislation. The industry is spending more than \$1.4 million a day on lobbying in the current fight.

## PUBLIC FORUM

# Stop Racism Spread By Glenn Beck, et al

By Darla Reynolds Sparks

As you may know, rightwing talk show hosts have been bringing race-based fear mongering into the mainstream, but Fox's Glenn Beck just took it to another level.

Beck said: "This president has exposed himself as a guy over and over and over again who has a deep-seated hatred for white people ... this guy is, I believe, a racist."

It's part of a larger argument Beck has been making that President Obama wants to serve the needs of black communities at white people's expense. This kind of talk stirs up fear, hate, and it can lead to violence.

I've joined [colorofchange.org](http://colorofchange.org)'s effort to stop Glenn Beck. It is already putting calls into Beck's advertisers, asking them if they want to be associated with this kind of racist hate and fear-mongering.

When the advertisers see that tens of thousands of us are behind that question, I believe they'll move their advertising dollars elsewhere, and his show and platform will be history.

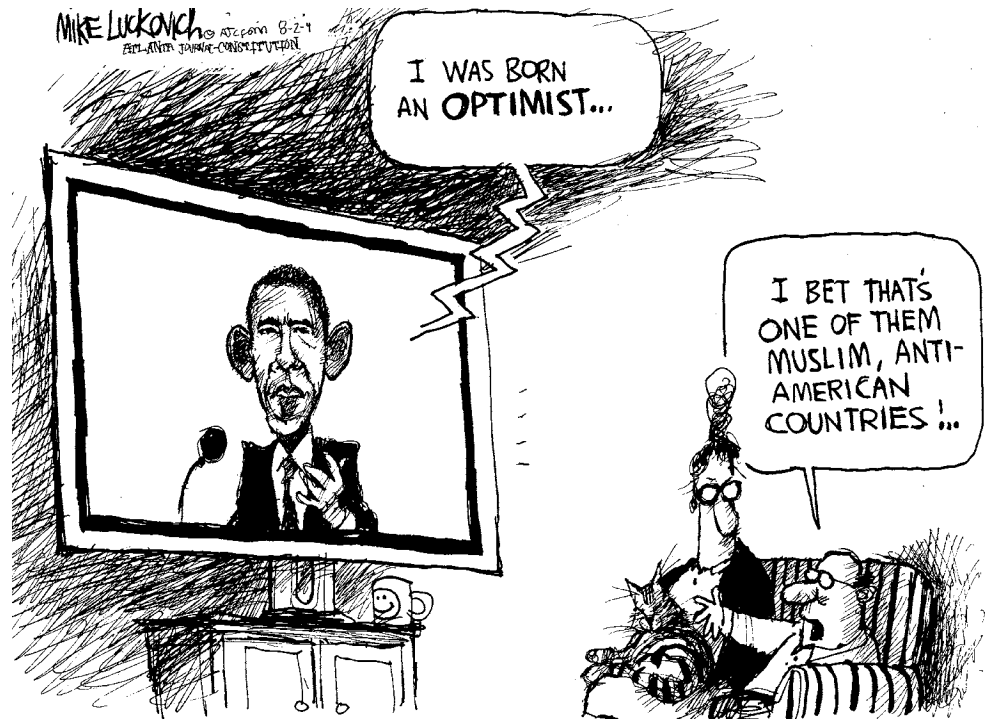
Will you take a stand and be counted, and invite your friends and family to do the same? It takes just a moment:

<http://www.colorofchange.org/beck/?id=1879-945926>

Glenn Beck is appealing to the worst in America. Of course, some Americans refuse to accept the fact that our president is black or the idea that he could truly serve all Americans.

The only way these views fade away is if they're not reinforced by mainstream society. Instead, folks like Glenn Beck, Lou Dobbs, and Rush Limbaugh are exploiting racism and race-based fear to bump their ratings, stirring up racial discord in the process.

The dangers of these tactics are real. We saw the same dynamic during the presidential race: By the end, the McCain/Palin campaign was unable to control



the violent energy whipped up by their race-baiting.

It resulted in an unprecedented number of threats on Obama's life, a rise in the number of hate groups, and an increase in the number of threats and crimes against immigrants and black people.

Fox has a horrible track record on pushing racist propaganda, but Glenn Beck appears to be taking the network to an even lower standard.

He's trying to divide and distract America when we should be coming together and talking about issues that really matter – like health care and the economy.

The good news is that we have the power to stop this. All major media are funded by advertising. And advertisers care more than anything what consumers think.

If we want to change what's happening and put an end to folks like Glenn Beck having a platform, we can do it.

It's up to us, and it can start now. Please join me.

– The author lives in Yukon

## How About MAPS For The Poor Saps?

By Jerry A. Gowman

The Oklahoman and the Oklahoma Gazette are at it again – trying to figure out ways to keep the extra penny sales tax going on into perpetuity.

I was dead set against a few of Oklahoma City's MAPS [Metropolitan Area Projects] drives. Two in particular: the building of the new ballpark in Bricktown and the refurbishing of the almost new Ford Center, including a new training gym for the NBA team.

Both projects were designed to benefit the Gaylord family.

George W. Bush's investment in major league baseball netted him a neat profit of 2,000% in just a few years. All over the country, rich people are being made much richer using the tactic of sales taxes to build new stadiums.

Some of the MAPS projects have actually been worthwhile, but they all have involved a sales tax – which is a regressive tax, especially since Oklahoma is one of the few states with a sales tax on food.

People in the workforce making \$12 an hour or less end up paying a much higher percentage of their meager income than the rest of us.

My prayer is this: Let the city fathers come up with needed projects, but – and this is important – let them realize that other means should be provided to pay for these projects, such as revenue bonds, property taxes or city income taxes.

The poor have been taken for a ride long enough!

– The author lives in Oklahoma City

## Will Public One Day Demand Nuclear Power?

By Lee Matthiesen

Well Morton S. Skorodin is at it again, using his MD degree and his sharp tongue to appear to be an expert in an area way outside his qualifications [July 10/25 Observer].

And yes, Dr. Skorodin, I'll put my knowledge of nuclear radiation against yours any day and, by the way, you'll have to find a word other than carpetbagger when you refer to me as I was born, raised, educated [for the most part] and taught college physics in Oklahoma, but I'm sure you'll find a way to discredit everyone who disagrees with you.

Let's address the concept "that there is no safe dose of radiation." Humans evolved and live in a sea of radiation, some from outside our bodies and some from within our bodies.

Cosmic radiation, which is the name we give to radiation caused by very fast moving particles arriving at the earth's atmosphere from outer space, is everywhere. We are also exposed to radiation from minerals outside our bodies and this varies from place to place on the earth's surface. From within our bodies we are exposed to radiation from Hydrogen-3, from Carbon-14, from Potassium-40 and from trace amounts of many other isotopes that are naturally occurring in nature.

We're also exposed to radiation from x-ray machines, and from radioactive tracers injected into our bodies, God forbid, by medical doctors to diagnose bone growth, cardiac function, thyroid function and many, many other medical applications.

I for one won't let my dentist use x-rays until after he has done a visual inspection and found a need for further follow-up, not because of the radiation risk but because of the expense of a procedure that may not be useful.

When one flies in an airplane the cosmic radiation level increases due to reduced atmospheric absorption, but do we choose not to fly? Of course not. In all these cases we weigh benefit versus risk and decide to fly, get our teeth x-rayed and our bone growth checked if a break is suspected.

Dr. Skorodin, you skewered Professor Singh for saying that "we would have to

have energy" and then pointed out that Oklahoma is an energy exporter. Our coal and natural gas will be gone some day; even you won't deny that. Solar and wind energy sources are coming on line and promise to be a big help, but I suspect – and here I confess to speculation unlike you Dr. Skorodin when you present your opinions as fact – that the time will come when the public will want, even demand, that nuclear energy be pursued. When that time comes, the public will have decided that the benefits outweigh the risks.

Incidentally, lest you come to think that nuclear reactors are the work of the devil, I point out that nature operated a natural nuclear reactor for several thousand years in our geologic past. Look it up.

– The author lives in Grove

## Gentle Thoughts For Today

If you can't be kind, at least have the decency to be vague. Don't assume malice for what stupidity can explain.

A penny saved is a government oversight.

The real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing at the right time, but also to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment.

The older you get, the tougher it is to lose weight, because by then your body and your fat have gotten to be really good friends.

The easiest way to find something lost around the house is to buy a replacement.

He who hesitates is probably right. If you can smile when things go wrong, you have someone in mind to blame.

The sole purpose of a child's middle name is so he can tell when he's really in trouble.

Did you ever notice when you put these two words "The" and "IRS" together it spells "Theirs"?

Did you ever notice: The Roman Numerals for 40 are "XL"?

## BOOKS

# Autumn In Yellowstone, Life A Riveting Tale

By Mike Nobles

### YELLOWSTONE AUTUMN

*A Season of Discovery in a Wondrous Land*

By W.D. Wetherell

University of Nebraska Press

178 pages, \$24.95

I must confess that when I first saw this book I thought it was another environmental tome that extolled the virtues of America's oldest, most popular national park and included the obligatory plea to preserve it for future generations. Fair enough. I am generally an advocate of preserving such national treasures and an environmentalist, of sorts. And, in a sense it is such a book.

To be sure it describes the geography and history of Yellowstone in a gentle, humorous manner that will remind those that have visited the park of its incomparable beauty and, if you know where to look, soothing solitude in what the author describes as "America's least-known best-known place."

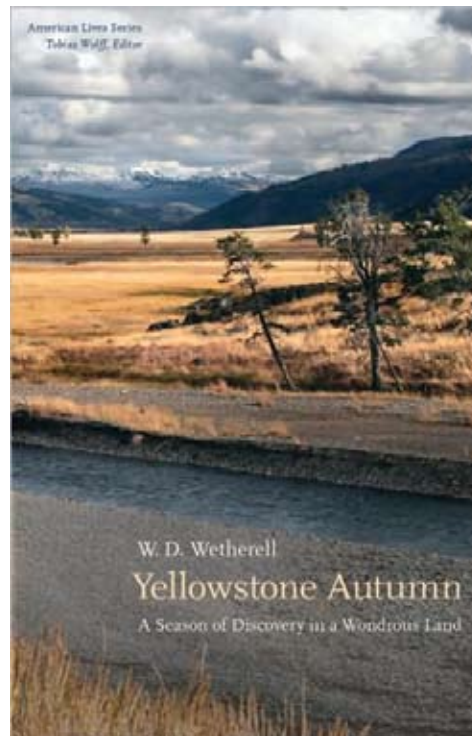
Yellowstone truly is a national treasure and to visit it when its myriad stunning sights are at their peak, in autumn, is a trip not to be missed. I have been to Yellowstone and thought I had seen most of its worthwhile sights but after reading this book I realized how much I had missed.

### A JOURNEY INTO LATE MIDDLE AGE

However, while the descriptions of the park are alluring and invitingly vivid it is the story of the author facing what he describes as late middle age [55] and his efforts to understand where his life has been and, as importantly, where it is going that makes it such a wonderful read.

Wetherell had been taking stock of his life and was jolted by a passage written by Roald Amundsen, the first person to reach the South Pole that concluded: "The future had closed solidly against me."

