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## UCO Prof Helps In Iraq

# Our Unwinnable Wars

By Arnold Hamilton

Five years after the U.S. invaded Iraq and quickly toppled Saddam Hussein's regime, Robert Kerr arrived in the Baghdad suburbs to a world defined by violence.

Within two days, one of his "teammates" would perish in a bombing in Sadr City. Each month, six or seven American soldiers would be killed or seriously wounded. A shadowy insurgency prosecuted a guerrilla campaign that seemed impervious to surgical air strikes and other high-tech wizardry.

Thirteen months later, when Kerr returned to his life as a University of Central Oklahoma professor, American casualties in Iraq were rare. At night, once empty streets were suddenly filled with Iraqis headed out to dinner. Town councils were debating mundane matters such as when to permit liquor sales.

Kerr credits the transformation to a radical shift in U.S. military policy that finally acknowledged the reality that America isn't likely to wage a successful 21st Century war with a 20th Century, Cold War mentality favored by the likes of Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld.

A civilian hired by the Defense Department, the UCO history and political geography professor was a member of a so-called "Human Terrain Team." Imbedded with U.S. military units, the eight-member teams include social scientists like Kerr whose expertise can provide military commanders and troops important, often life-saving information about local culture.

At one point, for example, U.S. troops noticed black flags suddenly flying everywhere. Worried it could



– Photo by Glenn Hightower

portend an attack, the battalion commander asked Kerr whether American soldiers "should be concerned."

"No," said Kerr, who's long studied Islamic fundamentalism and Middle East culture. "It just means it's a Shiite Islamic holiday. It's a mark of cel-

ebration. It's just a Shiite celebrating his holiday."

For much of the war, Kerr says, the U.S. military operated under the misperception "an Iraqi was an Iraqi." There was little understanding, and even less appreciation, of the cultural and religious differences of Sunnis and Shiites, for example.

When Robert Gates replaced Rumsfeld as defense secretary and the Bush Administration embraced Gen. David Petraeus' surge strategy, it was an admission, Kerr says, "we can't fight the war the way we used to fight" and "there are options other than just kicking down doors and blowing things up."

The new strategy included moving troops from large bases into com-

munities where they interact every day with Iraqis, a sort of military version of the community policing model implemented successfully in some American cities.

"The surge put an extra 30,000 troops on ground," Kerr says, but it wasn't just having additional troops that made the difference – it was changing the mission "to engage and talk to the population."

"It was common sense: Just listen to what the Iraqis want and help them get it."

The Human Terrain Teams, a mix of civilian and military personnel, helped open the lines of communication, striking a rapport with everyone from local leaders to shop owners to children in order to give American forces a better understanding of what makes Iraqis tick.

In its simplest terms, Kerr says, the idea is to "go out into communities and get the people to be on our side as opposed to other side and to understand what they needed from us."

What the teams often learned is that some Iraqis were helping the insurgents – not because they necessarily supported them or believed in their cause, but because Al Qaeda and others were paying monthly stipends to those willing to create trouble for the Americans.

The U.S. teams would then search for ways to neutralize the insurgency's payola – in effect, cutting a better deal. For example, if the team learned an Iraqi on the insurgency payroll had been a pre-war construction worker, it might offer a more lucrative salary to the Iraqi to help build a new school.

The Iraqi not only gets more money, Kerr says, but also the "feeling of self-fulfillment" that comes from working in his field of training. The Americans get less insurgent mischief – and perhaps a [face-saving?] scenario in which to finally escape the Bush-Cheney-Rummy morass that has claimed the lives of more than 4,300 American soldiers and 85,000-plus Iraqis.

The notion of Human Terrain Teams – which also are being employed in  
See IRAQ Page 19

# Observations

## A Winner

Oklahoma's bright light in education is our commitment to early childhood education. We led the nation, with many states copying our system of enrolling four-year-olds.

There will always be naysayers, such as the authors of a report on British education that claims children start school several years too early and should stay home until age 6.

That borders on stupidity and if followed, would deprive children of a fantastic start in life.

In Oklahoma we have had to put up with the insane rightwing Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, whose mouthpiece, Brandon Dutcher, continues to criticize early childhood education.

Brain science tell us to today that there is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for these children to develop educationally.

