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The Republican Trinity

Whither Democrats?

By Frosty Troy

What is the Democratic Party response to the emerging reality – Republican first-ever control of the Legislature, a GOP congressional delegation and the potential loss of one or more statewide offices?

It's clear that the Democratic Party is in crisis, far from the days when being a Democratic nominee was tantamount to election in all but a few Republican enclaves.

For years Democrats assumed Republicans were too far out of the mainstream to be taken seriously. The Legislature was perennially controlled by rural Democrats.

In the good old days the state's congressional delegation – with the exception of Enid's Page Belcher – consisted of Democrats bringing home more than the state's fair share of federal largess.

Democrats didn't see the tidal wave coming. The result was the 1962 election of the first Republican governor, Henry Bellmon, a Billings wheat farmer. He defeated Democrat Bill Atkinson who actually ran on a tax hike.

Believing it was a fluke, legislative Democrats made Bellmon's first term a living hell. His successor, Republican Dewey Bartlett, fared little better. Only Republican Frank Keating knew how to play the game – he was veto-proof.

Meanwhile, Oklahomans were entranced by Ronald Reagan and his endorsement of religion in politics. He told the Southern Baptist Convention, "You can't endorse me but I can endorse you!"

Baptists, then and now, dominate Oklahoma politics. Enthralled by Reagan stressing morality, SBC leaders



shifted to the Republican ticket, bringing much of the flock with them.

This was a shocker coming from a denomination that had previously prided itself on separation of church and state [mainly to oppose Catholicism].

The state's best known Baptist, Sen. Robert S. Kerr, told me when I was the Tulsa Tribune's Washington correspondent that Oklahoma was going Republican. He gave me two reasons: Baptists and the Daily Oklahoman.

The Religious Right tide was so high that Kerr was punished for intro-

ducing presidential candidate Jack Kennedy in Oklahoma City. Kerr drew 100,000 fewer votes in his re-election campaign.

While most Democrats were oblivious to the approaching political shift, Republicans had spent years honing their ideas, emphasizing morals and family values.

The shift in Baptist and other fundamentalist pulpits was reduced to three G's: "God, Guns and Gays" and it resonated powerfully with most rank and file Democrats.

Public works, federal pork and constituent services took a back seat to abortion, biblical inerrancy, the Second Amendment and the "sin" of homosexuality.

Bellmon profited from the shift but he was growing disgruntled with the GOP's rightwing rank and file. After two terms in the U.S. Senate he was elected again as governor, then alienating his party by spearheading a massive tax hike to pay for unprecedented public education reform [HB 1017].

Meanwhile, Democrats still found

themselves on the defensive, with much of the Bellmon-smitten media siding with the party of the Three Gs.

To this day some Democratic leaders don't get it. As long as they let Republicans define the issues the GOP will continue to win the votes [if not the minds] of Oklahomans.

Democrats are eternally quarreling among themselves. Today the public rift is location of party headquarters.

Pulpit politics are the norm in virtually every fundamentalist church, always preached as moral issues – good vs. evil.

Don't underestimate Oklahoma rightwing Catholics and Pentecostal Protestants – they are the icing on the Baptist cake.

Half the homes in Oklahoma don't take a daily newspaper. The state's poverty and education deficits are extreme, leaving the people in the pews easy prey for the deep pockets of the GOP, constantly pounding the Three Gs – the political version of the Holy Trinity.

The Democratic Party is painted as secular, pro-gay rights and in favor of "big government," when in fact the average Democrat is conservative, church-going, gun-owning, government-bashing and Bible-thumping.

A recent poll shows only 18% of Oklahomans identify themselves as "liberal" – which should come as a shock to The Daily Disappointment. They see a liberal under every bed.

Few were shocked when Oklahoma was reddest of the Red States – not one county opting for Barack Obama – especially Democratic Little Dixie where angry racism is alive and rampant.

Where is the Democratic Oklahoma Think Tank? The state is carpeted from border to border with rightwing drivel from the likes of the Heritage Foundation and the wacky Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs [OCPA].

Where are the proactive Democratic leaders who will tell it like it is?

Fact: Republicans are immoral when they seek to kill public schools in favor of vouchers.

Fact: Republicans are immoral when

See DEMOS Page 19

Observations

Shhh!

There is a reason why the state's largest newspaper doesn't print the weekly voting records of Oklahoma's congressional delegation – since they endorsed them it would be an embarrassment.

Thankfully, the state's most professional newspaper, the Tulsa World, prints those roll call votes weekly. A recent week would be instructive for Oklahoma voters.

First, only Democrat Dan Boren voted to “disapprove the behavior of Rep. Joe Wilson” for yelling “you lie!” at President Obama. The vote: 240 to 179.

A bill to help the ailing U.S. Postal Service by using funds to contribute to health care for retirees drew only one Oklahoma no vote – John Sullivan of Tulsa. The vote: 388 to 32.

A bill to provide funding grants and loans for college students and early childhood education drew only one Oklahoma yes vote – Dan Boren.

In the U.S. Senate, Tom Coburn ducked the vote on denying funds for ACORN, accused of illegally registering voters, while Jim Inhofe voted for it. The vote: 83-7.

Biggest vote of the week involved the \$75 billion transportation bill, with Coburn and Inhofe voting against it because it included low-income housing. The vote: 73-25.

How can Oklahoma voters who don't take the Tulsa World know how to cast informed ballots if they don't know how they are being represented?

Our Gang

Oklahoma can claim another embarrassing first – the worst congressional delegation in the nation, a fact hammered by the national media but ignored in Oklahoma.

From cult members to a fresh-from-rehab alcoholic to a climate denier, our GOP gang keeps racking up negative headlines. The Nobel Peace Prize brought this response:

Item: Republican Sen. Jim Inhofe

said the President received the Nobel Prize for peace because he is stripping us of vital military defense.

Item: Republican Sen. Tom Coburn said the Nobel Committee is trying to “shift the way we look at the world.”

Item: Republican Rep. Frank Lucas said he hopes the President can live up to the acclaim since many more people deserved it.

Item: Republican Rep. John Sullivan said eight months is too soon to receive such an award and that he hopes something will follow besides words.

Item: Republican Rep. Mary Fallin said it's all about “adulation from the world community” but Obama's focus should be on domestic issues.

President Obama was as surprised as his critics but he accepted it in the name of the American people. We say reversing the Bush disaster and keeping clone John McCain out of the office merits the award.

Who would have thought that mormouth Rush Limbaugh would be on the same side as the Taliban.

Pity Party

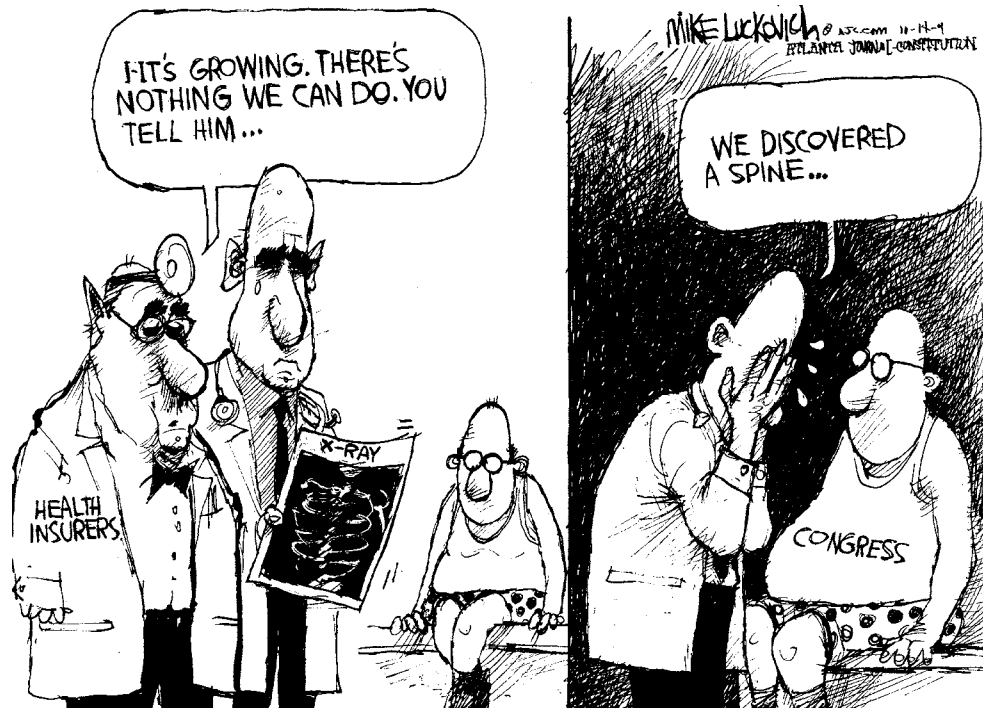
Sit in on any session of the Oklahoma House of Representatives or the state Senate and you will hear one Republican refrain: Our pitiful government is the problem.

That's ironic since the banking mess was a direct result of President George W. Bush and a GOP Congress, ordering hands-off by all the regulatory agencies, from the national parks [now a disgrace] to health care [47 million uninsured].

It all started under President Ronald Reagan, a wholly-owned subsidiary of General Electric – the company that made him a rich man.

Didn't he add a trillion dollars to the national debt?

We are the first to admit that government has its glitches, such as not long ago requiring decent car mileage; but how about the enormity of its successes?



The 40th anniversary of the creation of a brilliant technological breakthrough was spawned by one of those much-maligned Washington bureaucrats, Robert W. Taylor, a Defense Department employee.

He wanted the computer research projects he was supervising around the country “to talk to one another.” He envisioned these various research teams communicating instantly across a linked network – what we would later come to call the Internet.

No, it wasn't Al Gore.

Taylor tried to interest IBM in his fledgling network, but the computer giant wanted nothing to do with computers it hadn't made. AT&T, which controlled the telephone network, was equally wary.

Taylor was not to be denied so he forged ahead, proving the importance of a government role in fields such as basic research, which profit-seeking enterprises tend to shun.

Why? Because they require long-term investment and carry high risk.

Taylor said, “The idea that private industry can always do something better than the government is false and sad and divisive.”

Amen.

Experts?

Shucks, America doesn't need health care reform. To know what's really going on in Washington be sure to check with our do-nothing congressional delegation or tune in to Glenn Beck or Rush Limbaugh.

On the other hand, you might be interested in a joint survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation and Health Education and Research Trust [an affiliate of the American Hospital Association]. It found that, once again, health insurance premiums rose faster than either wages or general inflation.

The average premium for a family policy offered at work rose above \$13,300 in 2009 – up from \$5,800 in 1999. The average employer paid more than \$9,800 of that, while the workers contributed more than \$3,500.

Workers were also hit with larger co-payments and deductibles, while their policies often offered fewer benefits. There was no Social Security cost of living increase.

The premium increase this year is a relatively modest 5%, far below the 13% rate in the two previous years. But that still outpaces a 3.1% growth in wages.

Kaiser estimates that if increases revert to the average of the last 10 years, health insurance premiums in 2019 will average a whopping \$30,800, which it calls “a very scary number.”

Why the rightwing TV talkfest experts aren't worried? Beck makes \$13 million a year and Limbaugh rakes in more than \$28 million.

As for our congressional delegation – meld them and you wouldn't have one good political IQ.

What Facts?

The Oklahoma Birthers and Teabaggers cling to fiction even after being shown evidence to the contrary. In other words, “Don't confuse me with the facts.”

There are no death panels in any Democratic health care bill. Nor in the weak alternative offered by Oklahoma U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn. Medicare will not be lost.

The irrationality of these Okies leaves us agape. Are we seeing a new definition of “ignorant” creeping into Webster's Dictionary?

In a new study quoted in Atlantic magazine, social science researchers have found that people employ “motivated reasoning” to fend off any evidence that their strongly held beliefs are wrong. Many people feel that those are their opinions, and they hate to lose arguments.

Vince Lombardi once said, “Every time you lose, you die a little.” So when confronted with new, troubling information, ideologues selectively interpret the facts or use “contorted logic” to make the conflicting evidence just go away.

Thus a living will becomes a “death panel” and Social Security becomes a non-government program.

In the study, even when presented with compelling, factual data from a trusted source, many subjects still found ways to dismiss it.

Researchers found that exposing people to contradictory information actually “intensified” their existing beliefs, making them more rigid and entrenched.

Does that fit the current political debates on health care, Afghanistan, and Iran?

Give up trying to convince these political illiterates and concentrate on holding President Obama's feet to the fire on health care reform and getting us out of the deadly money pit of Afghanistan.

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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

Dart: To Gov. Brad Henry, taking 150 days before nullifying a parole recommended by the State Pardon and Parole Board. We've covered many governors – he is easily the laziest and most incompetent, his popularity notwithstanding.

Sign of hard times: food stamps last month hit a record number of poor Oklahomans: 553,880. That includes 25% of Oklahoma's children.

Laurel: To State Auditor and Inspector Steve Burrage for going after theft in school districts, where 75% was going undetected. It's due to inadequate or nonexistent internal controls. He means to correct that.

If a proposal to cut \$172 million from weather forecasting programs authored by Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-TX, becomes law the Severe Storms Prediction Center in Norman would take a huge budget hit.

Dart: To the Daily Disappointment for printing an incredible lie – budget cuts for nutrition centers for the elderly poor have nothing to do with the Legislature's \$770 million tax cuts!

Making English the official language of Oklahoma will not result in any federal penalties, according to the U.S. Justice Department. We hope the majority of Oklahomans learn to speak it correctly.

Laurel: To Sen. Jim Wilson, D-Tahlequah, for his plan to introduce legislation to take Oklahoma off the eight-state list that considers domestic abuse a preexisting condition.

It's official. After a three-year survey to get exact data, there are 1.57 billion Muslims in the world – with nearly one in four practicing Islam. [The Pew Religious Survey]

Dart: To Oklahoma's two U.S. senators, Tom Coburn and Jim Inhofe, among minority of male senators voting against Sen. Al Franken's bill to prohibit federal contractors from requiring legal waivers of employees. Two KBR women employees were raped but had no legal recourse.

According to the Jewish calendar, the New Year is 5770. The Chinese New Year is 4707. It means Jews went without Chinese food for 1,063 years – a period known as the Dark Ages.

Laurel: To Sen. John McCain, R-AZ, for sincerely congratulating President Obama for his Nobel Prize for Peace.

The average American farmer is 57 and farm income is now 89% off-farm income. No doubt the thousands of food poisonings reported each year are largely from imported food with no posting of its origin.

Dart: To Rep. Mike Ritz, R-Broken Arrow, bad-mouthing an Obama health care plan that has yet to take final form. Last time Ritz stood on a street corner, somebody tried to deposit a quarter in his head.

Wall Street is taking all the hits for a falling economy, but consider that consumer debt has hit \$2.5 trillion – \$8,000 per person. The average American has five credit cards with only 42% not carrying a monthly balance. [Manhattan College study]

Laurel: To Rep. John Trebilcock, R-Broken Arrow, for his work to protect newborns from the shaken baby syndrome. More than 3,000 Oklahoma babies were injured last year and 65% will have lasting disabilities.

Oklahoma is one of several states to discover we had 70-year-old war bonds. The search is on to locate them because they are as good as gold. Nationally they run into the billions of dollars.

Dart: To those who continue to dust off an old, old story – a third of Oklahoma college freshmen require remediation, mostly in math. That's the result of the false premise that all kids should go to college.

Oklahoma public school teachers are too busy enjoying their profession to pay attention to the fact they are the 48th lowest paid. In a new poll 98% "love teaching" and 75% would encourage young people to go into teaching. [Metlife 2008 Poll]



Laurel: To State Sen. Mary Easley, D-Tulsa, winner of the 2009 Child Abuse Prevention Award for Senate Bill 1138 amending the child endangerment law to include those who drive under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-CA, chairwoman of the Senate Ethics Committee, said an inquiry is underway targeting Sen. Tom Coburn, R-OK, for his involvement in the Sen. John Ensign adulterous affair.

Dart: To the Oklahoma State Chamber for the relentless campaign to destroy unions. Today only 6.6% of workers are unionized – giving Oklahoma an average income 20% below the national average. [AARP study]

A key indicator of Oklahoma's declining economy is the number of free and reduced meals served in the public schools – now hitting an unprecedented 56% of all students. [State Department of Education]

Laurel: To Oklahoma's CareerTech program, winner of a \$2.7 million National Science Foundation grant for its Cyber Security Education Consortium launched in 2002. It now includes 32 institutions in an eight state region.

The Tulsa World did Oklahoma a great service with its comprehensive analysis of the state's suicide rate – 578 in 2008. The hotline number is 1.800.273.8255.

Dart: To State Rep. Leslie Osborn, R-Tuttle, for a whining Op-Ed in the Daily Disappointment about the looming vote on regional average teacher salaries. Where was she when the GOP made that promise but broke it?