Wetherell began to wonder if the virtues that had successfully brought him



to late middle age perhaps were of no use for the future. The past year had included some reversals in his life, both financial and personal, and he found himself drifting in a current he felt powerless to control. He was tempted to wonder if the virtues he had embraced throughout life were perhaps irrelevant now and it caused him to pause and reconsider life.

### THREE WEEKS OF SOLITUDE

While such feelings are not all that unusual or unique to someone approaching late middle age, and there are shelves of books dealing with the subject, what makes this book so good is the way the author is able to candidly, with humor and introspective good nature, combine his three weeks of solitude in Yellowstone with his search for the future and end up producing a rather extraordinary book.

He deftly and gently combines the history of Yellowstone with his own history of marriage, aging, fatherhood,

award-winning writing and his relationship with his father and ends up providing the reader with an appreciation for both the beauty and solitude of Yellowstone but also the rewards of a life well lived, warts and all.

It is a story of the beauty of autumn in both Yellowstone and in a writer's life.

I have read this book twice. It's that good.

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

## Embedded With Organized Labor

By Seth Sandronsky

### EMBEDDED WITH ORGANIZED LABOR

*Journalistic Reflections On The Class War At Home*

By Steve Early

Monthly Review Press

288 pages, \$75.00

U.S. labor unions have been and remain in trouble. Hardly a day goes by without new evidence of this. Steve Early was a "participatory" scribe in unions over the past three decades.

In *Embedded With Organized Labor: Journalistic Reflections on the Class War at Home*, he strives to help readers make sense of the roads [not] taken by American unions.

His book arrives at a fateful time for the nation's labor force. Workers in and out of unions are on their heels amid the most severe crisis of capitalism since the 1930s. Job losses and pay cuts rule the roost, a trend that began in the private sector.

With the deepening recession and fiscal crises of the states and their local governments, wage cuts and layoffs are reaching the public sector. In such trying times for so many, what can a self-defined embedded labor journalist bring to the table?

### A READABLE MIX

In brief, the answer is a historical context and a critical intellect. Early provides a readable mix of both in six sections, an introduction, epilogue and afterword.

The actions of working people from the previous century informed him and other activists of the 1960s and 1970s. Early begins with looks at some of those trailblazing heroes. Take the so-called "factory girls" of Lawrence, MA, fighting for "bread and roses, too" in 1912.

Their push for a better quality of life with livable wages resurfaced at a New York City hospital and service workers union in the late 1970s.


An essay of Early's, in part on labor activist and author Moe Foner, at the center of this urban union's production of films, musicals and writing courses, is instructive.

### RACE, CLASS AND GENDER

Early's race, class and gender articles spotlight these linked oppressions for laboring Americans. He is not afraid of critiquing patriarchy and white supremacy. Silence may be golden sometimes, but it is not an option for Early on such matters.

As he notes, citing historian Jacqueline Jones, "the idea that white workers have everything to lose if non-white workers are allowed to make any gains" has weakened the class interests of all who labor for a living.

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## 'Blue Dog' House Democrats

# Lead Dogs Or Mythical Beasts?

By Burdett Loomis

As the 2008 presidential and congressional elections came into focus during the summer and early fall, the centrist band of Blue Dog Democrats in the U.S. House aroused considerable interest. With 49 members in a chamber in which Democrats held a 35-seat margin, this coalition of fiscal moderates could well hold the balance of power on the close, party-line votes that have characterized the contemporary Congress, both in the waning days of the 110th Congress and in the crucial early days of the next administration. Not only did journalists pay real attention, so did Barack Obama, who established solid communication lines to the group.

At the same time, critics on the Democratic left, frequently expressing themselves in blogs, argued consistently that the Blue Dogs should be ignored, or even purged, given their reluctance to embrace progressive changes across an array of politics. For example, at the blog Open Left, Chris Bowers argued:

"As long as the Blue Dogs are extracting right-wing policy promises from the Obama Administration, giving credence to Republican opposition to even tepid legislative proposals that are probably inadequate to solve our myriad crises, and making not so subtly veiled threats to cut Social Security and Medicare in the form of "fiscal responsibility summits," progressives should not be assisting them in elections. In fact, progressives should not only deny assistance, but they should be loud and clear in their denial."

Conversely, some conservative voices, such as the Wall Street Journal's editorial page and [New York Times] columnist David Brooks, argued that

there would be no brakes on a liberal, big-government Democratic majority. Said Brooks, "What we're going to see, in short, is the Gingrich revolution in reverse and on steroids. ... In normal times, moderates could have restrained the zeal on the left. In an economic crisis, not a chance." In other words, Blue Dogs would act more like Democrats in a historically liberal Congress than like centrist power brokers.

The Blue Dogs themselves, who represent disproportionately rural and Southern districts, have consistently traded on their position at the center of the House's ideological spectrum, especially on fiscal issues, most notably PAYGO [pay-as-you-go] budgeting

that offsets spending increases or tax cuts. As Rep. Mike Ross, D-AR, observed, "We see our role as ensuring that not only Democrats but Republicans adhere to this House role [PAY-GO] in ensuring that bills are paid for." Even as the economy was worsening in mid-2008, Blue Dogs made the case that deficit reduction and fiscal discipline were crucial to their survival. Iowa Rep. Leonard Boswell pointed out, "So many of us come from ... so-called swing districts, we understand that you can't just keep accumulating unbelievable debt."

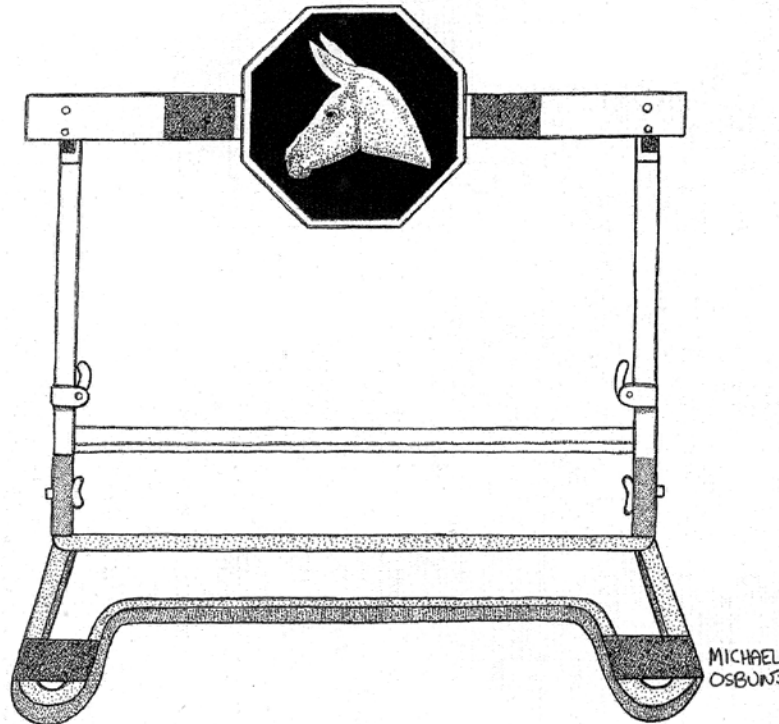
Thus, coming into the 2008 elections, not only did Blue Dogs sit at the center of the House ideological spectrum, they saw their survival as

crucial to the maintenance of a Democratic majority. Given a strong sense of internal loyalty and camaraderie, coupled with a formal institutional presence as a caucus, the Blue Dogs have taken their commitment to fiscal conservatism very seriously, as they have sought to remain united as a centrist block in order to affect final votes and particular elements of the House Democratic agenda. But serious questions remained as to if and how this could be accomplished, especially as the 2008-09 economic crisis came to a head.

Even before the 2008 election campaign took shape, congressional scholars took stock of the Democratic control of the 110th Congress and looked forward to a new era of unified government, which would provide more evidence and insights as to the nature of agenda control and party impact on policy outcomes. While Democrats would definitely control the congressional agenda, examining the nature of that control – and the policies that would be forthcoming – seemed sure to be illuminating. In terms of congressional scholarship, the Blue Dogs would continue to reflect the median legislator within the House, but they would also be part of a Democratic majority, whose leaders would expect loyalty, especially with a fellow partisan as president.

More generally, those who wrote about the Blue Dog Democrats in the House often mis-characterized them and used "Blue Dog" as shorthand for centrism in general or for given policies, such as abortion or Iraq, on which the caucus explicitly refused to commit itself. Ironically, no matter

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## Free Food Can Be Yours For The Picking

By Jim Hightower

Years ago, a young, sorta-hippyish couple who lived nearby knocked on my front door. They had noticed that fig trees in my side yard were laden with ripening fruit. "If you're not going to pick all the figs for yourself," asked the couple, "could we harvest some of them?" Sure, I said, have at 'em. About a week later, to my delight, I found at my doorstep a nice surprise: two sparkling jars of fig jam.

A little common neighborliness can be delicious, in so many ways.

I remembered this happy fig exchange recently when I read that a fast-growing, underground fruit economy is spreading in cities across America. Well, the movement is underground, but – like my figs – the fruit is in plain sight.

### MOST OF ABUNDANCE GOES UNPICKED

"Urban fruit foraging" is a grassroots phenomenon that has arisen spontaneously as local folks have taken a look around their neighborhoods and suddenly noticed that yard after yard contains all sorts of trees bearing a cornucopia of apples, plums, pears, oranges, peaches, loquats, pecans, avocados, lemons, mulberries, pomegranates ... and so much more. The "aha" moment comes when these folks realize that most of this abundance goes unpicked.

So, rather than just let it rot, why not find new ways to gather, distribute and share this free food with the larger community? From coast to coast, people are doing exactly that, with each group finding their own clever ways to spread the concept of "public fruit."

One of the simplest is in Oakland, CA, where neighbors created a small exchange they call Forage Oakland. Some 200 people have signed up – those with lemon trees, for example, open their yards for harvest when the fruit ripens; in exchange, they get access to other yards when their fruits come in.

### FRUIT TREES 'MADE FOR SHARING'

The Portland Fruit Tree Project in Oregon, an all-volunteer group, maintains an online registry [including maps] of about 300 edible trees across the city. Noting that a family can only eat so many pounds of a tree's fruit production, one of the project's organizers points out, "A fruit tree is really made for sharing."

Here's how the sharing happens in Portland: A couple of weeks before the fruits or nuts in a particular yard are ready for picking, the registered owner notifies the group, which schedules a harvesting party; volunteers arrive, the communal picking is done, and the bounty is divvied – half to the volunteers and half to local food pantries.

The project also conducts workshops, holds "pruning parties" and offers hands-on "preservation parties" to teach canning, drying and other ways to extend nature's bounty.

Another approach is to grow more public fruit by planting trees in city spaces and vacant lots. Urban Orchards in Boston, for example, has planted hundreds of fruit and nut trees across the metro area, and the Philadelphia Orchard Project is turning abandoned inner-city lots into orchards. This not only beautifies and humanizes blighted neighborhoods, but also provides nutritional relief in areas that locals call a "food desert," where only junk food had been sprouting.

### RE-CONNECTING AMERICANS

Good eats are only the most obvious benefit of the urban foraging movement. It's also a powerful way of connecting people to nature, to each other and to the American ethic of sharing with our community. It's a modern expression of an ageless idea: We're all in this together.