Not a single parent is required to engage their child in early education. It's strictly voluntary. Oklahoma is already reaping the excellent results.

## Only In Texas

Think you've heard everything? Think again. A Texas jury in a capital case asked to consult the Bible and their wish was granted. As a result, the man on trial was convicted and sentenced to death.

Khristian Oliver, 32, was executed after jurors used biblical passages supporting the death penalty to help them decide whether he lived or died.

A U.S. federal appeals court acknowledged last year that the jurors' use of the Bible amounted to an "external influence prohibited under the U.S. Constitution, but nonetheless upheld the death sentence.

Apparently, this "external influence" included the following passages from the Old Testament, some of which were read aloud in the jury room:

"The murderer shall surely be put to death."

"And if he smite him with an instrument of iron, the murderer shall surely be put to death."

"The revenger of blood himself shall slay the murderer."

One juror, Michael Brenneisen, told a reporter in 2002 that he asked himself, "Is this the way the Lord would decide the case?"

But Brenneisen also said that in discussing the Bible [they had four in the jury room] the jury "went both directions in our use of the scripture - forgiveness and judgment."

Now you know why the founders separated church from state. Unfortunately, we have folks on the bench who think otherwise. They make a mockery of the Constitution.

## New Singles Bar

In 2006, a survey by career-research company Vault found almost 60% of employees in America confessed to having had an office relationship, up from 47% in 2003.

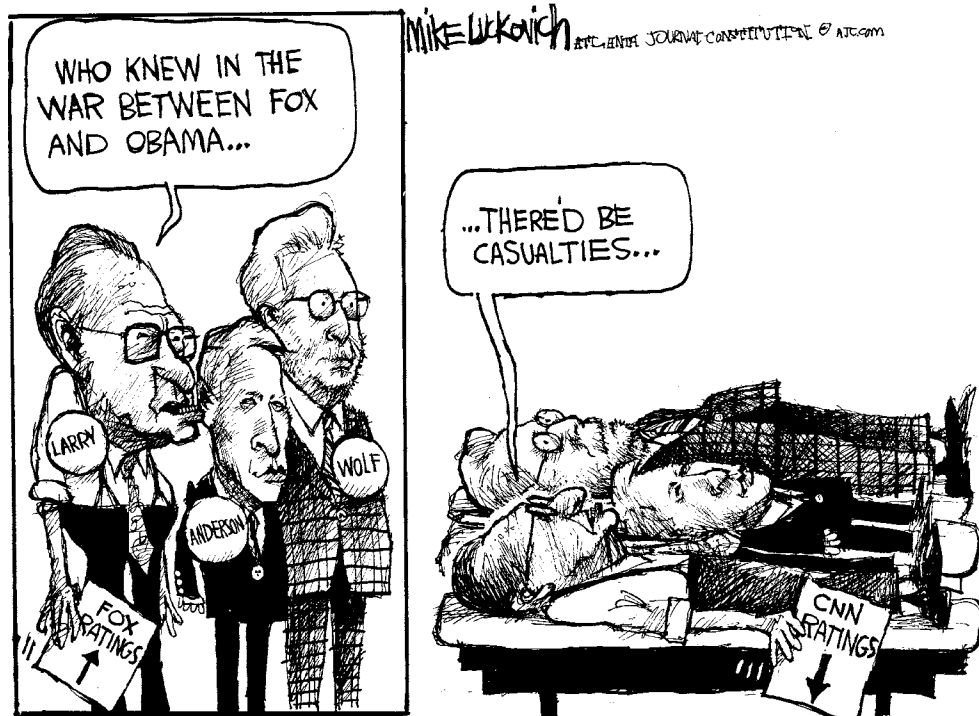
In his book *MicroTrends*, pollster Mark Penn declared, "The office has become the 21st-century singles bar. Water is the next gin and tonic, and Muzak the new club beat."

Sexual-harassment claims have shot up alongside romances - by almost 11%, to 13,867 in 2008. Almost any working woman will have a tale to tell: crass comments, clumsy come-ons, abusive e-mails, furtive gropes.

Attempts to stamp out love in the workplace are futile. You either bring morals to the workplace or you don't.

## Evil Empire

Across America, oil and coal interests are polluting President Obama's effort to pass clean energy reform. Through a variety of front groups, companies like ExxonMobil, Chevron and Peabody Coal are fueling misinformation about global warming and fear about clean energy solutions.



