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# THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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SEPTEMBER 10, 2009

## Wanted: Union Renaissance Labor Daze

By Arnold Hamilton

A decisive moment looms for Oklahoma's unions.

The next general election – only 14 months away – will serve as a benchmark for whether organized labor is poised for revival or still scratching to reverse the devastating effects of the state's 2001 embrace of right-to-work.

Whether teachers or carpenters, workers already are battling a stacked deck at the state Capitol where anti-union Republicans control both houses of the Legislature.

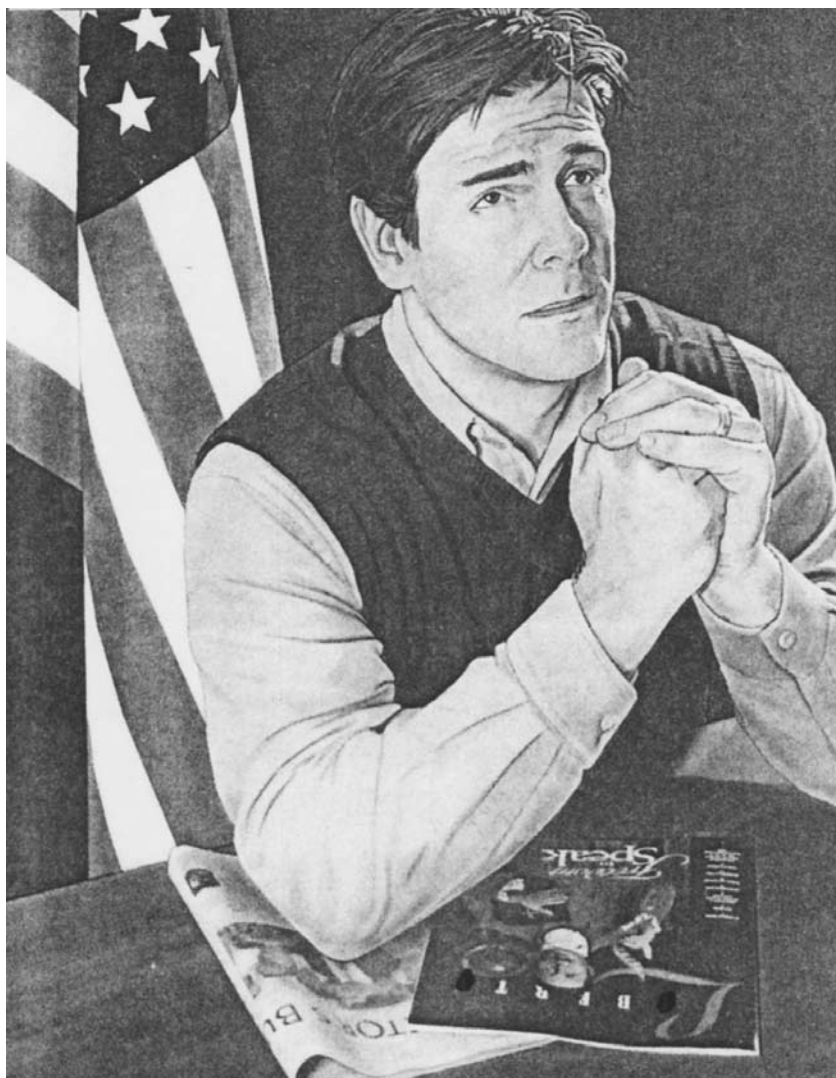
If the GOP maintains or expands its current 61-39 House [the western Oklahoma House seat vacated by Democrat Ryan McMullen will be filled next month in special election] and 26-22 Senate majorities – and if it wrestles the governorship away from Democrats after eight years – organized labor's prospects are bleak.

And so are those of working Oklahomans.

If organized labor learned anything from this year's session, it must be this: Accommodation is not possible with this band of GOP legislative leaders.

The fact is, they will not be satisfied until they've driven a stake through the heart of the state's largest teachers union, the Oklahoma Education Association, and crippled, once and for all, what's left of the state's trade unions [next step to crushing organized labor: workers compensation reform, the GOP's No. 1 legislative priority next year].

The OEA leadership is getting it from two sides: First, from a Legislature controlled by union-hating corporatist leaders who forged an unholy alliance with homeschool- and parochial school-loving theocrats that



want to destroy public education and replace it with religious schools.

Second, from some of its own members who have been duped – primarily by fundamentalist preachers, acting as not-so-subtle agents of the GOP – into voting against their economic self interests and in favor of a Republican agenda of hot-button social issues. It's a scheme to divert atten-

tion from the real goal: the transfer of more and more wealth from working Oklahomans to the privileged few.

It's a diabolically brilliant strategy, extraordinarily difficult to counter. In the last session, the OEA sought to mollify not only some of its members – who complain the union isn't working hard enough to find common ground with Republicans – but also GOP legislative leaders by endorsing controversial SB 1111 that would have moved student assessment and data collection from the state Department of Education into a new stand-alone agency.

The olive branch didn't keep legislative Republicans from ramming through SB 834 that would have eliminated collective bargaining, stripped away what little is left of Gov. Henry

### Unions Built This Country

The Employee Free Choice Act went down in flames. Congressional Republicans were solidly against it but failure came at the hands of so-called Blue Dog Democrats.

Today's economic tailspin has put the middle class, our country's backbone, in peril. Rising health care costs, home foreclosures, stagnant wages, and shrinking retirement plans are all taking a huge toll.

To revive the economy and rebuild the middle class in the long term, America needs to empower workers to bargain for better wages and benefits.

American unionization in the private sector has fallen to less than 8%. It's less than that in Oklahoma thanks to constant media lies and a State Chamber that operates the Legislature by remote control.

The Free Choice Act would have allowed workers to form a union when a majority of them want one. It would have stiffened penalties on employers who harass, intimidate, and fire workers for their support of a union.

It was a critical piece of our economic recovery. Unions benefit all of America's workers and strengthen our communities. States with higher rates of unionization have lower rates of poverty, crime, and failing schools.

Republicans have never stood up for working Americans, but the same Blue Dogs, including Oklahoma's Rep. Dan Boren, are now blocking health care reform.

Studies show that a large union presence in an industry or region can raise wages even for nonunion workers.

In 2008 the AFL-CIO and the United Food and Commercial Workers sued to get employers to provide personal protective equipment. Now, workers in hazardous jobs that require safety gear – like hard hats or protective glasses – must be provided this equipment, instead of being asked to

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# Observations

## Turgid Twins

Only four U.S. senators voted 100% of the time against America's children. If you guessed our senators, Jim Inhofe and Tom Coburn, were among them, you guessed right.

Forget party politics. Forget ideology. The one thing Americans share in common is the welfare of children – something our senators have renounced.

Thirteen million U.S. children live in poverty, eight million are without health insurance, and more than three million are reported abused and neglected. These numbers will only get worse during the current economic recession.

In the first few months of this year's Congress, several pieces of legislation have been passed which will make a difference in the health, education, and safety of children. You be the judge on whether our senators should have voted no on all of them:

- Expanding coverage to 4.4 million uninsured children through the State Children's Health Insurance Program [S-CHIP];
  - Protecting state Medicaid and education programs from cuts through the federal stimulus;
  - Increasing funding for the Head Start early education program, Title I education programs for the disadvantaged, afterschool, child care, food stamps, and child support programs, among many others in the federal stimulus and 2010 budget;
  - Pay equity for single moms;
  - Greater volunteer opportunities for children and those who want to work with them;
  - Helping families stave off the foreclosure of their home, and
  - Working to reduce child and teen smoking.
- Inhofe and Coburn are a national disgrace.

## Flush Rush

That fountain of misinformation, Rush Limbaugh, would rather lie

when telling the truth would serve him better.

MSNBC has been keeping score, using cuts from Limbaugh's show to prove he's lying. He's in a blind rage about that.

Remember, this is the same Rush Limbaugh who dodged the Vietnam draft but was gung-ho for Iraq, claiming "they're funding WMDs all over Iraq."

Another infamous quote: "Ladies and gentlemen, here's a fact that will shock you: Prescription drug prices and overall health care are coming down."

In fact, both were going up at twice the rate of inflation.

He forgets to remember that his hero, Ronald Reagan, viciously attacked the concept of Medicare, claiming "our children will look back at this age and remember when men were free."

More than 20 million dittoheads follow this yapping moron's every word as gospel. They are the same freaks manipulated to break up Town Hall meetings – listening to anything but the truth.

## Church Mice

Remember when our legislative leaders were blasting President Obama and his stimulus package? They're quiet as church mice now because it was only about \$630 million stimulus dollars that balanced the state's \$7.2 million budget.

Agencies were still required to take budget cuts between 4% and 7%, leaving the state's overflowing Rainy Day Fund unscathed. Barring a miracle, it will come into play next fiscal year.

Despite the storm clouds, the House had 1,272 bills and the Senate 1,249 bills. Only 25% became law.

Taxpayers are getting a lot more government than they require. It's fashionable to blister the federal government as a buttinsky but they seldom mention our own bloated state



government.

Not satisfied with what failed, the GOP-dominated Legislature has sent a slew of state questions to next year's election ballot.

As the time draws near we will give you detailed explanations on the state questions. Meanwhile, keep counting those bad old stimulus dollars – thanks to George W. Bush, they're the only thing keeping Oklahoma going today.

## Unmentionable

Dare we mention the subject?

The Week magazine had an interesting tidbit recently: They claim that Americans have always known that wiping their rears with dry paper is ineffective.

A classic survey showed that half of TP users spend their days with "fecal contamination" – anything from "wasp-colored" stains to "frank massive feces" – in their underpants.

And yet Americans continue to mock the bidet, the Frenchest of innovations, as froufrou, risqué, de trop. [They look like a very small square bathtub.]

But while personal hygiene is one thing, the future of the planet is another. The average American uses 57 sheets of toilet paper a day.

Collectively, we burn through 36.5 billion rolls each year at the cost of 15 million trees, 17.3 terawatts of electricity and more than 473 billion gallons of water.

No wonder the Japanese bidet behemoth Toto is gearing up for a massive sales push in America. When it's hip to be green, ditching the Charmin could actually make a difference – not only in our [dirty] drawers.

## Tort Paradise

If you think those TV-advertising lawyers are the only ones shopping for clients, you're dead wrong.

Even by Texas standards, the verdict against Illinois drug maker Abbott Laboratories this June was a whopper. After a four-day trial a jury in the tiny city of Marshall ordered Abbott to pay \$1.7 billion.

It wasn't a case of sympathetic jurors socking it to an out-of-state corporation for injuring one of their own. The plaintiff was Johnson & Johnson,

of New Brunswick, NJ.

The dispute was a technical one over patents on the companies' competing arthritis drugs, J&J's Remicade and Abbott's Humira.

The media and corporations endlessly complain about liability lawyers who seek plaintiff-friendly jurisdictions. But when they have a patent case to prosecute, they do the same thing.

Often they go to Marshall or two other federal courts in the Eastern District of Texas. With lightning-fast deadlines and a preference for putting matters before a jury, the judges there have created a patent plaintiffs paradise, averaging 133 cases a year.

Tell us again about Texas "tort reform."

## Going Green

House Democrats have drafted a sweeping climate-change bill that would establish a permit system to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 17% below 2005 levels by 2020.

The Environmental Protection Agency is moving ahead on the issue, too. In April the agency concluded that CO2 and other gases are a threat to public health, meaning it could regulate them under the Clean Air Act.

Strict carbon regs could cost the economy jobs, business groups say. In February the EPA and Justice Department announced an assault on utilities that modify old power plants without upgrading their pollution controls to the latest standards.

The Bush Administration was permissive on modifications. Industry watchers say this rule change is a taste of what's to come from the EPA, which is in line for a 34% budget increase in fiscal 2010.

In 2007 Congress passed an energy bill requiring automakers to boost their fleetwide fuel efficiency average 40%, from 27.5 mpg for cars and 22.2 mpg for light trucks to 35 mpg combined by 2020. Not fast enough, says the Obama Administration.

With the auto industry already under its thumb, the White House in May announced an agreement with automakers to achieve this goal by 2016.

Even by the Administration's conservative estimates, it will add another \$600 to the price of a vehicle. That's on top of the \$700 per vehicle the previous goal would have cost.

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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

MIKE LUKOVICH  
ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION  
ARTIST © 9-1-09

Has GOP Rep. John Sullivan really gone off the deep end this time? At a Town Hall meeting this congressional "birther" said President Obama was "hiding out" on vacation, unable to produce a birth certificate.

Dart: To U.S. Rep. Dan Boren, not because he said he's opposed to a bill that has yet to be finalized, but that he failed to nail the birthers and other misinformed in his audience.

Frosty Troy shared an adjoining cubicle in the U.S. Capitol with the late columnist Robert D. Novak, then working for the Wall Street Journal. Novak railed with unrelenting hatred against President Jack Kennedy.

Laurel: To NPR's Doug Mitchell, winner of a Knight Foundation fellowship and a Fullbright Award to teach broadcast journalism in Chile. He honed his skills at KOSU.

It was a dream of the late U.S. Sen. A.S. Mike Monroney that light rail link Tulsa and Oklahoma City but Congress said no. If an Obama Administration grant wins approval \$2 billion will finally get the ball rolling.

Dart: To Tulsan Ann Falling, candidate for mayor, who said her first order of business would be a creationism exhibit at the zoo. Is she living proof that for some, evolution hasn't started?

Despite ranking 46th in teacher salaries, 33% of Oklahoma teachers have a master's degree. The national figure is 48%. More Oklahoma teachers would go for it except for the cost.

Laurel: To the 2009 Legislature - Oklahoma is 16th state to pass a law making it a felony to assault on-duty nurses, paramedics, doctors, aides, interns and hospital security officers. It happens frequently - especially in the ER.

So Rep. Jabar Shumate, D-Tulsa, is being paid to promote membership in the rightwing Professional Oklahoma Educators? Can he even spell e-t-h-i-c-s?

Dart: To Sen. Tom Coburn, R-OK, one of a handful of far right senators signing a fear-mongering letter to the president, warning that if he appointed a special prosecutor the U.S. would be hit by terrorists again.

Haskell County commissioners must pay attorney fees for the losing case of the Ten Commandments on the courthouse lawn. In fact, taxpayers will be paying unless commissioners dig down in their own pockets.

Laurel: To term-limited state Sen. Johnnie Crutchfield, D-Ardmore, giving to local charities the remaining \$153,861 in his campaign coffer. How about including the Democratic Party?

Talk about a non-story. Tulsa County Democratic headquarters moved into Tulsa's Sun Oil building owned by the wife of former Gov. David Walters. They pay the same rent as other tenants so what's news to the Daily Disappointment?

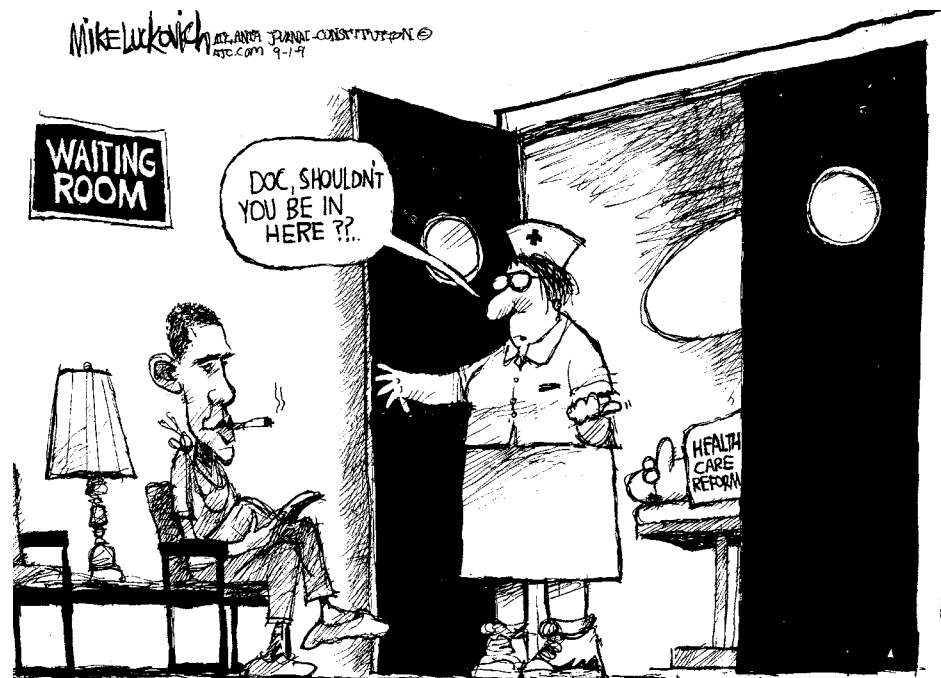
Dart: To fast talking state leaders who act surprised that the state faces a \$700 million budget shortfall. Ironic, isn't it, they cut taxes [mostly for the affluent] \$720 million?

The Tulsa World editorial page dislikes two things about Republican Congressman John Sullivan - his face. They nailed him on his hate-mongering racism and double standard on health care.