A century ago, Jim Hogg, one of only a handful of really good governors that my state of Texas has produced, practiced this idea of the common good all the way to his grave. In lieu of a tombstone atop his eternal resting place, Hogg asked that a pecan tree be planted at the head of the grave and a walnut at the foot, directing that the fruit of the trees "be given out among the plain people, and make Texas a land of trees."

Maybe you'd like to spread your own community's abundance. If so, here are a few websites to help you get going: forageoakland.blogspot.com, portlandfruit.org, earthworksboston.org, phillyorchards.org, fallenfruit.org and neighborhoodfruit.com.

# BLUE DOGS

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how carefully the members of the Blue Dog Coalition sought to focus on fiscal matters, largely PAYGO and a balanced budget, journalists and outside critics would paint the caucus in broad, metaphorical brushstrokes.

Still, as of August and early September 2008, the Blue Dogs did appear to be on their way to represent 50-plus fiscal centrists in a House that would likely include 250 or more Democrats. If they could stick together, keep up their dialogue with the prospective president, and focus tightly on fiscal issues, they might well be able to exert disproportionate influence.

To examine how this prospect has fared, this article will briefly examine who the Blue Dogs are, how they have sought influence, and how successful they have been, both in the waning days of the 110th Congress and the early ones of the 111th. In so doing, the findings will comment directly on the role of party in the Democratic House under an Obama Administration.

## FOCUSED ON FISCAL ISSUES

"The coalition," according to its web site, "has been particularly active on fiscal issues, relentlessly pursuing a balanced budget and then protecting that achievement from politically popular "raids" on the budget. ... In the 110th Congress, the coalition intends to continue to make a difference in Congress by forging middle-ground, bipartisan answers to the current challenges facing the country. A top priority will be refocus Congress on truly balancing the budget and ridding taxpayers of the burden the national debt places on them. The group also expects to be involved in education, regulatory reform, taxes, defense and veterans affairs."

Although BDC members do address issues beyond the budget and fiscal restraint, these emphases permeate their approach to most issues, such as welfare reform. As Blue Dog veteran Rep. Dennis Moore, D-KS, observed in an interview, "Our focus is key – on the economic issues of balanced budget and PAYGO. We don't take positions on social issues." Both Moore and caucus staffer Kristen Hawn argue that neither the Democratic Left nor the Republican Right truly understand the Blue Dogs. Hawn said, "Blue Dogs are misunderstood a lot, because their positions are often complicated, although based on principle; [those on the left and right] tend to stereotype them." As we shall see, much of this stereotyping comes in the way many observers use "Blue Dogs" as a metaphor for any compromise-oriented, centrist politicking, across a wide range of issues.

In the real [sic] world of Congress, the Blue Dogs are a well-defined caucus, to anyone who is paying attention. In the 111th Congress they consist of 49 Democrats [50 before New York Rep. Kirsten Gillibrand was nominated to replace Hillary Clinton in the Senate], who have applied and been accepted for membership. They caucus regularly, without staff, and require members to attend 60% of their meetings; before taking a position on a given issue, 60% of the members must vote to approve.

## 'THEY DO ALMOST EVERYTHING TOGETHER'

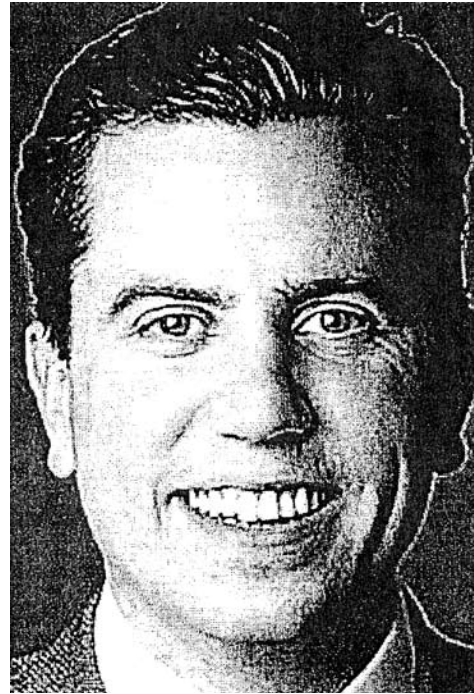
More important than the formal rules are the social bonds that Blue Dogs have knit among themselves. In interviews, both Rep. Moore and Hawn emphasized the "member-driven" nature of the caucus. Said Hawn, "They do almost everything together – sit together on the floor [near the center aisle]. They're friends, they trust each other. ... Essentially the contact is member-to-member, although personal staffs do provide some support." The Blue Dog network provides a counterweight to the power of the Democratic leadership, whose agenda and organization often push them farther to the left than their publicly held positions would indicate.

It is no wonder that journalists turn to the Blue Dogs as a good story; they present potential conflicts by providing some opposition to the powerful party leadership and offering a centrist counter-narrative to that of Speaker Pelosi and a liberal majority. Recent analyses illustrate the popularity of the Blue Dog story line. For example, in the last three months of 2008, a Lexis-Nexis search found 993 mentions of the Blue Dogs, as opposed to 93 for the Progressive Caucus. This attention was unusual, in that, from their founding in the aftermath of the historic 1994 election until 2007, Blue Dogs had little leverage in the House, because Republican leaders could muster consistent partisan majorities on crucial votes. BDC potential for influence grew, given their numbers [between 47 and 49] and the modest size of the Democratic majority [in the vicinity 236-199]. Still, as one Democratic legislator put it, "Being in the majority didn't make that much difference, in that not so much could get through the Senate. And the president had the veto."

## DABBLING IN ELECTIONS

To address their lack of impact, the Blue Dogs have become active in congressional electioneering, endorsing 10 House candidates [four eventually won] and Mark Warner in the Virginia Senate race that he won convincingly. Blue Dog leader Rep. Mike Ross, D-AR, noted in October 2008: "It's been a very productive and frustrating two years in the Democratic majority for the Blue Dogs. Out of frustration, we've decided that we need to get involved in Senate races." These sentiments may reflect a conclusion that the real action in congressional centrist politics and fiscal restraint is at least as likely to occur in the Senate as the House.

In the 110th Congress, Blue Dog members clustered around the chamber median on measures such as DW-Nominate scores and National Journal's ideological scores. The most liberal Blue Dog, California's Jane Harman, stood as just the 100th most liberal Democrat in the House; the most conservative Blue Dog, Georgia's Jim Marshall, ranked as the 235th most liberal member of the chamber, and his NJ score of 43.5 was not that far from the chamber mean [50.3]. Nominally, coalition members could have chosen not to support the Democratic leadership, but that simply was not the case. The average Democratic House member's CQ Party Unity Score was 92 [first session, 110th Congress], while



Rep. Dan Boren of Muskogee is one of 51 moderate and conservative Blue Dog Democrats in the U.S. House. According to Wikipedia, the label "Blue Dog" has two origins: It's a play on the Yellow Dog Democrat moniker – i.e. "I'd vote for a yellow dog before I'd vote for a Republican." It also refers to the "blue dog" paintings of Cajun artist George Rodrigue that hung in the offices of Louisiana Reps. Billy Tauzin and Jimmy Hayes where original "Blue Dog Democrats" met. For the record, Boren voted with President Obama 81% of the time in the first six months of 2009, according to Congressional Quarterly research.

the average Blue Dog came in at 88, a score that was equal to or higher than the mean for the entire Democratic caucus in any Congress since CQ began its analysis in 1956.

Moreover, in the final 110th Congress DW-Nominate scores, all Democrats stood farther to the left than did all Republicans, and while Blue Dogs did cluster around the center, they remained aligned with their party colleagues, rather than with the corporal's guard of moderate Republicans.

In short, Blue Dog Democrats do have centrist tendencies, but they are also – and perhaps first and foremost – Democrats. Under Speaker Pelosi, who has fostered generally positive relationships with the caucus and its members, Blue Dogs have voted much more like their fellow partisans than as independent individuals or a centrist bloc.

## MIRRORED ENTIRE DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS

Despite their strong party unity rankings, Blue Dogs did demonstrate their centrism during the first session of the 110th Congress [at least as indicated by NJ scores]. They remained the subject of many articles that played up their moderation, and they continued to talk about the coalition as an independent bloc, which would continue to seek to affect outcomes in the House, either in votes or within the Democratic caucus. As former congressman and original Blue Dog Charlie Stenholm argued, "No legislation, good or bad, will be passed without the Blue Dogs. Anything they support will pass." Although there are some examples of Blue Dogs affecting the agenda, as in 2008 farm legislation, Stenholm's analysis was flawed, in that the members of the BDC voted very much like the entire Democratic caucus.

The most profound tests for the Blue Dogs would come in the fall of 2008 with the TARP legislation, and in early 2009, with the passage of the \$800 billion stimulus package. Taken together, these economic packages generated approximately \$1.5 trillion in new debt, and challenged the core beliefs of the coalition. But when given the chance, the Blue Dogs did not, for the most part, bark. In a series of votes, they supported the banking bailout in the fall, as well as the auto industry bailout [later killed in the Senate] and the February stimulus package. Both before and after the 2008 elections, in both the 110th and 111th Congresses, the Blue Dogs generally, though not unanimously, supported the Democratic position on the floor.

## THEY TARGETED TARP

Blue Dogs did vote proportionately more than other Democrats against both TARP packages and the auto stimulus; they gave all three issues majorities; and for TARP 2 and the auto stimulus, sizeable majorities. More important, while they could have changed the TARP 1 result, the fact that 73 other Democrats opposed the measure argues against pinning any "blame" on the BDC; TARP 1 had many more problems than losing Democratic centrists. On the other votes, the Blue Dogs could not have changed the outcome, and they generally offered substantial support for both initiatives – even the auto industry bailout, which failed to garner enough support in the Senate for passage.

Indeed, even before the presidential election, many Blue Dogs acknowledged that their issue positions on PAYGO and a balanced budget simply had to give way, at least temporarily, in the face of the economic crisis. In part, BDC members were willing to put aside their preferences because Obama as a candidate had directed both public and private statements at them, offering reassurance that he would in the future behave with fiscal discipline.

As president, Obama has continued to court the House Blue Dogs, most notably by inviting them to the White House as the stimulus package vote approached in February. And he has argued consistently for long-term fiscal restraint, even as he has put forward the costliest legislative package in history, as well as offering his support for extensive executive/independent agency bailouts to the financial community. In the end, Blue Dogs did make some marginal changes in the stimulus bill, but those did not account for their overwhelming backing of this record-setting proposal. Of the 49 House Blue Dogs, 43 voted for the final

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# Women Struggling For Affordable Care

By Shannon Stevens

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has released a report placing a spotlight on the impact that the nation's health care crisis is having on women, particularly women of childbearing age.

The report, "Roadblocks to Health Care: Why the current health care system does not work for women," states that "women are more vulnerable to high health care costs because women's reproductive health requires more regular contact with health care providers, including yearly pap tests, mammograms and obstetric care."

The report from Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius underscores the real need to ensure that women have access to quality, affordable reproductive health care as part of any health reform effort.

## WOMEN SEARCH FOR HEALTH CARE

The findings of the report reaffirm what Planned Parenthood sees every day in health centers. Women turn to Planned Parenthood for affordable, accessible, high-quality preventive care. That includes a large number of Catholics.

Women's Research and Education Institute reports that women of childbearing age spend 68% more in out-of-pocket health care costs than men in part because of reproductive health-related supplies and services.