We can't let Grant Hastings slip out of this life without acknowledging that his invention of the Hasty-Bake Grill brought us countless hours of family pleasure over the years.

Laurel: To the U.S. Senate for an official apology to Native Americans for their treatment in America's early years. Rep. Dan Boren, D-OK, has introduced it in the House. President GW Bush vetoed an earlier resolution. No money damages attached.

Gov. Brad Henry has named retiring Tulsa Mayor Kathy Taylor to the unpaid position of chief of education strategy. Why? She has zero background in education.

Dart: To Rep. Harold Wright, R-Weatherford, the latest in a long line of legislators enhancing criminal sentences. He wants to enhance DUI – doing 85% of the sentence. How about drug court?

AT&T lost its long legal battle over property taxes it clearly owed – \$11.2 million. The state Supreme Court said interest is accruing, adding to the final tab. Shame on AT&T.

Laurel: To U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius for pointing to Oklahoma as an example of why health care can't wait. More than 498,000 Oklahomans are uninsured – 20.1% of the population.

It's hard to believe, given the TV monopoly of teabaggers, but 61% of Americans think the federal income tax is fair! Oklahoma ranks 50th in local, state and federal taxes combined.

Dart: To the rightwing morons cheering because the U.S. lost its Olympics bid and jeering because President Obama won the Nobel Prize for Peace. Whatever happened to American patriotism?

The second floor mezzanine of the new OU College of Allied Health building in OKC is being deservedly named for Marti Ferretti, chairwoman of the Department of Rehabilitation Sciences.

Laurel: To OKC attorney Jerry Fent for a lawsuit challenging alleged mis-spending of federal stimulus funds because the Oklahoma Constitution requires that they go through the State Equalization Board, not be spent willy-nilly.

American Airlines, Tulsa and the state should be proud of the cooperative efforts that have produced American's new 81,400 square foot aircraft maintenance building, keeping good jobs in Oklahoma.

Dart: To those ministers constantly harping on such irrelevant issues as homosexuality while Oklahoma is second nationally in people who have been married three times or more. [U.S. Census Bureau]

Women outnumber men in multiple marriages – 7.9% of Oklahoma women vs. 6.6% of men. Reasons include addiction, financial hardship and lack of maturity.

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

In response to Bobby Dunford's letter in the 10.10.09 Observer:

Dunford claims that "Medicare recipients are suspicious of any government health care plan resembling that of Canada or Britain." Isn't that what Medicare is? Can he substantiate this statement with facts? This claim is in direct contrast with an AARP poll that I cited in my article.

Dunford claims that I want a free ride. I re-read the article. No such request was made. I suggested a "government option" which someone could choose to take - or not. How is that a "free ride?"

Dunford notes that Medicare picked up part of the cost of a drug his wife needed, but doesn't mention the amount he had to pay. He states that he paid it "for a year." Point being ... what? There's potentially a huge difference in paying a fixed cost for a year versus paying a fixed cost for the rest of your life.

Tim Jarvis
Edmond

Editor, The Observer:

Your article "Schools" [9.10.09, Frosty Troy's notebook] should be posted on every school house door in the state!

Bruce Howell
Bird Island, OK

Editor, The Observer:

Your recent article on Gov. Henry Bellmon compels me to write this letter.

The first time I met him was in 1960. I was in Law School at the University of Oklahoma and was managing the speaker bureau at the time. I invited Mr. Bellmon, the Oklahoma Republican Chairman at the time, to speak. He accepted the invitation and did so. In that speech he spoke of Sen. Mike Monroney as "a willing agent of the Communist Party."

Having worked in the Senate for Sen. Monroney during my undergraduate days I was furious and had never heard anything so irresponsible.

It was many years later when Steve Wexler, a friend from those days working in the Senate, had become Chief-Consul of the Senate Sub-Committee on Education. Steve had drafted the legislation for the National Endowment for the Arts and the first student loan programs. He was a Democrat from Rhode Island and would have been considered a strong liberal. It

was in Steve's sub-committee on education that Sen. Henry Bellmon voted to approve busing to achieve integration.

One night, having dinner with Steve, he reflected that after 25 years of working in the Senate, Sen. Bellmon's vote "was the bravest vote he had ever seen cast."

Again, years later, I was driving from Oklahoma City to Broken Arrow. I picked up on Sen. Bellmon speaking from the well of the Senate. He was speaking in favor of our withdrawal from the Canal Zone and returning the Canal to Panama. He reminded me of a serious Will Rogers, his reasoning sound, his purpose magnanimous and persuasive.

One thing the press has missed about the man was his capacity for growth, his tenacity and courage to stand behind what his intellect told him was right.

As President Jefferson once said, "I owe my constituency more than my vote, I owe them my good judgment."

Scott L. Graham
Broken Arrow

Editor, The Observer:

Sen. Inhofe is using fear tactics to convince his constituents that our country will loose jobs and our economy will suffer if we don't develop nuclear power as a resource. We need to let him know that his children and his grandchildren will NOT enjoy the increased scarcity of water, much larger utility costs, higher incidence of cancer rates within the area of a plant nor will they survive a catastrophic meltdown in their area!

It is absolutely insane for any government representative to support this path as an alternative for energy.

Darla Reynolds-Sparks
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

My friend Connie Alagood [a good Democrat] from Moore ends all her e-mails with this:

"No one should die because they cannot afford healthcare, and no one should go broke because they get sick. Unknown."

Nadine Jewell
Norman

Editor, The Observer:

Watching the conservative and Republican reaction to President Obama's Nobel Peace Prize certainly tells us more about them than about



the prize. It should be remembered these are the same people who cheered when Chicago lost its Olympic bid, because it was a loss for Obama.

These people have shown they care not one whit for America or American values. They have instead shown they place their agenda, a one-party near totalitarian society, above the best interest of the United States.

Did they think some half-drunk clown who killed hundreds of thousands in a fabricated war was going to get such an honor?

No, these elements which shame the name of Democracy would, and do, demean any vestige of civility and common decency by attacking anyone who accomplishes anything for the public good.

Whether at the local or national level the message has been, and is, the same: If the ultra-conservative is not in charge, then no matter how much good can be accomplished, the project or person must be ridiculed and if possible hounded from the face of the earth.

Thus it is with the Peace Prize honor. Rather than showing a nation united they have instead shown us they would rather have the Tom Coburns of the world, people whose word isn't worth the utterance and Christianity nothing more than a sales tool for totalitarianism.

Richard L. Fricker
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

The unanswered question looms large.

For those that have already contracted the H1N1 virus themselves or had a family member become infected, how many of your wingnut neighbors have followed Sen. [doctor] Tom Coburn's suggestion that they should arrive en masse to treat you?

That's what I thought.

Kenny Belford
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

The media buried the truth about the 2000 election. George Bush appeared to have won Florida, and therefore, the presidency. Following Florida state law, the Florida court ordered a recount. The U.S. Supreme Court stepped in and shut the recount down. Bush was left as victor and be-

came president. But the whole world wanted to know who actually did get the most votes.

So a consortium was formed. It consisted of the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Tribune Company, the Washington Post, the Associated Press, the St. Petersburg Times, the Palm Beach Post, and CNN. It took almost a year and cost more than a million dollars.

All the news organizations got the results. Here are the headlines:

Wall Street Journal: *In Election Review, Bush Wins Without Supreme Court Help*

Los Angeles Times: *Bush Still Has Votes To Win In A Recount*

Washington Post: *Florida Recounts Would Have Favored Bush*

CNN: *Florida Recount Study: Bush Still Wins*

St. Petersburg Times: *Recount: Bush*

The New York Times spent the first three paragraphs supporting the headlines and they explicitly stated that Bush would have won even with a statewide recount. Finally, in the fourth paragraph was the actual statement of the consortium: "If all of the ballots had been reviewed under any of seven single standards, and combined with the results of an examination of over-votes, Mr. Gore would have won, by a very narrow margin."

The largest and most prestigious news organizations in the United States and in the whole world discovered a great and exciting story: The wrong person was president of the United States. Also, that the Supreme Court of the United States had interfered in an election to frustrate the actual will of the voters.

Why did they distort the story and all at the same time? A conspiracy? That would make a great story! But we will never know about it.

Frank P. Belcastro
Dubuque, IA

EDUCATION

America's Greatest Success Story

Despite an avalanche of social problems - drugs, alcohol, teen pregnancy, dysfunctional families gangs - American education today is more successful than than at any other time in history. If you doubt it, sit back and listen to America's foremost champion of education, Frosty Troy, founding editor of The Oklahoma Observer. He not only tells it like it is, he backs up his words with facts - which is more than the critics do. Everything America is or ever hopes to be depends upon what happens in our classrooms. Call Frosty at 405.760.1843 to book a speech.

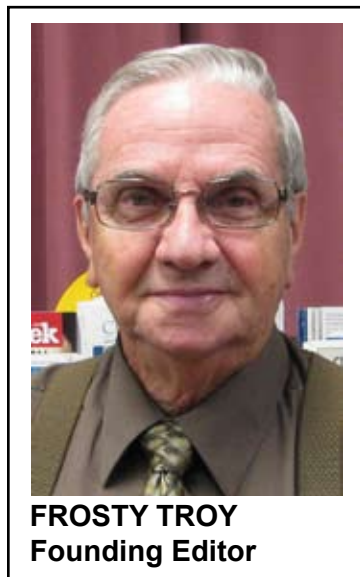
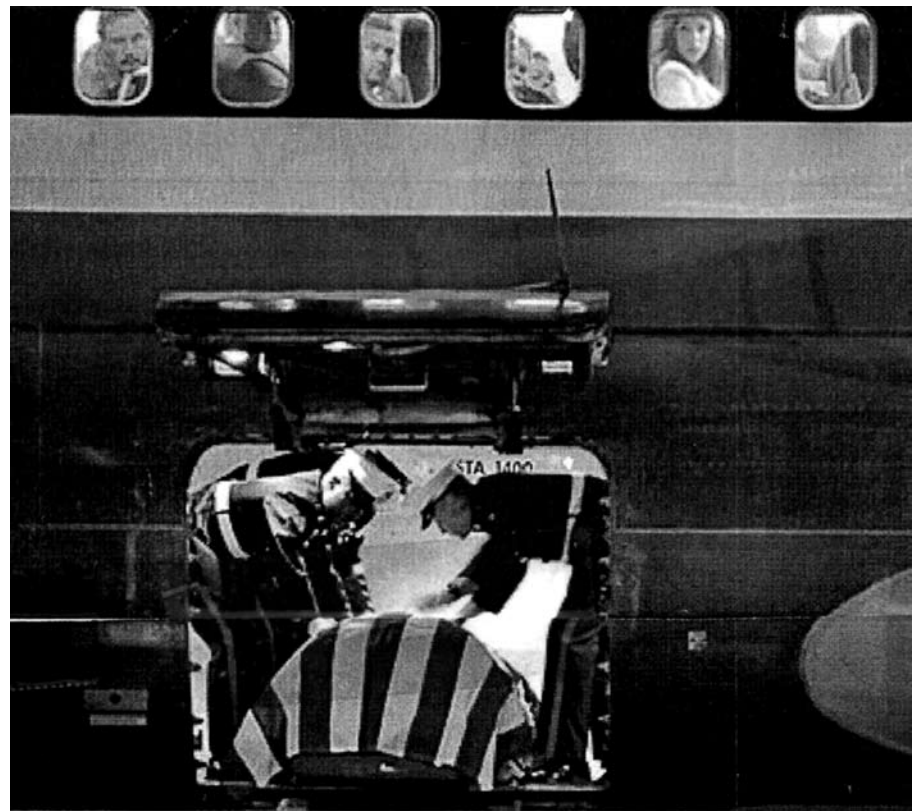
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Whiners



FROSTY TROY
Founding Editor

I don't remember any cameras when I brought my brother Kevin's body home from Heartbreak Hill, raked by a Chinese burp gun. I had to identify him at graves registration in Oakland – one of dozens of body bags in a huge auditorium.

Surely we all remember howls of protest from whining media for being denied the right to take photos of the returning coffins of America's war dead?

If you believed the media, the Pentagon's ban on such photos was part of a Bush Administration plot to hide the terrible costs of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

President Obama lifted the ban as long as families give permission. For a very few weeks, photographers from dozens of news organizations rushed to take photos of the flag-draped coffins at Dover Air Base in Delaware.

The impassioned advocates of showing the true human cost of war grew weary of the story and only the AP bothers to send a photographer anymore.

The Katy Depot in McAlester was jam-packed when I arrived with Kevin's body in the wee hours of the morning.

Nearly three dozen American soldiers have been killed in Afghanistan this month and the total for the year tops 220 – more than died in 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004 combined.

The same is true of Gitmo – the press rages about the Cuban detention center

holding alleged terrorists. Few report the truth – in 2006 the Bush Administration ordered that no new prisoners be housed there – and there have been none.

President Obama will continue taking heat for his promise to close it because numerous members of Congress in both parties are opposed to housing them in America. So what is he supposed to do – send them to one of the CIA's secret prisons?

Obama is being held accountable for his campaign promise – but what about Oklahoma's congressional delegation, unanimously opposed to housing any in America? Let the Oklahoma media ask them. If not Gitmo, where?

America Held Hostage

I was touched by a story on ABC News. Nine year old Chastity Turner was bathing the family dog on her grandmother's porch. It was the beginning of summer in Chicago. There was sunshine, a garden hose, a drooling, happy dog. Then gun shots.

Life was much too short for Chastity, ending that day when a bullet pierced the back of her neck, the result of a gang shooting from a moving van. She became one of more than 40 Chicago school children murdered by midyear.

Two teen Chicago boys were shot days later near St. Sabina Catholic Church. One was released from the hospital while the other remained in stable condition.

"How many children have to die?" asks Rev. Michael Pflieger, a Catholic priest. "How many children have to die before we say, we've got to do something? Everybody waits until it's your child."

In the first six months of this year 199 murders by guns occurred in Chicago streets. That was more American fatalities than in either Afghanistan or Iraq, yet President Barack Obama has yet to speak about gun regulation. Congress is terrified of gun legislation – fearing the NRA's fat wallet and Second Amendment rhetoric.

Religion & Politics

Oh, the things we think we know that are not so.

America has become a godless, churchless, humanistic society, right? It must be true because that's the message radio and TV evangelists use to haul in the big bucks – telling us we're on the low road to hell.

The truth is considerably different. America is the most church-going nation in the western world. In fact, for religion, the bad old days were early-day America. No, not the America of pious pilgrims and holy puritans. On the very day America won its independence, only 17% of colonials were church-going.

In Europe, you'd be lucky to find 20% of the population in a house of worship on Sunday. In England only one in five affiliates with the dominant Church of England.

In America, 65% of the population belongs to a religious denomination and 55% attend weekly worship services. That's more than twice the church attendance of Catholic Italy or France.

I make this point – based on solid research – because this nation is being sold a false bill of goods on a nearly hourly basis by a bevy of radio and TV theocrats. They should be careful what they pray for.

Those who want to Christianize America "from the courthouse to the White House" should know it is those countries where the government has melded with religion that churches have been abandoned.

The Gallup organization's polling shows that more than 90% of Americans believe in God – highest belief in the western world. Some are more pragmatic than others – only 75% believe in hell.

Even the presidential race degenerated into a battle over values. I would remind the candidates that a bedrock value is truth. And the truth is that with all its societal problems, we're the most religious of any Western nation in the world. That fact should not be lost in the clamor of radio and TV preachers bawling for money or politicians fishing for votes.

So the pulpit is taking action. Father Pflieger is taking aim against gun violence and using the church to do it. He is flying the flag outside the church upside down – a sign of distress used only in extreme emergencies. He says the city of Chicago is in just such an emergency.

The rest of the civilized world considers Americans barbarians, with more than 15,000 murders last year. Gangs control parts of large cities such as Chicago and Los Angeles.

Oklahoma authorities have identified more than 10,000 gang members, mostly in urban areas.

We feast on violent movies and violent television shows. Gun violence isn't the only problem. Bullying is epidemic in both private and public schools.

The latest manifestation of our blood lust is cage fighting – men [and sometimes women] with thin gloves, pounding each other senseless, beating at kidneys and ear drums, egged on by the roar of the crowd.

Domestic violence is rampant and prisons and juvenile facilities hold an immense number of violent criminals – most of whom will be back on the streets.

America is held hostage – racist goons showing up at Town Hall meetings packing guns. If indeed this is a "Christian" nation, what would Jesus do?

Precious Gift

We keep love by giving it away.

A happiness that is sought for ourselves alone can never be found for a happiness that is diminished by being shared is not big enough to make us happy.

There is a false and momentary happiness in self-satisfaction, but it always leads to sorrow because it harrows and deadens our spirit. True happiness is found in unselfish love, a love which increases in proportion as it is shared.