We sighed with relief when Oklahoma's Corporation Commission nixed a proposed coal fired plant in western Oklahoma. Read our lips: There is no such thing as clean coal.

Lobbyists and public relations firms have established websites and Twitter feeds while crisscrossing the nation on "clean coal" and "energy citizens" tours.

The oil industry's "American Energy Express" bus tour has now joined the coal industry's "Factuality" bus tour, going to state fairs and political events. A "Hot Air" balloon tour attacking "global warming alarmism" is being run by Americans for Prosperity, an evil empire bankrolled by the Koch billionaires, among others. They also are the ones who disrupted Town Hall meetings across America.

## Cut Where?

How many times have you had to listen to the know-it-all who says if the deficit is so bad why don't we just reduce spending.

We can't. Forbes magazine spells it out in exact detail: Nearly two-thirds of spending [62%] is mandatory entitlements and interest on the debt.

The defense budget - which will never be cut substantially - is consuming more than half of what remains. That leaves a total of \$485 billion for everything else.

Given a deficit of \$459 billion last year, a balanced budget would require the elimination of virtually every single domestic program, including all social programs, education, highways, border patrols, air traffic control, and the FBI.

The only alternative is to reduce mandatory spending on Medicare and Social Security - and good luck with that. The elderly will fight anyone who tries to cut their benefits, even as they hypocritically demand fiscal responsibility. And seniors' political power will get only stronger, as Baby Boomers get old.

The truth? If the U.S. ever stops running a deficit, it won't be because Congress made massive cuts in federal spending. The votes aren't there, and never will be.

Too bad the Founding Fathers didn't have the wisdom of Oklahoma's constitutional drafters. The state has to produce a balanced budget or each agency takes a prorata cut - with 5% being in place today.

Only loophole? The Legislature

passes out bond issues like confetti, especially for corporate welfare. So do some localities.

Consider Broken Arrow's dilemma. FlightSafety International wants a \$6 million handout toward a new facility and a lease of \$1 a year. They employ hundreds so the city fathers had to go along - grudgingly.

So much for private enterprise and the fabled marketplace.

## Remember?

The twittering, texting millions should take note that Gordon Bell, a Microsoft research scientist, envisions a new technological world in his book *Total Recall*.

If you aren't afraid of Big Brother's Internet and other high-tech toys, just wait. In the future, says Bell, electronic devices will record, for instant recall, every block we walk, every trip to the store, every conversation and chance meeting.

With full search capability on our personal database, you can retrace your steps to track down the moment you misplaced your keys.

That new friend whose name you've forgotten? Just replay the moment you met, a month ago. For techno-triumphalists, this vision of the future may be both inevitable and glorious, but for most of us, it's a nightmare - and not just because of the Orwellian loss of privacy.

Even more alarming, according to the Wall Street Journal, is the loss of the ability to forget. A neurotic fixation on the past is rarely the best strategy for success in the present, and who doesn't have experiences we'd rather see deposited in "the Memory Hole"?

We prefer amnesia.

## Just Desserts

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce usually fares well in lining up support for their version of the free-enterprise system, but that was before their sanctimonious mask was ripped off as just another corrupt lobby.

They have been bleeding membership, yet their answer is not to straighten up but rather to launch a \$100 million lobby campaign to fight decent financial and healthcare legislation.

Read the details in this issue. It's the only place in Oklahoma you will find the truth.

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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

Latest national polls reveal that only 20% of American voters identify themselves as Republicans. We think they're all in Oklahoma.

Laurel: To Mother Jones magazine for pouring through the U.S. Chamber's own figures to expose the Chamber lie that it represents three million businesses. The Chamber finally admits it is between 200,000 and 300,000.

Why health insurance reform? The uninsured are 40% more likely to die - 45,000 every year. Oklahoma is facing a \$100 million cut in health care services, yet the Legislature has \$1.2 billion in an untouched kitty.

Dart: To The Board of Juvenile Affairs for voting 3-2 to allow tasers [sometimes deadly] to be used on kids in custody. Sure, teach them to be non-violent by being violent. What ever happened to pepper spray?

Don't blame the 12,552 registered professional lobbyists for the mess in Washington. Congress does that with or without outside help.