Laurel: To retiring U.S. Attorney John C. Richter for a job well done. It is to his non-partisan credit that he was retained, although a new president can replace all U.S. attorneys.

If you want to gamble on a lottery ticket be aware that your chances of winning are one in 175 million. You have a much better chance of being struck by lightning.

Dart: To Larry Jones for putting Feed the Children through months of bad publicity before finally yielding control to his board. They average \$1 billion a year in donations.



OKC's Jesus House hasn't paid employees in three weeks and the gas was almost shut off before \$2,000 was found. It now houses 75 of God's least fortunate. Send a check to PO Box 60369, OKC, 73146 or call at 405.232.7164.

Laurel: To country music star Carrie Underwood who hasn't forgotten where she came from, establishing a fund to aid her hometown of Checotah.

Oklahoma has the seventh most paddled kids in public schools - 14,828 last school year. Only 20 states allow corporal punishment. [U.S. Department of Education for Civil Rights]

Dart: To Newt Gingrich, switching to the Catholic Church as he prepares for a presidential campaign. People who have to attend mass with him are doing their penance.

Oklahoma legislators earn \$38,400 in salary [\$54,000 counting perks] - highest in the seven state region which averages \$14,989.

Laurel: To the U.S. Supreme Court for assigning new Justice Sonia Sotomayor to the Tenth Circuit, which includes Oklahoma. You can already hear the anguished cries of the ignorant.

State Superintendent Sandy Garrett announces she won't run again. Who can blame her? Every one of Gov. Henry Bellmon's HB 1017 reforms has been wiped out by the ruling GOP Legislature.

Dart: To an American leadership [?] that wastes more than \$200 billion in military cost overruns but can't find enough money to address the needs of 38.8 million Americans without health insurance.

The U.S. Senate's No. 1 showoff, Tom Coburn, says he can't think of "a single federal agency that is managed effectively." Gee, senator, didn't you know that thinking requires a working brain?

Laurel: To Oklahoman Rick Bayless, winner of Bravo TV's Top Chef Master award. He now owns two restaurants in Chicago and has written six cookbooks. Yummy.

A non-scholarship student [only 30% are on scholarship] who completes a bachelor's degree at Tulsa's Oral Roberts University owes an average of \$34,900. [U.S. News and World Report]

Dart: To the 59 Oklahoma public school districts that don't have a web page so taxpayers can see how their money is being spent. Oklahoma has 531 districts.

Oh, woe is James Dobson's Focus on the Family, continual source of political hate-mongering, gay-baiting disguised as religion. He's \$6 million short of a \$138 million budget.

Laurel: To Tulsa Booker T. Washington teacher Ronald Foote and East Central University's Jack Paschall, inducted into the Oklahoma Educators Hall of Fame.

More than 1,200 veterans have been told that their initial diagnoses of Lou Gehrig's disease were mistakes. The Veterans Affairs Department is "re-viewing" the matter.

Dart: To Sen. John Ford, R-Bartlesville, blasting the state high school graduation rate as "atrocious." Only he was quoting outdated figures and the only thing "atrocious" is the GOP battering of public education.

Keep your fingers crossed - 36 candidates have enrolled for online alternative certification to teach in the public schools. There have been more than 600 inquiries. Chalk it up to hard economic times.

Laurel: To Nita Chaudray for a letter to the Baptist Messenger pointing out that each day 50 Oklahomans lose their health insurance, and 519,000 are now without coverage. She said this is a moral issue.

OKC's marvelous Union Station railyard isn't only casualty of the new I-40 route. Trains carrying hazardous materials are being re-routed through Capitol Hill neighborhoods. Why not shift the new I-40 125 feet and solve both problems?

Author Thomas Frank [What's The Matter With Kansas?] tentatively scheduled to appear in OKC in October. Details in Sept. 25 Observer.

## THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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# Letters

Editor, The Observer:

I am a Democrat and I voted for Barack Obama. I would do it again. I approve of his domestic policies. I think he is a good man. Now, however, I believe that too many folks are giving him a pass on war. We are still in Iraq and recent news stories would indicate that we are going to be in Afghanistan for a long, long time. He and his generals are calling for more and more troops to be sent in harm's way and I haven't heard anything that resembles an "exit plan."

Do none of you remember Vietnam?

I landed in Danang in 1965. That was about the time when another good man, Lyndon Johnson, a good man who had some good domestic policies, escalated a conflict that eventually claimed the lives of almost 60,000 Americans and untold numbers of Vietnamese.

How do you end a war? You stop fighting. How do you bring the troops home? Load the planes and fly away. Let President Obama know that it's not enough to be a good man. He has to do the right things. End the war.

Darrell Barton  
Edmond

Editor, The Observer:

Always wonder why all those tax protesters never said a peep while the Shrub [President George W. Bush] let our nation sink into poverty. Of course, we know all the protest is spontaneous. Haw!

I still have a neighbor who tells me President Obama is a Muslim, etc. I recall the talk when President Kennedy was a candidate. Ain't seen the Pope take over the White House yet. Those hatemongers don't care that many good Muslims have died because of Bush.

Please keep up the only sane voice we have in Oklahoma.

Ernie Wirsich  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

In the midst of the push and shove of the health care Town Hall meetings, and in the midst of violent threats at those meetings, I ponder the irony that no one has raised the issue of how violence increases the cost of health care. When I speak of violence I am referring in particular to interpersonal violence. One-against-one violence is very common and covers domestic violence: spouse against spouse, partner against partner and roommate against roommate. Please note that I am not referring at this

moment to gang violence or random violence in a mall or similar public spaces. To be sure, those events make the NEWS, but that is not what raises the cost of health care.

The health care costs resulting from interpersonal violence are due to violence in the home. Someone has pointed out that the most violent place in America is not the streets of a ghetto, but the average American home. This is a myth busting fact, for we are led to believe that the home is a safe haven. What is even more disconcerting, the data suggests that frequent abusers in the home are found among the clergy, attorneys and physicians, not just your average workers. In short, domestic violence knows no one socio-economic group.

There is a cost to domestic violence and all interpersonal violence. There is lost time from the job, as well as the medical costs of an emergency room or hospital stay. There will be special treatment for traumatized children.

Although it is difficult to obtain hard data on the cost of medical care resulting from interpersonal violence, the best low estimate is that such violence costs Oklahomans over \$100 million per year in hospital care alone. And much of that cost is paid for by public money. But private insurance is affected by the ripple effects of those costs.

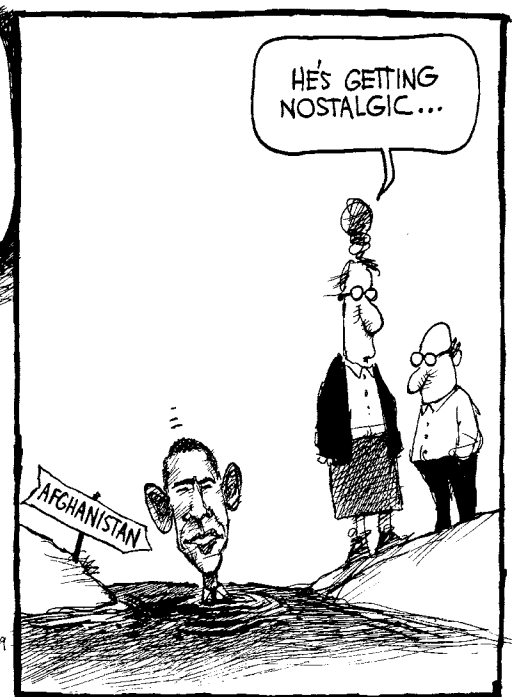
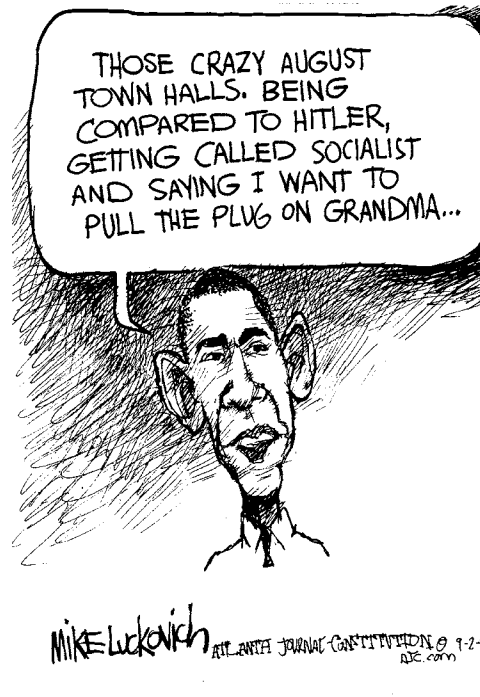
So I say, "How ironic that those who are the most violent in their protests against health care reform are the very one's who remind us that violence contributes to rising health care costs!"

Jeff Hamilton  
Midwest City

Editor, The Observer:

Since Republicans are convinced there is no inappropriate place to bring a firearm, especially to college classes, national parks and Town Hall meetings with the president, I have a suggestion for them: If you really believe it's a swell idea to have angry, armed citizens - especially those that selected a fully loaded semi-automatic assault rifle - attend these Town Hall meetings, don't stop there.

Pick up the phone and call your representative in Washington, call Sen. Inhofe and Sen. Coburn and tell them you have a great idea for them. You can suggest that they go to work removing all those needless prohibitions against bringing a firearm, especially a semi-automatic assault rifle, when anyone wants to visit the Capitol. You can explain to them how great it would be to look up at the visitor's



gallery and see all those lovely, fully loaded firearms.

No screening, no background checks, just grab your weapon of choice and head to the Capitol. You might even mention to them - since they're always looking for ways to cut government spending - how much they'll save for the taxpayers by having all those needless security guards depart.

After you have your conversation with your Washington delegation you can report back on the progress of your suggestion.

Kenny Belford  
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Re: Dr. Don Smith's letter [8.25.09 Observer]:

I know next-to-nothing about mercury and fluoride. But science needs to stay away from the bigotry of calling those [like Jim Maxey, DDS] whose opinions are not mainstream a "nut case." Galileo was disparaged because he believed [or speculated] the earth was round instead of flat. Mainstream opinions are often shaped, conditioned, and sculpted by power or economical interests.

Please, let's refrain from lowering ourselves to name calling and the writing off of people whose opinions, for whatever reasons, differ and particularly in a forum designed for airing opinions. It's a forum to air opinions, not a bashing party or place to intimidate or ridicule non-conformists. Right?

Let's at least keep a vestige of free speech going here.

Stephanie Hershberger  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

As a white female I have been in the arena battling for my seat at the table of white men for equal pay for equal work; for the right to be free from sexual intimidation and harassment in the work place and out; to be acknowledged for my contributions and respected for them and to not be disrespected by white male counterparts and co-workers.

Michael Jeffries' article [Obama vs. The Angry White Men, 8.19.09, Alternet.org] certainly explains the vindictive nature of many white men who feel the loss of their "superior" place in this country. Check out the Southern Poverty Law Center to more

readily see how many angry and well-armed white males are roaming in bands across this land.

Will violence be forthcoming? Ask yourself which segments of humanity have started many of the wars of history? It certainly wasn't the blacks, the red men, the women of any color! The violence has always been embraced by the white, male neanderthal. Their days of being on top of the heap with their clubs in hand is past! They will not relinquish their power and their positions until the last bullet is fired and the last bomb dropped.

Their days of always being in the power position are numbered and we will and are seeing violence as they slip into the history books.

Electing Obama to the highest position in the world is not the only thorn in their sides. The same reactions would have been forthcoming against Hillary if she had obtained the position and will be when any female of any race is elected president!

Darla Reynolds Sparks  
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

I appreciated the review of Ambrose Bierce's *The Devil's Dictionary* in the Aug. 25 Observer, but Mr. Acuff left out at least two of its definitions, both of which are my personal favorites:

**PATRIOT**, n. One to whom the interests of a part seem superior to those of the whole. The dupe of statesmen and the tool of conquerors.

**POLITICS**, n. A strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles. The conduct of public affairs for private advantage.

There are so many others to choose from, I realize it's hard to narrow them down to just a few.

I first read *The Devil's Dictionary* when I was in my early teens. I suspect this explains a lot about why I usually find myself being a glass-is-half-empty kind of guy.

Mark Burkett  
Oklahoma City

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# Schools



**FROSTY TROY**  
Founding Editor

I took time this summer to recharge and gear up for the fall. Never fully off point, I personally talked to a variety of public school teachers to see how they felt about the school year behind them.

The few miles that separate inner city and suburban public schools might as well be an ocean, too deep as to seem unbridgeable.

Putnam City, Broken Arrow and Jenks are about as good as it gets in larger community schools. Rural schools remain a bastion of old fashioned values – gangs are rare, parents belong to the PTA and actually attend.

Tulsa and Oklahoma City span the gamut, from Booker T. Washington High School in Tulsa to the three high schools in Putnam City.

North Tulsa is an educational disaster zone, so bad that the teachers' union is willing to try merit pay if the money can be found. Oklahoma City won't be far behind, given rampaging gangs

and woefully indolent parents.

It's time supporters of public education face the hard truth as uncomfortable as it is – the system that has been in place isn't working.

Test scores are only part of the problem. Discover the hard truth about thousands of youth lost to drugs, sex and teen pregnancy.

Of course it isn't the majority, although it's large enough to be called an epidemic – 360,000 young people.

Pick a school to visit in the "right" part of town and one in the other part. It doesn't take Sherlock Holmes to see and feel the difference. Kids in so-called "good" schools are focused and destined for success.

A lot of kids in the "other schools" are resigned to failure. "Why not drop out? There's nothing here for me." Or, "I got four of 'em pregnant. How many times you scored?" Or, "Me, for college? Give me a break ..."

Often they shoulder family responsibilities that no kid ought to have to shoulder. These are often the children of divorce – if there ever was a man at home. Often they are raised by a grandparent – prison has claimed one or both parents. When there is no dad, many join gangs for protection.

Oklahoma is not an exception. Given the attitude of America's political establishment it is little wonder that public schools are a political football.

Remember Ronald Reagan's budget cuts – he thought education should be a state responsibility but still he rolled out unfunded mandates.

Bill Clinton had "Goals 2000" and more unfunded mandates, but they paled in comparison with No Child Left Behind, education's impossible goals set by George W. Bush.

This horrific mandate was unfunded to the tune of \$30 billion. It was written by non-educators and set the bar impossibly high except for a sliver of outstanding schools in each state.

After reclaiming the White House from hostile Republicans, educators crossed their fingers. Barack Obama sounded the right notes during the campaign – although he drew boos at the NEA convention when he mentioned merit pay.

He picked a non-educator as his Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, who immediately said he thought No Child Left Behind was a good law needing only



a little fine tuning.

Testing the mentally retarded at grade level? Forcing teachers to teach to the test? Name as "failing schools" some of the better school districts in the nation? Placing the academic bar deliberately too high, causing a cascade of dropouts who would have been well served by CareerTech? Forcing vouchers?

When Democrats took the Congress by wide margins, you could hear the sighs of relief from educators across America – regardless of party.

Democrats began by killing a voucher scheme in Washington, DC, only to be bitterly opposed by Obama who vows to renew it, despite the fact that millions were wasted and test scores were not improved.

Here it comes – more "reform" of public education. Obama is just another promising politician who fails to see that it isn't a teacher problem, it's a parent problem.

Even if it becomes easier to rid a district of low-performing teachers, it will have little impact. More than 700 New York City school teachers were booted, then came the moment of truth: Other than Teach for America kids, finding "high quality" teachers for inner city schools is an insurmountable mountain.

In a horrible 6-3 ruling, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that an Oregon high school student can receive a private education at taxpayer expense without first having received public school special education.

In a dissenting opinion, Justice David Souter, joined by Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas, noted the high cost of private school placements and said it "makes good sense" for parents to work with administrators to come up with an alternative within the public system.

School systems nationwide warn that the decision will drain millions of dollars from tight education budgets. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA] has yet to be fully funded by Congress.

It seemingly matters not to the ruling establishment that continued underfunding and a business-as-usual teaching model are not dealt with. They see the "important" things as: [1] keeping the mantra that "throwing money" at the schools won't work; [2] it's an all-new global ballgame and the winners will be countries that produce technologically savvy students – China and India are already out front. But where is the American funding?

Why not try money one time, and if it doesn't work the schools could go on to something else?

It is the shame of America that in some districts, civic clubs have had to buy computers for impoverished students. Those who think we can't lose this country's dominance haven't been paying attention.

## Wonder Who Education Is?

We are the TEACHERS who help children learn to read, write and think.

We are the BUS DRIVERS who safely take children to school and back home again.

We are the COUNSELORS who help students solve problems and assist in their preparation for college and vocational programs.

We are the CUSTODIANS AND THE MAINTENANCE PEOPLE who keep learning places clean and safe.

We are the COACHES, MUSICIANS AND ARTISTS who teach children to shoot a basketball, play a trumpet, sing a song and draw a picture.