A recent survey conducted for the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists found that women are delaying their annual exams as a result of the economic downturn.

Planned Parenthood health centers are seeing an increase in patients who have lost their jobs or their health insurance or who no longer have the money to pay for lifesaving medical care.

## SOME DEFER CRITICAL EXAMS

Some women are deferring annual exams, including preventive cancer screenings, and buying fewer cycles of contraception.

To get a sense of how widespread the need for health care reform is, the U.S. Census Bureau and the Commonwealth Fund say there are 47 million Americans



without health insurance and an additional 25 million who are underinsured.

On top of that, one in five non-elderly women is underinsured, and more than 17 million women need publicly supported reproductive health care, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation and the Guttmacher Institute.

## WOMEN HURT THE MOST

Health care providers know firsthand that women are disproportionately affected by the economic downturn and in tough times will put many things before their own basic health care.

We know sexually transmitted infections continue to pose a serious public health threat in the country, particularly to young women. Without detection and treatment, these infections can lead to serious short- and long-term health consequences, including infertility.

The demand for health care is urgent, and the value of prevention, a cornerstone of Planned Parenthood services, is self-evident.

As state and federal governments consider reforms to our health care system, we all have a critical interest in not only maintaining access to quality health care services for our patients but also in expanding access to all in need of comprehensive health care in order to build healthier, stronger families.

# DEMOCRATS

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stimulus package, and four of the six dissidents came from conservative southern districts. In January, Blue Dogs accounted for 10 of 11 defections on an earlier version of this legislation, which still reflected an almost 80% support level. In short, the Blue Dogs again acted more like Democrats and responders to an economic crisis than hard-line advocates of fiscal restraint.

## DESERVING OF ALL THE ATTENTION?

To be sure, the BDC is an active, formal coalition, which provides real benefits to its tight-knit band of members, but there is a legitimate question as to whether it deserves the attention that it has received. With an identifiable brand name, the Blue Dogs – as they are portrayed in the press – may be more important as a point of media emphasis than a key set of congressional actors.

Moreover, the media's focus on the House BDC may divert attention from the Senate, whose centrist Democrats do not operate as an easily identifiable caucus, but where their political clout may be far more consequential.

Writing in the liberal *Nation*, Christopher Hayes wonders why the Blue Dogs have continued to garner a lot of attention in the 111th Congress, even when [he argues mistakenly], "the Democrats' margin is big enough to pass legislation without a single ... Blue Dog vote." He's wrong on the numbers [255-49=206], but overall his point is valid, given the consistent support that BDC members have given large-scale spending packages. Hayes sees the caucus's unity as significant, as well as what he calls "the Beltway love affair with 'fiscal conservatism.'" And even though their focus is narrow – on fiscal issues – many commentators expand the Blue Dog notion to policies far beyond the caucus's announced scope.

## COURTED ON A VARIETY OF ISSUES

It is true that Blue Dogs, as centrists, become targets for moderate/conservative initiatives, on a host of issues, such as the Military Commissions Act or bankruptcy legislation. The widely available list of Blue Dogs gives all organized interests a clear set of targets. So when 23 BDC members vote against the Military Commission Act, their actions are labeled as that of Blue Dogs, even though the caucus made no formal recommendation. Still, using the "Blue Dog" label to denote Democratic centrists has become common, as in remarks by Democratic Majority Leader Steny Hoyer and even BDC Chair Mike Ross, D-AR, when they discussed the FISA bill in 2008, another issue on which no formal caucus position had been taken.

Although House Blue Dogs have, on occasion, meaningfully modified the House Democratic agenda, in the end Democratic leaders, especially from 2007 on, have been able to control the House agenda, almost always with the support of large numbers of Blue Dogs. With 30 or so votes to spare, Speaker Pelosi could be thwarted only by a close-to-unified BDC.

All the attention on Blue Dogs in the House, however, has obscured the fact that Senate Democratic centrists may well be accomplishing a good deal of what metaphorical Blue Dog moderates in the House might be expected to do. Indeed, Sen. Evan Bayh, D-IN, attempted to create a Blue Dog caucus in the Senate after the 2008 elections, when it became clear that Democratic centrists might exer-

cise real negotiating power. But the individualistic Senate is less receptive to caucuses than is the House, and there is less need for them given the chamber's smaller size and its members' stronger personal relationships.

## REAL POWER IN SENATE?

Still, as the politics of the 111th Congress began to take shape in early 2009, for all the media attention given the Blue Dogs, it is a set of 12-to-14 Senate Democrats, led by Bayh, who are exercising some leverage in addressing the size of spending bills. Bayh noted, "If we're going to get 60 [to end debate], we have to have the pragmatists, the moderates in the Senate, in the Democratic caucus working together and reaching out to those on the other side, of like minds." Without the Blue Dog label, the Senate moderate Democrats are behaving much like the BDC has sought to act in the House. Given the structural requirements of contemporary Senate legislating on most issues, this group has more potential leverage than do their House counterparts with their formal caucus.

In the end, the very existence of the House Blue Dog Coalition can fit within both [Keith] Krehbiel's median legislator perspective on congressional decision-making and the [Gary] Cox/[Matthew] McCubbins emphasis on majority party agenda control. At the same time, the actions of moderate Senate Democrats, absent any formal caucus organization, look a lot the same, as they threaten to vote against the party leadership [on the 2009 budget package, for example], while simultaneously seeking to alter the content of the legislation, as well as the future policy agenda.

## INFLUENCE IN 'EYE OF BEHOLDER'

So does the existence of the Blue Dog Coalition matter? Its members argue strongly that it does, both as an institution that brings them closer together and that provides a voice for fiscal moderates. When it comes to impact, however, the answer is less clear; as a voting bloc, despite the fears of some liberals and the attention of many journalists, there is little evidence that the Blue Dogs have made much of a difference. Whether they have significantly altered the Democrats' agenda in the House may be in the eye of the beholder, with leaders acknowledging few adjustments, while Blue Dogs may see real modifications on given issues, such as PAYGO. Ironically, one such issue – the FISA bill amendments in 2008 – was depicted as a victory for the Blue Dogs, even though a key letter supporting immunity was sent to the Speaker by "21 Democrats in the conservative Blue Dog Coalition." Less than half the Blue Dogs sent the letter, on an issue that was not central to the BDC mission. A Blue Dog victory or the actions of a set of moderates, only incidentally or indirectly connected to the caucus. No matter, the Blue Dog brand name was easy to use, as it stood for moderate-conservative Democrats. The story was told, even as the influence of the caucus remained less than well demonstrated.

– The author is a University of Kansas professor of political science who has written extensively on Congress, legislative careers and state legislatures. This essay is reprinted from *Extensions*, Spring 2009.

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# Will Congress Ever End Pay For Play?

By Bridgette Blair

Lawmakers spend a huge amount of time contacting potential contributors and attending high-priced fundraising events – all in an effort to stockpile the enormous amounts of money necessary to run their re-election campaigns.

As a result, they spend much less time representing the people who elected them in the first place. Wealthy donors, corporate lobbyists and those who can bundle together large numbers of donations supply most of this campaign cash.

In return, they often expect special access – and paybacks in the form of tax breaks for their industries, earmarks [special spending measures that lawmakers often discreetly insert into bills], federal contracts or appointments to powerful positions.

## IT WOULD END PAY FOR PLAY

A publicly financed congressional campaign system would end all of this.

“Americans would be shocked if they knew how much time members of Congress and candidates seeking office must spend dialing for dollars and attending fundraisers,” said Sen. Dick Durbin, D-IL, assistant Senate majority leader.

“Without a fundamental reform of the way we finance campaigns, we cannot bring real reform to Capitol Hill.”

Durbin and Sen. Arlen Specter, D-PA, have introduced the Fair Elections Now Act [S.752], which would enact a publicly financed system for congressional elections.

## HOUSE VERSION THE SAME DAY

Reps. John Larson, D-CT, and Walter Jones, R-NC, introduced the House of Representatives version of the bill [H.R. 1826] on the same day.

The legislation would provide qualified congressional candidates public funds in exchange for agreeing to limit their contributions from individuals to \$100 or less.

Public Citizen is pushing Congress to pass the Fair Elections Now Act. The organization is part of a pro-public financing coalition that includes the Brennan Center for Justice, Change Congress, Common Cause, Democracy Matters, Public Campaign and U.S. PIRG.

## END CHASING CAMPAIGN DOLLARS

“This legislation will ensure that members of Congress focus on solving the nation’s problems instead of chasing after campaign contributions from lobbyists and corporate special interests,” said David Arkush, director of Public Citizen’s Congress Watch division.

“It will cause a seismic shift in the way business is done in Washington and that could hardly come at a more critical time.”

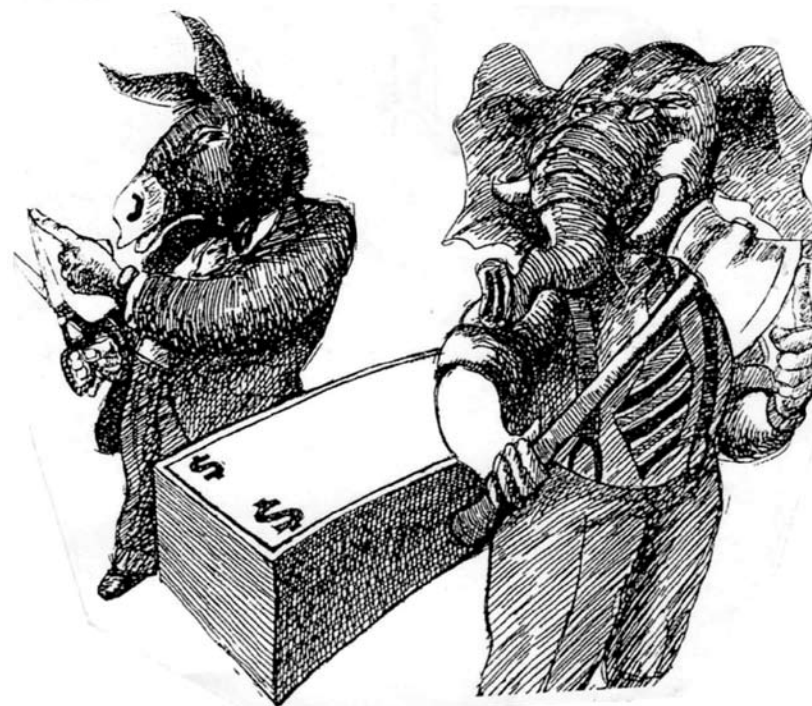
Many Americans agree – a publicly funded system would be a refreshing change from the current system. According to a poll conducted by Lake Research Partners and The Tarrance Group, 81% of those surveyed said the way elections are financed should be changed, and 67% of those surveyed support a public financing system.

## FINANCIAL SECTOR WINS BIGTIME

In the current economic climate, it is difficult to deny the influence corporate contributors have on lawmakers. For instance, donations from the financial services industry totaled \$460 million for congressional and presidential candidates in 2008.

What did the industry receive from lawmakers in 2008? A \$700 billion bailout!

Dig a little deeper, and you’ll find that during the 2008 election cycle, insurance giant American International Group [AIG], through political action committees [PACs] and individual contributions, gave more than \$644,000 to congressional



and presidential candidates, other PACs, and the Democratic and Republican parties.