Laurel: To Rep. Kris Steele, R-Shawnee, Speaker-designate of the Oklahoma House of Representatives. We hope he will find the heart to extend insurance coverage for children with autism.

Oklahomans who are overweight or obese cost \$864 million per year in direct medical expenditures.

Dart: To the nutty outfit that named Sen. Tom Coburn as one of the 50 most "effective" members of Congress. No, no, no! The word is "defective."

Our dilatory Congress has five different health plans from which to choose, plus VIP access to Bethesda Naval Hospital and a reserved ward at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

Laurel: To Dr. Gerald E. Gustafson, winner of AARP's Andrus Community Service Award. His work on medical recycling from nursing homes has provided \$5 million worth of drugs for Tulsa's neediest.

Given the plentiful amount of conservative columnists, why does the Tulsa World carry the hate-driven columns by ethically challenged Patrick Buchanan?

Laurel: To the Legislative Compensation Board for not lifting salaries this year. Our Legislature, at \$38,500 [\$45,500 counting fringe benefits], is already highest paid in the region and 16th in the nation.

Congress is finally acknowledging that Indian Health Services are woefully underfunded and ill equipped to deal with runaway diabetes, TB, alcoholism, infant mortality and suicide. We will keep you posted.

Dart: To Rep. Mike Christian, R-OKC, for carrying a gun at the Capitol. The Capitol Highway Patrol security said it is OK since he spent 10 years as a trooper.

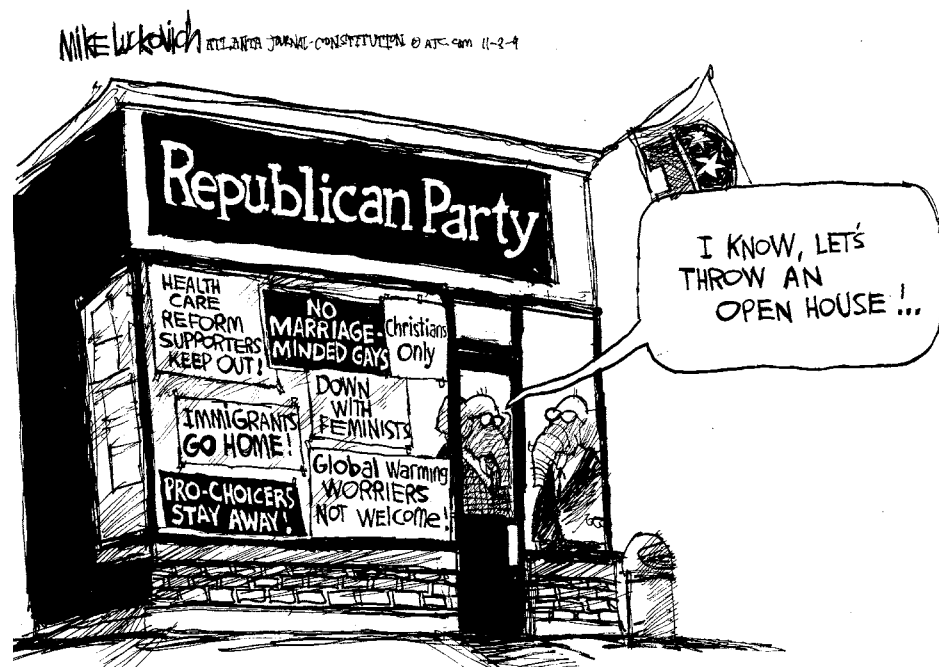
Columnist Jim Hightower says his new favorite word is "pusillanimous" in describing half-assed Democrats. He said Republicans - all too often with Democrats in cahoots - want Obama to fail, even if it means America fails.

Laurel: To Mitzi Hancuff, honored with the Governor's Award for her self-funded facility dedicated to enriching the arts. Her classes are growing phenomenally.

Tobacco wholesaler Alan Beck claims weak collections by the Oklahoma Tax Commission are costing the state millions of dollars. The Commission has sanctioned 11 dealers in the past 18 months.

Dart: To columnist Richard Cohen for his personal attack on President Obama for lacking "warmth and commitment." The last time we saw Cohen walking down the street alone, his T-shirt read, I'm With Stupid.