We are the SCHOOL NURSES who care for medically fragile children who require the assistance of skilled medical professionals in our schools, who administer medications, and who bandage skinned knees and respond to everyday hurts and tears.

We are the LIBRARY SPECIALISTS who open the door to a world of information.

We are the PEOPLE WHO COOK HEALTHY MEALS and the SECRETARIES who answer the phones and respond to students' and parents' needs.

We are the PARAPROFESSIONALS and AIDES who help teachers teach.

We are the SPECIAL EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS – including certified occupational therapy assistants, and sign-language interpreters – who provide services for children with special needs.

We are the INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES who help teachers employ the most effective strategies to advance student learning.

We are the SCHOOL LEADERS who ensure the bells ring, the busses run on time and the schools are fully staffed so teachers can teach and students can learn.

We are the STUDENTS IN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES who aspire to work with students daily in our public schools.

We are the COLLEGE PROFESSORS teaching tomorrow's professionals.

We are the EDUCATORS and FUTURE EDUCATORS who love children, the art and science of teaching, and the opportunity to make a lasting contribution to the communities in which we work.

*From the Tennessee Education Association*

## Ted Kennedy

No other member of Congress came close to being the champion of church-state separation that Ted Kennedy was. He took more than a few brickbats because of his Catholicism.

The American Catholic hierarchy fought for years to voucher Catholic schools with taxpayer dollars. He also opposed the non-stop attempt to repeal Roe v. Wade – the only assurance that women would be guaranteed safe health care.

His biggest disappointment other than his relentless fight for universal health-care was the lack of funding for No Child Left Behind.

He was fast-talked in a face-to-face meeting with President Bush in the oval office. He agreed to co-author the bill with the understanding that changes were necessary and it had to be funded.

Imagine his dismay when Bush broke his word on both – not only did he refuse to fully fund the largest unfunded mandate in congressional history [\$30 billion], he also broke his word about needed changes.

Foremost change was one dear to his heart – testing the retarded at grade level.

# Slogging Through The Health Debate Muck



**ARNOLD HAMILTON**  
Editor

Taking advantage of the early fall weather, we gathered one recent evening in the driveway, about a half dozen neighbors and friends sitting in lawn chairs, catching up on each other's lives.

From down the street came another couple, walking their dog. When they stopped briefly to chat, Beverly – knowing the man is a physician – posed what she thought was an innocent question: “So is this health care debate driving you crazy?”

The doctor, a proponent of universal health care, exploded. He railed against what he viewed as the lies and distortions dominating America's Town Hall meetings – and media coverage of them. He also shared his anguish over delivering a diagnosis that day that effectively rendered a 9-year-old uninsurable for the rest of her life, unless our current system is changed.

He then offered a dark assessment of America's future. He sees no way we can bridge the chasm

between Blue and Red thinking in the next half century. In fact, he believes it might be time for us to shake hands, end our noble, 233-year experiment, and divide into two countries.

I am not so pessimistic about our nation's future, but his frustration is hardly unique.

In the three years since Beverly and I became publisher and editor, respectively, of The Oklahoma Observer, I've never seen our readers as exercised over a single issue.

The Town Hall malarkey spewed by dupes of silk-stocking insurance companies and Faux News' tin-foil-hat hosts stirred a righteous indignation among those who believe health care should be an inalienable right – not a privilege reserved for elites or a profit center for greedy corporatists that routinely come between patients and doctors.

After all, much of America's cutting edge medical care was born of taxpayer-financed research efforts that became the envy of the world.

Many of our readers and contributing writers are so incensed over the ridiculousness of the so-called “debate” – Pulling the plug on grandma? Death panels? *Seriously?* – that we've been inundated with letters and essays and personal stories.

We've devoted three pages [beginning on page 11] to this most important national debate, offering viewpoints you will rarely find in Oklahoma's corporatist mainstream media. Many other fine essays have been posted on our blog at [www.okobserver.net](http://www.okobserver.net).

A personal note: When I served as Oklahoma Bureau Chief for the Dallas Morning News, we enjoyed a Cadillac-style health insurance. We heard horror stories from those who either couldn't get insurance or were charged ghastly rates in exchange for virtually no coverage. But it was difficult to fully comprehend what 47 million uninsured Americans were facing when it came to their health care.

Since taking over The Observer, the very definition of a small business, we've

## Sooner Test Takers Far Above Average

The average ACT college entrance score for Oklahoma and the nation remains unchanged for 2009 from 2008. Although Oklahoma posted gains in math and science in 2009, its average composite score remains 20.7; the nation's average score is still 21.1.

During the last five years, Oklahoma has improved its composite score by 0.3; the nation's has improved by 0.2. The ACT is graded on a scale from 0-36.

Oklahoma's average science score for 2009 increased to 20.5 from 20.4 and it improved to 19.9 from 19.8 in math. Nationally, science improved by the same margin but national math performance was flat in 2009.

Oklahoma's reading and English scores remained the same from the previous year – as they did nationally. Oklahoma's reading score [21.4] equals the national average and its English score [20.5] is just one-tenth of a point from the national average [20.6].

This is noteworthy because participation rates impact large-scale assessment scores. A much higher percentage of students in Oklahoma's Class of 2009 took the ACT [71%] as compared to the national average [45%].

Retiring State Superintendent Sandy Garrett said Oklahoma's ACT results are in line with the state's high school End-of-Instruction [EOI] scores and both highlight important facts about college readiness.

“College remediation rates are based on ACT scores and ACT scores mirror our EOI scores,” Garrett said. “What these scores tell us is that rigor is lacking in some schools and too many students are not making the most of the four years they are given in high school. In 2009, completion of four years of rigorous core courses is a prerequisite to college and work readiness.”

Students taking advantage of every academic opportunity while still in high school makes more economic sense for parents, she added. If high school students fail to get enough core instruction and need college remediation, their parents will have to pay for zero credit, college mediation courses.

She encouraged parents and school leaders to consider enrollment in core

learned about this subject the hard way. It took us months to find an insurance company that would accept two middle-agers as clients – but the cost is back-breaking and the coverage woefully inadequate.

For us, and I suspect for many millions of Americans, Medicare for all is the fastest, easiest solution. No system is perfect, but our friends and family who participate in Medicare rave about it. At the very least, we taxpayers deserve the opportunity to buy into the same insurance programs – with no pre-existing conditions – that we help make available to our elected officials.

And I'm not buying this patently hypocritical argument that a public option introduces an unfair advantage into the marketplace that would destroy private insurance. Isn't the rightwing mantra that private enterprise is *always* more efficient and *always* preferable to the *always* bloated, *always* lazy, *always* corrupt government? By rightwing definition, insurance companies are so obviously superior to the public option that it's not even a contest.

So why is the insurance industry's opposition to a public option so fierce? The answer is simple: They're afraid a public option would be as wildly popular as Medicare, ending their hammerlock on the perfect scam: Insure as few as possible, at as exorbitant a cost as possible, then deny as many claims as possible. It's a recipe for never-ending record profits.

The insurance industry's political power – check out its long list of campaign contributions – isn't limited to Washington. It controls the Oklahoma Legislature, as well.

When I became Observer editor and returned to full-time state government coverage, I assumed highway contractors or energy producers were the most powerful special interests. I was wrong. It's the insurance industry.

Just ask Wayne Rohde of Edmond. He's fought valiantly – but so far unsuccessfully – to persuade state lawmakers to require that insurance companies cover treatment for autistic children. He's exhausted his life's savings on behalf of his son Nick, a casualty of the condition that now afflicts one of every 100 children.

There's a compelling argument to be made that mandating autism coverage is good public policy: First, children who receive proper treatment are significantly more likely to become productive adults – no lives are wasted. Second, children denied proper treatment are all but condemned to an unproductive life in which many will be warehoused – wards of the state and its taxpayers. Finally, it costs much less to provide proper treatment in childhood than it does to warehouse adults later.

The first wave of thousands of untreated children will reach adulthood over the next few years [coincidentally, at the same time that hordes of Baby Boomers retire]. According to some estimates, as much as one-fourth of the state's future budgets could be required to care for autistic adults.

Whether at the federal or state levels, health insurance reform is complex enough without the chaos generated by a deliberate distortion campaign. Our coverage is designed to create a forum for the tough questions and factual answers so often absent in today's mainstream media coverage.

Let us know what you think.

subjects, and to compare grades given in core courses to their high schools' average ACT and EOI scores in the same subjects.

“The data is there for parents and school and community leaders to use in guiding local school improvement,” Garrett said.

“We will continue to demand more rigor in math and science in all grades, but the biggest hurdle is convincing parents and students of the importance – and logic – of enrolling in four years of core subjects.”

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## Oklahoma Wingnuts

# Obama Is Attacked For Talk To Kids

If there is anybody out there who still doesn't believe that the conservative media will attack President Obama no matter what he does, now they can believe it.

Rightwingers told their children to skip school as a protest against Obama's encouragement of students to stay in school.

State Sen. Steve Russell and Rep. Sally Kern, a pair of Oklahoma City Republican wingnuts, immediately attacked the president. Russell claimed it was "North Korean" style indoctrination, and Kern said it was using the schools for partisan purposes.

Where were they when President George H. W. Bush made his address to schoolchildren? Were they present when President Ronald Reagan did likewise?

The Russells and Kerns of America defy caricature. There's nothing you can imagine that is too crazy for these people to say. They are proof that all squirrels don't live in trees.

They claim Barack Obama was secretly born in Kenya - his birth announcements in Hawaiian newspapers were just one part of an elaborate, decades-long conspiracy involving Kenyans, the media, Hawaii's Republican governor, and the Stonecutters.

They say he has a diabolical plan to create government "death panels" to kill off the old and the young. They claim he is building a secret private army [consisting of AmeriCorps and Peace Corps volunteers] that is "just as strong" as the U.S. military so that he can "seize power" and create a "thugocracy."

## Doomed By Failure To Think Critically?

By Sharon Martin

Do you just read those columnists with whom you agree? I'm guilty sometimes even when I know I should be seeking multiple points of view. That doesn't mean I have to stomach hateful rhetoric or blistering stupidity, but there are thoughtful thinkers on both sides of the political aisle whose ideas deserve attention.

If a reader/citizen isn't critically literate, his reading skills only scratch the surface of meaning. It's like my reading in Spanish. I can pronounce all the words, but I only get a gist of the story. Too many people watch the news and read the paper in the same way I read Spanish, and this surface reading can be blamed for much of the divide in this country.

Getting the whole story affects every facet of our lives. Let's talk about Medicare, for example. Medicare has been watered down with something called Medicare Advantage insurance. This program, subsidized by the federal government, is an opening for private insurers into the Medicare program.

### QUESTIONS NEED TO BE ASKED

Does anyone question how a for-profit insurance company can provide care at the same rate that a not-for-profit government entity can? Hint: they cannot.

What about for-profit prisons? Do they save taxpayers money?

You must ask questions. And you may not like the answers you get.

The party that brought us Medicare Advantage is now targeting seniors, telling them that Medicare is in danger if we get health care reform. What's the motive for spreading dissent?

### TAKING NOTE OF HYPOCRISY

Here's another one: Along party lines, the Oklahoma Legislature voted to deny insurance coverage to autistic children. Now, these same legislators are reacting with concern to former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin's statement suggesting that children with special needs will be denied coverage under a government health program.

Why is Palin weighing in on health care reform? Of course, if people would gather and listen to me, I would speak my two cents. What's my motive? What is hers? For a politician ... or a writer ... any publicity is good publicity.

Another one: What do legislators have to gain by introducing legislation about equality of marriage? Hint: it's the money. Businesses don't want to offer spousal benefits if they don't have to. And by couching it as a moral issue, they can get people who are not affected by the legislation to do their protesting for them. Has any protestor asked this question: What's moral about denying benefits to a family member, whether we recognize the family or not?

### THINKING FOR YOURSELF

I urge everyone to do more than scratch the surface of any story. Don't stop with stories. Read can labels and the cereal box. Just because it says "made with whole grain" on the label doesn't mean it has much whole grain in it. Dig deep. Protect yourself.

Understanding comes when we try to comprehend all sides of a story. Question why and by whom something was written. Don't jump to conclusions based on hot-button terms. Don't be hoodwinked by sales people and glitzy ad campaigns. Question even the politicians for whom you vote. Look at the entire package and not just the bow with which the package is tied, and when you don't like what is inside, take action.

- The author lives in Oilton



President Obama delivered the least-controversial message you could possibly imagine - "Stay in school." They called it "indoctrination" and an attempt to "get 'em while they're young," warning "they are capturing your kids" and "your republic is under attack."

Glenn Beck and his fellow tinfoil hat-wearers sprang into action. Beck went off on his "indoctrination" rant, warning of secret private armies [no, he isn't worried about Blackwater].

It's the thought of English majors signing up to help teach people how to read that keeps him up at night.

Icing on the rightwing cake? Fox News was the first network in history to skip a president's address to a joint session of Congress.

The Russells and Kerns are intent on destroying America - one episode of hatred at a time. It's a cauldron of racism, government-bating rhetoric and pure ignorance.

If President Obama came out for the Bible tomorrow, the squirrels of America would become instant atheists.

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## Okies In Congress

# Where Have All The Giants Gone?

By Edwin E. Vineyard

Having just seen and heard a promo from an Oklahoma City television station for its news anchor saying that he was "born and bred" in Oklahoma, one pauses to ponder just what that means.

The first reaction, even from an Oklahoma native, might be: "Oh, my gosh, I hope he is not advertising himself as a redneck." To many, even natives, bragging about being a "born and bred" Oklahoman, or a Texan, has come to mean that the person eschews culture in any classic sense, and that he/she espouses a rural, cowboy, rough and ready, independent, hard living, anti-intellectual, anti-academic, uncouth life style of one who thinks it is fun to butcher the English, sprinkle in epithets and four-letter words, and lift his middle finger and bully any who cross him. Too bad. Hope not.

Historically, in polite circles of the middle class, such behaviors were thought to show a lack of gentility and breeding. Gentlemanly conduct was highly encouraged in middle and upper class families, and the lack of such thought to indicate "poor breeding."

### NO ARISTOCRATS IN FAMILY TREE

Nobody in this writer's family tree was an aristocrat. One governor of Texas 75 years ago doesn't count. But I was once lectured in the kitchen of my grandfather's house by an uncle. He told me that the families from whence I sprung were considered to be "good stock." That meant that they were honest, reliable, respected people, not given to excesses. Family members were expected to be ladylike or gentlemanly in speech and conduct.

Now, how is it that anyone could conjure up that other kind of image from just a simple statement of being "born and bred" in Oklahoma? If we don't know, we ought to try to figure that one out. That image, right or wrong, has been holding Oklahoma back for decades.

But we Oklahomans are somewhat schizophrenic, i.e. we have a communal split personality. Some of us are quick to invoke the reputation of our Dean McGee Eye Institute or the success of our Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation. Others rarely get past their infatuation with Toby Keith and/or the Sooner football team.

Too infrequently do we rise above the latter.

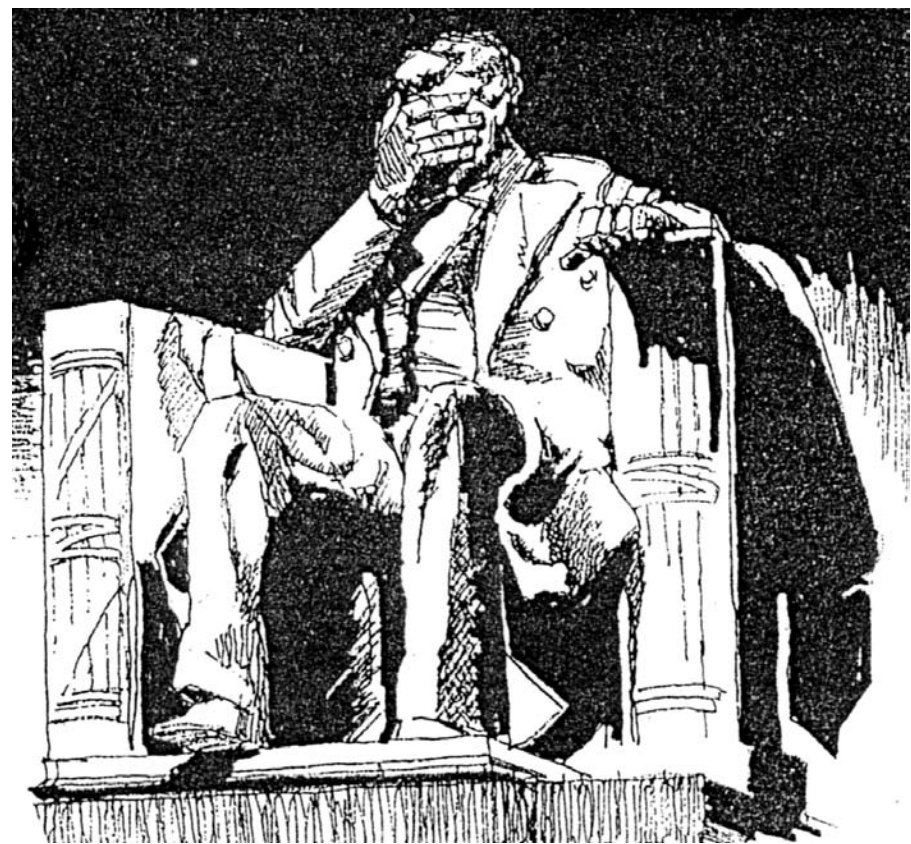
### POLITE BY COMPARISON

However, the rowdy conduct and bad behavior demonstrated around the country in recent "town meetings" must quickly lead us to the defense of Oklahomans. Rude and boorish conduct is common across the nation. Nobody has the right to look down on us. Rather, we may well be considered polite and genteel by comparison. That's good.