Congress then gave AIG a \$170 billion federal bailout.

## END THE CORRUPTION

“We need, once and for all, to end the corrupting influence of money in politics,” said Craig Holman, a Public Citizen expert on campaign finance reform. “The Fair Elections Now Act would reform the congressional campaign financing system and allow lawmakers to truly represent the public.”

The bill is modeled after parts of successful state public financing programs, known as “clean elections.” Almost 400 state lawmakers, judges and other officials were elected in 2008 under public funding systems in Arizona, Connecticut, Maine, New Mexico, North Carolina and Oregon.

How would it work?

A candidate for congressional office – whether a challenger or an incumbent – would have the option to use the Fair Elections system. To qualify, a candidate would have to raise a certain amount of money in small contributions between \$5 and \$100.

Once the candidate qualifies, he or she would receive a federal grant based on the average costs of winning primary campaigns. If the candidate were nominated in the primary, he or she would receive another grant for the general election campaign.

## \$100 LIMIT FROM ANY INDIVIDUAL

Additionally, the candidate would be limited to raising no more than \$100 from any individual. Up to a certain point, the candidate would receive \$4 in public financing for every \$1 from individuals. Once the matching limit was reached, the candidate could continue collecting donations of \$100 or less without a match – if the candidate deems it necessary.

An oversight board of five people appointed by the president would make sure the candidates understand the rules and propose changes in the law, when necessary.

How would the system be funded? That’s still up for discussion. The Senate proposal [S.751] would institute a 0.5% tax, up to \$500,000, on companies that receive \$10 million or more a year in federal government contracts. In the House proposal, the funding system would require a 10% assessment fee on the sales of new broadcast spectrums to broadcasters.

“Americans have called for an end to a campaign finance system in which special-interest money overpowers citizen voices,” Arkush said. “Passing the Fair Elections Now Act is the perfect way for Congress to show that it’s serious about change.”

For more information, visit [www.FairElectionsNow.org](http://www.FairElectionsNow.org).

– The author is editor of *Public Citizen News*.

# Unaffiliated Millions Are Open To Faith

The fastest-growing religious segment of the United States population is those who are not affiliated with a particular religion – but that group is not necessarily comprised of secularists and largely remains open to faith.

But majorities of those who have left their childhood faith cite judgmentalism and hypocrisy among religious people and leaders as a major reason why they left the fold.

The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life released the study, the “Faith in Flux: Changes in Religious Affiliation in the U.S.”

It involved in-depth interviews with more than 2,800 people who had responded to the earlier “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey,” which found that more than 16% of all Americans were not affiliated with any particular religious group.

## MOST WERE RAISED IN CHURCH

Of the currently unaffiliated in the original survey, 79% said they had been raised in a religious tradition. However, those raised without a specific religious affiliation apparently have a significantly harder retention problem than many faith groups. A majority – 54% – of those who were raised religiously unaffiliated now say they belong to a religious group.

A full 39% of respondents who said they were unaffiliated as children became Protestants. While 22% of the formerly unaffiliated had joined majority-white evangelical Protestant churches, 13% had joined historically white mainline Protestant denominations and 4% had joined historically African-American Prot-

estant churches.

Only 6% of those raised without a religious affiliation had converted to Catholicism, and 9% had converted to other faith groups [including Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Judaism, Islam and smaller religious bodies].

Of the unaffiliated who eventually joined Protestant churches, those who joined evangelical organizations – whose very name implies evangelism – were just as likely to cite a friend’s invitation to church as a factor in their conversion as those who joined mainline Protestant churches.

The ranks of the currently unaffiliated, the survey found, are not heavy on strong secularists. In fact, about a third of those who were religiously affiliated as children but have become unaffiliated said they thought they simply had not yet found the right religion and would be open to becoming religious again.

## WHY THEY ARE TURNED OFF

When asked about why they had left their childhood faith, large majorities of former Catholics and Protestants cited hypocrisy and judgmentalism among religious congregations and leaders, Pharisaical attitudes among the religious, greed in religious leaders and institutions and a belief that no single religion holds a corner on the truth.

Only 32% of the unaffiliated raised in Catholic and Protestant churches agreed with the statement that “modern science proves religion is superstition.”

*Associated Baptist Press*

# Coming To The Aid Of Disabled Marine

*"It is foolish and wrong to mourn the men who have died. Rather we should thank God that such men lived."* – Gen. George S. Patton

**By Jaye Lewis**

I only noticed him out of the corner of my eye. I knew he was a Marine from the cut of his uniform, with its tightly pressed military creases. Then I heard him, speaking low with a kind of hiss.

He was not speaking to me. He was speaking to my sergeant, who was the Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge of the Military Information Booth at San Francisco International Airport, where I served as a Navy WAVE, during the Vietnam War.

"Hep nee, peesss!" [Help me, please!]

## **STRUGGLING TO SPEAK**

He struggled with every word. I was grabbing my purse to take a much-needed break, but I was caught by his struggle to make himself understood.

I could hear the irritation in the sergeant's voice, as she demanded that he "speak up!" I paused, as he began again, "I-nee-to-change-ny-tickek!"

I understood every painful word he said. He needed to change his ticket. What was wrong with my NCO?

"I CANT understand you!" she said, irritated. "Speak up!"

How rude! I thought. I turned, putting down my purse, and I looked at him, again beginning his struggle to speak.

## **A TALL, STRONG MARINE**

And, no wonder. There stood a tall, strong Marine officer, perfect in his pristine uniform, missing half his jaw! My God, I thought! What is she thinking?!

"Excuse me, sir. I can help you."

Without thinking, I shoved my sergeant aside and maneuvered my way in front of her. I could see the man's teeth through the wire that held his face together.

I was of no importance, a lowly seaman apprentice, but I knew what this man needed – someone who cared enough to listen.

## **THE PAIN IN HIS EYES**

I studied his eyes. I saw the pain, and I felt his humiliation. Soul to soul, I knew what to do. I smiled. A big, welcoming smile.

"Yes Sir! How can I help you?"

Painfully slow words, tortured and slurred, escaped from his wired mouth. I listened with all my heart, and I watched his eyes.

Dear God, help me to understand, I prayed. And I did understand him, more than I can express.

I gave him the directions he needed, and his eyes smiled his thanks.

When he walked away, I called a friend at United Airlines, who adopted him im-

mediately, taking great care with his situation.

## **HELPING A REAL HERO**

I thanked God for this opportunity to help a real hero. However, I also knew I was in trouble. I looked at my sergeant, feeling anger rise in me, at her rudeness and total lack of sensitivity. She stared at me, and she said, "I could put you on report." Her eyes narrowed.

Without thinking, I blurted out, "And, I could put YOU on report, sergeant, for insubordination to an officer!"

My eyes spit fire, as I hurtled the stack of report chits towards her.

"Be my guest!" I said, as I grabbed my purse. "I'll be on break." And I left.

I went on to supper, as I knew it would be a long night. I was troubled, however, now that my "dander" was down, at the thought of going to Captain's Mast, for my insubordination to an NCO. I was certain it would be very unpleasant.

As I neared the United Airlines counter, I saw him again. His luggage was being checked, and his back was towards me.

## **OUR EYES MET**

Then, as though someone had told him I was there, he turned, and he looked at me. Our eyes met, for an eternity. Then I smiled.

This soldier and hero, in the United States Marine Corps, pulled himself up to his full height, and with all the military perfection in his being, he gave me a sharp, military salute!

I was thrilled! WAVES normally did not salute indoors, especially when they were not wearing their cover [hat], but I pulled myself to attention and returned that salute.

Moving on to the cafeteria, I walked a little taller. I felt more like a lady than I ever had before in my whole life! And ... just a little bit ... I felt like a hero, too.

*Editor's Note: The author wonders after 35 years if the Marine and her paths will cross again. She was 21 at the time and her sergeant never did put her on report. She is a retired Navy wife and Vietnam veteran who hopes we remember, in our present wars, that the Marines and all our forces, hit the ground running. Civilians make war, our armed forces fight them.*



# Sonia, Trailblazing Women And Heroic Men

**By Wanda Jo Stapleton**

Statements made during Supreme Court Nominee Sonia Sotomayor's hearing before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee recalled the valiant efforts and achievements of trailblazing women among us.

For example, listeners were reminded that former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor graduated third in her class from Stanford Law School – only to be offered legal secretarial positions in law firms.

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg encountered similar obstacles. Upon entering Harvard Law School, she found that her class consisted of nine women and about 500 men. That's when a professor demanded to know how she could justify taking a classroom seat that could have gone to a man.

It's no wonder that Ginsburg wrote a stinging dissent [and read it from the bench] when in 2007, the Supreme Court ruled 5-to-4 against Lilly Ledbetter, supervisor at a tire plant in Alabama. Ledbetter had learned after working almost two decades in the tire plant that she had been paid up to 40% less than men doing the same job.

Supreme Court justices [Roberts, Alito, Kennedy, Scalia, and Thomas] declared that she should have filed her lawsuit within 180 days after her first discriminatory paycheck during her first days on the job!

## **LEDBETTER'S COURT VICTORY ERASED**

That ruling erased Ledbetter's back pay awarded in a jury trial and left her without recourse for over \$200,000 in salary benefits that she had lost. She lost pension and Social Security benefits as well. Of course, this ruling affected women, minorities and others in her situation. Ironically, Clarence Thomas, who voted with the majority against Ledbetter, formerly headed the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC].

Ginsburg in her dissent [and speaking for dissenting justices Stevens, Souter, and Breyer] said, "In our view, the court does not comprehend, or is indifferent to, the insidious way in which women can be victims of pay discrimination." And she called on Congress to "correct the Court's parsimonious reading" of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 – which Congress did. In fact, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act was the first bill that President Obama signed into law.

## **OKLAHOMA SENATORS OPPOSE FAIR PAY**

Noteworthy, Oklahoma's entire congressional delegation and both senators

voted against this Fair Pay Act. In doing so, they answered "no" to the question: Should women be paid the same as men for the same work?

Interestingly, the Ledbetter Supreme Court case came up at least twice during the Sotomayor hearing. When Republicans on the Senate Judiciary Committee repeatedly tried to portray Sotomayor as an "activist judge," she countered with specifics about her 17-year record of deciding cases based on the law, the facts of the case, and respect for Congress [not herself] as lawmaker.

Also in response, Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, D-RI, used the "infamous Ledbetter decision" as one example how "rightwing justices of the court" were the activist judges with a "striking record of ignoring precedent, overturning congressional statutes, limiting constitutional protections, and discovering new constitutional rights."

## **ROBERTS' RIGHT-WING ACTIVISM**

Whitehouse also said that "Jeffrey Toobin, a well-respected legal commentator, has recently reported that in every major case since he became the nation's 17th Chief Justice, Roberts has sided with the prosecution over the defendant, the state over the condemned, the executive branch over the legislative, and the corporate defendant over the individual plaintiff."

Sen. Richard Durbin, D-IL, also cited the Ledbetter case as "the best example of the Supreme Court putting conservative activism over common sense" because the court's decision "defied common sense and the realities of the workplace where few employees know what their fellow employees are paid. And it contradicted decades of past precedent."