Unsung heroes are the civic clubs that quietly go about doing the work of good citizens, including the Tulsa Downtown Lions Club, spending a record \$51,000 for eye exams and glasses for the poor in the past year.



Laurel: To 47% of Americans who consider "whatever" the most annoying word in the English language. We were surprised when "you know" came in at only 25% - easily the most annoying expression in Oklahoma.

Tourism is still Oklahoma's blessing, producing a \$6.1 billion revenue impact last year - up 6.5%. Now if the Tourism Department would only refurbish shabby Western Hills Lodge.

Dart: To Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-OK, saying, "Socialized, government-run health care, touted by many as the only solution, is not the answer." Anybody remember when he cancelled his government-run socialized health care that covers Congress?

Beware of Policy Analysis papers from the CATO Institute and the misnamed Reason Magazine. They are far rightwing mouthpieces founded by the Koch fortune, easily the most unpatriotic heirs in America.

Laurel: To the Obama Administration, trying to clean up the Bush mess with a stimulus package [\$4.5 billion for Oklahoma] that has already saved more than 250,000 jobs in public education. As we've noted before, a Republican teacher is an oxymoron.

Thanks to a misguided Legislature and governor, the Oklahoma Health Care Authority will no longer receive federal stimulus money [so far \$300 million] because the Feds back out when programs are cut.

Dart: To the chronic lunacy that all students should be prepared for college. That fallacy results in not one higher ed institution outside of OU and OSU graduating even 40% of its students. OU is 63.5%, OSU 59.7%. Thank goodness for CareerTech.

Gee, our state leaders said we don't have it as bad as some states. Tell that to the unemployed and 500,000 on food stamps - 15% of all Oklahomans and 25% of all our kids. How about 35,000 losing mental health services?

Laurel: To our glorious leaders who cut taxes \$770 million while our prison staff levels were at 77% of authorization. They pack 'em in prison but adequate funding is chronically ignored.

The University of Central Oklahoma was the focus for the first gubernatorial debate but Republicans Mary Fallin and Randy Brogdon were no-shows. The Dems have two superb candidates in AG Drew Edmondson and Lt. Gov. Jari Askins.

Dart: To the foot-dragging Congress when America is desperate for health care reform. Globally health care expenditures were \$4.1 trillion last year - \$639 per person, but in America it was an astonishing \$6,719. [WHO]

This is a good news-bad news tidbit. The good news is that abortions worldwide fell from 45.5 million to 41.6 million. The bad news is that 70,000 women died from botched abortions - mostly in sub-Saharan Africa. [Guttmacher Institute]

Laurel: To Oklahoma City, named by CNN/Money magazine as one of the best American cities for launching a small business.

The Religious Right blows off any attempt to provide students with honest sex education. The result in Oklahoma: 40% of births last year were out of wedlock - 15% were second and subsequent births.

Dart: To Sen. Tom Coburn, for amendments designed to kill the Violence Against Women Act. He's a show-off and doesn't care who he hurts - including women with breast cancer.

The National Governors Association put the pencil to it after studying America's dropout problem and came up with a startling fact: The cost in lost wages is \$300 billion annually.

Laurel: To Oklahoma's trial lawyers. Upon learning that OKC's Jesus House was losing electrical services due to a \$2,000 unpaid bill, they raised the money - and then some.

Listen up 2010 Legislature: For every Oklahoma dollar invested in teen pregnancy prevention programs, \$2.65 is saved in direct medical and social service costs.

Dart: To Janet Barresi, GOP candidate for State Superintendent, favoring vouchers. Just what Oklahoma doesn't need - another Republican attack dog.

## THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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# Letters

Editor, The Observer:

When Judge Barbara Swinton ordered Oklahoma City schoolteacher Joe Quigley reinstated and thoroughly chastised the Oklahoma City School Board, it became clear that they had no case. When the board had to be threatened with contempt of court to get them to obey the ruling, that showed they had little respect for the law. Apparently Joe Quigley was right all along – he was targeted for his advocacy for gay and lesbian students.

At this time when the Oklahoma City school system faces dire economic hardship, wasting taxpayers' dollars this way is criminal. But more serious is the message the school board is sending to the kids being harassed and bullied, as well as the bullies and the parents. Their actions clearly state that they don't care about these kids and what they're going through.