We remember well Gov. Dewey Bartlett's efforts to remake the image of "Okie" into something positive. He tried hard. This writer has a couple of his personally awarded "Okie" certificates and pins for forgotten accomplishments. During all his days as lieutenant governor, George Nigh took as his goal the remake of the popular conception of Oklahoma into a positive image, and he continued that effort as chief executive. Even though having limited success, both should be commended.

### DELEGATION HURTS STATE'S REPUTATION

But, again, has anyone taken a look at our congressional delegation lately? These are the people we chose to represent us. What style of Oklahoman do they represent? Of course, they would tell us that it is the hardworking taxpayers of the state. Is that so? Take a look at their positions on issues affecting the common people.



Indeed they do appeal to our everyday working folks, yet they represent the interests of the economically elite. If challenged, they will quickly come out with the argument that these businesses create jobs. They forget to mention many are at low wage, non-union levels. But then, heck, jobs are jobs, aren't they?

Then who does represent the interests of the common person, whom we like to characterize ourselves to be? We would be ashamed to find that it is often those effete, intellectually elite Eastern liberals that we so readily condemn. But while indeed those may hold up for the rights of the working class, to which most Oklahomans belong, they often do not represent our geographic and economic interests.

### PICK BEST, BRIGHTEST

The challenge to Oklahomans is to put people in Congress who are the brightest and most knowledgeable among us. We must choose for intelligence and grasp of depth of issues, and stop choosing those who ply us with worn-out clichés about family values and such, yet behave no better than anyone else, and know little of the issues except to mutter simple party slogans over and over.

Our two senators are often the butt of national humor. Not good. Probably the most able and politically savvy of our delegation is Rep. Tom Cole.

We need to choose people who will represent the interests of the voting class, rather than the donor class. Those best representing the common people have often come from the privileged classes economically and socially. Acting and talking like most of us doesn't necessarily qualify one to represent Oklahoma, nor does repetition of the clichés of the religious right.

While our representatives may be "one of us," they should be more able than most of us.

### MISSING KERR, ALBERT, MONRONEY ...

Oklahoma was better served by national oratorical and debate champions like Sen. Josh Lee and Speaker Carl Albert. We were well represented by Rhodes Scholars like David Boren. Congressmen Jim Jones and Sen. Mike Monroney were tops in their profession. Sen. Robert S. Kerr was a successful businessman, but also a populist in his beliefs. Nationally, the Roosevelts and the Kennedys have been good examples of the elite with a social conscience.

Oklahoma can do better than it has been doing lately.

- The author, AKA *The Militant Moderate*, lives in Enid. More of his essays can be found at [www.okobserver.net](http://www.okobserver.net).

# School Kids Are Pawns In Fundraising System

By Norm Rourke

You can tell school has started by the outbreak of stuff kids are selling as fundraisers. This has become a large cottage industry fueled by companies that have conned their way into public schools with pitches about rewards for kids and/or schools using the term "fundraiser" as the hook.

It's as American as apple pie only the servings are disproportionate in favor of the companies.

Most of the products sold are pricey and of questionable value. This is especially true of confectionary products. For \$10 you get a handful of stale chocolate covered peanuts. Not bad for the companies producing this stuff. What does the school get? Usually not much.

Dangling the carrot of reward for selling unwanted stuff in front of the eager eyes of a kid is a pathetic learning experience. Why it is condoned by school officials is beyond me.

### SURELY THERE'S A BETTER WAY

Instead why don't schools support more worthy fundraisers that will have direct benefit to the community and teach the kid something about community service? These might include:

- Helping a family in need buy school supplies.
- Buy books and games for a hospital children's ward.
- Do something similar for a nursing home.

- Buy food and supplies for an animal shelter.

The list could go on. Fundraisers for things like these would be far more rewarding not only for the kid but also for the donor. For donors it would be a legitimate tax deduction. I doubt the IRS would consider buying stale candy a legitimate deduction.

I've always bought something - maybe not a lot - of whatever our grandchildren are selling. They're only trying to win a prize [often beyond their ability to sell enough of the product to be successful] or garner some worthless trinket.

### AKIN TO WALL STREET CHARLATANS

I would rather support a more worthy fundraising effort like those mentioned above. I don't like spending money that will go into the pockets of some fly-by-night fundraiser using kids and schools for their profit. To me these people are no better than the Wall Street crooks.

In these tough economic times for families, it's hard to come up with extra money for stuff they don't need. And since the families of the kids selling the products are the major purchasers, it places an unnecessary burden on them. Moreover, it's the families who spend the time and gas to drive around getting orders and delivering them.

I get angry at the abuse of kids and schools in the name of helping others by

See FUNDRAISING Page 9

# Oklahoma Farmers Deal With Disaster

By Terry Detrick

Summertime and the living is easy--family cookouts around some of the best times a high quality standard of life can provide. The question we ought to be asking is, "How long can America truly claim its independence?"

We're almost 70% dependent on foreign oil imports. We are importing almost 47% of our food.

There is less grain supply on the world market than in recent history. As a nation, if we cannot feed ourselves, how long do you think we will be celebrating our "Independence?"

The high-dollar cost of our U.S. farm policy is blamed on farmers, but the truth is: the Farm Bill represents less than 1/2 of 1% of the entire federal budget.

Furthermore, more than two thirds of that small amount [66.1% of the 2008 Farm Bill] goes for school lunch programs, food stamps and aid for women, infants, and children [WIC programs].

8.9% goes for conservation practices [most must be matched by a farmer's own money to improve air and water quality and to preserve natural resources] ... to the public's advantage - not for his/her financial gain.

## A SAFETY NET

Only 13.9% goes for commodity price support [safety net from very low prices] - benefiting those few farmers left who produce the vast majority of our nation's food supply. [38% of the farm families produce more than 92% of America's food/fiber.]

The words "farm or agriculture" are not even mentioned in the so-called farm bill. It is the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008.

What benefit does the American taxpayer receive for these "food security payments?"

The real truth is that U.S. consumers spend the least percent of our income on food of anyone in the world. In practical terms, U.S. farm policy costs Americans just three cents per meal or nine cents per day.

## YOU CAN THANK A FARMER

Thanks to American farmers, American people enjoy the cheapest, safest, healthiest and most dependable food supply anywhere in the world!

Input supplies and equipment purchased by our farmers and ranchers for each year's crops help support other American workers enjoying the world's highest standard of living.

Because of weather, global governments, government regulations, embargoes, disease, the fluctuating value of the dollar, and world food inventories, farmers/ranchers are at everyone's mercy to which they have no one to pass the results of their perils. The farmers/ranchers are at the bottom of the food, fiber and fuel chain.

When agriculture hurts, so do others. It doesn't take a Wall Street crash to cause layoffs throughout the entire agriculture production industry. If we are dependent on other countries for our food and our energy supply, how long does this allow us to remain independent?

## DISASTER PILED ON DISASTER

With all of this on my mind, I can't help but hurt for Oklahoma's farmers and ranchers. For the last four to five years, drought, fires, floods and late freezes have been the normal occurrence and not the exception to the rule.

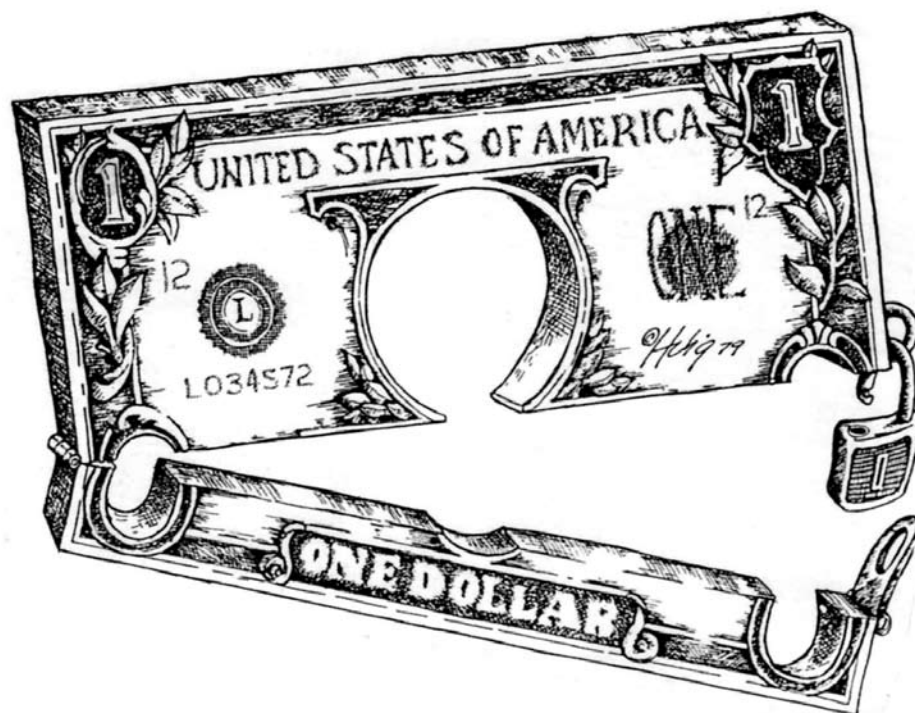
For thousands of Oklahoma farmers, on July 4, 2007, a wheat crop lay untouched in the fields and rain-soaked hay lay in ruin. That same year spring planted crops were a disaster, for which no crop insurance program was sufficient to even repay input costs.

For many in Oklahoma agriculture [the state's second largest gross producing industry after oil and gas], the payday did not come.

Fast forward two years and not much has changed. We have had our drought, wildfires, floods, hail and now late winter freezes in 2008-2009.

## WORST WHEAT CROP IN 50 YEARS

Experts project the wheat crop to be the worst in 50 years. It was a shorter-



than-normal-in-height wheat crop - with few kernels left in the head for harvest in many areas. Instead of 30-40 bushel wheat, eight bushel wheat was prevalent.

Tales of combining all afternoon and barely getting a hopper of wheat is disheartening. Much of the distraught crop was converted into hay.

What is particularly heart-breaking is that this crop had record input costs associated with preparing and planting it. Because of a dry winter in many areas - comparable to the driest of times during the Dust Bowl - little wheat pasture for grazing stacker yearlings was available for the other major agriculture commodity in the state - beef.

This meant buying additional hay and feed to supplement the sparse grazing. Yet, while farmers' livelihoods are suffering catastrophic losses, they also continue to endure uninformed and misunderstood comments.

## MORE FARMER BASHING

A case in point, the comments such as an editorial published in The Oklahoman on June 24, 2007. The writer referred to America's farm policy with such phrases as "wasteful," "missing the mark" and "didn't work," calling it a "1930s-style subsidy policy, skewed toward large farmers of just a few crops."

And fellow Oklahomans have since written other news stories critical of Oklahoma's No. 2 economic industry, including some during the debate last year of a new farm bill.

How "wasteful" is the agriculture policy investment? What "mark" did we miss? What "didn't work?" The truth is ... It cannot be a 1930s style policy.

In 1930, agriculture represented more than 12.4 million people on 6.5 million farms - more than 10% of our entire population.

Today agriculture represents less than two million farms and fewer than three million farm laborers - less than 2% of our population; with the average age 56-58; less than 6% are 35 or younger.

## WHERE ARE ALL THE YOUNG FARMERS?

If these programs being criticized are so lucrative, why aren't young agriculturally-minded entrepreneurs attracted to the profession?

George Washington said, "Farming looks easy when your plow is a pencil and you are a thousand miles from the cornfield."

It's understandable that people who "haven't been there" can only dream of simple solutions to extremely complicated problems. But one thing everyone should understand - very few Americans worried this year about whether there would be enough food at their 4th of July cookout or even considered where it came from!

Thank God for Veterans - past and future - and for farmers and ranchers - past and future - enabling us to truly celebrate our nation's independence with such freedom and abundance!

- The author is president of the Oklahoma Farmers Union. This essay first appeared in their newsletter.

# FUNDRAISING

From Page 8

charlatans who pose as good will merchants.

Many years ago one of our daughters broke her Girl Scout troop's record for cookie sales. Like all parents we bought most of the cookies. She was excited about her accomplishment and looked forward to the reward. She received a worthless trinket made of three feathers. Needless to say the following year she wasn't as enthusiastic about making sales.

## INNOCENT PAWNS OF GREEDY ADULTS

Younger kids are eager to do their best to fulfill the sales obligation placed upon them. They are innocent pawns of people who use them [and the schools] to make money for themselves. That's why so-called "fundraising" companies prey upon them. Their products are not always the best. Their profits are not always shared as they would have us believe.

How up front are these companies with their financial reports showing where the profits go? Is their administrative overhead out of proportion with what the schools receive? Are their products of a quality that equals the price asked?

There are some worthy fundraisers in which schools and kids participate. But it seems more involve the selling of products that companies couldn't sell on the

open market without school kids being used as salesmen.

School officials should review their fundraising programs to see if they truly benefit the school, the community and most especially the kids. If they don't meet the criteria of offering value for price paid or have no learning experience for the kid, then junk them and come up with something that does.

- The author lives in Beggs

## NOTABLE QUOTE

"Already, it's possible that somewhere in our country the first Latino - or Latina - president of the United States sits in a classroom. This child's potential will be fully realized when education affords him or her the best chance of achieving all that he or she dreams." - Sarita Brown, president of Excelencia in Education

## BOOKS

# Author Helps Crystalize Meth's Scary Impact

By Derrek Belase

### METHLAND

*The Death and Life of an American Small Town*

By Nick Reding

Bloomsbury USA

272 pages, \$25.00

My first encounter with meth was in the winter of 1998. I was working as a police dispatcher at the Blanchard Police Department when Jonathan May, a part-time officer in the small town department, busted a lab in a quiet residential area of that otherwise peaceful Oklahoma town. I will never forget the smell emanating from the arrestee as he spent the night in our two-person jail. I did not know then how dangerous the man or the drug was.

Since that night, in my roles as a police dispatcher, police officer, town council member, school teacher, and United Methodist minister, I have seen the ugly truth that meth is indeed dangerous to those who cook it and buy it. It is dangerous to those who are around it when it is being cooked, whether they are in its presence by choice or not. It is dangerous to our communities and our schools. It is just plain dangerous.

The reality of this phenomenon is described in amazing detail by Nick Reding in his most insightful new book *Methland: The Death and Life of an American Small Town*. Reding's book is set primarily in Oelwein, IA where he describes the devastating effects of the methamphetamine epidemic on this small town.

### MORE THAN CRIME STORY

Located about 300 miles from Chicago, Oelwein boasts about 6,000 residents. When I was reading his book, I pictured the many small towns dotted across the plains that have been affected in horrific ways by the meth epidemic. In this book, Reding is able to move meth from a crime story "to one that has much more pervasive and far-reaching implications."

The problems with meth are much more insidious than some of the other drugs that have been problematic throughout our country's history, since meth can be made at home in bathtubs and most of the people making it are "poor or working-class rural white." Compared to the mostly urban Prohibition-era raids in the 1920s and '30s, LSD in the 1960s or cocaine in the 1980s, meth presents its own unique problems as it moves from cities to the heartland of America. It also does us good to remember that as late as the 1930s, meth was considered a legal pharmaceutical.

Reding is able to do some interesting things in his book. Not only does he tell the story of Oelwein, he also tracks the ways in which big agriculture companies have taken over small town America. He writes about how the Drug Enforcement Administration tried to curtail what has become an epidemic, only to be stopped by big corporations. And throughout the entire book, he is able to weave in personal stories about people with real names and real addictions. He even traces how Lori Arnold, step-sister of the famous Tom Arnold, was largely responsible for meth in Iowa. You get a stark picture of what life is like before, during and after meth.

### IS THERE REALLY AN EPIDEMIC?

Some people ask whether or not meth is a real epidemic. Reding addresses this in his book when he describes, in detail, how certain surveys are conducted. He concludes that it is "simply impossible to know how many people become addicted to any drug, methamphetamine included." Further, he says, there is "no set number or percentage of drug users that signals a drug 'epidemic.'" Therefore, we have to rely partially on anecdotal evidence that can be found throughout our country.