There is no end to the sharing of love, and, therefore, the potential happiness of love is without limit. Infinite sharing is the law of God's inner life. He has made the sharing of ourselves the law of our own being, so that it is in loving others that we best love ourselves. In disinterested activity we best fulfill our own capacities to act and to be.

Yet there can never be happiness in compulsion. It is not enough for love to be shared: it must be shared freely. That is to say it must be given, not merely taken. Unselfish love that is poured out on a selfish object does not bring perfect happiness: not because love requires a return or a reward for loving, but because it rests in the happiness of the beloved.

And if the one loved receives love selfishly, the lover is not satisfied. He sees that his love has failed to make the beloved happy. It has not awakened his capacity for unselfish love.

Hence the paradox that unselfish love cannot rest perfectly except in a love that is perfectly reciprocated: because it knows that the only true peace is found in selfless love. Selfless love consents to be loved selflessly for the sake of the beloved. In so doing, it perfects itself.

The gift of love is the gift of the power and the capacity to love, and, therefore, to give love with full effect is also to receive it. So, love can only be kept by being given away, and it can only be given perfectly when it is also received.

Thomas Merton
No Man Is An Island

The Kind Of Campaign Oklahomans Deserve



ARNOLD HAMILTON
Editor

The Democrats' crushing defeat in western Oklahoma's House District 55 special election earlier this month is more evidence of a sea-change in Sooner politics: The state's once-reliably Democratic rural areas are fast trending knee-jerk Republican.

A primary reason for the historic flip-flop is the unholy marriage of the pulpit and partisan politics that took root with Ronald Reagan's presidential election in 1980 [see Founding Editor Frosty Troy's magnificent cover essay on the state of Oklahoma's Democratic Party].

The unmistakable trend underscores a daunting reality for Oklahoma Democrats: The 2010 governor's race will determine whether they are positioned to regain their groove over the next decade – or are doomed to a generation or more as a distinct statehouse minority.

Without a Democratic governor to thwart the excesses of a reactionary rightwing GOP major-

ity in both houses – especially in redistricting – Democrats will be packed into fewer districts, diffused into Republican-majority districts – or both.

The result: 62-39 House and 26-22 Senate advantages for Republicans will grow exponentially.

Oklahoma politics is nothing, though, if not counter-intuitive.

In an era when the state twice overwhelmingly supported George W. Bush for president, Republicans dominated congressional and U.S. Senate races, and Democrat Barack Obama failed to carry a single county, Oklahoma voters:

- Twice elected Democrat Brad Henry as governor;
- Embraced Democrat Jari Askins for lieutenant governor;
- Twice re-elected Democrat Drew Edmondson as attorney general;
- Favored Democrat Lloyd Fields over incumbent Republican Brenda Reneau for state labor commissioner, and
- Elected Democrat Kim Holland as state insurance commissioner, even though her Democratic predecessor engaged in criminal misconduct that eventually led to his conviction and imprisonment.

Mid-term elections are rarely pleasant for the party occupying the White House, and many political insiders – including more than a few hand-wringing Democrats – are predicting a GOP tidal wave in Oklahoma next year.

Perhaps, but talk 13 months before Election Day is typically cheap. The reality is, many voters won't even begin to focus on the candidates until next August, when primary elections will determine the nominees.

Even so, I was excited two weeks ago to claim a second row seat for a gubernatorial forum featuring Edmondson and Askins at the University of Central Oklahoma, sponsored by the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy.

For the 500 or so assembled in UCO's Constitution Hall, it was a riveting 75-minute discussion of major issues facing the state – the sort of dialogue everyone claims they want, but rarely get in an age of 30-second attack ads and cable TV shoutfests.

I've heard more than a few Democrats lament that two of their best officeholders – and candidates – are vying for the same prize. Given the party's shaky status, wouldn't it be better for Edmondson and Askins to target different offices, rather than guarantee one will be tossed to the sidelines – perhaps permanently – by the end of next August?

It's too late for those discussions, but what became clear in both the UCO forum, and in Edmondson's appearance days later at the weekly Oklahoma County Democratic Party luncheon, is that these candidates get it.

They know Oklahoma cannot continue on the path set by government-hating Republicans that dramatically worsened a budget crisis that now threatens vital state services from senior nutrition programs to public education to corrections.

Both Askins and Edmondson seemed to recognize that \$770 million in tax cuts approved by lawmakers – and signed by Democrat Henry – during boom times now haunt state officials during a recession in which monthly 5% across-the-board budget cuts are now common.

Thanks to SQ 640, taxes cannot be raised without a super-majority of legislators or a vote of the people – neither of which is likely since many Oklahomans seem incapable of making the connection between taxes and good roads, bridges, schools, etc.

Worse, lawmakers can't help but pander to the anti-tax hysteria. Oklahoma's history is one of boom-and-bust, and the last great bust was only a quarter-century ago. Yet, over the last several years, legislators jumped on the tax-cutting bandwagon as oil and gas revenues soared. In a scene eerily reminiscent of the early 1980s, energy tax revenues suddenly plummeted. Last month, gross production tax revenues on natural gas were down nearly 83% when compared to September 2008. Will lawmakers ever learn?

Askins said it's clear to her that most legislators don't have a clue how state dollars are being spent, since budgets are crafted annually by a closed-door cabal that presents it to the rest of the Legislature in a take-it-or-leave-it format.

She argues that Oklahoma should join other states in scheduling a budget-only session every other year that would draft a two-year spending blueprint that automatically would require longer-term thinking about how the state targets its

revenues for spending.

Edmondson indicated he's willing to take specially-targeted revenue-producers to a statewide vote, if necessary, to protect vital state services.

"We've had tax decreases in times of plenty, and then when we need the resources back, it's almost impossible to get them," he said. "I'm going to find it very difficult to support or sign any tax decrease in my administration that further ratchets down the income base of the state of Oklahoma."

This is the kind of serious dialogue Oklahomans need – and deserve – as our state maneuvers through perilous economic times. What kind of state do we want? And how do we get there? It's never too early to start that discussion.

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Oh, No! Another Okie Black Eye

By Ryan Grim

With the White House zeroing in on the insurance-industry practice of discriminating against clients based on pre-existing conditions, administration allies are calling attention to how broadly insurers interpret the term to maximize profits.

It turns out that in eight states, including Oklahoma, plus the District of Columbia, getting beaten up by your spouse is a pre-existing condition.

An outraged Sen. Jim Wilson, D-Tahlequah, is drafting legislation to take Oklahoma out of that sickening category.

Under the cold logic of the insurance industry, it makes perfect sense: If you are in a marriage with someone who has beaten you in the past, you're more likely to get beaten again than the average person and are therefore more expensive to insure.

In human terms, it's a second punishment for a victim of domestic violence.

In 2006, Democrats tried to end the practice. An amendment introduced by Sen. Patty Murray, D-WA, now a member of leadership, split the Health Education Labor and Pensions Committee 10-10. The tie meant that the measure failed.

All 10 no votes were Republicans, including Sen. Mike Enzi, R-WY, a member of the "Gang of Six" on the Finance Committee who was working to hash out a "bipartisan" bill.

A spokesman for Enzi didn't immediately return a call from Huffington Post.

At the time, Enzi defended his vote by saying that such regulations could increase the price of insurance and make it out of reach for more people.

TRADE ASSOCIATION WANTS IT TO END

Robert Zirkelbach, a spokesman for an insurance industry trade group, America's Health Insurance Plans [AHIP], said that the National Association of Insurance Commissioners [NAIC] has proposed ending the discrimination.

During the last health care reform push, in 1993 and 1994, the industry sim-



ilarly promised to end discrimination against people with pre-existing conditions.

Murray pushed to include the domestic violence concern in this year's comprehensive health care bill.

In 1994, then-Rep. Charles Schumer, D-NY, now a member of Senate leadership, had his staff survey 16 insurance companies. He found that eight would not write health, life or disability policies for women who have been abused.

In 1995, the Boston Globe found that Nationwide, Allstate, State Farm, Aetna, Metropolitan Life, The Equitable Companies, First Colony Life, The Prudential and the Principal Financial Group had all either canceled or denied coverage to women who'd been beaten.

The Service Employees International Union has asked members to write letters to Congress regarding the exclusion and have quickly generated hundreds, says an SEIU spokeswoman.

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Anti-Abortion Law Is Being Challenged

Little wonder that an atrocious bit of anti-abortion legislation is being challenged in the courts. Whether you are for or against abortion, this bit of drivel is gross.

On Nov. 1, a law in Oklahoma will go into effect that will collect personal details about every single abortion performed in the state and post them on a public website.

Here are the first eight questions that women will have to reveal:

1. Date of abortion
2. County in which abortion performed
3. Age of mother
4. Marital status of mother [married, divorced, separated, widowed, or never married]
5. Race of mother
6. Years of education of mother [specify highest year completed]
7. State or foreign country of residence of mother
8. Total number of previous pregnancies of the mother; live births; miscarriages; induced abortions

This vicious bit of legislation comes from a pair of Oklahoma Republicans, Rep. Dan Sullivan of Tulsa and Sen. Todd Lamb of Edmond.

The bill also requires physicians to provide detailed information to the State Department of Health on any abortion they perform.

Lamb, a Baptist and former Secret Service agent, is running for lieutenant governor. He calls the law "common-sense legislation."

It's hard to understand how it could possibly qualify as "common sense" to pass such a flagrantly intrusive, completely unnecessary measure that will cost taxpayers \$281,285 the first year and \$256,285 each subsequent year.

In a rural county a woman could probably be identified by the posted questionnaire.

Nobody is kidding anybody - this is another attempt to do through the back door what is prohibited in the front door.

Unfortunately, this has made international news. MSNBC has featured it, arousing anti-Oklahoma feelings across the nation.

With this legislation in mind, it's an easy call to vote against Todd Lamb for lieutenant governor. As for Sullivan, he makes his living representing those who would deny an injured party the right to sue medical professionals or hospitals.

The lawsuit was filed by former state Rep. Wanda Jo Stapleton of OKC and Lora Joyce Davis of Shawnee, contending that as taxpayers they shouldn't have to cough up money for the anti-abortion law.

High-Speed Rail Funding Is Sought

The Oklahoma Department of Transportation has submitted its formal application for funding from President Obama's \$8 billion High-Speed Rail Plan.

The competitive application includes improvements between Tulsa, Oklahoma City and the Texas state line. The route is part of the nationally designated South Central High Speed Rail Corridor.

The cost of proposed high-speed rail improvements for the entire route is estimated to be approximately \$2 billion.

NOTHING BUT A CHARADE?

Critics derided the state effort as a sleight-of-hand aimed at diverting attention from the fact state highway officials are destroying the state's priceless central rail hub - at OKC's Union Station - in favor of a new route for Interstate 40.

If the state were truly interested in upgrading passenger rail service, critics say, it would be incorporating, not eliminating, the Union Station rail yard that connects to the state's four corners.

With only \$8 billion in high-speed rail funds available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, it's highly unlikely, critics say, that a small state with little congressional stroke like Oklahoma would gobble up one-fourth of the available funding.

ODOT's application proposes improvements to the existing Heartland Flyer route, including rail crossing safety upgrades, passing track, a double track from Oklahoma City to Norman and switch improvements along the route.

IT WOULD LINK TULSA AND OKLAHOMA CITY

Top speeds on the Heartland Flyer route between Oklahoma City and the Texas state line would be 90 mph, with an average speed of more than 60 mph.

High-speed rail service would be provided from downtown Oklahoma City to downtown Tulsa along the 1-44 Turner Turnpike corridor. Improvements to the route would include overpasses, acquisition of equipment and new signaling.

Top speeds between downtown Oklahoma City and downtown Tulsa would be over 150 mph, with an average speed of more than 110 mph.

Construction could start as early as 2010 and would take at least six years to complete.

ODOT performed an Environmental Analysis that includes two public meetings and a Service-Level Environmental Assessment as part of the application.

Next step: await word from the Federal Railroad Administration. No estimate of time has been given for the selection announcement, but all indications are after the first of the year.

And Then The Fight Started

My wife and I were sitting at a table at my high school reunion, and I kept staring at a drunken lady swigging her drink as she sat alone at a nearby table.

My wife asked, "Do you know her?"

"Yes," I sighed, "she's my old girlfriend. I understand she took to drinking right after we split up those many years ago, and I hear she hasn't been sober since."

"My goodness," said my wife. "Who would think a person could go on celebrating that long?"

How Erma Fares In A Nursing Home

By Dorothy Cassel

Editor's Note: This was passed out at a legislative committee meeting looking at nursing homes and the millions spent allegedly rewarding those who have gone above and beyond the routine.

As someone who loves and cares for her aged mother-in-law, my question is, "Out of five stars, how many stars are required in Oklahoma to receive adequate care in a nursing facility?"

I care a great deal for my mother-in-law, Erma. She is a friend and someone I hold dear. She is in a nursing home and together we aren't able to do the things we used to, but we make the best of it. I visit often.

At 102 years of age, Erma is a remarkable lady who has experienced God's grace through decades of happenings in Oklahoma. Living on a farm north of Verden, her life reads like living history. She is so wise and I respect her perseverance.

SHE IS STILL ONE OF US

It is a privilege to be with her and to attend to her as she continues on her journey. For, she is still among us ... still one of us ... a feeling, thinking person with thoughts and ideas and wants and needs.

One activity that she greatly enjoys is having the Bible read aloud. We read the Bible together daily and I enjoy that time with her so much.

Not only am I Erma's lifeline to the outside world but I have been a lifeline to others:

1. RN-Past President of the SHL of Oklahoma
2. DON, Director Of Nursing Home Nurses
3. DHS Advocate of the Year
4. Outstanding Citizen of El Reno
5. Creator of legislation known as Silver Alert

So, I have a clear understanding of the needs of seniors. When Erma required

the services of a nursing home, my husband and I chose a 5-Star Facility, Grace Living Center of El Reno.

It was the hope of my husband and I that Erma would receive excellent care, based upon the five stars. Today, we are here to report the following:

THE REALITY OF ERMA'S LIFE TODAY

On a regular basis, Erma is left incontinent to wet down her legs in to her socks and shoes. Erma is left with feces and urine caked upon her body. Erma's floor is sticky with urine and feces.

Erma's room is left with no towels, washcloths or soap in the dispenser for days. Erma's dentures are left in her mouth caked with food. Erma is given no knife at the dinner table and eats by bending over and grabbing the food with her mouth because no one will cut up for her what's on her plate and residents are allowed to sit down after one another and eat each other's leftover food, with residents feeding each other, at times.

Erma's skin has been left to dry and crack and staff does not apply the pharmacy cream.

Erma has grown less talkative and alert and obviously needs her family to intervene now.

I have voluntarily gone to the nursing home to clean and wipe Erma when needed and to care for her in every other way only to be told by Adult Protective Services, Specialist 111 OKC, that when I attempt to provide this care, "I am interfering with Grace Living staff and am perpetrating 'ABUSE' upon Erma."

After my distinguished career as a caregiver to so many, my name is now "mud" because of these accusations. I have now been threatened with arrest if I do not stop attempting to assist Erma but what am I to do?

I'm here to ask all of you, "How many stars does it take ...?"

Distracted Driving Drawing Attention

Eighteen states and the District of Columbia ban text messaging for all drivers, but the Republican-controlled Oklahoma Legislature dodged the issue this year.

The Oklahoma Highway Safety Office had a dire warning for an interim legislative committee studying the issue.

One study performed by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety in 2006 reviewed more than 100 experimental studies and found that cell phone conversation tasks, whether using hand-held or hands-free devices, did affect driving performance.

Two simulator studies have reported that talking on a phone has an effect similar to having a 0.08% Blood Alcohol Content [BAC] level when driving; however, while one-third of crash deaths occur in crashes involving drivers with BAC at or above 0.08%, there is no actual on-the-road evidence that cell phone-related crashes represent the same magnitude of problem.

BRAIN ACTIVITY IS REDUCED

In another study in 2008, participants were scanned with functional magnetic resonance imaging while maneuvering a vehicle. This study showed a 37% reduction in brain activity when listening to spoken sentences in a headset.

One study cited often in the recent news is the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute 100-car study. In this study, vehicles were equipped with video and electronic sensors for about one year. This equipment identified crashes, near-crashes and incidents requiring evasive maneuvers, as well as driver inattention.

Oklahoma statistics do show that distraction by use of electronic devices is a particular concern among young drivers. In 2007 and 2008, drivers in the 16-25 age group were reported to be in crashes involving distraction by an electronic device more than drivers in the three age groups 26-35, 36-45 and 46-55 combined.

OTHER DISTRACTIONS HIGHER

Distractions from other factors play an even more important role in crashes. In

2007 and 2008, 4,320 drivers in the 16-25 age group were reported to be involved in crashes involving other distractions. Again, this number is much higher than any other age group.