Finally, President Obama, while signing the new law to reverse the Supreme Court's "Ledbetter" decision, said, "Lilly Ledbetter didn't set out to be a trailblazer or a household name. She was just a hard worker who did her job – and did it well – for nearly two decades before discovering that for years, she was paid less than her male colleagues for the very same work."

Today, achieving women stand on the shoulders of trailblazers like O'Connor, Ginsburg, Ledbetter, and Sotomayor. Equal gratitude goes to heroic men like Whitehouse, Durbin, and Obama who have greatly helped along the way.

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

# Medical Bills Cause 60% Of Bankruptcies

By Maggie Fox

Medical bills are behind more than 60% of U.S. personal bankruptcies, U.S. researchers revealed in a report they said demonstrates that health-care reform is on the wrong track.

More than 75% of these bankrupt families had health insurance but still were overwhelmed by their medical debts, the team at Harvard Law School, Harvard Medical School and Ohio University reported in the American Journal of Medicine.

"Unless you're Warren Buffett, your family is just one serious illness away from bankruptcy," Harvard's Dr. David Himmelstein, an advocate for a single-payer health insurance program for the United States, said in a statement.

"For middle-class Americans, health insurance offers little protection," he added.

## TODAY IT'S A PATCHWORK SYSTEM

The United States is embarking on an overhaul of its healthcare system, now a patchwork of public programs such as Medicare for the elderly and disabled and employer-sponsored health insurance that leaves 15% of the population with no coverage.

The researchers and some consumer advocates said the study showed the proposals under the most serious consideration are unlikely to help many Americans.

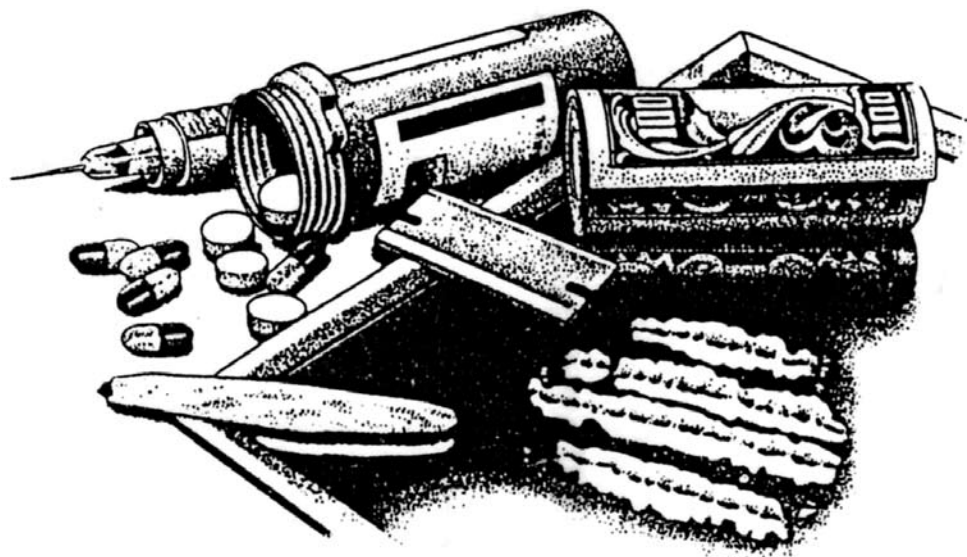
Authors of the report are pressing for a single payer plan, in which one agency, usually the government, coordinates health coverage.

"Expanding private insurance and calling it health reform will fail to prevent financial catastrophe for hundreds of thousands of Americans every year," Dr. Sidney Wolfe of the Health Research Group at Public Citizen said in a statement.

## EMPLOYERS ARE DROPPING COVERAGE

About 170 million people get health insurance through an employer but President Barack Obama says soaring healthcare costs hurt the economy and force businesses to drop medical insurance for their workers.

"Nationally, a quarter of firms cancel coverage immediately when an employee suffers a disabling illness; another quarter do so within a year," the report reads.



Obama told Congress he was open to making mandatory health insurance part of the overhaul.

Neither Congress nor Obama are considering the kind of single-payer plan advocated by Public Citizen, Himmelstein and his colleague Dr. Steffie Woolhandler.

## HUNDREDS OF BILLIONS NOW WASTED

"We need to rethink health reform," Woolhandler said. "Covering the uninsured isn't enough. Only single-payer national health insurance can make universal, comprehensive coverage affordable by saving the hundreds of billions we now waste on insurance overhead and bureaucracy."

The researchers studied 2,134 random families who filed for bankruptcy between January and April in 2007, before the current recession began.

They used public bankruptcy court records and surveyed 1,032 people. By using a conservative definition, 62.1% of all bankruptcies in 2007 were medical; 92% of these medical debtors had medical debts over \$5,000 or 10% of pretax family income, the researchers wrote.

"Most medical debtors were well-educated, owned homes and had middle class occupations."

The researchers, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, said the share of bankruptcies that could be blamed on medical problems rose by 50% from 2001 to 2007.

Patients with multiple sclerosis paid a mean of \$34,167 out of pocket in 2007, diabetics paid \$26,971, and those with injuries paid \$26,096, the researchers found.

© Reuters

# Sickening Addiction May Kill Reform

By Joe Conason

If Congress fails to enact health care reform this year – or if it enacts a sham reform designed to bail out corporate medicine while excluding the "public option" – then the public will rightly blame Democrats, who have no excuse for failure except their own cowardice and corruption.

The punishment inflicted by angry voters is likely to be reduced majorities in both the Senate and the House of Representatives – or even the restoration of Republican rule on Capitol Hill.

Many of those now talking down President Obama's health care initiative were in Washington back in 1994, when Bill Clinton's proposals to achieve universal coverage were killed by members of the president's own party.

## WHY DEMOCRATS LOST CONGRESS

The Democrats lost control of Congress that November in a historic repudiation, largely because of public disillusionment with their policy failures.

Nearly every poll now shows the American people demanding change in the health care system, with majorities favoring universal coverage and, in many surveys, a government plan that competes with private insurance. But powerful Democratic politicians, especially in the Senate, are pretending not to hear. They adopt all sorts of positions, from bluntly opposing any substantive change this year to promoting bogus alternatives.

They claim to be trying to help Obama gather the votes he will need, or to assist him in attracting Republican votes. They insist that the country can't afford universal care, or that the public option won't pass [before debate has even begun].

## THEY WOULD NOT EXPLAIN THEIR POSITION

Indeed, many of the most intransigent Democrats don't bother to make actual arguments to support their position. Nor do they seem to worry that Democratic voters and the party's main constituencies overwhelmingly support the public option and universal coverage.

Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-LA, has simply stated, through her flack, that she refuses to support a public option. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-OR, who has tried to fashion a plan that will entice Republicans, warns that the public option is a step toward single-payer health care – not much of an objection to a model that serves people in every other industrialized country with lower costs and superior outcomes.

## FEINSTEIN'S FEEBLE PROTEST

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-CA, feebly protests that her state's mismanagement by a Republican governor must stall the progress of the rest of the country. Sen. Kent Conrad, D-ND, says he has a better plan involving regional cooperatives, which would be unable to effectively compete with the insurance behemoths or bargain with pharmaceutical giants.

The excuses sound different, but all of these lawmakers have something in common – namely, their abject dependence on campaign contributions from the

insurance and pharmaceutical corporations fighting against real reform.

Consider Landrieu, a senator from a very poor state whose working-class constituents badly need universal coverage [and many of whom now depend on Medicare, a popular government program].

According to the Center for Responsive Politics, a nonpartisan watchdog outfit, she has received nearly \$1.7 million from corporate medical interests, including hospitals, insurance companies, nursing homes and drug firms, during the course of her political career.

## CAMPAIGN REPORTS DEPRESSING

The same kind of depressing figures can be found in the campaign filings of many of the Democrats now posing as obstacles to reform, notably including Sen. Max Baucus, D-MT, the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, who has distinguished himself in the most appalling way.

The Montana Standard, a news outlet in his home state, found that Baucus has received more campaign money from health and insurance industry donors than any other single member of Congress.

"In the past six years," the Standard found, "nearly one-fourth of every dime raised by the Montana senator and his political-action committee has come from groups and individuals associated with drug companies, insurers, hospitals, medical-supply firms, health-service companies and other health professionals."

Whenever Democratic politicians are confronted with this conflict between the public interest and their private fund-raising, they take offense at the implied insult. They protest, as a spokesman for Landrieu did, that they make policy decisions based on what is best for the people of their states, "not campaign contributions."

But when health reform fails – or turns into a trough for their contributors, who will believe them? And who will vote for them?

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## Don't Rock The Boat

Everything I need to know about life I learned from Noah's Ark. One: Don't miss the boat. Two: Remember that we are all in the same boat. Three: Plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the Ark. Four: Stay fit. When you're 600 years old, someone may ask you to do something really big. Five: Don't listen to critics; just get on with the job that needs to be done. Six: Build your future on high ground. Seven: For safety's sake, travel in pairs. Eight: Speed isn't always an advantage. The snails were on board with the cheetahs. Nine: When you're stressed, float a while. Ten: Remember, the Ark was built by amateurs; the Titanic by professionals.

# The Ascent Of Fox News Militia Media

By Eric Boellel

After a night of drinking, followed by an early-morning argument with his mother, with whom he shared a Pittsburgh apartment, 22-year-old Richard Poplawski put on a bulletproof vest, grabbed his guns, including an AK-47 rifle, and waited for the police to respond to the domestic disturbance call his mother had placed.

When two officers arrived at the front door, Poplawski shot them both in the head, and then killed another officer who tried to rescue his colleagues.

In the wake of the bloodbath, we learned that Poplawski was something of a conspiracy nut who embraced dark, radical rhetoric about America.

He was convinced the government wanted to take away his guns, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reported.

## OBAMA HAS NO GUN BAN

Specifically, Poplawski, as one friend described it, feared “the Obama gun ban that’s on the way” and “didn’t like our rights being infringed upon.” [FYI, there is no Obama gun ban.]

The same friend said the shooter feared America was “going to see the end of our times.”

We learned that Poplawski hosted his own [failed] Internet radio show and that he visited the website of 9/11 conspiracy backer Alex Jones, who has been hyping the threat of a totalitarian world government for years.

More recently, Jones has been warning listeners like Poplawski about The Obama Deception [that’s the name of Jones’ new documentary DVD] and how President Obama is bound to destroy America.

## THE TIN FOIL HAT CROWD

Who’s Alex Jones? Even according to some conservative bloggers, the anti-government, anti-Obama talker is a “freak” who is popular with “the tin foil hat crowd.” Like with Poplawski, apparently.

Jones might be a “freak,” but he has recently been embraced – and mainstreamed – by Fox News, part of the channel’s unprecedented drive to push radical propaganda warning of America’s democratic demise under the new president.

During a March 18 webcast of FoxNews.com’s proudly paranoid “Freedom Watch,” Andrew Napolitano introduced a segment about “what the government has done to take your liberty and your property away.”

## GLOBAL GOVERNMENT IS LOOMING?

With that, he welcomed onto the show “the one, the only, the great Alex Jones,” who began ranting about “exposing” the New World Order and the threat posed by an emerging “global government.”

“I appreciate what you’re exposing,” Napolitano assured his guest.

Waving around a copy of his Obama Deception, Jones warned Fox News webcast viewers about Obama’s “agenda” for “gun confiscation.”