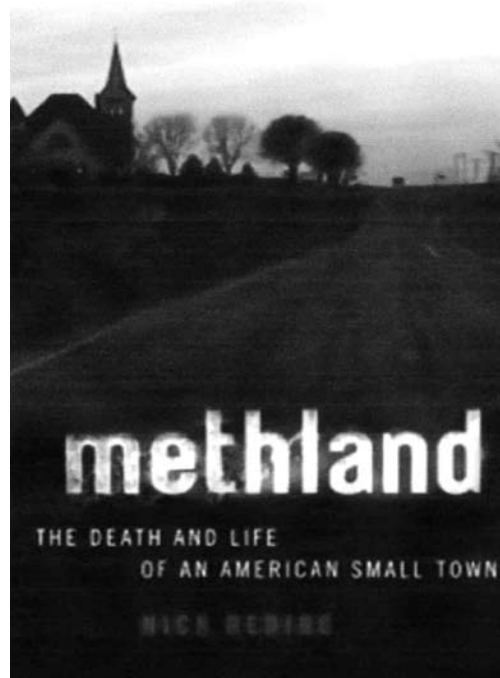
According to information I found on the website of the Oklahoma Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs [OBNDD], in the late 1980's, Oklahoma ranked fourth in the nation for the number of laboratories seized. By the 1990's, that number was reduced dramatically. If you look on their website today, you will find a warning to veterinarians to be cautious of selling iodine crystals, a new ingredient in meth production. Of course, there is the ever-present warning to farmers and business owners to protect anhydrous ammonia tanks, since this is an ingredient commonly used to make "Nazi-meth."

According to a press release quoting OBNDD Director Darrell Weaver, Oklahoma passed legislation in 2004 that cut meth production by 90%, but meth cooks frequently change methods meaning that drug enforcement agents must remain ever vigilant in education and enforcement. In 2006, Oklahoma led the way as the first state to begin tracking pseudoephedrine sales electronically in real time. Pseudoephedrine is one of the main ingredients in meth.

### OKLAHOMA'S DOCUMENTARY: CRYSTAL DARKNESS

In January of this year, all of the major television networks in Oklahoma aired the 30-minute documentary *Crystal Darkness* in which viewers could see and hear about the life of various meth addicts right in our own state. If you have not had a chance to see this short documentary, it is well worth your time. You can find more information about it at [www.crystaldarkness.com](http://www.crystaldarkness.com).

When I was in seminary, I had the chance to work with Dr. Marvin Anderson, then the director of our town and country ministry program. He used to say that rural communities were the dumping grounds for the seven P's - poultry, pigs, pollution, prisons, pornography [adult book stores], pharmaceuticals [dirty ones - like meth] and poker [in the form of casinos]. When I think of the rural county that I grew up in, we certainly have our fair share of some of these.



In Middle America, a small town wrestles not only with a methamphetamine epidemic but also its servitude to Big Agriculture.

However, it is my contention that the only item on Anderson's list of seven P's that will ultimately harm all people in a given community, whether or not they ever use meth themselves or not, is the manufacture and distribution of meth. If you don't believe me, read Reding's book. Your eyes will be opened.

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

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# Wake Up, America! It's Not A Conspiracy

By Steve Booher

Remember when former First Lady and now Secretary of State Hillary Clinton moaned and groaned about the "right wing conspiracy" out to derail both her and her husband, then-President Bill Clinton?

Conservatives of both the Republican and Democrat persuasion pooh-poohed it – rightfully so.

So how come conservatives – again both of the Republican and Democrat persuasion – are so quick to jump on the conspiracy bandwagon when it comes to the president and his health care plan?

I'm not seeing or hearing much wrenching debate over the plan, but I am hearing a lot of name-calling and angst by right-wingers who decry the takeover of their government by [their words] a "socialist" president.

### WANT TO GIVE UP YOUR MEDICARE?

If the president's health care plan is "socialist," then I suppose we should label Medicare, Medicaid and even Social Security as socialist. We can debate how well or how poorly these government programs are operated, but first I'd like all of those who think those programs are socialist to immediately ask the government to exclude them from any benefits those agencies provide to them or their families.

No, I didn't think you would be that foolish.

Cost of the president's plan is a legitimate concern. But to do nothing is even more expensive, as health care costs go up and up, and private and public [Medicare and Medicaid] insurance rates skyrocket.

If you think those of us who are lucky enough to have insurance aren't already paying for those who don't, think again. Charging those with insurance more is the only way doctors and hospitals have of recouping their losses from those who use emergency room docs as their primary physicians.

### UNIVERSAL COVERAGE A NECESSITY

It's past time that we recognize that those with insurance should not be penalized with higher rates or be excluded from an insurance plan simply because they are unfortunate enough to contract or suffer from a major illness.

Those with insurance should be allowed to take it with them from job to job.



That can't be accomplished without universal coverage.

There is room for compromise on health care reform that can benefit all of us.

Politicians who see defeating the president's health care plan as a way to lessen his political influence and enhance their chances in the next election are to be pitied. They are about themselves and not their country or their neighbors. They are the most selfish of all Americans.

President Obama is not a socialist or a communist and he was born in Hawaii. He's an American and like those who served before him, he can be right and he can be wrong. This debate should be about Americans and their health care, not Barack Obama.

– Steve Booher is publisher of the Cherokee Messenger and Republican, where this column first appeared

# Deja Vu! Death Panel Hysteria Nothing New

By Jeff Hamilton

The spread of the Death Panel myth about the health care legislation currently before us is not new.

In 1992, when I was a member of the Oklahoma House of Representatives, I authored HB 1893, the Living Will Bill or Advanced Directive to Physicians concerning end of life care. The purpose of the Living Will was to allow for a person – while competent to make a decision – to express their view about their wishes concerning heroic measures in the event of a terminal illness.

This was not about euthanasia, but about the withholding of treatment that would only prolong the dying process.

The Terri Shiavo case is an example of the hysteria found in the so-called right-to-life movement over this end-of-life issue. President George W. Bush and Congress passed legislation in a matter of hours to prevent the removal of the feeding tube from the brain-dead 41-year-old woman. But that dangerous politi-

cal stunt failed. Her ordeal of prolonged dying was finally over.

The Living Will legislation allows for a person to express their wishes should they be in a terminal or permanently vegetative state. That prevents the tragic Shiavo scenario.

But on the day that I was to present HB 1893 on the floor of the House of Representatives, my phone rang and I heard a voice on the other end of the line telling me that I was a killer. The woman said that she had heard it on a religious TV show that Hamilton's bill would allow for the government to come and take her out of her house and kill her because she was disabled.

The Death Panel myth may be more subtle, but the purpose is the same: discredit perfectly good legislation.

HB 1893 was signed into law and there have been no death squads. Déjà vu!

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

# A Personal Experience With Canadian Care

By Marilyn Rosfeld

Why are so many people in the United States speaking disparagingly about the Canadian Health Care system? I have no idea.

I just returned from a visit with several of my family members in Canada. On a Tuesday, the day before I left Oklahoma City, my aunt [who is 82] called me and told me she had breast cancer and needed to have her left breast removed. The diagnosis was made after two mammograms, two ultrasounds and a needle biopsy.

I went directly to her home when I arrived in Canada, and was able to go with her the following Friday to meet with the surgeon, who was very competent, personable, friendly and patient. Surgery was scheduled the following Thursday, and involved one night in the hospital. On Friday, she was home, up and around and eating chocolate strawberries.

Each day until the drain was removed a home health nurse came to the house to change the dressing and monitor the amount of drainage from the tube. On the Tuesday after the surgery, she had a bone scan and a stomach ultrasound to see if there was cancer in those areas. On the following Monday, she met with her general practitioner and was told that the lymph nodes and the hospital tests revealed no further cancer.

From the time she learned of the cancer to her follow up visit with her family doctor, less than three weeks had elapsed. She will see her surgeon in another week, and will then be able to be fitted with a prosthesis. All of this cost her nothing.

A final check by a specialist in the cancer clinic will follow in two weeks to see if any further treatment is needed. All of this will cost her nothing.

In addition to the care she received locally, a provincial organization called Comprehensive Breast Care Program [<http://www.cancerboard.ab.ca/Professionals/CBCP>] was in touch with her, offering literature, counseling, and support during the time before and after surgery. The organization helps people from rural areas with transportation and housing arrangements, and with post-surgery procedures, chemotherapy and radiation.

I grew up in a rural area of Canada and had complete access to excellent medical care throughout my childhood and youth. When I moved to the United States I had to pay a huge amount each month for insurance, with a very high deductible, that only covered catastrophic medical needs. I was self employed and didn't have access to group rates.

All of my medical needs had to be paid out of pocket and I was able get care for only the most urgent issues.

There is a lot of unfounded fear about socialized medicine. Why aren't countries like Italy, England, and Canada adopting the United States system? Let us at least give an objective look at health care reform, stop making cases out of isolated and unfounded rumors, make healthcare available to all people in this country and be supportive of an administration that is trying to make this happen.

– The author lives in Bethany

# Inhofe & Co.'s Vile Rhetoric Treasonous?

By Steve Benen

One of these days, it sure would be nice if Republicans felt the need to denounce radical, vile rhetoric.

At a town hall, Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-OK, told constituents, "We're almost reaching a revolution in this country."

Inhofe also said he doesn't need to know what's in the health care reform bill to vote against it.

"I don't have to read it, or know what's in it. I'm going to oppose it anyways," he said at the event in Chickasha.

The senator was in good company, with most of the audience agreeing with him and expressing their disdain for big government and Democrats.

One man said, "No more compromise. We're losing our country."

I can't begin to understand why Inhofe and his like-minded extremists are so angry. For an elected member of the United States Senate to speak publicly about the possibility of a "revolution" is deeply frightening.

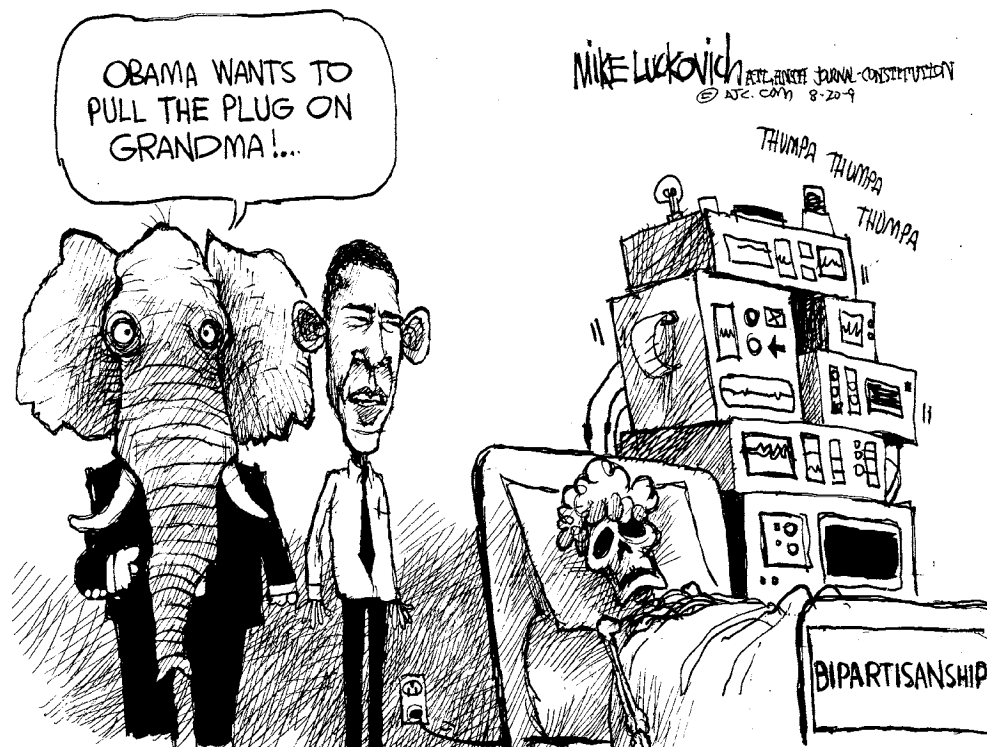
What's more, let's not forget that Inhofe isn't the only one throwing around insane rhetoric like this. Rep. Michele Bachmann, R-MN, has encouraged her supporters to "rise up" and be "armed and dangerous."

Several GOP lawmakers are talking up the idea of "nullification," which is effectively secession-lite.

Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison's former press secretary recently wrote about "the coming revolution," which he suggested might be similar to "Project Mayhem" from the movie "Fight Club." [In the film, "Project Mayhem" involved militarizing terrorist cells that blew up banks.]

I'm reminded of something Josh Marshall wrote a few weeks ago: "Let's all collectively throw a little cold water on our faces and just realize that this is some really crazy stuff."

The health care debate is now being driven by a perverse nonsense feedback loop in which the Palin/Limbaugh crowd says all sorts of completely insane lies, gets a lot of ... how shall we put it ... impressionable people totally jacked up over a bunch of complete nonsense.



It's getting worse, the perverse nonsense feedback loop is getting louder, and elected members of Congress are dues-paying members the Palin/Limbaugh crowd.

It was just a couple of years ago when prominent conservatives told us criticism of the president and the United States government in the midst of a crisis was borderline, if not outright, treason.

The love-it-or-leave-it crowd, after just seven months of a Democratic administration, has reached a very different conclusion about standards of patriotism in the 21st Century.

- From Washington Monthly's blog

## Ignoring The Debate No Longer An Option

By Mary McAnally

Is it true that America has become the most crime-filled society in the world? Current data on countless issues provides the answer - a firm, resounding YES!

Examples:

- A higher percentage of the population in jails and prisons.
- Court agendas so full we can't prosecute even half the criminals arrested.
- A society and culture based on consumerism.
- A person's value based on what they have rather than what they do for others.

What are the worst crimes? Of course, murder, rape, torture and physical abuses. These are the worst in terms of human life and limb.

What are the second worst? They are those crimes that affect every one of us. They include the diseases of alcoholism [thousands killed by drunk drivers], drug abuse [families and neighborhoods robbed for someone's drug high], and greed [me first, my needs over yours, anything goes as long as I get]. Greed is an act initiated by an attitude.

But I suspect the worst crimes of our current times are those committed by those in power against those who only have the power of the vote to speak for them, such as:

- Public tax dollars being used to create more private wealth. [Government bailouts in the billions to corporate criminals and their super rich CEOs.]

- Laws that protect the criminals at the cost of their victims. [Allowing industry to pollute air, water, and land for the sake of profits and at the sake of people and animals, and to make millions for doing nothing to help taxpayers prosper.]

- Advertising and commercials that play mind games to get people to buy foolishly and unnecessarily, even lying about their benefits. [Bottled water a perfect example since it has now been proven to be tap water in disguise, like Dasani and Aquafina.]

- Turning over of public lands, waterways and airspace to corporate criminals to pollute, depopulate, and destroy freely [national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, rain forests, prairie/grasslands and waterways polluted to the point of poisoning us all].

- Placing public health in the hands of the profiteers [insurance companies and pharmaceuticals] instead of the protectors [elected officials and community leaders].

Our president has launched a national debate on health reform. Everyone must join the debate to ensure that our individual and national health policy serves us instead of the profiteers who will only raise our rates and lower our benefits for the sake of their investors and CEO million-dollar salaries.

Don't let the real criminals harm us any longer!

- The author lives in Tulsa

## America, Beware The Voices Of Evil

By Phyllis E. Price

The voices of Truth and Reason tend not to shout. And so, truth and reason are often drowned out in times of great fear and uncertainty: times such as these.

Such times as these give an advantage to the forces of evil. Fear works on their behalf. When hate blinds whole societies, when lies reign, evil wins.

I recently saw evil trying very hard to win. At a political "informational" meeting, where both sides of the health care issue were invited to speak, those trying to communicate were insulted and shouted at, and cars drove around the meeting, horns blaring, for an hour and a half, hoping to disrupt or prevent the exchange of ideas.

Those in charge, however, kept reminding us to not respond rudely, and with the help of loud speakers we were still able to learn something.

I commend those who keep trying to do the right thing in the midst of such rudeness. I hope and pray that those who truly want to find solutions do not get discouraged and give up. I hope the president and Senate and Congress realize that these screamers do not represent the majority of people.

They represent either that small portion of the population who have been terri-

fied by false information, or that portion of the population who are motivated by greed or power, who want people to be terrified.

Throughout history, our blackest days - the Inquisition, Salem's witch trials, Hitler's Germany - came when voices pandering lies implanted fear, inserted dissonance in the multitudes, encouraged confrontation created straw men for the masses to fear and then proclaimed themselves the heroes who would defeat these invented "enemies."

America, if you intend to continue to exist, do not fear the calm voices.

Do not become deaf to the voices of reason.

Fear instead those who do not want us to hear the truth, who infiltrate the crowd, honking their horns or screaming insults to subvert and drown out the discussion and free speech that is the basis of our democracy.

That strident voice is the voice of Evil. It does not have your good at heart. It is the same voice that stood at the edge of a crowd 2,000 years ago and screamed, "Crucify!"