In 2007, there were 10 fatal crashes in Oklahoma involving a driver distracted by an electronic device. In 2008, there were 13.

In Oklahoma, driver distraction is mostly self-reported by drivers involved in a crash. Crash reports are completed by law enforcement officers at the scene and do show when a driver is distracted by an electronic device or by other factors.

In 2007, there were 24 fatal crashes involving a driver who was distracted by something other than electronic devices; in 2008, there were 19.

A SLIGHT REDUCTION IS NOTED

Injury crashes involving drivers distracted by electronic devices in Oklahoma also declined in the same time period. In 2007, 693 injury crashes involved these types of drivers; in 2008, the number was 661.

Injury crashes involving drivers distracted by other means [such as eating] was 2,138 in 2007, and 1,999 in 2008.

The number of drivers who were distracted by electronic devices and were involved in crashes rose from 1,736 in 2007 to 1,811 in 2008.

However, the number of drivers distracted by other means and involved in crashes fell from 5,520 in 2007 to 5,252 in 2008.

When all Oklahoma traffic crashes are considered, drivers who were distracted by electronic devices or other factors make up 2.2% of 75,059 total crashes in 2007 - 2.2% involved a driver distracted by an electronic device; 7.2% involved a driver distracted by something else.

In 2008, the numbers were similar: Of 72,667 total crashes, 2.3% involved a driver distracted by an electronic device; 7.1% involved a driver distracted by something else.

It is clear, the report stated, that distracted driving is an important and growing issue in Oklahoma, but we have yet to definitively determine the most dangerous types of distraction or the best methods with which to deal with the dangers.

Things You Learn Living In Oklahoma

1. A possum is a flat animal that sleeps in the middle of the road.
2. There are 1,947 types of snakes and 1,945 of 'em live in Oklahoma.
3. There are 10,000 types of spiders. All 10,000 of them live in Oklahoma, plus a couple no one's seen before.
4. If it grows, it'll stick ya. If it crawls, it'll bite cha.
5. "Onced" and "Twiced" are words.
6. It is not a shopping cart, it is a buggy.
7. "Jaw-P?" means "Did ya'll go to the bathroom?"
8. People actually grow and eat okra.
9. "Fixinto" is one word.
10. Tornado watches and tornado warnings are like television commercials. Just another annoying break in your favorite television program, giving you just enough time to go to the bathroom and get another cold drink.
11. Iced tea is appropriate for all meals and you start drinking it when you're two. We do like a little tea with our sugar.
12. Backwards and forwards [pronounced "backerds 'n' fords"] means, "I know everything about you that I need to know."
13. The word "Jeet" is actually a phrase meaning, "Did you eat?"
14. You don't have to wear a watch, because it doesn't matter what time it is, you work until you're done or it's too dark to see.

15. You don't PUSH buttons, you MASH 'EM.
 16. "No. Jew?" is a response to the question, "Did you bring any beer?"
 17. You measure distance in minutes.
 18. You switch from heat to A/C in the same day.
 19. All the festivals across the state are named after a fruit, vegetable, grain, insect or animal.
 20. You know what a "DAWG" is.
 21. You carry jumper cables in your car - for your OWN car.
 22. You only own five spices: salt, pepper, Head Country, Tabasco and Ketchup.
 23. You think that the first day of deer season is a national holiday.
 24. A day that reaches 100 degrees Fahrenheit is "just another day."
 25. You know all four seasons: Almost summer, summer, still summer, and Christmas.
 26. You describe the first cool snap [below 70 degrees] as good chili weather.
 27. Fried catfish is the other white meat.
 28. We don't need no dang driver's education. We've been drivin' tractors 'n hay trucks since the age of 8! Besides, if our mama says we can drive, then we can.
- Our thanks to Darla Reynolds-Sparks for this one

Bellmon's Letters To His Children

Editor's Note: Retired teacher Liz Parker said her first thought on hearing of the death of Henry Bellmon was, "What a great father! I had his girls in class and they couldn't stop talking about him."

His daughter Gail read two of his letters at his funeral, and we thought we should share them with you. It was what he was all about. Here are daughter Gail's introductory remarks:

All through his life Daddy was a letter writer. I am so grateful for that habit today. He has left us with a treasure as he recorded meetings with heads of state, moments of joy and times of sadness all written in his nearly unreadable handwriting.

Following in his beloved mother's footsteps he was the consummate teacher, never missing an opportunity to gently "guide" us. As anyone who ever toured a factory with Henry Bellmon can tell you he never stopped learning and asking questions. He instilled that in us and continued to teach us throughout his life.

Letters were used to encourage, to congratulate and on occasion defend himself. Though this habit began during his first term as governor, I want to share two of the more recent ones with you today. The fall of 1994 brought a letter after John and I arrived early at the farm to pick up Elliott [her son] who was 13 at the time.

The First Letter

Nov. 7, 1994

Dear Gail:

I am writing this in red ink deliberately, since it approximates the color of your complexion when your son rolled up the driveway Sunday in our old Ford pickup! It was easy to see how surprised, shocked and even angry you were. You appeared to feel something clandestine had been going on behind your back.

As evidence to the contrary I offer the cellular phone by which he was contacted after your arrival. Gail, all over the country rural kids learn to drive and practice their skills at young ages. It helps build confidence and a sense of accomplishment.

In addition it equips them to help out in a meaningful way when the occasion arises. Elliott seems to want – even need – to be really alone. Like most young people he probably needs an opportunity to think the long thoughts that are an essential part of growing up.

Where better than around a bass pond on a sparkling November afternoon with deer and wild game birds as companions? I meant no harm, Gail, and am willing to take the slight risk involved. After all – only prisoners live risk free lives – Elliott is growing up rapidly. My motivation is to help him become a grown up we will both love and admire.

Love,

Your Dad



The Second Letter

Nov. 26, 1993

Dear Gail,

As my "sensitive" daughter you may be interested in knowing some of the thoughts that were going through my mind last evening as you all struggled to erect the "plastic thing" in our living room.

Real live red cedar trees have long held a special place in the Bellmon household. It all started when my Dad dug up five small cedars as he and his family forded the Arkansas River at Ark City and brought them to the dugout on his new claim in the Cherokee Strip where they were planted.

Three years later they were moved to the "home place" where three have survived the heat and drought of summer, the cold and winds of winter as well as the good times of spring and fall. They are now over 100 years old.

During my early youth in the depression years, when there was barely enough money for necessities, my mother would saw off a carefully selected lower branch from one of the trees.

By placing it carefully against a wall and by decorating it laboriously with strings of white popcorn and red cranberries interlaced with paper people cut from red and green paper folded so each emerged holding hands with its neighbor, she managed to brighten up what would otherwise have been a bleak Christmas season.

After your mother and I were married I accidentally came across a patch of wild cedars growing near the creek south of the "big hill." By cutting above a low limb [which later grew upright into a respectable new tree], I was able to harvest our Christmas trees from the patch during the years you girls were growing up.

Some of my fondest memories are of Christmas seasons highlighted [for me at least] by my annual sojourn, ax in hand, to the cedar patch followed by three small girls having trouble – and needing help from their father – getting past weeds and brambles.

After some time spent artfully selecting the best tree for our purpose I would fell the candidate with the ax and we would drag it, butt first back to the pickup for the ride to the house. The decorating was done by your mother helped by you and your sisters.

The trees were far from perfect but they were "our trees" in every sense of the word. They briefly added a clean outdoor scent to the whole house which was – is – their undoing since cedar oil is a villain so far as your mother's allergies are concerned.

Also, after a few days the branches dry out and become a fire hazard. When taken down and pulled out the door after Christmas is over they leave behind a trail of brittle, sticky, dead needles like leaves which adhere to carpets and drapes into the next spring and summer – a reminder of Christmas past.

There is even one memory of taking the grandsons on a – hopefully – annual Christmas tree search. Our joint efforts produced a tree too large for the living room of our "new" house.

And now we have our "Made in Taiwan" "plastic thing" – what memories can it hope to breed? Of dust accumulated during the months it will be stored in some dark and deserted place, of cobwebs, perhaps of a nest of mice?

Clearly there will be no allergy for there is no scent, not hint of life, no danger, no challenge. The "plastic thing" is thoroughly safe, sensibly sterile – decidedly dead, forever.

Is the "plastic thing" symbolic of what life in the waning days of the 20th Century is coming to – safe – comfortable – secure – complacent? What will follow – monotony – boredom – frustration?

Life as I have known it needs its imperfections, its disappointments as well as its successes. Without challenge there can be no victory.

Maybe the above is too strong. Your mother's allergies are a real and important fact of life. If the "plastic thing" solves that problem I reluctantly, and with a real sense of loss, accept the inevitable. I greatly appreciate your concern for your mother but I wanted you to see another side of the Christmas tree controversy.

Love,

Your Dad

And you all thought he was simply a tough political negotiator!

Thank you Daddy for your wit, your wisdom and sharing this marvelous life. We love you and carry you with us each day.

BOOKS

On The Brink: Schriever, ICBMs And Cold War

By Tim Rutten

A FIERY PEACE IN A COLD WAR

Bernard Schriever And The Ultimate Weapon

By Neil Sheehan

Random House Publishing Group

560 pages, \$32.00

In the not-so-very-distant past, when newspapers had staffs large enough to include a variety of talents, there were journalists known mainly for their sure handling of breaking or specialized news and others valued mainly as writers. Among the latter there were always a few who labored so long and intensely over their stories that some colleagues – and frustrated editors – derisively referred to them as “stone cutters.”

It was meant to be an epithet, of course, but the metaphorically inclined sometimes would point out that those who work in stone, though they proceed slowly, sometimes produce monuments.

Neil Sheehan is both a giant among the American reporters of his very distinguished generation and, in the best sense of the term, a genuine stone cutter. As a combat correspondent for United Press International and the New York Times, he spent three years on the ground in Vietnam and, later, obtained the Pentagon Papers for the Times. Twenty-one years ago, he produced *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam*, a meticulously reported, Homeric account of our role in the Southeast Asian war that portrayed the idealism and delusion, the selflessness and self-deception that characterized the U.S. intervention there. The book won both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award.

BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF COLD WAR

A Fiery Peace in a Cold War: Bernard Schriever and the Ultimate Weapon has preoccupied Sheehan ever since, and, if the result lacks some of the passion and existential profundity that marked *A Bright Shining Lie*, it is nonetheless an important contribution to our understanding of those decades when the United States and Soviet Union held each other – and the world – in a balance of terror.

Sheehan structured his Vietnam book around the brilliant and, initially, iconoclastic Army Lt. Col. John Paul Vann. *A Fiery Peace* utilizes a similar structure, though here the protagonist is the late Gen. Bernard Schriever, father of the American intercontinental ballistic missile and through it – the author argues – the United States’ military and civilian space programs.

Like others, Sheehan also contends that ICBM forces were the terrible fulcrum on which the strategic balance between the United States and Soviet Union rested throughout the Cold War.

In Sheehan’s telling, Schriever – who came to America as a German immigrant schoolboy and served with distinction in World War II – was that rare thing, a scientifically minded visionary of both great personal integrity and bureaucratic savvy. Melding those things, he not only identified the centrality of bomb-bearing rockets to the nation’s continued security but also recognized and promoted whole new systems of weapon development to realize his goals.

In the process, he confronted – and bested – not only a host of skeptical military superiors and politicians but also corporate fat cats eager for new sorts of profiteering.

KEY CONTRIBUTORS TO U.S. SECURITY

While Schriever is at the center of Sheehan’s history, the author surrounds him with a compelling – indeed, fascinating – cast of characters whose critical contributions to U.S. security deserve to be honorably remembered. None of these is more mesmerizing and, ultimately, tragic than the great Hungarian-born mathematician and physicist Johnny von Neumann. His formulation of “game theory” would be critical to the Cold War’s nuclear strategy [his mathematical modeling of implosion was a key to the development of the first atomic bomb].

As chairman of the committee of scientists and cutting-edge technologists Schriever put together to advise him, von Neumann would deliver most of the brilliant briefings that convinced then-President Dwight D. Eisenhower to approve the first ICBM program on terms that made its unprecedentedly rapid development possible. A little more than a year later, von Neumann was dead of cancer.

A secular Jew driven from his native land by prewar anti-Semitism, von Neumann – terrified of oncoming mortality – converted to Catholicism on his deathbed only to be denied burial in Princeton’s Catholic cemetery because he’d divorced his first wife.

Lt. Col. Edward Hall, the “rocketry genius” who devised the Minuteman missile that became the cornerstone of U.S. nuclear deterrence, was another fiercely patriotic refugee from another kind of anti-Semitism, the sort that blocked his prewar progress as an engineer and led the New York-born young man to change his name from Edward Nathaniel Holtzberg. His equally brilliant brother was, along with Klaus Fuchs, the most important of the Soviet spies who penetrated the Manhattan Project.

DESIGNER OF HIGH-TECH WEAPONRY

Simon Ramo – the brilliant scientist-engineer whose last name became the “R” in TRW – is brilliantly profiled in this book, and the full measure of his invaluable contribution to U.S. defense comes clearly to the fore. You get a taste of the man he’d become when – as a poor but gifted student hoping to make the most of college – he gambled and spent all his savings to buy a better violin in hopes of winning a music scholarship. He did, thus enabling him to devote himself full

time to his studies rather than working through school. He later would make one of the most critical contributions to Schriever’s project by developing a revolutionary means of designing and producing high-tech weaponry.

Gen. Curtis LeMay, the flinty – some would say half-mad – proponent of strategic bombing and preemptive war, emerges chillingly from these pages as Schriever’s main theoretical and bureaucratic antagonist.

On the other hand, Eisenhower – who, as a young staff officer, had written a paper warning that the need for industrialized military productions would confront the country with unprecedented political dangers – comes across as both open-minded about the strategic necessity of the ICBM initiative and supremely sane about its implications.

Similarly, the implications of John F. Kennedy’s remarkable sobriety and steadiness during the Cuban Missile Crisis seldom have been as well recounted as they are here.

THE STRATEGIC FRONT DETAILED

The Cold War was a conflict of immense complexity fought out on ideological, economic, diplomatic, aesthetic, tactical and strategic fronts.

Sheehan has given us an engrossing account of the strategic front, though it suffers to a certain extent from the absence of critical nuclear war-and-deterrence theorists like Bernard Brodie and Albert Wohlstetter, to name just two.

That lends to some parts of *A Fiery Peace* a feeling of gee-whiz-let’s-put-on-a-show, as the protagonists here concerned themselves with the weapons and not their potential consequences.

Kennedy dealt with that in the acrimonious meeting he had with his military advisors in which they – particularly LeMay – violently dissented from his adoption of quarantine rather than military action against Cuba.

As Kennedy said afterward, “These brass hats have one great advantage in their favor. If we listen to them, and do what they want us to do, none of us will be alive later to tell them that they were wrong.”

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Nobel Peace Prize Top Ten Reasons Obama Deserving

By David Walters

Congratulations and well deserved, President Obama.

Frustrated while listening to those who would argue that President Obama has done nothing to deserve the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize, I hoped to quickly borrow someone else's list to answer the critics. I searched the Internet and was surprised by the negativity – link after link of virulent statements claiming he had no accomplishments. Denied the lazy way out, I made my own Top 10 list of accomplishments related to world peace.

1. *Inspiring a nation and changing perception of America around the world.*

All along the campaign trail, millions of Americans cheered candidate Obama's views on the advantage of – and his intent to conduct – personal diplomacy in foreign policy. Contrast this with his opponent, Sen. McCain, who sang “bomb, bomb, bomb ... bomb, bomb Iran” at a campaign stop. Obama's message resonated outside the U.S. as well. More than 200,000 gathered in the streets of Berlin to hear Obama call for nuclear disarmament. It was a bold and brave stance in the middle of a highly competitive presidential campaign. Perhaps when the Nobel Committee referred to “extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy,” they were aware of the full history.

2. *Reclaiming America's moral high ground.*

Obama reclaimed America's moral high ground when he announced the closing of secret prisons that violated both our Constitution and the sensibilities of the world and declared an end to U.S.-sanctioned torture.