Jones also noted with excitement that Fox News’ Glenn Beck had recently begun warning about the looming New World Order on his show, just like Jones



had for years.

“It is great!” cheered the conspiracist. [Like Jones, Beck recently warned viewers that “the Second Amendment is under fire.”] Concluding the interview, Fox News’ Napolitano announced, “It’s absolutely been a pleasure” listening to Jones’ insights.

## FOX PLAYS A DANGEROUS GAME

There isn’t any doubt that Fox News is playing an increasingly erratic and dangerous game by embracing the type of paranoid insurrection rhetoric that people like Poplawski are now acting on.

By stoking dark fears about the ominous ruins that await an Obama America, by ratcheting up irresponsible back-to-the-wall scenarios, Fox News has waded into a territory that no other news organization has ever dared to exploit.

What Fox News is now programming on a daily [unhinged] basis is unprecedented in the history of American television, especially in the form of Beck’s program.

Night after night, week after week, Beck rails against the president while denouncing him or his actions, alternately, as Marxist, socialist, or fascist.

## EXPECTING OBAMA-LED TYRANNY

He felt entirely comfortable pondering whether the federal government, under the auspices of FEMA, was building concentration camps to round up Americans in order to institute totalitarian rule.

That’s when Beck wasn’t gaming out bloody scenarios for the coming civil war against Obama-led tyranny. In just a few shorts months, Beck raced to the head of Fox News’ militia media movement.

The consequences of Fox News’ doomsday programming now seem entirely predictable. MSNBC featured Fox’s unhinged abortion stance, with speculation that the abortion doctor was killed as a result of such hype.

In fact, his partial birth abortions saved women’s lives and eliminated grotesquely formed infants – most of whom were doomed.

FYI, weeks before his deadly shooting spree, Poplawski uploaded a video clip of Beck ominously referencing the FEMA camps on Fox News.

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# Poor Swamping Legal Aid Offices

By Tony Pugh

After years of funding shortfalls, legal aid societies across the country are being overwhelmed by growing numbers of poor and unemployed Americans who face eviction, foreclosure, bankruptcy and other legal problems tied to the recession.

The crush of new clients comes as the cash-strapped agencies cut staff and services. Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma report the same problem. Heading this year’s fund-raising drive is Gov. and Mrs. Brad Henry.

The nonprofit Legal Services Corp., which funds legal-aid offices nationwide, says that the number of people who qualify for assistance has jumped by about 11 million since 2007, because of the recession.

Roughly 51 million people are now eligible for assistance – individuals and families who earn less than 125% of the federal poverty level, now set at \$27,564 a year for a family of four.

## INCREASE WON’T COVER THE NEW CRUSH

The federal government budgeted an 11% increase in funding for legal aid this year. That increase, however, is more than offset by the growing demand for services and a recession-driven decline in state funding, charitable gifts and grants, which together traditionally make up half of legal service funding.

That means that legal-aid programs will turn away roughly a million valid cases this year, advocates say, about half the requests for assistance they’ll receive.

“The impact of the recession on the delivery system for civil legal aid has been dramatic with respect to those nonfederal funds,” said Don Saunders, the director of the Civil Legal Services division of the National Legal Aid & Defender Association.

## MIDDLE CLASS ALSO HAVING TROUBLE

Middle class people also have trouble affording legal help, but with fewer economic resources, the poor are more likely to find their money problems leading to court.

Legal aid offices typically handle cases involving divorces, child custody and a host of consumer issues that can include landlord-tenant disputes, foreclosures,

evictions, applications for government benefits and battles with predatory lenders. They often represent battered women who need protection, women who are trying to obtain child support or families trying to secure insurance payments.

Each downward turn of the economy increases the need for services.

## VAST MAJORITY IN NEED DON’T GET IT

Nationally, experts estimate that 80% of low-income Americans who need legal help in civil cases don’t receive any. That comprises “not only people who show up at the door and are turned away, which is a large number, but also those who don’t even try because it’s so hopeless,” said Peter Edelman, who teaches poverty law at Georgetown University in Washington, DC.

One major reason is the decline in funding from the Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts program. The program collects interest from lawyers’ client trust accounts and distributes the money as grants to legal-service organizations nationwide.

Nearly \$112 million in such funds were distributed last year. That funding is expected to fall 21% this year, however, in part because the Federal Reserve slashed the benchmark interest rate to near zero to help fight the recession.

## CONGRESS EXPECTED TO UP THE FUNDING

After providing \$390 million for programs funded by the Legal Services Corp. this year, Congress is poised to up the ante again. The House of Representatives has requested \$440 million for fiscal year 2010, President Barack Obama asked for \$435 million and the Senate has called for \$400 million.

House and Senate conferees will settle on a final amount, but it’s unlikely to approach the previous inflation-adjusted peaks of \$750 million in 1981 and \$554 million in 1995, according to a new report by the Center for American Progress, a liberal research center.

The report found that the Legal Services Corp.’s inflation-adjusted funding this fiscal year is the lowest in the program’s 38-year history, an estimated \$6.85 per person.

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# High School Targeted Quit? Not Option On Ed Redesign

By Gene R. Carter

Four years ago, 30 students entered a high school classroom. This year:

- Nine of those students won't walk across the stage to receive their diplomas.
- Because they've dropped out, of those nine, four will be unemployed.
- Three will receive government assistance.
- Two won't have health insurance.
- And each will be eight times more likely than their peers to go to jail.

Those nine kids are part of the 1.2 million U.S. students who fail to graduate every year, jeopardizing their futures and costing our economy billions of dollars in lost wages.

As President Obama declared, "Dropping out of high school is no longer an option. It's not just quitting on yourself; it's quitting on your country."

## PROPOSING SCHOOL REDESIGN

U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-NV, and Rep. Dave Loebsack, D-IA, have introduced legislation that would provide critical resources for innovative secondary school redesign to dramatically raise high school graduation rates and stem the flow of high school dropouts by implementing scalable innovation that benefits all students.

The Secondary School Innovation Fund Act would supply competitive grants for states, districts, schools, higher education institutes, businesses, and community-based organizations to promote transformative models and programs in our nation's middle and high schools that improve student achievement and prepare students for success in postsecondary education and the workforce.

## WHAT THE LAW WOULD REQUIRE

Specifically, the legislation would:

- Expand on the success of emerging models like multiple pathways to graduation, early college high schools and dual enrollment, and early warning intervention systems.
- Support a variety of secondary school redesign strategies such as personalization, improved transitions into and out of high school.
- Expand learning time, postsecondary and work-based learning opportunities and a rigorous curriculum aligned across grades and with post secondary education and the workforce.
- Provide resources for high-quality research and evaluation to ensure funding goes to programs with a proven track record in raising student achievement.

## VITAL FOR NEEDS OF THE WHOLE CHILD

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development [ASCD] and its 175,000 members have long been leaders in advocating for high school redesign that provides the necessary academic supports and vital comprehensive services to meet the needs of the whole child and lead to successful high school graduates.

The association helped craft the original version of the Secondary School Innovation Fund Act [known as the GRADUATES Act], first introduced in 2007. Moreover, ASCD members made innovative high school redesign a priority in this year's ASCD Legislative Agenda, calling for the 111th Congress to enact the Secondary School Innovation Fund Act.

## RICH AND RIGOROUS CURRICULUM

ASCD supports high school redesign that includes a rich and rigorous cur-

In 1969, a year after the killings of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Sen. Robert Kennedy, Gallup and Harris surveys reported that more than 80% thought King's assassination was the work of a conspiracy. A third felt the same was true in Kennedy's case.

Over the next 20 years eight surveys showed a fourth believed King had been felled by James Earl Ray alone, while the portion doubting that Sirhan Sirhan alone had murdered Kennedy grew to a 55% majority.

Conspiracies were involved in the assassination attempts on Gov. George Wallace of Alabama in 1972, President Ford – twice – in 1975, and President Reagan in 1981.

This phenomenon is not new. As far back as the 1930s, a Catholic priest, Charles Coughlin, propagated extensive conspiracy theories nationwide on his radio show.

Would a Catholic priest lie? Until silenced by the Vatican, Coughlin

repeatedly claimed that American society was controlled by Jewish international bankers and atheistic Communists. Polls showed a third of Americans believed it.

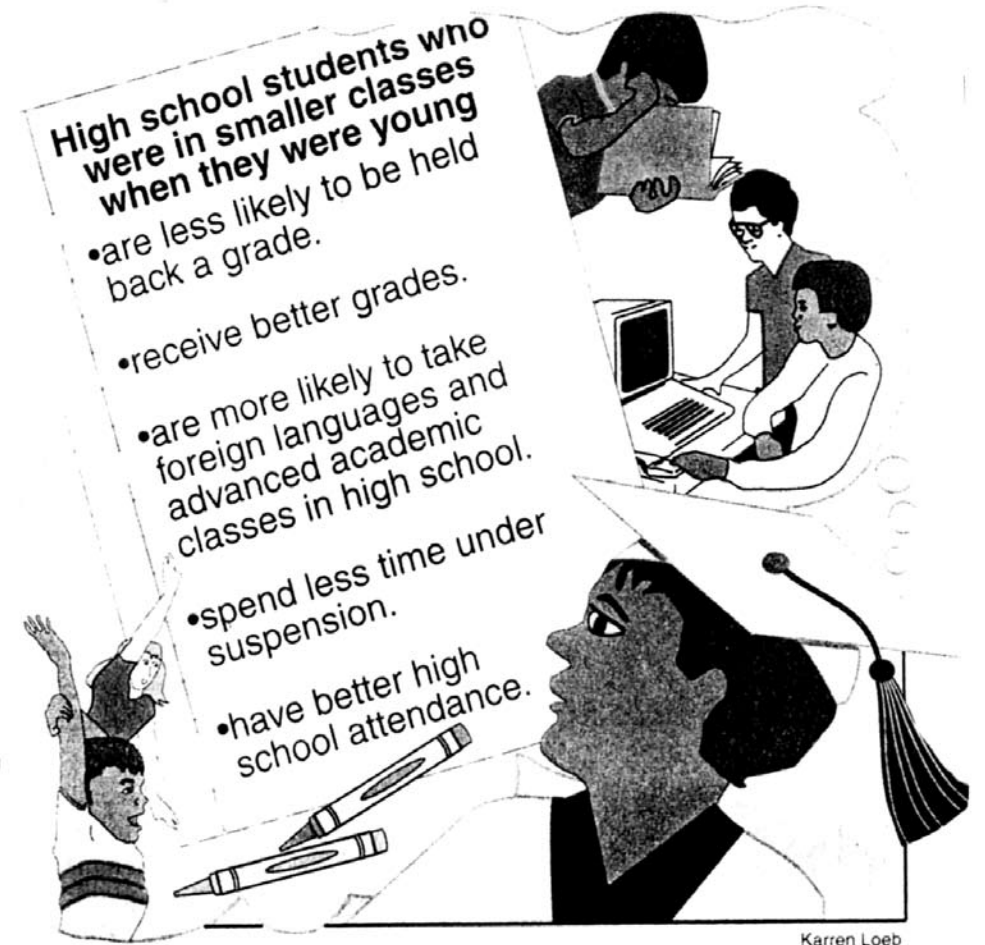
He accused President Franklin D. Roosevelt of being anti-God and a liar and betrayer. He also believed Roosevelt himself to be a Jew.