School bullying makes schools less safe for everyone, and can influence attitudes students take with them throughout life. Instead of wasting time, energy and money trying to fire Mr. Quigley, they should be working with him as he advocates for the safety of gay and lesbian students [or those perceived to be]. Working together on this would result in safer and more effective schools for all.

Victor W. Gorin  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

I was so proud of our president. Unlike the sniveling, gutless coward, George W. Bush, President Obama went to Dover Air Force Base to pay tribute to some of our fellow citizens who lost their lives in service to this country.

George W. Bush claimed he met "privately" with some of the families who lost loved ones in the wars he started, but who knows. He misled us on so many things. In eight years, George W. Bush never attended a funeral for an American service member. Never. I guess he and Dick Cheney were too busy hiding out in an undisclosed location. Thank God we are rid of those two.

Deborah Lewis  
Garland, TX

Editor, The Observer:

Caught with his pants down by the news of his winning the Nobel Peace Prize, the best Barack Obama could do was eat humble pie.

"To be honest, I do not feel that I deserve to be in the company of so many

transformative figures who have been honored by this prize," said the President.

He needs to adopt the rule of the late president of the University of Oklahoma, Dr. George Cross. Informed that he had been selected for the Oklahoma Hall of Fame, Cross confessed, "I knew I did not belong in any Hall of Fame. A Hall of Good Fortune, perhaps, but not a Hall of Fame."

However, Cross decided to accept the honor because "it has not been uncommon for me to receive things I did not deserve."

He added, "Mrs. Cross is perhaps the best example of this. My friends will think of others."

Ditto Obama with the First Lady, Michelle.

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner  
Wagoner

Editor, The Observer:

In your Oct. 25 editorial "The Kind of Campaign Oklahomans Deserve," you said: "The reality is, many voters won't even begin to focus on the candidates until next August, when primary elections will determine the nominees."

Well, sir, the last time I checked with the Oklahoma State Election Board, the 2010 primary is July 27, and not in August as you referenced above.

If you are going to write about Oklahoma politics, I suggest you get your facts right and not mislead the voters. Otherwise, your newspaper needs to go into the trashcan.

Frosty continually harps on inaccuracies in the "Daily Disappointment." I would say this ranks right with them.

Joe Neal Hampton  
Enid

*Editor's Note: Hampton is correct about the election date. The 2010 primary is July 27. The runoff is Aug. 24.*

Editor, The Observer:

I just want to sum up the articles in The Observer on lack of legislative representation, over-taxed, under-taxed, fraud, lies ... you name it. I'm claiming it as all wrong by saying the solution is a "Recall."

When that piece of legislation was put in place, it was to correct and/or derail this type of political molestation, yet it lies dormant. Why? Because:

- Most legislators are guilty of any, some, or all of these miscarriages of justice,
- Have gotten comfortable with the

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BALLOON BOY 2

"kick-backs"

• Downright fearful of repercussions to their political careers ... or their life!

Solution: submit a petition with signatures for the recall.

God knows recall is warranted!

All the while recruiting "new" political legislators to represent their constituents with the knowledge that if you [new legislators] repeat past policies of non-representation, you, too, will be recalled!

Where will we get the new recruits for political legislators? From the political science students. Or from retired citizens that would seek office if the assurance of not being raped financially or not fearful of past skeletons in their closets [good hard working folk deserve an opportunity to lead and serve].

People, we need representation and we need it yesterday.

Unless we put the fear in the now-sitting and soon-to-be-sitting politicians, we will continue to get the same old rehashed speeches and promises that we now get.

Accountability is the key that will unlock the corruption and deceit that we now have in our U.S. government.

Hope is what we need to encourage the voters not to give up! This recall could very well be the solution.

Faye Sherill  
Edmond

Editor, The Observer:

You ask, "How much trouble are newspapers having in Oklahoma?" Only 14% get their news from papers.

I have always wondered how many read the New York Times, Washington Post, Christian Century, New Republic. While few can afford subscriptions, all – or most – are available at the local library, and most on-line.

How can one not be in despair about the ignorance of the American public?

T.H. Milby  
Norman

Editor, The Observer

Devastated in two consecutive national elections, Republicans are continuing to struggle to regain their footing. Actually, they'd be happy to just slow down their free fall into the abyss. They have employed strategies this year that not only haven't worked, they've worsened their already crushed status. They created loony radicals, called teabaggers, and used them as their poster kids, which

further helped position themselves as a political party of uneducated, uninformed, frequently embarrassing individuals.