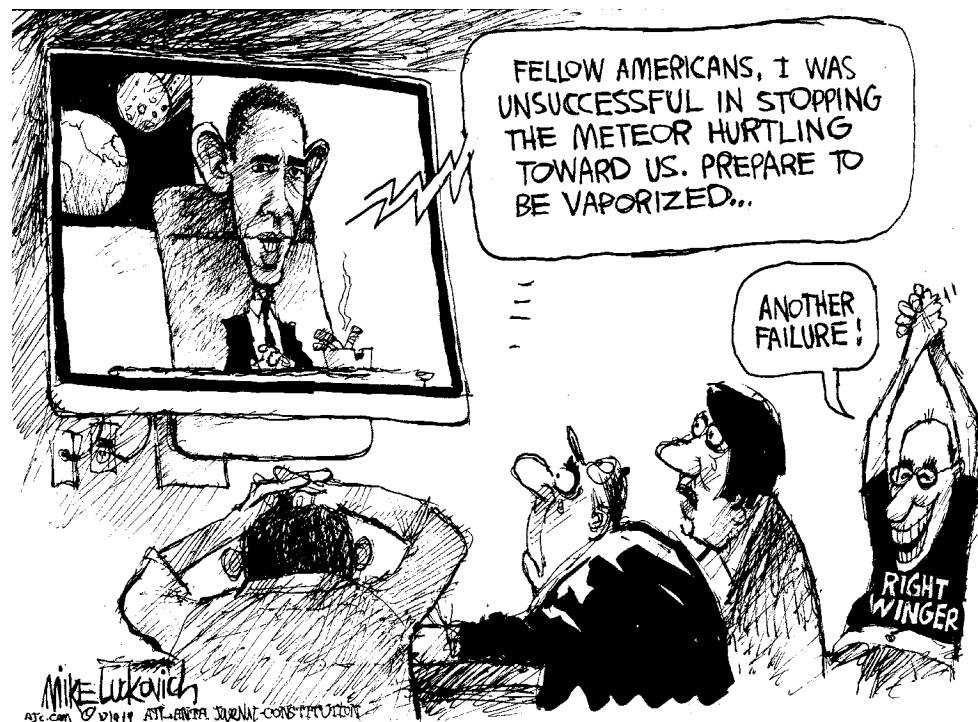
3. *Reaching out to Iran with diplomacy rather than belligerence.*

A remarkable and generally non-credited achievement is the positive impact of President Obama reaching out to Iran with diplomacy rather than belligerence. As a result, the Iranians decided they could now quit hating the U.S. in unison and turn their attention to getting rid of the morons running their own country, leading to the remarkable protests we witnessed following their last election. They have damn near thrown their freakish rulers out and now Iranian leaders are submitting to nuclear inspections. NONE of this was possible under a blustering Bush.

4. *Re-Engaging the world.*

Instead of ignoring the Israel/Palestinian conflict for seven years as the Bush administration did, Obama immediately engaged the issue with significant results. U.S. Envoy George Mitchell and former U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair, with Obama's strong guidance and support, have dramatically eased tensions. Obama has demonstrated a sharp eye for talent on the ground. The maturity and professionalism to put a high-profile, brilliant political rival in charge of the State Department, and to have experienced envoys like Richard Holbrook crisscrossing these trouble spots, is much different than the former U.S. policy of making broad and inflammatory ideological statements and ignoring the problem.

5. *Focusing attention on the real bad guys.*



At the same time Obama reaches out diplomatically, the effort to get the really bad guys has been ramped up. I was in Pakistan when a drone took out Baitullah Massud, the murderous leader of the Pakistan Taliban with strong ties to Al Qaeda. Drone attacks have gone up sharply with significant results. Peace is dependent on safety and finally we are using surgical attacks rather than blunt force.

6. *Joining world efforts to address environmental issues.*

Obama told the world that we are no longer going to work against environmental improvements and global warming initiatives. The U.S. finally announced that carbon emissions from the world's largest polluter are going to be reduced. Re-joining the world in this effort in a cooperative way has had enormous impact.

7. *Stabilizing Pakistan*

Tripling non-military support for jobs in Pakistan to try to stabilize this nuclear-armed unstable country is the right step at a critical time.

8. *Re-Evaluating Afghanistan*

Conducting and allowing the first ever open debate and discussion about the Afghan conflict with generals and numerous participants and then making a firm decision as to how to proceed is radically different than the past and very helpful to the future security of the U.S. and the world.

9. *Reducing Russian tensions*

Reaching an agreement with Russia to enlist their help on Iran by moving a worthless land based missile defense system to a highly useful mobile ship based system has radically reduced tensions with this historical enemy.

10. *Changing the world with words – and actions.*

His opponents like to downplay Obama's oratorical skills. They are wrong to do so. The Cairo speech changed the world. I was in London with a room full of Muslim businessmen who held a negative view of Obama and the U.S. Following the speech, I saw their attitude change dramatically. Obama's blunt, truthful

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It's A Shame Ditto-Head Class Is All Low

By Edwin E. Vineyard

As an octogenarian, this writer does not follow all the current slang employed by the younger set in describing the conduct of others. Back in the olden years, we had a saying about people whose behavior clashed with our commonly held code of social acceptability. We would say, “He has no class!”

One thinks that it might be well to drag out this descriptive term, and apply the connotation which it carries to current conduct. We have seen so many examples of rowdy, boorish, vulgar, unsportsmanlike, uncivil, bully, and just plain asinine public behavior recently. It is time to call such conduct what it is, and to call the perpetrators to accountability as “having no class.”

Certainly we have seen some really bad, “no class” behavior from segments of our population recently.

This comment is not directed now at the verbal brawls of the summer Town Hall meetings, although those examples would certainly qualify as standouts for the “no class” designation. We are not referring now to the diatribe of lies and distortions by political pawns of the insurance industry about health care proposals intended for the welfare of citizens of this country. However, that political misbehavior would certainly qualify as “no class.”

OBAMA'S OLYMPIAN EFFORT

President Obama, showing great class, went to Europe attempting to aid with the American city of Chicago's bid to host the Olympics, while also having a face meeting with Gen. Stanley McChrystal from Afghanistan. The Olympics would have been a tremendous boost to that struggling metropolis, and it would have been good for America. The award went instead to a city in Brazil, no doubt deserving in some way other than fielding teams of competitive Olympians or supporting past events.

At this news, videos show crowds attending a conservative political organization gathering cheering and deriding the failure of our president to accomplish a goal which was evidently already decided before his entry into the game. The opposition's national committee chair and dozens of members of his party showed their glee to the public. Their conduct said, “Anything bad for Obama is good for us – even if it hurts the country.”

We have a term to apply for those who cheer a loss of an American president of the opposition party in a positive effort to benefit the country or any segment thereof internationally. They have no class! Further, they could be dubbed as exhibiting unpatriotic conduct.

JEERING THE NOBEL RECOGNITION

We have just seen the surprise international honor of the Nobel Peace Prize come to an American, who happens to be the elected leader of our country. Do all Americans rejoice, as might be expected, for such an honor? No, there were no cheers for our president from the opposition party, only derision and belittling of the man and of the honor itself. That response came from the titular and other leaders and members of that party. It is appropriate for us to say, “You have no class!”

Further, we would like to extend that label to all those political and news pundits who questioned, “What has he done to deserve this honor?” “This award was for not being George Bush, who was disliked and hated abroad,” they said. “This was given on the forward expectation rather than things already done,” they said.

We would like to extend the designation, although not quite as severely, to all these pundits, “You have no class! You are supposed to be intellectuals, and this is all you can come up with?”

THE DITTO-HEAD DIATRIBES

Harsher terms might be employed for those talk show hosts, AKA party leaders, who have used the public airwaves to deride the honor extended to our president. Picking up negatives from the extremist Muslim group, the Taliban, Rush Limbaugh declared his agreement with those now killing our troops in Afghanistan. With something beyond his usual pomposity, he derided Mr. Obama, the Swedish Nobel committee, and declared our president had won the world's favor by degrading his own country.

To Mr. Limbaugh, Glenn Beck, their friends, and ditto-heads, “You have no class!” Your public statements tell us that you think, “Anything good for Mr.

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'Beckerheads' Worship Glenn's Insanity

By Sheila Samples

I didn't know Van Jones. I didn't know Van Jones was a friend of mine – at least not until the stench billowing from the Fox Hate Channel became so foul I was forced to take a closer look at this terrifying creature. No – not Jones, whom President Obama wisely had hired as Special Advisor for Green Jobs at the Council on Environmental Quality – but the sobbing, lying, deliriously insane Glenn Beck.

According to Beck, who began his assault on Jones in a July 23 disjointed rant, wherein he claimed Jones is not only “a communist-anarchist radical,” but a former black nationalist, avowed communist-anarchist radical. Or something. Anyway, according to Beck, Jones is really, really dangerous – a racist just like Obama, who has a “deep-seated hatred for white folks” and whose entire agenda is restructuring America into a land of reparations, social justice and jobs for minorities.

A PODIUM TO SPEW HATE

The appalling thing about the intellectually challenged Beck, like the Limbaugh-loon he so desperately struggles to impersonate, is that he is given a podium from which to spew his hate. Even more appalling is that he is allowed – encouraged – to do so with no reservation, no regulation, and no repercussion. Unless, of course, you consider the multi-million-dollar salary he receives for telling lies and for whipping paranoid masses of gun-toting racists into glassy eyed fury, then it's easy to see Beck is hitting the repercussion jackpot – over and over again.

As Alexander Zaitchik points out in his three-part Salon series on Beck's background, Beck has always been desperate for two things – attention and ratings. And he learned early in his career that nothing works as quickly nor as well with the media as personal insults, public humiliation and character assassination.

With few exceptions, the mainstream media fawn over him, laugh at his blatant lies, his death threats and his fake tears. Beck has long been obsessed with destruction – even murder. In March 2001, he fantasized about killing Rep. Charles Rangel, D-NY, with a shovel as well as lining up several others and shooting them in the head. On his May 17, 2005 Glenn Beck program, he chortled:

MUSING ON-AIR ABOUT ASSASSINATIONS

“Hang on, let me just tell you what I'm thinking. I'm thinking about killing Michael Moore, and I'm wondering if I could kill him myself, or if I would need to hire somebody to do it. No, I think I could. I think he could be looking me in the eye, you know, and I could just be choking the life out – is this wrong? I stopped wearing my What Would Jesus – band – Do, and I've lost all sense of right and wrong now. I used to be able to say, 'Yeah, I'd kill Michael Moore,' and then I'd see the little band: What Would Jesus Do? And then I'd realize, 'Oh, you wouldn't kill Michael Moore. Or at least you wouldn't choke him to death.' And you know, well, I'm not sure.”

And more recently, on his Aug. 6 Fox program, Beck regaled at least himself by giggling about putting poison in House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's wine.



Not a pretty picture. No – not Beck, who should have the FBI nipping at his heels like other “homegrown terrorists” for threatening the lives of legislators and sowing dissent within the government – but the media, going all Hunter Thompson on us, curled up at Beck's feet like so many chimps in a zoo cage, feverishly pumping out masturbatory praise for the low-class dirty trickster.

CELEBRATING JONES' DEMISE

When Jones, rather than sink to Beck's level, resigned his position over the Labor Day weekend, some in the media were ecstatic. NBC Deputy Political Director Mark Murray whooped it up in his Sept. 8 “First Read:”

“Van Jones resigns: Speaking of distractions, Glenn Beck got his man – Van Jones, who resigned from the administration over the weekend. And judging by how Beck responded to the news of the resignation of the mid-level staffer, he won't be satisfied with this scalp. Beck made it sound like he might even have a list of 'Who's next,' which will embolden defenders of the administration to start focusing on Beck and others. [...] As for Jones, clearly, that 9/11 stuff made him indefensible and does call into question the White House's vetting process. The irony in all of this: Beck never lost his job for calling Obama a racist, but Jones did ...”

Time magazine, a partner of CNN, has led the charge to cover Beck's every move, every word, every teardrop in a desperate effort to get a piece of Beck's attention-and-ratings action.

Then, of course, there's Time's photo gallery and the much-heralded Sept. 17

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NOBEL

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words released the steam from the “hate the U.S. balloon” that drives so much violence. If you have not read it, please Google it and read it. Words are important, particularly when they come out of the mouth of the President of the United States. Obama's ability to so beautifully articulate the hopes and dreams of the U.S. – and how closely they align with the desires of billions around the globe who want only good things for their families – is important.

Frankly, the list goes on and on. Imagine trying to save the meltdown of an economy that was left in his lap while simultaneously dealing with two wars, advancing health care reform, financial controls to avoid another depression, energy policy advance, and tackling the 10 items on my list ... in just nine months. They should have given him two Nobel Prizes.

French President Sarkozy had it right when he said, “This award symbolizes America's return to the hearts of the people of the world.” UN Secretary-General

Ban Ki-moon said, “President Obama embodies the new spirit of dialogue and engagement on the world's biggest problems: climate change, nuclear disarmament and a wide range of peace and security challenges. President Obama's commitment to work through the United Nations gives the world's people fresh hope and fresh prospects. We at the United Nations highly applaud him and the Nobel Committee for its choice.”

The Nobel Peace Prize is frequently about efforts rather than completed accomplishments and often intended to give momentum to causes, inspiring others to courageously pursue peace.

I agree with MSNBC host Rachel Maddow whose clear voice is resonating ever stronger, “The President of the United States has received the Nobel Peace Prize. By any reasonable measure all Americans should be proud.

– The author served as governor of Oklahoma from 1991-95

DITTO-HEADS

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Obama is bad for us – even if it honors our country.”

We wonder whatever happened to all those campaign posters that said, “Country First.”

WHO IS MORE DESERVING?

Personally, this writer would in no way question the awarding of the Nobel Prize to our president, even though it was a surprise to all of us. He challenged himself to name another person who deserved it more. Although admittedly a bit short on worldwide knowledge and experience, this writer cannot think of another person who would have deserved it as much.

Since Mr. Obama first came on the national and international scene, even while still engaged in running for his party's nomination, he began to revive the world's hopes of something different and something new. He brought hopes of a new era

in international relations.

With the emergence of this nation's more restrained and respectful policy approach to other countries, and the absence of bullying and threatening, “axis of evil” accusations, and “cowboy diplomacy” of the past, Mr. Obama brought a season of good will and optimism about the world's future. It is difficult for us to see how any other candidate, within either political party, could have brought these positive changes so quickly. Nor could any other world figure have done so.

With his personality, his rhetoric, and his progressive actions in diplomatic outreach, Mr. Obama has changed the international climate already. He deserves the Nobel Peace Prize as would no other.

He has class!

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

Bloviators Can't Abide A Black President

By Joe Conason

With admirable calm, President Obama has sought to deflect the supercharged politics of race by expressing his optimism about American attitudes and ignoring the most extreme statements by his critics. For his own sake, as well as the nation's, he is wise to give a pass to the likes of Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh. That is not, however, what they deserve.

The behavior of those media provocateurs over the past few months is almost beyond parody. They call the president a racist, even though there is no evidence of prejudice on his part and much evidence to the contrary. They demand that nobody should ever point out racial prejudice, but spend hours on the airwaves making false claims of bias against whites. And they whine constantly about being called racists, even though the president has never made that accusation against them.

"You can't get your agenda," protested Beck the other day, speaking of the president, "so you unleash the hounds and point the fingers, and everybody is a racist." That was around the same time Obama's spokesman said quite emphatically that the president does not believe his opponents are motivated by racism.

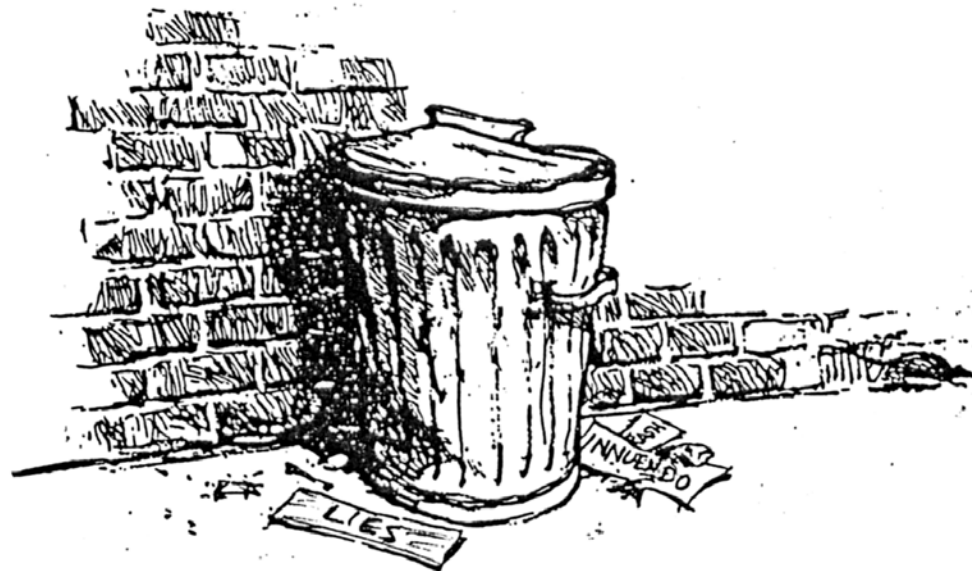
HISTORY OF RACIAL INSENSITIVITY

But since Beck and Limbaugh seem to be obsessed with this touchy subject, let's examine their record. It turns out that both established their keen racial sensitivity on air long ago.