In his 1996 book *Radio Priest*, Donald Warren calculated from Gallup polls that by 1938 Coughlin reached an audience of about 16 million – about the same number as Rush Limbaugh has today.

The latest conspiracy theories revolve around the murder of a Wichita abortionist, with some on the far right claiming pro-abortionists had it done to harm the right-to-life crowd.

Don't kid yourself. Conspiracies are alive and well today, often promoted by radical rightwing radio talkers.

Hillary Clinton claimed there was a "vast rightwing conspiracy" against



Karren Loeb

riculum, meaningful and relevant learning experiences, and relationships with caring adults who know students well. Its legislative agenda demands implementation of proven strategies, such as:

- Mentoring programs where students are supported and encouraged by adults in the school building.
- More flexible use of time that enables students to fulfill graduation requirements not through seat time but by demonstrating their knowledge and skills.
- Incentives for businesses and community organizations to offer expanded student learning opportunities and innovative programs for earning credit.
- Incentives for school-university partnerships to align curriculum between secondary and postsecondary education to increase college readiness.
- Alternative opportunities for students who are not succeeding in traditional high school programs.

## CRITICAL FEDERAL SUPPORT

The Secondary School Innovation Fund Act would provide critical federal support for an expansion of innovative strategies like these. Without such expansion, too many kids will be unprepared to compete in the global economy.

ASCD will diligently work to garner support for the legislation on Capitol Hill, solicit additional sponsors, and advocate for its enactment.

But just as schools cannot do the hard work of high school redesign in isolation, ASCD cannot advocate for high school redesign alone. We need you to contact your legislators, share what has worked, and explain the consequences of maintaining the status quo.

We need you to help redraw the picture of the next high school freshman class so that by the time they reach their senior year, all will be called on stage to receive their diplomas.

– To support innovative high school redesign and ask your legislators to do the same, visit [www.educatoradvocates.org](http://www.educatoradvocates.org).

# LISTEN!

From Page One

the Clintons.

Despite official assurances to the contrary, after 1945, 96% thought Hitler was still alive. Many denied, and continue to deny, that the Holocaust occurred. Latest poll shows nearly 6% of a Gallup sample – equivalent to about 10 to 12 million Americans – express this view.

Two years after Germany's defeat, 45% told Gallup interviewers that despite official assurances to the contrary, they thought Hitler was still alive.

Many other conspiracy theories appeared in the years that followed, some reflecting the simple questioning of government leaders fostered by our country's founding ideology.

Over 40% of Americans in 1950 believed Sen. Joseph McCarthy's accusations that Communists had infiltrated the U.S. State Department.

In 1995 and again in 1999, 12 million Americans insisted that the U.S.

government had faked the moon landings. Another 5% to 11% were unsure.

A majority of Americans believed that President Bill Clinton perpetrated a cover-up of his and his wife's dealings in the Whitewater affair. By 1997, Americans believed this by an almost three-to-one margin.

The 9/11 tragedy was believed to be the work of an insidious international conspiracy.

The Johnson White House tapes, published in Michael Bechloss' *Taking Charge*, reveal that Lyndon Johnson himself immediately suspected President Kennedy's assassination was part of a conspiracy.

He said, "It might be the forerunner of a surprise, Pearl Harbor style attack by the Soviet Union against America."

Despite black helicopters, Area 51 and other forebodings, Americans still venture out. OOohhhh.

# Quit Stereotyping Black Americans

By Elon James White

I write this letter on behalf of a lot of people that fall into the category of Average Black People. [Yes, I capitalize it, as if it were a title.] I do not claim to represent them because that would be absurd.

I really, truly don't. I don't even represent my circle of friends. At any point in time one of my Black buddies will, in fact, tell me to go to hell when speaking on concepts of race, politics, or religion.

I do, however, qualify as an Average Black Person. I am neither a part of the Black intelligentsia, nor do I fall into the category of your garden-variety street Negro.

A lot of folks see Black people in one of these two categories. Normally, let's be honest, it's the latter.

I don't qualify.

## EVER LISTENED TO GANGSTER RAP?

I do come from "the Hood." I am a born and bred Brooklynite raised in the middle of Bed-Stuy. If you aren't familiar with Bed-Stuy, perhaps you have never listened to gangster rap.

You're probably also unfamiliar with Jay-Z, Biggie Smalls, or the thousands of songs that yell out "Brooklyn!" and then give a shout-out to Bed-Stuy. It's fine.

Just understand that Bed-Stuy has a primarily negative connotation and for many years was used in boasts to gain respect or fear because it's an incredibly violent environment. In other words, you could get shot, son.

Speaking of which, I am the son of a single mother. My father is in prison. My grandfather was a pastor and I grew up in the church.

## NO SHAME IN WHAT HE LIKES

I, without shame, also enjoy fried chicken, watermelon, ribs, and orange soda. I can have an incredibly in-depth debate on the best five MCs ever. My credit isn't great and I've been shot.

With facts like this I qualify as a stereotypical Black person, right?

But I am also a computer programmer. I've been known to quote Nietzsche. I, on occasion, host dinner parties where I serve five-course meals, including a specialty of mine, White Truffle Tilapia [it's delightful].

I have the entire John Williams discography and wear a backpack that is emblazoned with the Thundercats insignia.

Those with one half of that story shake their head at the sheer mass of stereotypes I carry.

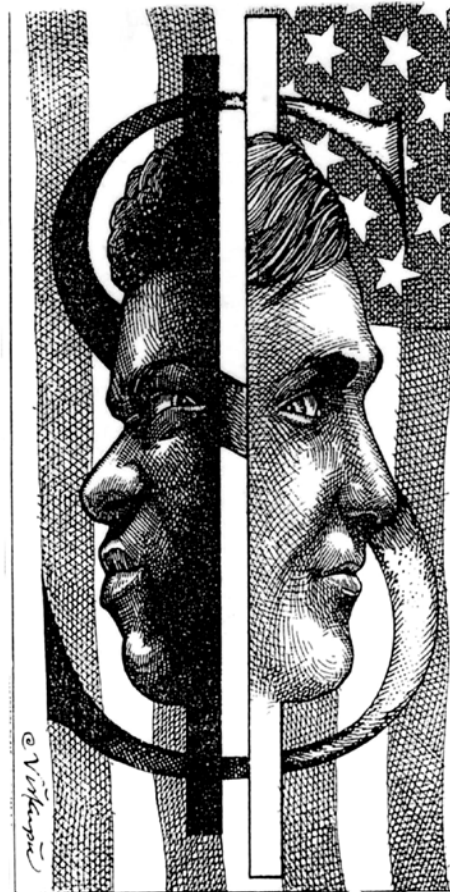
## SOME ARE SIMILAR, SOME AREN'T

Some refer to me as someone who "made it out." I currently live in Crown Heights. Some say "You're not like the others." Most people I interact with are very similar to me. I am an Average Black Person.

So, as an ABP, I have a few requests:

Media: Please stop referring to blacks as a monolith. I can't possibly express to you the different types of Black people that exist. We neither move as an entity, nor do we move as three or four entities. For every Sharpton, there's a Steele. And for every Sharpton and Steele there are a hundred folks in the middle. What we share is a past, which on occasion helps shape our view on things.

Also? Obama is not a unicorn. Please stop acting like Obama and his family are magical in the Black community. Just because some of you may not have



seen a Negro like this doesn't mean they don't exist.

Lots of smart black men are living with their smart mates and their cute smart kids. So please remember. Obama? Not a unicorn. Black people? Not one voice: I don't care what the supposed Black leaders try to claim.

Supposed Black Leaders: Please stop speaking for us as if we were a monolith. This is not the 1960s. We don't need a Martin Luther King Jr. or a Malcolm X. You speak for yourselves and your view on what's happening.

## NOBODY SPEAKS FOR BLACKS

You also can't police black people. There isn't an us. Are there issues within the Black community? Absolutely, but it's not everybody as much as it is certain groups, most time classes that are in need of help and focus.

Hence you can't speak for "Blacks."

There are people who need your help and don't want you speaking for them. Oh, and for the love of all that is holy, could you please stop critiquing Obama simply to show you aren't drinking the Kool-Aid? I get it.

We are not holding Obama on a pedestal. Some critique him harshly [and

personally I feel unjustly] and others love him. This is the case with every president.

Obama is not the spokesperson for Black people. He is a symbol of hope. He is a symbol of opportunity in a land where opportunity for us seemed nonexistent.

He's a symbol of a fight where people cried and died and sacrificed in order for the opportunity for him to exist. But his actions are his actions and have to be judged. Just not four months after he walked in the door with one of the worst clean up jobs in the country's history. You may critique him without critiquing Blacks' ability to critique him. After reading this, the next time you talk to a Black person you can feel comfortable in now knowing with every fiber of your being that you have no clue what they think or feel based on their skin color.

- The author founded the Brooklyn Comedy Co. and the Black Comedy Experiment

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## LABOR

From Page 10

Early also explores viewpoints of labor activists and historians concerning the "New Voice" AFL-CIO presidency of John Sweeny, who began his term in 1995. He evaluates differing takes on the significance of this reform from above, a kind of "palace coup."

## WORKING PEOPLE WORSE OFF

When the rank-and-file are on the margins in reenergizing organized labor, unions' vitality as a social movement suffers. Unions' declining power has worsened the living conditions of the nation's working people, not to be confused with organized labor.

Meanwhile, the fraction of the non-union U.S. work force has grown, with the past two years being exceptions that prove this rule.

Private-sector employees' rights to organize have fared poorly since Early began his decades-long career with the Communications Workers of America.

This on-the-job experience helps him to critically assess the history of federal labor law. That critique serves as a backdrop to millions of Americans' high hopes under President Obama and a Democratic controlled Congress for passage of the Employee Free Choice Act.

## FULL FURY OF CORPORATIONS

The EFCA, facing the fury of corporate America, would ease the big barriers for private-sector workers to join unions and negotiate first-year contracts. This is a must-read section for those seeking to understand present workplace conditions in light of past legal efforts to improve Americans' working lives.

Oh, and capitalism? It has been a global system from the start. Its built-in drive to grow-or-die is a process that means many things. One is that unions must organize locally, nationally and globally. The alternative is to perish.

Early's essays challenge conventional thinking on related trends, from U.S. de-industrialization to Mexican immigration. Along the way, he pulls back the veil on the AFL-CIO's coziness with the U.S. government's policy to undermine independent unions abroad.

Early nears the book's end with thoughtful and thought-provoking reviews of books about the Service Employees International Union and its 2005 departure from the AFL-CIO with the Change To Win coalition of unions. He explains the whys and wherefores of the flaws in the SEIU/CTW bureaucracy. Briefly, it has been working at cross-purposes to the interests of the rank-and-file.

However, this is contested terrain. For instance, Early writes on the SEIU takeover of a large California health care local. As political debate over the EFCA enters a crucial stage, this SEIU battle rages on. Tens of thousands of SEIU workers in the state are choosing to jump ship to the new National Union of Healthcare Workers.

In the final pages, Early turns to union-building, with a special focus on readers and writers. How to bring the two together more frequently? Digital media are part of the answer. But don't throw out what has worked before.

"It's long past time for progressives in labor to find new methods of encouraging rank-and-file reading or to revive some of the old-fashioned ones." Exactly.

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