- The author lives in Fort Wayne, IN

## Health Insurance Reform

# It's An Investment, Not A Cost

By John C. Brown

An open letter to Sens. Tom Coburn and Jim Inhofe and Rep. Dan Boren:

The debate over health care reform seems to focus solely on the short-term cost of correcting this long-standing national policy quandary.

The so-called "cost" of modernizing our current health system pales when compared to the real cost of a continued devastation of our national, state, local government and school budgets.

Worse, a much more onerous threat to our national security and world financial and social standing grows daily.

Modernization is not a cost but an investment in America's future. It will assist small businesses and our vital international competitiveness.

Creation of true competition by adopting a public option is the only realistic method to control out of control costs. It is not only a moral rectitude but also a sound business policy for America.

The day of reckoning has arrived for enlightened and patriotic Americans and their elected representatives to now act to edify those being deceived by the blatant falsehoods and misrepresentations [e.g., death panels, socialism, etc.] propagated by narrow, selfish, financial special interests.

America's health system is currently ranked 37th by the World Health Organization [barely ahead of Slovenia and Cuba]. Great leaders will use their public pulpits not to divide us by playing to the outrageous and ungrounded fears engendered and paid for by an industry with its highly paid mercenaries; but will overcome their fear of right-wing media demagogues and faithfully serve America's vital interest.

America's warriors are suffering daily hardship, horrible mutilation and death in service to America. Much less courage and sacrifice is sadly needed on the



home front. Most voters will recognize and appreciate the wisdom, strength and statesmanship you must demonstrate in behalf of this critical reform.

- The author lives in Choteau

## Educating Coburn On The Real Death Panels

By Tim Jarvis

An open letter to Sen. Coburn:

My father was diagnosed with a serious illness about a year ago. With the help of great doctors and the wonders of modern medicine, he is currently doing very well, all things considered. In order for him to continue to live, though, he must take a pill every day which, after insurance, costs him - out of pocket - roughly \$1,300 per month. Without insurance, this pill would cost him over \$13,000 per month.

He had two options: pay this amount or die. His life was placed before a very real Corporate Death Panel [as opposed to the fictional government death panel you and your pal Palin like to scare people with] and that was the verdict. There's no way this little pill costs that much to produce.

My father has always provided for himself and his family, trying to do the "right" thing. He's never had to ask the government for anything. He's been fortunate in that regards. You could say that, although he's clearly not rich in a material or financial aspect, he's "made it" on his own. He's been able to have a reasonably comfortable existence.

### A 'BRILLIANT JOB OF DEFLECTION'

It is with this backdrop in mind that I saw some film of your recent Town Hall meeting in which a woman presented her current dilemma to you. She stated that her husband was very ill, and her insurance company told her they would pay no more of his nursing care, that they were in essence "on their own."

Your response was something like Americans need to get out of the mindset of looking to the government for help, and that it was up to neighbors to assist instead.

Brilliant job of deflection, sir! Perhaps a more appropriate and on-point response, however, would have been "Why did your insurance company cut you off?" Their corporate insurance company apparently put their case in front of a Corporate Death Panel, which decided that in spite of the premiums the company gladly took over the years, they were finished paying for medical expenses for this American citizen because it was hurting the company's profits. Some exec needed a new boat, or maybe his mistress needed a boob job. I think you knew you were at a dead end, so you opted to put the responsibility on the neighbors! You weren't about to blame it on the Corporate Death Panel, because you are their john. [Or is it the other way around?]

Personally, I think it is abhorrent that the health care industry and the pharmaceutical industry are geared to making huge profits based on the unfortunate illnesses of American citizens. I saw where the CEO of United Health has been compensated in excess of \$750 million in the last five years or so, even as United Health is raising the percentage that their clients are forced to pay. It just doesn't seem "Christian-like."

### ALWAYS PROTECTING SACROSANCT MARKET

One of the typical responses from the rightwing is that having a single-payer system or a public option would eliminate The Market, and we can't do that because The Market is always better, because it allows so many wonderful choices, which are simply, on its face, so much better than anything the government can provide, because the government is inefficient, and The Market eliminates inefficiencies, and those savings pass right on through to the consumer, who gets better care at a lower price, and besides, who wants a government bureaucrat making those choices about personal care when you can have a corporate bureaucrat instead?

Right? That's why my premiums have been going down [?] and that poor lady's husband is getting such great, wait, what?

Based on your response to this lady, it appears to me that you are the one trying to limit choices. If there was a government option available and people chose to take it, so be it. If that causes insurance companies to go under, so be it. If they thought the corporate-provided insurance was a better deal, they could choose that route. If you want to call it socialism [which it clearly isn't], so be it. [I'll call it socialism if you agree to call the direction the country was heading under Bush fascism - which it was. Deal?]

### WELL-TRAINED NEIGHBORS

Oh yeah, about those neighbors. I guess you are assuming the poor lady's neighbors had plenty of money [and time] to give to them? Maybe even that some of those neighbors just so happen to be trained in the specialty care her husband needs?

Remember, Tom, this is Oklahoma. While we have plenty of really nice people here, not that many are afloat in cash. In fact, I think the wide majority of U.S. citizens are in the same boat. We don't all have neighbors that are highly trained in speech therapy or physical therapy.

They might be able to provide a tasty casserole or watch the house for a week-

See DEATH PANELS Page 19

## DOCTORS VS. HEALTH REFORM

The American Medical Association has weighed in on the health insurance reform package:

The Allergists voted to scratch it.

The Dermatologists advised not to make any rash moves.

The Gastroenterologists had sort of a gut feeling about it.

The Neurologists thought the administration had a lot of nerve.

The Obstetricians felt they were all laboring under a misconception.

Ophthalmologists considered the idea shortsighted.

Pathologists yelled, "Over my dead body!"

The Pediatricians said, "Oh, Grow up!"

The Psychiatrists thought the whole idea was madness.

The Radiologists could see right through it.

Surgeons decided to wash their hands of the whole thing.

The Internists thought it was a bitter pill to swallow.

The Plastic Surgeons said, "This puts a whole new face on the matter."

The Podiatrists thought it was a step forward.

The Urologists were pissed off at the whole idea.

The Anesthesiologists thought the whole idea was a gas.

The Cardiologists didn't have the heart to say no.

In the end, the Proctologists won out, leaving the entire decision up to the a--holes in Congress.

# Scandal Brews Over The Christian Mafia

In an MSNBC show, Rachel Maddow and Jeff Sharlet revealed the disturbing fact that the “Christian Embassy” scandal, propelled by a complaint to the Department of Defense from the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, was investigated by a Pentagon Inspector General who is in fact a “Family” member.

The Family, also known as “The Fellowship,” is a secret fundamentalist Washington, DC, ministry which runs the National Prayer Breakfast and Bible study groups attended by numerous members of Congress, including Sens. Jim Inhofe and Tom Coburn, both Oklahoma Republicans.

The Family wields global influence, and celebrates the leadership teachings of Hitler, Lenin, and Mao.

## NOTORIOUS FOR SEX SCANDALS

Over the course of the summer of 2009, Washington’s Family-run “C Street House” has become notorious as a string of sex scandals have engulfed national GOP political figures who live at or have lived at, or attended Bible study classes at, the secretive former convent-turned-church cum cheap-rent, high-end boarding house: Sen. John Ensign, former Congressman Charles “Chip” Pickering, and South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford.

By far the story has been driven, first, by Sharlet, who wrote the 2008 book *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at The Heart Of American Power*, which followed Sharlet’s 2003 Harper’s expose *Jesus Plus Nothing*.

But MSNBC’s Maddow also has pursued breaking new aspects of the festering scandal with a long-term dedication rarely seen in mainstream media news coverage. She has played an invaluable role in giving the mafia-like “Family” widespread public exposure.

## MAINSTREAM MEDIA SITS IDLE

Maddow’s willingness to cover the story of The Family and the C Street House in an ongoing manner, week to week over the summer, implicitly indicts much of mainstream news coverage as suffering from collective attention deficit disorder.

It’s nothing less than astonishing and appalling that most of mainstream news media have neglected for so long to dig further into revelations seeded by Sharlet, especially given:

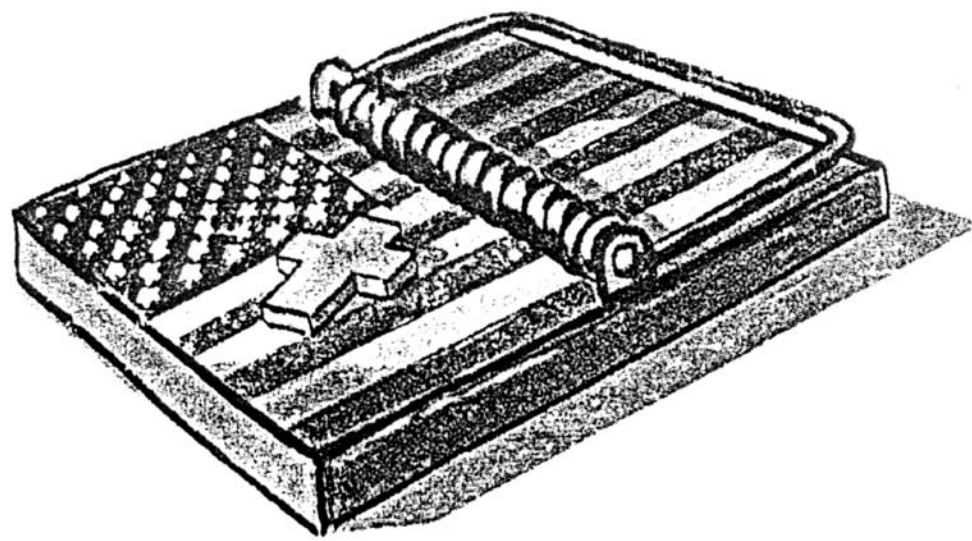
- The level of international, geopolitical influence The Family wields;
- Its members’ penchant for describing their group as a Christian “mafia;” and
- In light of Family head Doug Coe’s zest for celebrating useful leadership lessons he says can be gleaned from studying Lenin’s Bolsheviks, Mao’s Red Guard willing to chop off their own parents’ heads for the good of the revolutionary state and Hitler’s Nazis.

## IT WASN’T THE FIRST REVELATION

Sharlet wasn’t the first to expose The Family. That was Thomas Frank in his award-winning book *What’s the Matter With Kansas?* Unfortunately, he didn’t follow up and it was a dormant issue until Sharlet’s documented book.

Both Inhofe and Coburn have traveled abroad, visiting with heads of state in order to convince them that they need to follow The Family’s lead for winning the world so Christianity can dominate all decisions of every country.

Now, bypassing most mainstream news organizations, Christian media is getting into the act. As covered on Maddow’s *The Family/C Street House* segment, a conservative Christian news magazine, *World Magazine*, has not only covered the



Family/C Street saga but also advanced the story in important ways.

In *All In The Family*, Emily Belz and Eric Lee Pitts do what is sorely lacking in much of mainstream journalism – they investigate, dig that is, and uncover new information on the welter of Family-owned properties located in Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, DC, as well as on the financial dealings of The International Foundation, the Family’s central nonprofit entity which finances international travel.

*World Magazine* quoted Chris Halverson, the son of Former U.S. Senate Chaplain Richard Halverson – one of the earliest Family members – as stating, “They used to call themselves the Christian mafia – and they would laugh.”

## THEY WIELD POWER WORLDWIDE

This story is certain to continue to generate new revelations on the influence that The Family’s elitist, theocratically-oriented members have managed to garner both within the Washington, DC, power establishment but also worldwide.

As Family member David Kuo, author of *Tempting Faith* has stated, “... The Family’s reach into governments around the world is impossible to overstate or even grasp.”

Revelations concerning The Family and other fundamentalist groups it works with, such as *Campus Crusade For Christ* and *Youth With A Mission*, will no doubt continue to break into Fall.

Other angles to The Family story include its proclivity for promoting falsified American history and The Family’s relationship with the global behemoth missionary group *Youth With A Mission*, which owns the C Street House.

## TOM COBURN SHORT OF FACTS

Coburn has been caught in a slew of fabrications, tarnishing his reputation as the champion “political pork” exposé.

The founder of *Youth With A Mission*, Loren Cunningham, espouses a widely marketed program for Christian world domination called the “Seven Mountains” mandate [also known as the 7-M mandate and “Retaking the Seven Mountains”] that is promoted in conferences, books, literature, and videos and has been espoused at Sarah Palin’s church, the Wasilla Assembly of God, during an October 2005 ceremony and “anointing” Palin attended before running for the Alaska governor’s seat.

In 2000, YWAM and The Family co-founded a bipartisan Congressional junket by two Congress members who went with their wives to Kona, HI, the location of YWAM’s international university.

The two congressmen indicated that they went on official congressional business relating to the National Prayer Breakfast, the yearly signature public event of The Family since the institution was first established during the Eisenhower Administration in 1953.

If you’re not watching MSNBC from 7 to 10 weeknights, you really don’t know what’s going on in your world today.

# Will Senate Honor Teddy’s Memory?

By Susan Estrich

It was a long and ugly weekend, e-mail wise. Ted Kennedy may be gone, but the haters are still out there. Every time I said a nice word, my BlackBerry would start vibrating.

“Did everyone like Ted Kennedy?” one of the Fox anchors asked me. Certainly not everyone in America. There was a reason Republicans chose him, year-in and year-out, as a focus for organizing and fundraising appeals since long before anyone had ever heard of a guy named Barack Obama.

And yet, Kennedy offers to Obama what may be his best chance to pass health care.

## KENNEDY’S COMPASSION, GENEROSITY

Inside the United States Senate and inside the top ranks of the Democratic Party, it would be hard to find someone who was not touched by Teddy’s passion or generosity, someone who doesn’t have a story to tell of how Teddy reached out to them in their own time of illness or loss. A friend wrote to me today describing the gathering of former staffers on the Capitol steps, everyone weeping openly.

Working for “the Senator” was for many of us the best work we have ever done. Working with him, many legislators discovered, was the best work they ever did.

If we owe him anything, and I think we do, it is to try to figure out how to use this moment to do more than scream at one another across the partisan divide about socialized medicine.

For a man who was a partisan symbol, Kennedy spent a great deal of his life courting Republicans. He prided himself on his relationships with those on the other side, relationships that allowed him to accomplish more legislatively than

the liberal lion should have.

## KENNEDY WAS ‘OLD SCHOOL’

Justice Stephen Breyer was confirmed for the Court of Appeals *after* Jimmy Carter lost the presidency in large part because of Teddy’s relationship with Strom Thurmond. Orrin Hatch was a close friend. Teddy was from the old school, the one that loved politics with all its rivalries, the one where you fought all day and had a drink at night, the one where we’re all on the same team when it counts most.

The best way to accomplish health care reform in this country would be for Democrats and Republicans to work together to come up with an approach that provides access to those who don’t have it and controls the costs that both government and private insurers are having grave difficulty keeping up with. I know, dream on. Still, if there is one place that could happen, right now, it is the United States Senate.

This is the moment to renew the call, in Teddy’s name, to not let his dream become the next “Willie Horton” or the next “Swiftboat,” a shorthand for the failures of attack politics.

## STILL INFLUENCING THE DEBATE?

Teddy was not for “nationalized health care,” and he was not for “socialized medicine.” He was not for taking health care from the elderly and giving it instead to immigrants. The public debate on health care has been won, so far, by those who oppose Obama far more than they care [or know] about health care.

I would like to believe that could change. I would like to believe that someone,

See **KENNEDY** Page 16

# Is Your Congress Bought By Lobbyists?

Six lobbyists per lawmaker work on health overhaul – that’s six lobbyists for each of the 535 members of the House and Senate, according to Senate records, and three times the number of people registered to lobby on defense.

More than 1,500 organizations have health-care lobbyists, and about three more are signing up each day. Every one of the 10 biggest lobbying firms by revenue is involved in an effort that could affect 17% of the U.S. economy.

These groups spent \$263.4 million on lobbying during the first six months of this year – more than any other industry – according to the Center for Responsive Politics, a Washington-based research group.

They spent \$241.4 million during the same period of 2008. Drugmakers alone spent \$134.5 million, 64% more than the next biggest spenders, oil and gas companies.

## LIKE RINGING THE DINNER BELL

“Whenever you have a big piece of legislation like this, it’s like ringing the dinner bell for K Street,” said Bill Allison, a senior fellow at the Sunlight Foundation, a Washington-based watchdog group, referring to the street in the capital where many lobbying firms have offices.

Health-insurer and managed-care stocks have gained this year, led by WellCare Health Plans Inc., based in Tampa, FL; Cigna Corp., based in Philadelphia; and Coventry Health Care Inc., a Bethesda, MD, company. The three paced a 13% increase in the Standard & Poor’s Supercomposite Managed Health Care Index since Jan. 1. Drugmaker shares have stagnated.

## THOUSANDS OF DIFFERENT VOICES

Health-care lobbyists said their efforts are the biggest since the successful 1986 effort to overhaul the tax code. The result is a debate involving thousands of disparate voices, forcing Congress to pick winners and losers.