Back when Beck was simply a coked-out zoo-style morning talk jock on a Kentucky station – rather than a national political philosopher – he regularly mimicked African-American speech patterns for fun. "He used to do a funny 'black guy' character, really over the top," recalls one of his former colleagues, quoted by biographer Alexander Zaitchik in a fascinating Salon.com profile.

Beck also became a devotee of the Mormon crank author and conspiracy theorist W. Cleon Skousen, whose writings he enthusiastically promotes to this day. Among Skousen's pet theories was that Southern slave owners were actually the victims of the plantation system, which according to him favored the lazy and pampered slaves, whose children he called "pickaninnies." Like his ultra-right friends in the John Birch Society and kindred groups, Skousen was a dedicated foe of civil rights legislation.

Does that mean Beck is a bigot? If Obama had ever endorsed the writings of Louis Farrakhan, replete with vile slurs against whites and especially Jews, that would certainly be enough for Beck – who says he believes that the president



has "a deep-seated hatred for white people, or the white culture." That must be why the Obama White House has so many whites of all ethnic and religious backgrounds advising the president, from the Cabinet down.

SPREADING RACIAL POISON

As for Limbaugh, perhaps nobody remembers the time that he told a black caller to "take that bone out of your nose"; or the time when he said the non-violent NAACP "should get a liquor store and practice robberies"; or the many times when he would play the "Movin' On Up" theme from the old Jeffersons TV show to accompany his commentary about Carol Moseley Braun, the first black woman in the United States Senate. He used to do mocking bits in black dialect, too. But who needs to remember those sorry episodes when he continues that ugly pattern on air nearly every day?

The Limbaugh show reached a new low recently when he began a campaign around a school-bus incident in Belleville, IL, where two black students were videotaped beating up a white kid. Police authorities first said they believed the assailants were motivated by race, but later said it was just a nasty bullying assault [for which the two little thugs are now being prosecuted].

But Limbaugh could not resist the opportunity to turn that nastiness into something much more dangerous. "It's Obama's America, is it not? Obama's America – white kids getting beat up on school buses now. I mean, you put your kids on a school bus, you expect safety, but in Obama's America, the white kids now get beat up, with the black kids cheering." In a more reflective mood, he later asked, "Can this nation really have an African-American president?"

Yes, we can – and despite the racial poison spread by Beck and Limbaugh, most Americans are proud that at long last, we do.

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BECKERHEADS

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cover story wherein author David Von Drehle takes 3,598 words to debunk his own headline, "Mad Man: Is Glenn Beck Bad for America?" and to paint Beck as nothing more than a feisty, lovable – albeit controversial – little whippersnapper.

EXPLOITING PARANOIA OF TIN-FOIL HATTERS

"Glenn Beck: the pudgy, buzz-cut, weeping phenomenon of radio, TV and books ... The old American mind-set that Richard Hofstadter famously called 'the paranoid style' – the sense that Masons or the railroads or the Pope or the guys in black helicopters are in league to destroy the country – is aflame again, fanned from both right and left. [...] No one has a better feeling for this mood, and no one exploits it as well, as Beck. He is the hottest thing in the political-rant racket, left or right. A gifted entrepreneur of angst in a white-hot market. [...]"

"Beck is 45, tireless, funny, self-deprecating, a recovering alcoholic, a convert to Mormonism, a libertarian and living with ADHD. He is a gifted storyteller with a knack for stitching seemingly unrelated data points into possible conspiracies – if he believed in conspiracies, which he doesn't, necessarily; he's just asking questions. He's just sayin'."

"In cheerful days of yore, he was a terrific host of a morning-zoo show on an FM Top 40 station. But these aren't cheerful times. For conservatives, these are times of economic uncertainty and political weakness, and Beck has emerged as a virtuoso on the strings of their discontent."

COURIC'S SHALLOW QUESTIONS

Not to be outfoxed by her peers, on Sept. 22, CBS Evening News anchor Katie Couric premiered her new one-on-one high-profile online interview show "@katiecouric" with Beck, whom she introduced as a "one-man cottage industry." Beck fielded Couric's painfully shallow questions, such as, "Do you feel that you're ... you're kind of being divisive?" with sly grins and winks. "Let me see, here," Beck said, giggling and rolling his eyes while tapping his forehead, "how can I answer that? You're just trying to make some news – you just want me to give you a sound byte ..."

But the most interesting – and entertaining – take on Beck comes from Fox News' Chief Beckerhead Chris Wallace, who boasts that he "is on the Glenn Beck bandwagon," and insists that "Beck is a meteor here at Fox News."

Wallace was taking the irrepressible Shepard Smith to task for not giving Beck the proper respect; even accused Smith of being jealous of Beck's fame. "Oh no," Smith proclaimed, fighting back fake tears – "We are here to celebrate, worship and adore..." You gotta watch this.

Most mainstream media – if they acknowledge Beck's attacks – present them as news, such as the czars fiasco, the fake Fox ACORN videos, etc. However, there

are some, even on the right, who are concerned enough about the damage being done, to sound the alarm.

NOT ALL DRINK THE KOOL-AID

The New York Times' David Brooks writes, not only about Beck, but Limbaugh, Sean Hannity and others whose lust for power [attention and ratings] knows no bounds:

"For no matter how often their hollowness is exposed, the jocks still reweave the myth of their own power. They still ride the airwaves claiming to speak for millions. They still confuse listeners with voters. And they are aided in this endeavor by their enablers. They are enabled by cynical Democrats, who love to claim that Rush Limbaugh controls the GOP. They are enabled by lazy pundits who find it easier to argue with showmen than with people whose opinions are based on knowledge. They are enabled by the slightly educated snobs who believe that Glenn Beck really is the voice of Middle America.

"So the myth returns. Just months after the election and the humiliation, everyone is again convinced that Limbaugh, Beck, Hannity and the rest possess real power. And the saddest thing is that even Republican politicians come to believe it. They mistake media for reality. They pre-emptively surrender to armies that don't exist.

THE GOP IS LEADERLESS

"They pay more attention to Rush's imaginary millions than to the real voters down the street. The Republican Party is unpopular because it's more interested in pleasing Rush's ghosts than actual people. The party is leaderless right now because nobody has the guts to step outside the rigid parameters enforced by the radio jocks and create a new party identity. The party is losing because it has adopted a radio entertainer's niche-building strategy, while abandoning the politician's coalition-building strategy.

"The rise of Beck, Hannity, Bill O'Reilly and the rest has correlated almost perfectly with the decline of the GOP. But it's not because the talk jocks have real power. It's because they have illusory power, because Republicans hear the media mythology and fall for it every time."

Like Chris Wallace says, they are all just meteors exploding across this nation's sky.

Perhaps someone should remind Wallace and others in the media that the shining streak they're hanging onto is nothing but a trail of gas, and when it enters Truth's atmosphere, it will disintegrate – taking the Beckerhead Bandwagon with it.

– The author is an Oklahoma writer and a former civilian U.S. Army Public Information Officer. <http://sheilastuff.blogspot.com/>

PUBLIC FORUM

Addiction: A Health, Not Criminal Issue

By Ron du Bois

An important sermon on addiction was delivered recently at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Stillwater. Ellen de Graad, licensed alcohol and drug counselor at Valley Hope Treatment Center in Cushing, led the lay service, consisting of a combination of her sermon on the nature of addiction and a statement by a local recovering young person.

His name, well known in the community, is withheld due to the false stigma, condemnation, and punishment currently associated with the disease.

Intelligent, good looking, an excellent public speaker, he belied the stereotype of the "derelict drug addict" and put a realistic face to addiction and addicts who in main are like the rest of us who do not have the disease.

By coming forward to tell his story he acted as a model for every other addicted person.

ENTRENCHED SOCIETAL IGNORANCE

Were all people with the disease to stand up and speak out they could literally change entrenched current societal ignorance and attitudes embodied in the "war on drugs."

"The public may not agree with me," he said. "I was born with a disease that had nothing to do with my family anymore than parents with children who have cancer, diabetes or any other disease.

"No amount of failure would make me stop." He continued, "Will power plays little part in dealing with any disease." He had the willpower to attend OSU and to be on the Dean's Honor Roll, but once addicted came close to failure.

He said one of the symptoms of addiction is "the loss of appreciation of ordinary things." It bothered him so much that he entered treatment. Fortunately, his family could afford the extremely high cost of treatment – more than \$30,000, necessary in a nation that, unlike every other industrialized nation, has no national health care.

ILLUSION: DRUGS THE SOLUTION

"The problem with addiction is the illusion that drugs are a solution to the underlying problem of feelings of emptiness and despair," he said. "These emotional and mental conditions always precede and are not caused by drugs. Drug use is perceived as a solution and as medication for the underlying disorders. Not understood by the public ... or lawmakers ... is that the underlying problem is a health, not a criminal issue.

"As we continue to think it is a criminal issue we continue to lower the quality of life in the nation."

He talked about recovery and the need to deal with a life-long disease, similar to alcoholism, cancer and diabetes in that it has no cure but can be controlled



throughout life.

Essential to recovery, he said, is the need to believe in a higher power, not necessarily the "correct" answer about the nature of God, but a belief that God is everywhere and in everything. "Access to God is blocked by fear, misery and character defects," he said.

STRONG FAMILY, COMMUNITY SUPPORT

He is now living in supervised housing and is working towards a university degree. Fortunately, the university he plans to attend has a strong student recovery program. With faith in a higher power of his own understanding, the support of family and community, this young person may well make a major contribution to the life and well-being of the nation.

In future decades society will look back to see this era as an era of ignorance and will wonder how we could ever have believed in such injustice towards those with the disease of addiction.

The Unitarian Church of Stillwater is to be commended for being in the vanguard of drug policy reform and for setting an example for other denominations in the community.

– The author lives in Stillwater. For more information, contact the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [www.samhsa.gov], a federally funded program whose mission is to facilitate recovery for people at risk for mental or substance use disorders. The motto of the National Alcohol and Drug Recovery program is, "Together we learn, together we heal." It aims to promote the societal benefits of alcohol and drug use disorder treatment, laud the contributions of treatment providers, and promote the message that recovery from alcohol and drug disorders in all its forms is possible.

Real Life 'Grumpy Old Men' – And Women

By Norm Rourke

They sit on one side of the chamber. Their faces and body language exude displeasure. Scowling, rigid and tight-lipped, they look like spoiled brats. They're pouting. Who are these people? What are they doing?

They are the members of Congress whose party isn't in power. They're listening to the president speak at a joint session. Their feelings are hurt. They're childish and foolish looking.

No matter which president addresses the group, the opposition sits like bumps on a pickle, frowning, shaking their heads at anything he says. It's called partisan politics.

THE GIDDY 'IN' GROUP

I always get a chuckle, along with a disappointment, watching the congressional clowns during a presidential address. The "in" group is generous with applause popping up from their seats, sometimes for no reason.

"Ah, I'm glad to be here tonight!" The prez says.

"Yea! Hurrah!"

Loud applause and jumping to their feet.

Come on, the guy just acknowledged his invitation or request to speak. No need to go ballistic with over indulging exuberance.

The other side of the aisle is stoic and grumpy looking. Didn't they remember what their mommas said: "Your face will freeze that way if you're not careful."

HOW ABOUT SOME ICE CREAM, KIDS?

As the address continues there are frequent outbursts from the "in" crowd. But stony silence and protruding bottom lips are the responses from the out crowd. Grumpy old men. Nothing the president says will crack their rigidity.

Even offering to buy them ice cream probably wouldn't change their stubborn looks. Do they realize how stupid they look to the TV audience?

No matter which party is in power, the others see them as the enemy. On rare occasion one of the "out" members will offer up a mild applause at something the president said. They're glared down by fellow party members; usually the senior members who control the party.

Oops, I forgot, I wasn't supposed to think anything he said was a good idea.

A SEVERE CASE OF GROUP-THINK

And that, dear friends, is part of the problem: Independent thinking. If you're

part of the grumpy old men group, you're not supposed to think for yourself. You'll be told what to think and when.

What a joke!

Meanwhile, the president continues on with his speech. The GOM crowd continues to glare and pout. They can take heart, however, because in a few years they might be the ones running the show and then they can be glared at.

I suppose it's too much to expect these people to work together for the benefit of the American people. I suppose it's not proper to think the opposition may have a few good ideas. I suppose it's not politically correct for these people to compromise occasionally and come up with something that's good for the country in tough times.

Nah, this is too much to expect from politicians. After all they must save face [even scowling ones]. They would much rather continue their partisan politics that divide the country while serious needs go wanting.

GOOD IDEAS FROM BOTH SIDES

Again, as our mommas said: "No one is perfect." That means neither party has cornered the market on good ideas. Each has good ideas and some not so good. Wouldn't it make a lot more sense to collect the good ideas and build on them for the benefit of all? It does unless you're a hard-liner with the attitude of my-way-or-the-highway.

OK, so this isn't the way it works in the real political world. Maybe it's time for a change.

I may be wrong [and frequently am], but from what people tell me, they're tired of the nonstop bickering and pettiness that is a way of life in politics. If things were better, if people weren't facing serious personal challenges, perhaps some of the partisan political stonewalling could be shucked off as having a bad attitude.

That's not the case now.

Instead of looking like they've got a sour stomach or took medicine, the grumpy old men on the other side of the aisle should get over their personal pettiness and start earning their pay for the people who hired them.

As that wise woman [momma] would say: "Put on your happy face!"

– The author lives in Beggs

Stealing Wages Is National Epidemic

By Annette Bernhardt

Last February, a chain of gourmet groceries in New York City paid nearly \$1.5 million in wages owed to 550 workers. In the same month, the Los Angeles city attorney charged two owners and a manager of several car washes with paying workers a flat daily rate of \$35 to \$40 for shifts that lasted eight hours or longer.

Also this year, a Chicago-area temp agency settled a class-action suit for nearly half a million dollars. When workers accumulated more than 40 hours a week at different client companies, the agency “split” their checks to avoid triggering mandatory overtime pay.

These cases are part of a growing stream of abuses reported by community organizers, unions, legal services offices, and even government agencies.

SCALE OF THE PROBLEM WAS UNKNOWN

Until now it has been impossible to know the scale of the problem. Are violations of workplace laws confined to a few peripheral employers affecting small numbers of workers – or a larger trend reshaping the American workplace?

To find out, we and our colleagues undertook a systematic study to measure the prevalence of employment and labor-law violations.

Using an innovative methodology designed to reach people often missed in conventional surveys [including unauthorized immigrants and people working for cash], we interviewed 4,387 workers in low-wage industries in Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City.

We think of this landmark 2008 survey as a census of the invisible, because from the standpoint of public policy and government regulation, these jobs and workers too often are off the radar screen.

CORE PROTECTIONS MISSING

Our findings describe a world of work where core protections that many Americans take for granted are failing significant numbers of workers:

- More than one-fourth of the workers in our sample [26%] were paid less than the minimum wage.
- Of those who worked more than 40 hours in a week, 76% were not paid the legally required overtime.
- Of workers asked to report early or stay late, 70% had an “off the clock” violation – they received no pay for work they performed outside their regular shift.
- Of those entitled to a meal break, 69% received no break at all, were interrupted by their employer, or worked during the break – all violations of meal break laws.
- Over half [57%] of all workers in our sample did not receive the legally required statement of their earnings and deductions.
- Altogether 68% experienced a pay-related violation in the week prior to the survey.

THERE ARE OTHER ILLEGALITIES

Other illegalities ranged from tip stealing by employers to illegal pay deductions to workers’ compensation violations. When workers complained or tried to organize a union, 43% experienced illegal retaliation [such as being fired or having their hours cut].

These problems are not limited to unauthorized immigrants. All workers are

Conservative Bible To Delete ‘Liberals’

By Daniel Tencer

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

That famous line, attributed to Jesus in Luke 23:34, could well apply to the folks at Conservapedia – the “conservative version” of Wikipedia – who have embarked on a project to rewrite the Bible.

In an effort to rid the Good Book of “liberal bias,” the group has set up the Conservative Bible Project, which aims to rewrite the Bible from a modern, rightwing perspective.

“Liberal bias has become the single biggest distortion in modern Bible translations,” the project’s Web site asserts.

The line quoted above is one of the group’s targets for deletion in a truly “conservative” Bible. The “forgive them father” quote “is a favorite of liberals but should not appear in a conservative Bible,” Conservapedia states.

NO MORE TURNING THE CHEEK

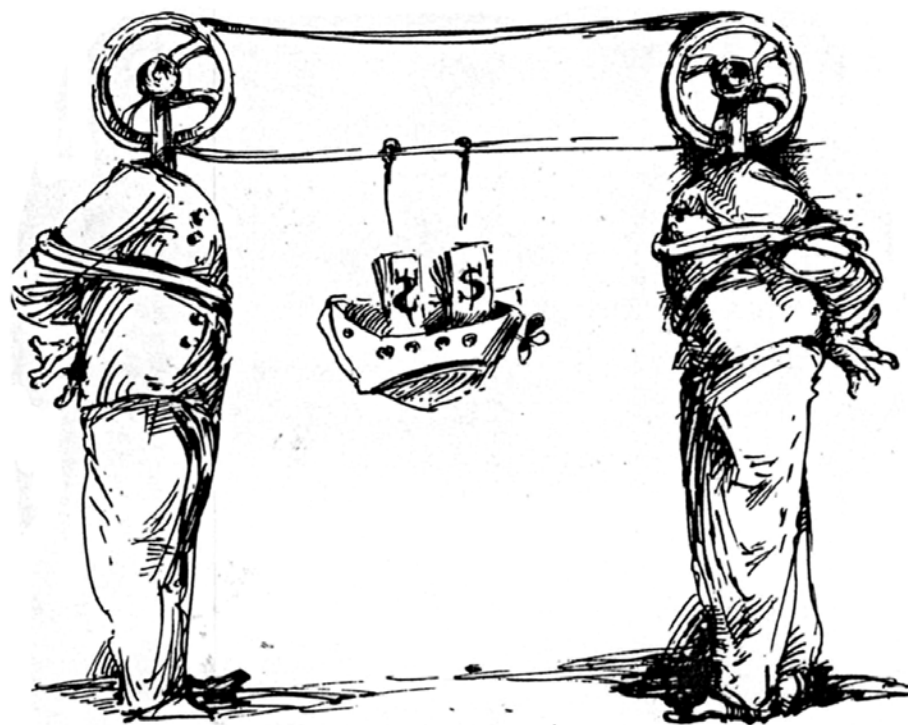
Evidently many of Jesus’ other teachings – from the “turn the other cheek” lesson, to his disdain for usury – will also no longer be acceptable in the conservative Bible.

“Socialistic terminology permeates English translations of the Bible, without justification,” the Web site states – a strange assertion, given that English versions of the Bible date back at least to the 16th Century, while socialism as a concept was formed in the 18th Century.

To combat the Bible’s “socialism,” the Conservative Bible Project wants to see Biblical use of the words “comrade,” “labor” and “fellow” [as in “fellow worker”] reduced.

Not surprisingly, the project has come under ridicule and derision from some corners.

“Jesus was obviously misquoted all over the place,” blogger P.Z. Myers writes sarcastically. “So what to do? When your claim of godly authority rests on your



at risk, although women, immigrants, and workers of color had especially high violation rates.

The best predictors of violations were industry and occupation. Minimum wage and overtime violations were especially common in garment manufacturing, nail salons, and domestic work, but we also found them in construction, retail, restaurants, warehousing, and home health care.

We found more violations in small companies, but even in big companies [with 100 employees or more] nearly one worker in six had a minimum-wage violation in the previous week.

Responsible employers still do exist in the low-wage labor market – violations were much lower in firms that offered their workers health coverage and paid vacations, for example.

AN ENDANGERED SPECIES

Such employers are becoming an endangered species, increasingly unable to compete with firms whose business model depends on systematically violating the law.

The sheer breadth of the violations we documented is a national call to action. We estimate that every week, about 1.1 million workers in Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City experience a minimum wage, overtime, or other pay violation, resulting in more than \$56.4 million in wage theft.

Rebuilding our economy on the back of these illegal working conditions is morally untenable – and it is bad economics. Unscrupulous employers who break the law rob families of badly needed money to put food on the table. They rob communities of spending power.

They rob state and local governments of vital tax revenues. They rob the nation of the good jobs and workplace standards needed to compete in the global economy.

The full report, *Broken Laws, Unprotected Workers: Violations of Employment and Labor Laws in America’s Cities*, is available at www.unprotectedworkers.org.

interpretation of God’s holy word, but God’s holy words contradict your desired ends, you’re in a bit of a pickle. There is a solution, though: rewrite the Bible and change the liberal bits!”

“The insane hubris of this really staggers the mind,” writes Rod Dreher at *Beliefnet*. “These rightwing ideologues know better than the early church councils that canonized Scripture?”

“They really think it’s wise to force the word of God to conform to a 21st Century American idea of what constitutes conservatism? These jokers don’t worship God. They worship ideology.”

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No Stone Unturned

Sam died. His will provided \$30,000 for an elaborate funeral. As the last guests departed the affair, his wife Sarah turned to her oldest and dearest friend. “Well, I’m sure Sam would be pleased,” she said.

“I’m sure you’re right,” replied Jody, who lowered her voice and leaned in close. “How much did this really cost?”

“All of it,” said Sarah. “Thirty thousand.”

“No!” Jody exclaimed. “I mean, it was very nice, but \$30,000?”

Sarah answered, “The funeral was \$6,500. I donated \$500 to the synagogue. The whiskey, wine and snacks were another \$500. The rest went for the Memorial Stone.”

Jody computed quickly: “\$22,500 for a Memorial Stone? My God, how big is it?”

“Two and a half carats.”

Guns Kill People Who Own Guns

By Joshua Holland

The debate over guns strikes me as odd. I can't quite grasp why it's viewed as a left-right issue – a matter of ideology – as opposed to a rural-urban divide.

In a first-of-its-kind study, epidemiologists at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine found that, on average, guns did not protect those who possessed them from being shot in an assault.

The study estimated that people with a gun were 4.5 times more likely to be shot in an assault than those not possessing a gun.

The study was released online this month in the American Journal of Public Health, in advance of print publication in November 2009.

"This study helps resolve the long-standing debate about whether guns are protective or perilous," notes study author Charles C. Branas, PhD, Associate Professor of Epidemiology. "Will possessing a firearm always safeguard against harm or will it promote a false sense of security?"

THEIR FINDING WAS ALARMING

What Penn researchers found was alarming – almost five Philadelphians were shot every day over the course of the study and about one of these five people died. The research team concluded that, although successful defensive gun uses are possible and do occur each year, the chances of success are low.

I've owned guns myself when I lived in the boondocks, but in a city, packed in like sardines with lunatics of all stripes, I'd prefer there be as few guns as possible within range of my windows.

Obviously, it's not easy to have a liberal gun policy in rural areas and stricter controls in cities, but in my mind, that tension should at least form the parameters of debate.

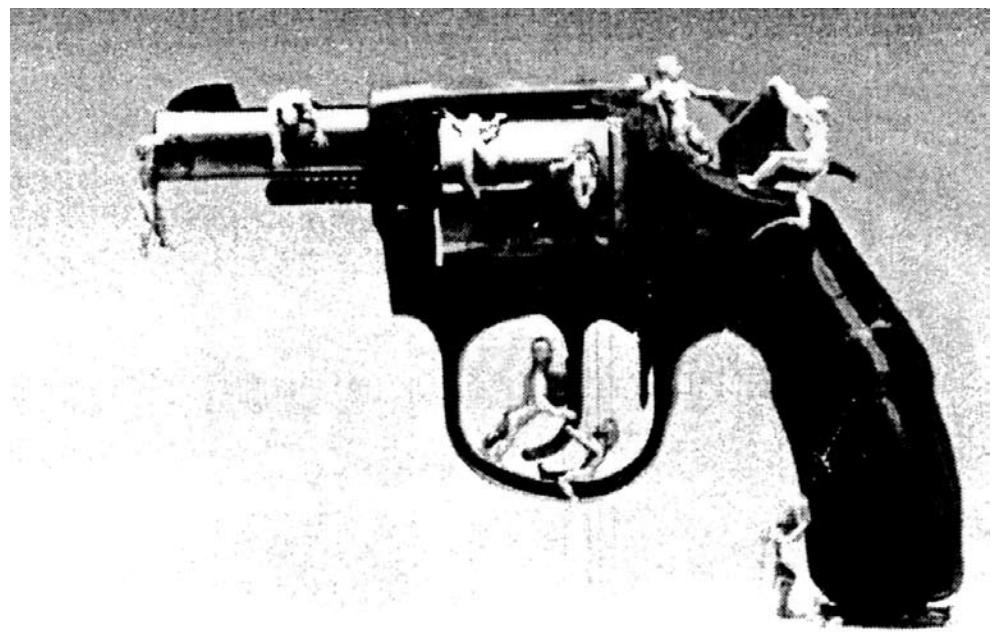
If you look carefully at who's on which side, it often does. Think about Rudy Giuliani's outspoken support for gun control, or the fact that even the most progressive Dems from rural districts oppose it.

THEY ARGUE JUST THE REVERSE

Gun-rights absolutists – I don't like "gun nuts" – answer that dense cities are precisely where firearms come in handiest. After all, you never know when you'll have to fend off a band of roaming zombies in the big city.

And similar arguments extend to just about everywhere they'd like to carry. In the aftermath of the Virginia Tech shootings, one pro-gun blogger wrote that the lesson we needed to learn was: "We should be crusading to abolish 'gun free zones.' History has shown us time and again that, rather than protecting children, gun free zones actually endanger them.

"They endanger them by creating a magnet for homicidal psychopaths who



know they will meet no resistance, and they endanger them by preventing responsible adults from deploying the means to defend the innocent and counter the threat of the evil."

That's built on a profoundly silly idea – that we're all potential John Waynes who just need to be in the right place at the right time in order to heroically save the day with our shiny heaters.

BEING THEIR OWN SWAT TEAM

Ordinary people, if heavily armed, can be their own SWAT teams! Same for home defense – the cops might take minutes to respond to a call, but your gun is right there in the drawer, loaded and ready for bear.

I've always thought there was more mindless machismo to the argument than common sense, and a new study appears to back up that view.

People should rethink their possession of guns or, at least, understand that regular possession necessitates careful safety countermeasures, write the authors.

Suggestions to the contrary, especially for urban residents who may see gun possession as a defense against a dangerous environment should be discussed and thoughtfully reconsidered.

A 2005 National Academy of Science report concluded that we continue to know very little about the impact of gun possession on homicide or the utility of guns for self-defense.

Past studies had explored the relationship between homicides and having a gun in the home, purchasing a gun, or owning a gun. These studies, unlike the Penn study, did not address the risk or protection that having a gun might create for a person at the time of a shooting.

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15 Million Reasons Obama Must Focus On Jobs

By Jim Hightower

Five days before taking the oath of office, Barack Obama called on the millions of people who had actively campaigned for him to be the engine for real change in America: "I don't want them to just sit around and wait for me to do something. I want them to be pushing their agendas."

He asked for it, so let's shove this agenda into his line of vision: jobs. Middle-class jobs. Jobs with a future. Jobs doing useful work that contributes to American progress and the common good. Lots and lots of those jobs.

Obama has talked often about the need for more jobs. But he's put little presidential heft into creating them, instead focusing most on extending unemployment benefits to assuage some of the pain of being jobless.

BANKER-FIRST JOB STIMULUS

Incredibly, he tried for a while to rationalize his "banker-first" Wall Street bailout as a jobs stimulus! The argument went like this: rescuing failed bankers might induce them to make loans to corporations, which then might increase corporate production, which then might cause corporate executives to hire some Americans [unless, of course, they used the capital to expand operations in China].

That's a lot of "mights," and, as we've seen, the money mostly remains in the tight clutches of the bailed-out bankers, producing little "trickle-down" benefit.

Meanwhile, the nation's official unemployment rate is soaring to 10% and beyond. That's not a statistic – it's 15 million struggling people. Plus their families. Their numbers nearly double when we add in part-time workers who need and want full-time jobs, as well as other underemployed and discouraged workers.

LIVING ON THE EDGE

Meet Debbie Kransky, a striver from America's great middle class who's now struggling. Living in Milwaukee, this intelligent and hard-working 51-year-old was offed by a medical firm in February and has been jobless ever since, despite being constantly on the hunt. Her unemployment benefits have run out, and her small life savings have been depleted.

"I've got October rent," she told a New York Times reporter. "After that, I don't know. I've never lived month to month my entire life. I'm just so scared, I can't even put it in words."

Not only are there millions of Debbies out here, but there are also many more millions who feel they're next. They know that there are already six "officially unemployed" people [not counting those part-timers] for every job opening that

becomes available in our country today.

CHIRPING THE RECESSION IS OVER

Yet, they now hear economists, pundits and politicians from both parties cheerfully chirping that the recession is "over." Obama himself, when asked about the oxymoron of a "jobless recovery," responded with this breezy insight: "As you know, jobs tend to be a lagging indicator; they come last."

Excuse me? Jobs are not an "indicator." They are the substance of a healthy economy, the sustainer of families, the lifeblood of our middle-class society.

FDR, when he faced deep and spreading national insecurity, made jobs first – not last. And so should Obama. America has plenty of work that needs doing, work that would strengthen our country for the long haul.

It's time for him to launch a long-term, nationwide revitalization effort to rebuild and expand our essential infrastructure [from bridges to water systems] and also to create the framework for a green economy – everything from rapid expansion of renewable energy systems to building high-speed networks that link our population corridors.

PERCOLATE UP, NOT TRICKLE DOWN

As he began his campaign, Obama declared: "I am running because of what Dr. King called 'the fierce urgency of now.' I am running because I believe there's such a thing as being too late."

Yes, there is. So get moving! Grab the urgency of this moment, and turn people's rising anxiety into a new can-do sense of confidence by putting Americans to work.

Instead of investing in Wall Street elites, invest in "percolate-up" economics based on ordinary people working to renew and reinvigorate our country at the grassroots level. Now would not be too soon to start.

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Another Myth Exploded

Is the great white shark the most dangerous animal? The number of Americans killed by sharks averages one per year. But 24 people a year are gored to death by cattle; 88 people are fatally thrown off horses; and 168 are killed when their cars collide with deer.

Check The Johns

Rating Schools More Than Hi-Stake Tests

By Folwell Dunbar

Whenever I evaluate a school, my first stop is the boys' bathroom because, without an unflushed urinal of doubt, it is every school's least common denominator.

Its sticky floors, calcified wads of toilet paper and juvenile-yet-timeless graffiti ["Here I sit broken hearted ..."] are generally not what a principal shows off.

Then again, I once visited a school run by the Knowledge is Power Program – which focuses on preparing students in underserved communities for college – and found fresh cut flowers next to an automatic recycled-paper-towel dispenser.

At another school, there were toilet targets. [Apparently, research shows that they increase accuracy by as much as 70%.]

AN UNUSUAL TEACHABLE MOMENT

My all-time favorite positive indicator, though, was a school that posted weekly "Stinky Animal Fun Facts" in the stalls and on the walls.

For example, did you know that dung beetles, using polarized moonlight for navigation, roll up balls of No. 2 to use as nurseries for their babies? This school's educators saw even the potty break as a teachable moment.

In today's data-driven world of No Child Left Behind and high-stakes accountability, administrators and lawmakers tend to obsess over hard measures.

Adequate Yearly Progress determinations and School Performance Scores are based on precise formulas – formulas made up of clean, cold and supposedly foolproof numbers.

In this highly calculable place, soft measures are rarely factored in. Nonetheless, after my "inspection" discovers the good, the bad and the ugly of the boys' John, I usually have a good sense [or scent] of how a school is doing.

TELLTALE SIGN OF PROBLEMS OR PROMISE

Though I wouldn't necessarily hold the bathroom test up against SAT scores as a measure of school success, I do consider it a telltale sign of either problems or promise.

Here are a few more "soft" indicators that a school might be in trouble:

- The faculty parking lot fills just minutes before class and empties immediately after the final bell.
- The entrance is distractingly disheveled. Plants are dead or dying, the marquee is missing letters, cigarette butts speckle the lawn.
- Classroom windows and/or the vertical slits on school doors are covered over with dark construction paper. Trust me, it's seldom for purely decorative



purposes.

- Children clutch long pencils with ground-down erasers. If this is the case, chances are students are more concerned about making mistakes than taking chances.

RECEIVING A PAT ANSWER

• When you ask students, "What are you learning?" they respond, "Chapter Eight." And then, when you ask, "Why are you studying Chapter Eight?" they say, "Because our teacher said so."

• Students continually ask, "Will this be on the test?" [The unstated premise: "If not, we'll just ignore it."]

• Civics teachers don't keep up on current events. Science teachers aren't excited about the latest scientific breakthrough. English teachers don't read for pleasure. Physical education teachers are overweight and/or smoke.

• Adults frequently YELL belittling language. Or: Like a restaurant with bad acoustics, the school's overall sound quality – whether too loud or too quiet – is just downright unpalatable.

• Administrators are unwilling to let credentialed visitors roam. Instead, they insist on "giving a tour" of the usual, safe suspects.

• Teachers read newspapers and take cell phone calls during professional development events.

TEACHERS WHO ARE GOOFING OFF

- Teachers play solitaire on their computers during planning periods [or class].

See **JOHNS** Page 19

Penmanship Is Another Lost Art

By John B. Amos

I wrote the assignment on the board, white chalk on black slate. When the kid in the back row asked me to read it aloud, I was worried that he might need glasses. So I asked him.

His answer floored me: "I can see fine; I just can't read cursive."