“There’s a lot of money at stake and there are a lot of special interests who don’t want their ox gored,” Allison said.

The lobbyists are on all sides of the issue. Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, the Washington-based trade group for drug companies such as Thousand Oaks, CA-based Amgen Inc. and New York-based Pfizer Inc., has embraced a health-care overhaul.

Lobbying by Amgen, the world’s largest biotechnology company, is intended to “effectively shape health-care policy,” said spokeswoman Kelley Davenport. Pfizer, the world’s largest drugmaker, is “dedicated to insuring that our voice is heard,” said spokesman Ray Kerins.

## U.S. CHAMBER IS THE BIGGEST LOBBY

The Washington-based U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the nation’s largest business lobby, is opposing efforts to offer government-run health insurance to compete with private companies. The chamber spent \$26 million in the first six months of this year to lobby – more than any other group.

For lobbyists, the goal is to ensure that whatever measure eventually becomes law doesn’t cripple the industry they represent.

“They assume health-care reform is going to happen and they want to be protected,” said John Jonas, a partner with the lobbying firm of Patton Boggs LLP in Washington.

Patton Boggs, the top lobbying firm in terms of revenue, has three dozen clients in the health-care debate, including New York-based Bristol-Myers Squibb Co., and Bentonville, AR-based Wal-Mart Stores Inc., more than any other lobbying firm.

Brian Henry, spokesman for Bristol-Myers, maker of the world’s No. 2 best-selling drug Plavix, said the company wants to ensure any legislation preserves incentives for innovation.

## THEIR DEFINITION OF REFORM

“We believe the health-care system needs to be reformed and we’ve specifically supported an employer mandate and cost containment measures,” said Greg



Rossiter, a spokesman for Wal-Mart, the largest U.S. employer.

The lobbyists fill the appointment books of lawmakers, and line up at House and Senate office buildings. The staff of Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus, a Montana Democrat, rotates weekly meetings among the various groups in the health-care debate – providers one week, purchasers a second, consumers a third.

“We hear from lobbyists all the time,” said Rep. Frank Pallone, a New Jersey Democrat who heads the House Energy and Commerce health subcommittee.

The blitz by lobbyists carries a risk for the public, said Larry McNeely, health-care advocate with the Boston-based U.S. Public Interest Research Group.

## MONEY SLOSHING AROUND WASHINGTON

“The sheer quantity of money that’s sloshed around Washington is drowning out the voices of citizens and the groups that speak up for them,” said McNeely, whose group backs a public health plan, which Obama and many Democrats consider a centerpiece of any proposal and most Republicans oppose.

The lobbying push also risks delaying legislation, said Rogan Kersh, associate dean at New York University’s Wagner School of Public Service.

“That amount of activity is inevitably going to slow down the process,” Kersh said.

The quest for influence isn’t limited to lobbying. Health-care advocates have spent \$53 million on commercials, according to Arlington, VA-based TNS Media Intelligence/Campaign Media Analysis, which tracks advertising spending.

## HEALTH CARE INDUSTRY BUYS ACCESS

The health-care industry also contributed \$20.5 million to federal candidates and the political parties during the first six months of the year, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, a Nevada Democrat who is up for re-election next year, received \$382,400 – more than any other lawmaker.

“There is a cacophony going on with so much money and so many individuals hoping to shape the legislation,” said Sheila Krumholz, executive director of the Center for Responsive Politics.

The number of lobbyists could grow once Congress resumes efforts to enact legislation by the end of the year.

“They have just decided this is serious enough and more fully understand the impact it’s going to have,” Jonas said.

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# Unscientific America Threatens Future

By Chris Mooney

As Mark Twain put it, “The trouble with the world is not that people know too little, it’s that they know so many things that just aren’t so.”

Take the army of aggrieved parents nationwide who swear vaccines are the reason their children developed autism and who seem impossible to convince otherwise.

Scientific research has soundly refuted this contention, but every time a new study comes on the subject, the parents and their supporters have a “scientific” answer that allows them to retain their beliefs.

Where do they get their “science” from? From the Internet, celebrities, other parents, and a few non-mainstream researchers and doctors who continue to challenge the scientific consensus, all of which forms a self-reinforcing echo chamber of misinformation.

## IGNORANT OR SCIENTIFICALLY ILLITERATE?

The anti-vaccination advocates are scientifically incorrect; there’s little doubt of that at this point. But whether they could be called “ignorant” or “scientifically illiterate” is less clear.

After all, they’ve probably done far more independent research about a scientific topic that interests and affects them than most Americans have.

The same goes for other highly informed, and deeply wrong, groups – the global warming deniers [U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-OK], anti-evolutionists [State Rep. Sally Kern], UFO obsessives, and so on.

Ignorance isn’t their problem, and neither is a lack of intellectual engagement [U.S. Rep. John Sullivan]. Anyone who has ever discussed global warming on national radio [as Mooney has done countless times] can expect to be besieged by callers.

## RESEARCH BACKS UP PREJUDICES

They don’t accept the prevailing scientific consensus and have obviously done a great deal of research to back up their prejudices.

If anything, such individuals want to make a show of their erudition and proceed to rattle off a mind-boggling string of scientific-sounding claims:

Global warming isn’t happening on other planets; urban heat islands [cities] thwart global thermometer readings; the atmosphere’s lowest layer, the troposphere, isn’t warming at the rate predicted by climate models; and the like.

Or consider the late Michael Crichton. He was a brilliant science fiction novelist, screenwriter, and movie producer who backed up his best-selling narratives

See UNSCIENTIFIC Page 18

# 75 Rightwing Terror Plots Since McVeigh

The following is from a new report, *Return of the Militias*, released by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

At 9:02 a.m. on April 19, 1995, a 7,000-pound truck bomb, constructed of ammonium nitrate fertilizer and nitromethane racing fuel and packed into 13 plastic barrels, ripped through the heart of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City.

The explosion wrecked much of downtown Oklahoma City and killed 168 people, including 19 children in a day-care center. Another 500 were injured.

Although many Americans initially suspected an attack by Middle Eastern radicals, it quickly became clear that the mass murder had actually been carried out by domestic, rightwing terrorists.

The slaughter engineered by Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, men steeped in the conspiracy theories and white-hot fury of the American radical right, marked the opening shot in a new kind of domestic political extremism.

## MORE THAN WILLING TO KILL THE INNOCENT

It is a revolutionary ideology whose practitioners do not hesitate to carry out attacks directed at entirely innocent victims, people selected essentially at random to make a political point.

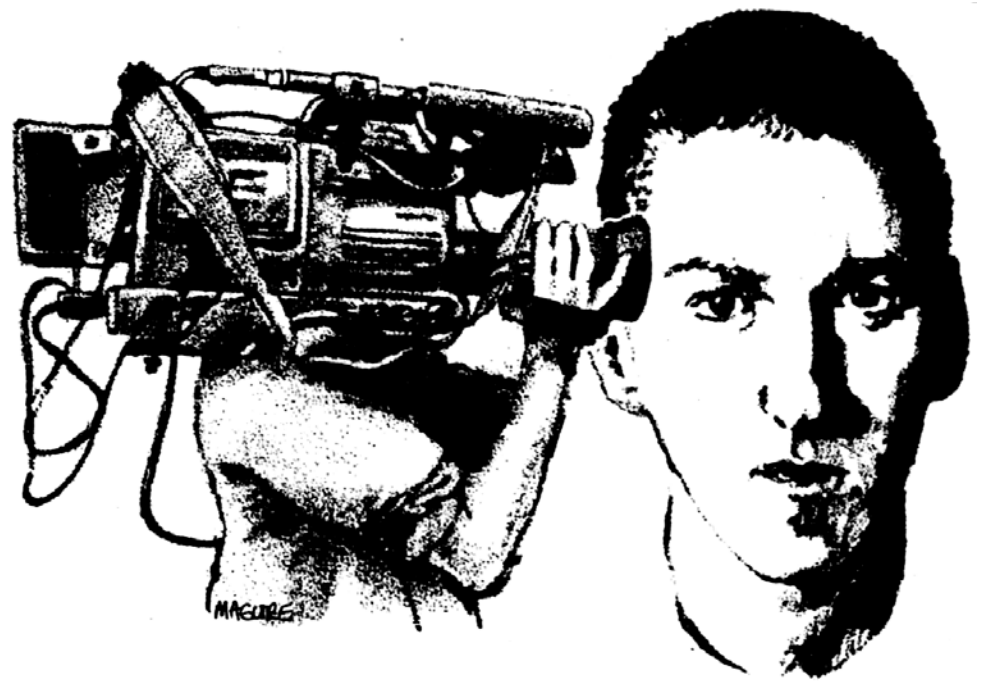
After Oklahoma, it was no longer sufficient for many American right-wing terrorists to strike at a target of political significance – instead, they reached for higher and higher body counts, reasoning that they had to eclipse McVeigh's attack to win attention.

Seventy-five major terrorist plots and racist rampages have emerged from the American radical right in the years since Oklahoma City. These have included plans to bomb government buildings, banks, refineries, utilities, clinics, synagogues, mosques, memorials and bridges; to assassinate police officers, judges, politicians, civil rights figures and others; to rob banks, armored cars and other criminals; and to amass illegal machine guns, missiles, explosives and biological and chemical weapons.

## SEEKING CHANGE WITH VIOLENCE

Each of these plots aimed to make changes in America through the use of political violence. Most contemplated the deaths of large numbers of people – in one case, as many as 30,000, or 10 times the number murdered on Sept. 11, 2001.

Another plot sprang from Oklahoma. On Nov. 9, 1995 Oklahoma Constitutional Militia leader Willie Ray Lampley, his wife Cecilia and another man, John Dare



Baird, were arrested as they prepared explosives to bomb numerous targets, including the Southern Poverty Law Center, gay bars and abortion clinics.

The three, along with another suspect arrested later, were sentenced to terms of up to 11 years in 1996. Cecilia Lampley was released in 2000, while Baird and Willie Lampley – who wrote letters from prison urging others to violence – were freed in 2004 and 2006, respectively.

## OKLAHOMA BOMBER IS HIS HERO

On April 23, 1997 Florida police arrested Todd Vanbiber, a member of the neo-Nazi National Alliance's Tampa unit and the shadowy League of the Silent Soldier, after he accidentally set off pipe bombs he was building, blasting shrapnel into his own face.

He was accused of plotting to use the bombs on the approach to Disney World to divert attention from a planned string of bank robberies. Vanbiber pleaded guilty to weapons and explosives charges and was sentenced to more than six years in federal prison.

He was released in 2002. Within two years, Vanbiber was posting messages on neo-Nazi Internet sites boasting that he has built over 300 bombs successfully and only made one error. He described mass murderer Timothy McVeigh as a hero.

Some hero.

# Slickest, Silliest Astroturf Campaign Of All

By Jim Hightower

"Hey, Hey, what do you say? Make some noise, seize the day!"

Protests are back! All across America, angry demonstrations are popping up like mushrooms on moldy Astroturf.

Similar to the plastic "grass," political astroturf is the corporate version of grassroots – instead of ordinary citizens organizing and mobilizing themselves for political action, astroturf campaigns are well-orchestrated PR efforts that put real folks out front, but are instigated, organized and funded by corporate interests and right-wing front groups.

We've seen a surge in these plastic uprisings this year, all directed at policy changes being put forth by Barack Obama. First come the April 15 "teabag" rallies to oppose Obama's economic recovery package. Billed as a spontaneous people's rebellion against BGS [Big Government Socialism], the events turned out to have been spawned and coordinated by a corporate-financed anti-government outfit in Washington called Freedom Works, headed by former GOP majority leader Dick Armey.

Next up were this month's rancorous confrontations at local Town Hall meetings that had been convened by assorted Congress-members to discuss Obama's health care proposals. Various groupings of red-faced, mostly elderly, mostly Republican citizens stormed these discussions, turning them into yell-a-thons. Again, BGS was the core theme of the seniors' screeds, including numerous versions of this muddled thought: "I don't want socialized medicine. And don't touch my Medicare."

Their talking points [yelling points, actually] were straight out of the litany-of-hokum that Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, Sarah Palin and Co. chant daily – including repetition of the ludicrous lie that Obama intends to deploy cadres of federal death agents to show up at bingo halls to euthanize granny and gramps.

Coordination and funding of this senior-scare campaign has come from such corporate front groups as Conservatives for Patients' Rights. CPR was created and financed by Rick Scott, the multimillionaire former-CEO of the huge hospital chain Columbia-HCA. In 1997, Scott was dumped by Columbia because of corporate policies developed on his watch to defraud patients, doctors and Medicare. Columbia pled guilty and had to pay \$1.7 billion to settle the fraud charges. Now, Scott is bringing this "expertise" to the health care debate.

The latest line of astroturf, however, is being peddled by an old flim-flammer: Big Oil. In a series of 20 mass rallies during the August congressional recess, a group called Energy Citizens is purporting to be a rebellion of common folks against Obama's climate change legislation. Who are these rebels? ExxonMobil, Chevron, ConocoPhillips and other oil giants.

Energy Citizens was created and funded by the industry's chief lobbying organization, the American Petroleum Institute, which has already spent \$3 million this year lobbying to kill the climate-change initiative. "We are about giving citizens a voice," declared a spokeswoman.

But, how many ordinary Joes and Jills really want to rally behind Big Oil? Practically none. No problem, though – in a memo to oil chieftains, API urged them to "put a human face" on the industry's self-serving opposition by putting their employees out front. Even API recognized the cynicism in this ploy, so it warned executives to "please treat this information as sensitive, [for] we don't want critics to know our game plan."

Call it what they will, Energy Citizen was a corporate show from the get-go. API hired an events management company to stage the rallies, put a field coordinator in each state, ran the PR campaign and served as general manager of the game plan.

Attendance essentially came from Rent-a-Crowd: oil company employees in Houston, for example, were "invited" by their bosses to attend, were given paid time off for the event, were bused to and from the rallies, were entertained by corporate-hired performers, were served a free lunch, were given yellow T-shirts to wear and were asked to wave placards declaring, "I'm an Energy Citizen."

Since Astroturf itself is actually made up of petroleum, there's a certain poetic symmetry in having Big Oil produce the slickest and silliest astroturf campaign of them all – so far.

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## KENNEDY

From Page 14

maybe the president, could find a way to move us past warring town meetings and screaming grandmothers, beyond media circuses to honest dialogue.

But even if it's too late to change the public debate, even if Teddy's name is not the right one to convince moderates and independents that the Democrats are not off on some tax-and-spend frolic and detour, there is still the Senate.

Sixty people will decide whether to change the health care system in this country, and all of them served with Ted Kennedy, worked with him, laughed with him. They sat in the church on recent Saturday to say goodbye to him. Now, it is up to them to write the bill that will honor his memory.

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## Change NCLB

# Poll: Public Favors Obama's Reforms

The long awaited PDK/Gallup Poll is out and it reveals Americans are tired of the No Child Left Behind law, favor merit pay for teachers and early childhood education.

Most Americans want to change No Child Left Behind [NCLB]. They favor several education reforms backed by the Obama Administration – charter schools and teacher merit pay.

Every year since 1969, Phi Delta Kappa [PDK] International, a global association of education professionals, and Gallup have created a poll to examine how the country views its educational system.

“Like it or not, all of these events affect our everyday lives. And with these major changes come changes in public attitudes about a variety of issues – including education,” says the report, titled *Americans Speak Out: Are Educators and Policy Makers Listening?*

### BIGGEST PROBLEM FACING EDUCATION

In every PDK/Gallup poll conducted since its inception, the first question asked is to describe the “biggest problem facing public schools” in the community.

With no prompts provided, respondents have cited funding as the biggest problem since 2000. This year, 32% of respondents said funding – the highest number ever recorded.

More than 50% gave their schools an A or a B, but only 20% gave the rest of the nation's schools an A or B.

“The reasons for this disconnect are simple,” says Gerald Bracey, a PDK columnist and author of *Education Hell: Rhetoric vs. Reality*. “Americans never hear anything positive about the nation's schools and haven't for years.”

Bracey says the news media, many education advocacy groups, and even President Obama, offer negative views about the current state of American education, which influence public opinion.

### ANNUAL TESTING STILL FAVORED

By a 2-to-1 margin, Americans continue to support annual testing of students in grades three through eight.

Only one out of four Americans believes NCLB has helped schools in his or her community.

One type of school system that most Americans can agree liking is charter schools. During the last five years, American's approval of charter schools has increased by 15%, says the poll, and almost two out of three Americans now say they favor the idea of charter schools.



Types of schools and NCLB aside, most Americans seem to value good teachers. Nearly three out of four Americans [both Republicans and Democrats] favor merit pay for teachers.

### CRITERIA FOR MERIT PAY

Student academic achievement, administrator evaluations, and advanced degrees are the three most favored criteria for awarding merit pay, according to respondents.

Also, three out of four Americans believe there should be national standards for the certification of public school teachers and that beginning teachers with a bachelor's degree and teaching certificate should earn more than they are currently paid by their communities.