During my 27 years as an English teacher, I've watched cursive handwriting gradually disappear among high school students. The majority prefers to type on the computer and if forced to write by hand, they almost always choose print over cursive.

Still, I wasn't prepared for a student to admit so casually that he couldn't read a simple set of handwritten instructions. I didn't realize it had gotten quite so bad.

As a high school teacher, I've not been in a position to do much more than bewail this trend. My students were exposed to cursive a long time ago in grade school, but they were never required to use it. The habit was never ingrained in them. And so they have opted for "easier" print over the vastly more efficient [and more beautiful] cursive.

IT WOULD BE TOO BURDENSOME

To teach the dying art of handwriting would take all of a teacher's time. And though I might like to pass along this small but treasured bit of culture, I could not "go old-school" on my students if that meant slighting my duties to teach them literature, composition, grammar, and vocabulary. Besides, what would be the point? Why teach a skill that's rapidly becoming obsolete?

Good handwriting is no longer necessary. It's a luxury, a frill. You really can get by today without having to write much by hand. In fact, I'm hard-pressed to think of a job that still requires good penmanship. Even the term "penmanship" has an old-fashioned ring.

There was a time when my best students had the best handwriting. But that's no longer the case. Some of my sharpest kids can produce no better than a sort of scribbled hen scratch on the page.

IT'S A NEW LEARNING DISABILITY

There is even an official learning disability, "dysgraphia," that, as far as I can tell, means that the student can't write neatly.

The death of handwriting, of course, has coincided with the rise of technology. After all, typed, electronic communication accounts for nearly all of the writing that most people do. We don't need to write by hand, and so we don't.

Though I spend a good bit of time railing against technology, when it comes to

its effect on the process of writing, I'm ambivalent. I actually love the computer as a writer's tool.

I recall my college days, when I wrote everything by hand and typed afterwards.

I'd sit at my desk with a legal pad, pen, and pair of scissors, trying to compose an essay on Tennyson's *In Memoriam* or Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. I'd write a while, revise a while, then ball up the page, toss it aside, and start over again.

After a few paragraphs, I'd begin rearranging, literally cutting and pasting with scissors and tape. Writing back then was a tedious and frustrating affair.

COMPUTERS MAKE WRITING EASIER

The computer makes the process so much easier. Good writers revise, revise, and then revise again. For me, the joy of writing is in the revising. I love cutting this and adding that; I love fiddling with phrases until they're just right.

The computer allows me to revise more frequently and more comprehensively, so I stand a better chance of getting an idea across clearly than I do with pen and paper. I'm a better writer because of, not in spite of, the computer.

Still, I mourn for what's been lost.

I think of monks in the Middle Ages and their gorgeous illuminated manuscripts.

- Of Anthony Trollope, the great 19th Century novelist, who wrote 3,000 words a day by hand.
- Of John Hancock's signature on the Declaration of Independence.
- Of the cool, backwards slant of left-handers.
- Of the Briffaux twins, boys from Belgium I taught years ago, who attributed their graceful script to beatings delivered by schoolmasters who insisted on neatness.
- Of handwritten notes from friends, real ink on real paper.
- And of my own signature, which intentionally runs my middle initial "B" into the "A" of my last name.

Maybe I'll start a new organization: the SPCCA – the Society for the Preservation of Cursive in the Computer Age.

Only one membership requirement would pertain: concern for how to revive a dying art.

– The author has been teaching high school English for the past 30 years, currently in Madison County, VA. His collection of essays, *Every Now and Then*, is available on amazon.com.

Analyzing Public School Teaching

By Timothy Egan

You're in third grade, back to school in Texas. Shoes are too tight. Your new shirt is scratchy. And the strange kid sitting next to you – how's he going to get that pencil out of his nose?

The teachers tell you to file into the gym. They turn on a television. Here comes President Obama. Boor-rrrring. Do you have to listen to this? Is there some kinda test afterward?

Some people in your part of the country didn't want you to hear the president of the United States. It's indoctrination. Socialism. Cult of personality. Stuff you'll learn about on cable news shows.

"This is something you'd expect to see in North Korea or Saddam Hussein's Iraq," says Oklahoma Republican State Senator Steve Russell.

Obama starts talking. He says, "If you quit on school, you're not just quitting on yourself, you're quitting on your country."

TO SUCCEED REQUIRES HARD WORK

And then he says, "No one is born being good at things, you become good at things through hard work."

And finally he says, "So don't let us down – don't let your family or your country or yourself down."

The teacher says the lesson is to take responsibility for your destiny. Great. When's lunch? Some kids don't get to see the speech in Texas, because their parents kept them home, or their schools caved to a couple of loud guys in the parking lot.

For them, the lesson is: play hooky whenever you feel like it, don't respect authority, even your commander in chief, and if you say stupid things over and over you can get reasonable people to give in.

Whining works, especially in Texas, which ranked 46th in overall SAT scores last year, falling further behind the national average.

EMBARRASSED TO BE FROM TEXAS

"There are few moments in my life when I'm embarrassed to say I'm from Texas," says Ron Kirk, the former Dallas mayor and current U.S. trade representative, who watched the speech with high school kids not far from your elementary school. "This is one of them."

You're a senior in high school, in Kent, WA. Senioritis! You're going to coast, and still get into a bodacious college. Is this year over yet?

But now your teachers are on strike. They were told by a judge that their walk-out is illegal. They were ordered to report to class. And yet ...

"Oftentimes, acts of civil disobedience have to occur to right a wrong," says the union president, Linda Brackin Johnson.

IT IS THOSE MANDATORY MEETINGS

What's the wrong? Too many meetings, for one. The teachers hate those mandatory meetings, and who can blame them. All those words that shouldn't be verbs – prioritize, incentivize, progressivize.

They also want smaller classes. And a raise, of course. Awesome. Except, this year, your school district is broke. Your state is broke. And your country is broke. All the money went to bankers and automakers and an unnecessary war that will end up costing nearly a trillion dollars.

Besides, the teachers are doing better than most. As the American Federation of Teachers reported in their 2007 wage survey, the average salary now is \$51,000, and some make \$100,000. While salaries for all U.S. workers fell sharply, to \$46,955, teachers saw the highest salary increases in 15 years.

BEWARE THE FIRST PERIOD GLARE

Good for them. This job is so lame. Duh! Is there anything more awful than that look you give them in first period – the half-lidded, blank-faced, don't-even-think-of-calling-on-me glare? [You're faking, but it works.]

The teachers should be happy to get raises while everyone else takes a hit. Happy to have a job in the worst recession in 65 years. Not in Kent, WA.

They vote to ignore the judge's order, break the law and stay on strike.



The lesson is: defy authority when it suits your needs. Take a seat over there with the Texas parents who kept their kids home.

You're in middle school in New York City. No more braces – the tracks are off the teeth. Sweet! You have a body you don't understand, and voice you don't recognize. In a few weeks, you'll stop talking to your parents. You hate them. They're the worst parents in the world.

One question: a teacher you were supposed to get for earth sciences, he's gone. Somebody says he's in the rubber room, along with 600 or so other teachers.

AMERICAN TEACHERS ARE NOT REWARDED

Frank McCourt was once a New York school teacher. He wrote about it in his book they may force you to read [don't worry, you can probably get the summary on a SparkNotes link, like everyone else].

"In America, doctors, lawyers, generals, actors, television people and politicians are admired and rewarded," he wrote. "Not teachers. Teaching is the downstairs maid of professions. Teachers are told to use the service door and go around the back."

That was then. Now, as Steven Brill showed in *The New Yorker*, a teacher basically has to hold up the cafeteria cashier to be removed. [As if you'd ever want to eat there!]

The rubber room is purgatory, where bad teachers get their full pay to do nothing all day, awaiting arbitration for things like showing up drunk in class. The average stay for some, he wrote, is three years.

Lesson: maybe everyone should be required to listen to the last president – yeah that guy from Texas. Maybe he had it right – just once – when he said we got one big issue here: "Is our children learning?"

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Charter Schools Given Low Grades

America's charter schools are not achieving what their proponents claim, according to a new study from Stanford University.

The study of 2,403 charter schools in 15 states and cities found that the schools had not raised student achievement in reading and math when compared with regular public schools.

Researchers at Stanford's Center for Research on Education Outcomes [CREDO] found that 46% of charter schools posted results that were "statistically indistinguishable" from traditional public schools, while 37% had academic results significantly lower than conventional schools. Only 17% of charter schools outperformed their public school counterparts.

African-American and Hispanic students did worse than their peers in public schools. The report also found wide variations in achievement levels, suggesting that a few schools were good and many were bad.

SOME GAINS BY POOR STUDENTS

Some gains were achieved by the poorest students, by those whose first language is not English, and by those who have spent two or three years in charter schools.

Geographic differences were also apparent. In six states [Arizona, Florida, Min-

nesota, New Mexico, Ohio and Texas] charter school students performed less well than those in a traditional public school.

In California, Georgia, North Carolina, and the District of Columbia [which has the highest overall percentage of students attending charter schools] there was no discernable difference in test scores.

Charter school students did slightly better in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Missouri and in the cities of Denver and Chicago.

40 STATES ALLOW CHARTER SCHOOLS

Forty states, as well as the District and Puerto Rico, allow charter schools. Nationally about 4,600 charter schools enroll 1.4 million students.

Presidents Clinton, Bush and Obama have all endorsed the charter school movement. The new Stimulus Plan includes \$650 million for states under the Department of Education's Innovation Fund.

Another \$211 million will be provided to charter schools, according to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. Education Secretary Arne Duncan favors expanding aid to charters and has warned the 10 states that do not allow charters that they may be last in line to receive discretionary grants to boost student achievement.

DEMOS

From Page One

they shred the progressive income tax, soaking working people so the rich escape their fair share of taxes.

Ivan Holmes could have retired in comfort as dean of journalism at Northeastern State University, but he worried about Oklahoma's future.

At no salary and 18-hour days, he led the Democratic Party, traveling across the state, sounding the alarm. Most Democrats rolled over and went back to sleep.

Ask rank and file Democrats when is the last time they donated to the party – even \$10.

Ask why they skipped voting or “voted for the man, not the party” – code words for voting Republican.

When is the last time they compared Republican issues with biblical principles?

Democratic leaders spend far too much time reacting to rightwing Republicans [Sally Kern and Jim Inhofe]

instead of firing away with genuine issues – public schools, health insurance for all, Social Security, fixing a decrepit infrastructure and naming names of OCPA fats cats and what they pay in taxes compared to Joe Sixpack.

Republicans – buttressed by the Daily Disappointment – talk about family values while starving social programs. They would rather fill prisons with non-violent offenders than fill the bellies of hungry children. One in five Oklahoma kids goes to bed hungry every night.

More than 74,000 Oklahomans are suffering from Alzheimer's disease yet there is no plan for dealing with this or the epidemic of diabetes and cancer.

Gene Stipe and other errant Democrats are held up as prototype Democrats, but Republicans have more than their share of fast buck artists

and adulterers. The media yawn.

Adulterer Newt Gingrich recently converted to Catholicism in order to woo 30 million voters on the religious right. That's a family value? He's a pathological liar who put his young mistress on the U.S. House payroll.

Our Republican senators belong to an outrageous religious cult, yet it is a non-story.

A microcosm of the problem was found in Woodward this year when ex-President George W. Bush got four standing ovations from a huge crowd.

He is easily one of the worst presidents in American history. His war mongering and tax cuts for the rich are overlooked because he's a “Born Again Christian.”

Ivan Holmes attempted to convene Democrats in every county to list their priorities. That's proactive politics.

How to handle the gay issue? I have told conservative audiences to “stay

out of other people's bedrooms! I don't want to hear about your gay sex or your straight sex. Just stay out!” They have applauded.

Many Democrats lack acute moral perspective on race, and they lack a genuine political identity – not hyphenated identity – yellow dog or blue dog.

Remember, people vote their identity, they don't just vote on the issues. If they did, Democrats would still be in control.

Democrats are too quick to blame everyone but themselves because of their lost political footing. That won't win elections. Good candidates, adequately funded, win elections.

If Oklahoma is going the way of Texas and the rest of the South, at least good Democrats can go down swinging. That should enrage the Daily Disappointment and drive Sally Kern crazier.

Birthers Full Of Wingnut Delusions

By Roy Edroso

Politico reports Arizona Rep. Trent Franks' complaint that he has been maligned as a birther, when he's really what we call around here birther with an explanation – he has come to believe, after “a significant amount of research,” that President Obama was in fact born in the U.S.

However, he's outraged that the President won't produce “the double secret long form birth certificate, which despite the conclusive results of painstaking investigation still finds necessary to put people's concerns about his national identity to rest for good.”

The item draws a passel of interestingly passive-aggressive comments in the blogosphere. So they invent fantasy scenarios in which Obama is actually harming citizens by failing to produce the proof they claim not to need.

Birthers show great imagination and nerve. You've got to admit, most ordinary people wouldn't pretend to have a large endowment to offer as ransom – in comments to a blog post, yet. But we're not dealing with ordinary people.

The current, sad era in American history isn't good for much, but it is proving a golden age for tendentious arguments. These folks want to keep the birther obsession alive as part of their greater effort to delegitimize Obama, but perceive that they are being laughed at.

Here is a recent sample:

I think President Obama is a wonderful man and a history maker, too! I want to celebrate him! Let's construct a great monument marking his place of birth, like we do with other presidents.

I'd also like to shake the hand of physician who delivered our great president into the world on his day of birth. So ... who exactly is that doctor? And, specifically, what is the address where we can begin building that monument? ... crickets ...

JOHNS

From Page 17

Or: the Web sites most visited by teachers include eBay, ESPN and Monster.com.

- Teachers and staff talk more about their latest degree or certification program than what they are doing with the kids.

- Administrators speak solely in the future tense [“We are planning to ...”] and dwell on process rather than outcomes.

- Classroom maps still show the Soviet Union, Rhodesia and British Honduras. Computers are shrouded in a patina of dust. Bulletin boards haven't been updated since the Eisenhower Administration.

- There are more athletic trophies on display than academic accolades or exemplary student work.

- In the course of a single day, you hear reams and reams of unsubstantiated jargon and excuses – lots and lots of excuses!

All of these indicators are potentially fallible. No single one warrants CSI-like scrutiny of a school. I rely almost exclusively on hard evidence when evaluating a school.

Still, soft measures can and often do matter. As David Whitman notes in his 2008 book, *Sweating the Small Stuff*, for troubled schools to improve, they need more than just better curricula and teachers. They need to teach kids how to behave in the learning environment – and even the bathrooms that are part of it.

– The author is a charter school authorizer. One of his jobs is to evaluate schools.

This is my favorite:

I am sitting on a very large cash donation that I wanted to make to the children's ward of the hospital that Obama was born. I mean it is historically significant the first Black President and first from Hawaii, I want to make that donation in the name of the doctor that birthed Obama.

That simple tidbit of information available on the long form version of his BC is the only thing standing in the way of the poor sick children getting some much needed upgrades to their hospital ward.

E-mails to the White House have not been responded to. No one will provide this information. It couldn't be that Obama wants to deny the sick children ... no that definitely isn't it, so why can't I get this information from the most transparent administration in our history?

Lawmakers' Superb Health Care Coverage

From time to time, we're reminded of the fact that members of Congress – many of whom are fighting to kill health care reform – give themselves pretty good coverage. The LA Times recently noted that, while most Americans have to go with whatever their employer offers, congressional members have a choice of 10 plans that offer access to a national network of doctors.

“Lawmakers also get special treatment at Washington's federal medical facilities and, for a few hundred dollars a month, access to their own pharmacy and doctors, nurses and medical technicians standing by in an office conveniently located between the House and Senate chambers,” the article added.

On the floor below them an elaborate Navy medical clinic – described by those who have seen it as something akin to a modern community hospital – is standing by, on-call and ready to provide Congress with some of the country's best and most efficient government-run health care.

Formally called the Office of the Attending Physician, the clinic – and at least six satellite offices – bills its mission as one of emergency preparedness and public health. Each day, it stands ready to handle medical emergencies, biological attacks and the occasional fainting tourist visiting Capitol Hill.

Keep this in mind the next time you hear a member of Congress complaining about the nightmares of government-run, taxpayer subsidized health care.

God help us if every American had such health care. How would we know which people deserve to live and which ones don't?

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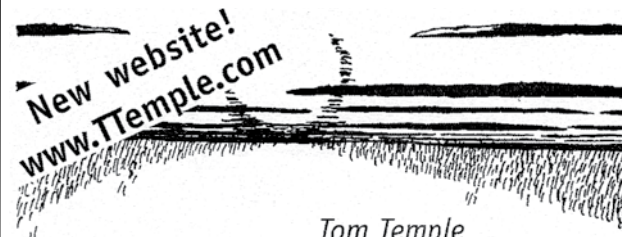
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