Americans also favor increasing the number of scholarships to college students who agree to teach science, math, and other technical subjects.

Finally, Americans believe that keeping teachers who were slated to be laid off should be the No. 1 priority in spending the economic stimulus funds, followed by providing support to the lowest-performing schools.

Today, 70% of parents say they would like their children to become teachers, versus 40% in 1980.

## Washington, DC Is Cliches Gone Wild

By William Ecenbarger

The General Services Administration has announced completion of an exact replica of the United States Capitol building – designed from C-SPAN videos that recorded debate in both houses of Congress in the early years of the 21st Century.

The grounds surrounding the Capitol have also been faithfully reproduced. There are bushes, which were beaten around, and a row of haystacks in which members of Congress used to look for needles.

The driveway is paved with stones, none of which was unturned, and there are three bandwagons in front of the building upon which they frequently climbed.

There are no fewer than seven flagpoles for the running up of ideas. There are slippery slopes and level playing fields to accommodate whole new ballgames.

### YOU CAN FIND THE TITANIC THERE

Directly in back of the building is a lake from which the tips of icebergs protrude, and anchored there is a ship named Titanic, whose deck chairs can be rearranged.

Several handsome doors, which were always open and upon which opportunity tended to knock, lead to the restored Capitol's interior.

Near the entrance sits a small waiting room for ideas whose time had come.

The first floor also contains a gymnasium where lawmakers could exercise their prerogatives and a pediatrics ward for the babies that were thrown out with the bath water.

The kitchen features a large bakery, where the ancient solons prepared half loaves that were better than none, pies in the sky and cake that they could have and eat it too. It accommodates hundreds of pork barrels.

A huge butcher block was used to trim fat from the federal budget, which was sometimes cut to the bone. Geese were frequently cooked there.

### IT'S A VERITABLE ZOO

An attached barn is a veritable Noah's ark of busy beavers, proud peacocks, sly foxes, mad wet hens, gored oxen, slow-paced snails and ducks [some sitting, some dead, some with water running off their backs].

The video debates indicate that the most common animal of all was the bull, which was taken by the horns before it was loosed in the china shop, where it had a tendency to defecate, about which lawmakers often exclaimed. Pigs were kept in a poke.

The stable housed horses – some of a different color – with carts before them. Some of these animals were changed in midstream, and there were even dead

horses that, sadly, appeared to have been beaten.

Spurs of the moment hang throughout the stable. Although there is a separate room for one lone 800-pound gorilla, it was rarely mentioned. The kennel housed many old dogs, some that wouldn't hunt and others that couldn't be taught new tricks.

### INCLUDING AN EXTINCT BREED

If sleeping, the dogs were allowed to lie – unless they barked up the wrong tree. A special holding pen was reserved for “Blue Dogs,” a breed that went extinct long ago.

The basement storage area includes shelf upon shelf of Pandora's boxes, both opened and unopened, and many cans of worms. There's a grindstone to which noses were put and bins of brass tacks.

From an office directly across the street from the restored Capitol, Speaker of the House Maxim Bromide said that making such good use of the videos was a stroke of genius.

“From time immemorial,” the Speaker said, “our nation's legislators have had a way with words and always managed to hit the nail on the head. It's high time we preserve this national treasure. Nothing succeeds like success ...”

*From The Smithsonian Magazine*

## Archeological Find

After having dug to a depth of 10 feet last year, New York scientists found traces of copper wire dating back 100 years and came to the conclusion that their ancestors already had a telephone network more than 100 years ago.

Not to be outdone by the New Yorkers, in the weeks that followed, a California archaeologist dug to a depth of 20 feet, and shortly after, a story in the Los Angeles Times read: “California archaeologists, finding traces of 200-year-old copper wire, have concluded that their ancestors already had an advanced high-tech communications network a hundred years earlier than the New Yorkers.”

One week later, The Oklahoma Gazette reported the following: “After digging as deep as 300 feet in his pasture near Mustang, OK, Bubba Mitchell, a self-taught archaeologist, reported that he found absolutely nothing. Bubba has therefore concluded that 300 years ago, Oklahoma had already gone wireless.”

Thank God for Bubba. Who says Okies are hicks?

# NEA At Odds With Obama Ed Reforms

The National Education Association has taken the offensive, announcing its opposition to core elements of the Obama Administration's proposed guidelines for the \$4.35 billion Race to the Top program.

NEA says it cannot support the fund's endorsement of using test scores for evaluating teachers, increasing the number of charter schools, and bolstering what the union calls "fast-track" alternative routes to teacher licensure.

In a strongly worded letter accompanying its comments on the guidelines, the union questioned U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's commitment to promote school improvement by being "tighter" on goals, but giving states and districts more flexibility to achieve reforms.

## TIGHT ON GOALS, TIGHT ON MEANS

"The administration's theory of success now seems to be tight on the goals and tight on the means," Kay Brilliant, the NEA's director of education policy and practice, wrote in the letter to Duncan.

"We find that top-down approach disturbing. We have been down that road before with the failures of No Child Left Behind, and we cannot support yet another layer of federal mandates that have little or no research base of success and that usurp state and local governments' responsibilities for public education."

The NEA has spent years and numerous resources on fighting elements of the NCLB Act, the signature education law of George W. Bush. They expected greater support from Obama for the union's own plans for renewing the law.

## OBAMA PUSHES BUSH AGENDA

Obama has pushed aggressively in areas associated with the prior administration, including greater accountability for teachers, more charter schools, and tough love for failing schools.

As a result, the relationship between the 3.2 million-member union and the administration it helped elect appears to be growing increasingly complex.

Technically speaking, the Race to the Top program is not a mandate: States can choose whether to apply. But given the economic downturn, many if not all, eligible states likely will do so.

Before the guidelines were released on July 31, NEA officials said they agreed with the goals of the Race to the Top program, which is oriented around the four "assurances" in the federal economic stimulus legislation: improve teacher and principal effectiveness, turn around the lowest performing schools, bolster standards and assessments, and update data systems.

## DUNCAN PROMISED TO INVOLVE TEACHERS

Duncan, in addresses before members of both the NEA and its sister union, the 1.4 million-member American Federation of Teachers, promised to involve teachers in school improvement efforts rather than impose reforms on them.

The proposed guidelines for the Race to the Top, released last month, conflicted directly with NEA policies, making strife with the union all but inevitable.

For instance, the guidelines propose giving a competitive advantage to states



that eliminated caps on charter schools. The union strongly supports caps.

"Despite growing evidence to the contrary, it appears that the administration has decided that charter schools are the only answer to what ails America's public schools," the NEA letter states.

In its comments, the NEA also raised the specter of legal challenges, stating that the program's priority on overhauling teacher evaluation, pay, and tenure might contravene local collective bargaining agreements. The administration must require that reforms to policies involving teachers be set in contracts, the union wrote.

So far, the AFT has kept a lower profile on Race to the Top. Its president, Randi Weingarten, has said that it is possible to use student-achievement information in evaluations as long as the process is done fairly and with teachers' consent. She has expressed reservations about the lifting of charter caps and the linking of student and teacher data.

# UNSCIENTIFIC

From Page 15

with considerable scientific research.

## TROUBLE SETTING STANDARD

The most troubling problem with the standard "scientific illiteracy" argument, however, is this: It has the effect, intended or otherwise, of exempting the smart people – the scientists – from any responsibility for ensuring that our society really does take their knowledge seriously and uses it wisely.

It's an educational problem, they can say, or a problem with the media [which doesn't cover science accurately or pay it enough attention], and then go back to their labs.

The Pluto saga, which captured vastly more attention than most science news stories ever do and deeply engaged many members of the public, utterly explodes this conceit.

There isn't any obvious "true" or "false" answer to the question of whether Pluto is a planet, and people certainly weren't ignorant about it. Rather, they were outraged by the sudden, top-down, seemingly arbitrary change by the science world, and they weren't necessarily wrong to have that reaction.

## SCHOLARS ABANDON THE IDEA

For all these reasons, scholars working in the field of science and technology studies [STS] have largely discarded the idea that our problems at the science society interface reduce to a simple matter of scientific illiteracy, traditionally defined.

Pointing fingers at the public or its surrogates – politicians, journalists, celebrities, and so on – is not only insulting and alienating but discourages reflection about the role scientists might be playing in the equation.

Perhaps most troubling, as science communication scholars have noted, the finger pointing approach can trigger a vicious circle.

A deficient public cannot be trusted. Mistrust on the part of scientific actors is returned in kind by the public. Negative public attitudes, revealed in large-scale surveys, confirm the assumptions of scientists: a deficient public is not to be trusted.

So although we share with scientists the concern that their work isn't adequately appreciated or heeded in our culture, this book, *The Republican War On Science*, will not unfold as a litany of all the ways in which the public falls short

in its scientific knowledge.

Neither will we proceed by exposing all the nonsense that people are regularly fed in place of good science: quack alternative medicine claims, fringe attacks on mainstream environmental research, paranormal obsessions, and the like. We're more interested in divides and how to bridge them.

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# UNIONS

From Page One

Bellmon's marvelous HB 1017 education reform standards and otherwise turned each school district into the private preserve of superintendents and school boards. Fortunately, Gov. Brad Henry vetoed both.

The truth is, with GOP majorities in both houses, it's increasingly difficult for organized labor – and other Democratic constituencies – to win many lobbying battles. The future instead will be decided by a political numbers game: Targeting and winning enough legislative seats to, at least, neutralize the Republicans' worst instincts or, at best, to regain control of one or both houses.

The battle next year is especially important, not only because of the governor's race, but also because legislative redistricting will follow the 2010 census. A solid GOP majority,

in concert with a GOP governor, could creatively re-draw themselves into power for decades – a long, uninterrupted stretch in which to prosecute a war against the teachers union and other working Oklahomans.

The numbers are encouraging if the state's labor interests unite. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Oklahoma has the nation's 12th lowest percentage [6.6%] of union workers – but there is a higher percentage here than in neighboring Arkansas [5.9%] and Texas [4.5%].

Imagine 100,000-plus union members, of all stripes, working together. Suddenly, the odds don't seem nearly as long.

Similarly, a failure to work together in the 14 months ahead could plunge Oklahoma into the abyss for generations.

# LABOR

From Page One

buy it themselves.

Unions have been instrumental in efforts to increase the federal minimum wage, state minimum wages and in the successful living wage movement that has already resulted in over 150 local living wage laws nationwide.

Unions raise wages the most for low- and middle-wage workers and workers without college degrees.

In June 2006, the AFL-CIO launched the Gulf Coast Revitalization Program, a \$1 billion housing and economic development program to create low and moderate income housing, job training services, and thousands of high wage union jobs throughout the region.

Unions are crucial in passing legislation benefitting all workers:

- Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2007, providing an increase in the federal minimum wage.
- The Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, a comprehensive federal law ensuring safety in the workplace.
- Workers' compensation laws, giving workers injured on the job medical coverage and compensation for lost time.
- Mine safety laws strengthening mine safety standards and protecting the rights of mine workers.
- The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, creating the 40-hour work week and the first minimum wage.
- The Social Security Act of 1935, providing benefits to unemployed and retired workers.

Union members earn 30% more than non-union workers.

Nearly 80% of unionized workers

receive employer-provided health insurance, compared with 49% of non-union workers. Union members are also more likely to have short-term disability and life insurance coverage.

Across the economy, unions raise productivity by 19% to 24% in manufacturing, 16% in hospitals, and between 17% and 38% in the construction sector.

Union workers are often better trained on health and safety rules and union workplaces are more likely to enforce Occupational Safety and Health Administration [OSHA] standards.

Good union jobs give working families security and flexibility in a changing economy, and unions help enact workplace protections – like paid sick leave, family leave, and medical leave – that are crucial for all working families.

In 2007 the United Auto Workers [UAW] donated \$15,000 to provide free phone cards to members of the U.S. Armed Forces stationed overseas.

The UAW donated the money to the Veterans of Foreign Wars in support of Operation Uplink, which helps military families stay in touch during terms of military service.

Several unions participate in the Helmets to Hardhats program, which offers training and job placement in the construction industry to military veterans returning from active duty.

Union workers between 18 and 29 earn 12.4% more and have better benefits than their non-union counterparts.

One study reviewed 99 union arbi-

trations involving the employees who were fired or disciplined for missing work due to family care needs. The study found that in all but one case, the union's filing of a grievance led to overturned dismissals or reduced discipline.

Unions helped give workers the right to alternative work arrangements – such as flexible hours, telecommuting, and compressed work weeks – which allow workers to balance family and childcare needs with work schedules. Union members also receive 14% more paid time off than non-union employees.

Unions also helped increase workers' access to childcare by creating childcare centers in the workplace, lobbying for childcare subsidies, and providing workers with childcare benefits through collective bargaining agreements.

Among other union accomplishments:

The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, allowing employees to take unpaid leave during serious medical conditions or to care for sick family members or new children.

The Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978, outlawing discrimination against workers on the basis of pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions, and requiring employers to give pregnant women the same insurance and leave.

Unions fought for:

- The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009
- The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
- The Voting Rights Act of 1965
- The Civil Rights Act of 1964

• The Equal Pay Act of 1963

• Unions took an active role in the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, supporting Martin Luther King Jr., A. Philip Randolph, and others.

Unions have opposed discrimination and firing based on immigration status. They have spoken out against illegal detentions and human rights abuses.

Many unions support comprehensive immigration reform.

There are clear economic benefits for people of color. Latino union members make 51% more than non-union Latino workers, and are more likely to have health and retirement benefits.

African-American union members make 35% more than their non-union counterparts. Unionized black workers are also more likely to have health and retirement benefits.

Asian-American union members make 40% more than nonunion Asian-American workers.

Women in unions make 33% more than non-union women, and are more likely to have employer-provided health insurance and pensions. The benefits of union membership are especially large for women in low-wage occupations.

Does collective bargaining pay off? In 2002, hundreds of the largely female teaching assistants and teacher aides in the Ithaca, NY, school district organized a union and bargained to raise the starting salary from \$6.72 an hour to \$10.05 an hour.

What have unions done for you?

Everything.

– *Compiled by Frosty Troy*

# DEATH PANELS

From Page 13

end, but that's about it. We aren't all physicians or members of the Senate, where I'm sure you would never have a problem such as this.

Besides, how do you square advice like you provided to this lady with the rugged individualism you rightwingers preach about? You know, the whole "I got mine, now you get yours, dammit!" philosophy? Maybe this couple did "have theirs" yet still fell through the cracks. And now, your solution is to have them go to their neighbors?

Why should a corporate greed monger [Death Counselor?] be allowed to make the decision on whether we can live or die? Why are very real Corporate Death Panels OK in your book, but fantasy-land government death panels absolutely un-American and wrong?

I posit that any death panel be obliterated immediately. That would result in some of your corporate cronies quickly going by the wayside. However, that would not be true with the government, since no death panel exists, not even in the proposed legislation. Try actually reading the bill.

## SHOW SOME COURAGE

Why don't you have the courage to actually let us Americans decide for ourselves who has control of our health care? I think I know the answer to that. You are afraid that Americans will opt to eliminate greedy corporate-driven insurance which cares about nothing except for profits, whether or not it costs us our lives. Come on, Tom; be big enough to admit the obvious that you and the rest of your colleagues – Republicans and Democrats – are nothing but political whores, for sale to the highest bidder. [And that's not a slam against prostitutes that sell their bodies for sex.]

If the current American system is so great, why aren't other countries standing in line to change their system to something more in line with ours?

The latest polls show that Americans [OK, I'll say it] are literally dying for a single-payer system. I saw that a new survey commissioned by the AARP asked respondents to what degree they support or oppose "starting a new federal health insurance plan that individuals could purchase if they can't afford private plans offered to them" – a public option, in other words.

The results were as follows:

All: 79% favor/18% oppose

Democrats: 89% favor/8% oppose

Republicans: 61% favor/33% oppose

Independents: 80% favor/16% oppose

## WHOSE INTERESTS DO YOU REPRESENT?

Wow, Tom. Over 60% of Republicans. Who exactly is your "base constituency" now-a-days? I didn't realize Oklahomans were so well off, especially since Oklahoma has traditionally been one of the poorest states in the Union. Are you sure that you are looking out for your constituents' best interests? Or are your constituents the insurance industry and Big Pharma? And we thought we were a democracy! Silly us. If President Bush thought a victory of less than 3% was a mandate, what would he consider percentages like this to be?

It's kind of ironic that the irresponsible tax cuts that President Bush signed at the beginning of his war have cost this country roughly \$700 billion to date, and that the projected cost of a single-payer system of health coverage would cost approximately \$700 billion over the next seven years! Oh, that fuzzy math.

So, your answer to that poor lady is to look to her neighbors. Really? Is that your final answer? God help us. Because that's really no answer at all, and you know it. Typical of today's Republicans.

– *The author lives in Edmond*

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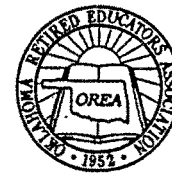
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