Then they combined that with a total obstructionist policy. No matter what the issue, they were against it. No! No! No! That became their battle cry. Americans clearly understood our country had massive problems created by, and left from the previous Republican administration and the attempt to block all efforts at course corrections didn't play well. In reality it simply served to illustrate that Republicans were void of any ideas of their own, and just whiny, petty individuals.

During the health reform debate Republicans made matters worse for themselves with their constant stream of ridiculous lies. Death panels, denial of coverage, interment camps, rationing of health care, on and on ... no lie was too absurd for the Republicans. Time after time their lies were debunked, then ridiculed, branding them as desperate and untrustworthy.

There's a recent report card on how the various Republican strategies have worked. The ABC/Washington Post poll states, "Only 20% of respondents identified themselves as Republicans – the lowest number since the paper started asking the question in 1983. These numbers, coming roughly one year before the 2010 midterm elections, show that any celebration on the GOP's behalf is premature as the party has yet to convince most voters that it can be a viable alternative to Democratic control in Washington today.

George Stephanopoulos adds: "Only 19% trust Republicans in Congress to make the right decisions for the country's future – compared to 49% trust in Obama. In addition, President Obama outpaces his fellow Democrats on the Hill – by 15 points – in this measure, providing some ammunition to the perpetual White House argument to Democratic members that their political success is inextricably linked to the president's. And unlike other recent polls, ABC-Post give Democrats a 51-39 edge in the generic Congressional ballot."

It would appear that using the tin-foil hat crowd as their public face, lying and trying to obstruct everything in their path hasn't been such a winning strategy. Imagine that!

Kenny Belford  
Tulsa

## 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.**

## **Violent Kids**



**FROSTY TROY**  
Founding Editor

Justice Department researchers were the bearers of bad tidings for the future of America – 60% of our children are exposed to violence in their daily lives.

The children surveyed were exposed to violence within the past year, either directly or indirectly, according to data compiled by the department.

The survey's authors defined exposure to violence as being a victim, or having witnessed violence, or learning about violence against a relative, friend, or hearing about a threat to their school or home.

A typical college professor, James Alan Fox, criminal justice professor at Northeastern University, blew it off, saying most people are exposed to violence. So what else is new?

Any chance he can interview nearly half of all children surveyed who were assaulted at least once in the past year. He should include

the 6% of children who were sexually assaulted.

The survey's definition of sexual victimization includes rape, attempted rape, sexual harassment, or flashing.

Among the survey's other findings:

- Nearly one in 10 children said they saw one family member assault another in the past year.
- More than one-half of the children, about 57%, reported having been assaulted at some point in their life.
- 13% reported having been physically bullied in the last year.

The National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence was sponsored by the Justice Department's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, with help from the Centers for Disease Control.

This report coincides with the possibility that tasers will be used on juveniles in school or in state detention. Make no mistake, we have hundreds locked up who are as violent as any adult. Ask how many times the police have been called to Hissom.

Don't be misled by the word "juvenile" when considering being beaten up to and from school. Bullying is a major problem in today's America. These aren't the occasional fistfights or teasing of yesteryear.

The U.S. Attorney General and Education Secretary went to Chicago to meet with local officials, parents, and students to discuss the vicious beating of a 16-year-old high school student whose killing was captured on a cell phone video.

Dernon Albert, an honor roll student at Christian Fenger Academy High School, was attacked when he got caught up in a mob of teens about six blocks from school.

Video shows him curled up on the sidewalk as fellow teens kick him and hit him with splintered railroad ties. So far, four teens have been charged in his death.

## **Woodstock Revisited**

There was plenty of hype recently over the 40th anniversary of Woodstock, including the '60s generation throwing a concert to commemorate the event.

The event was organized by the same bunch who'd put the first one together – typical of aging Boomers turning it once again into a corporate event.

Pizza sold for \$6 a slice, and in the middle of a heat wave, water cost \$4 for a tiny bottle.

For those who couldn't make it to the concert in upstate New York – at a Superfund-listed former U.S. Air Force base – the entire festival was available on pay-per-view.

More than 200,000 young people did show up, though. Unlike their gate crashing parents, they paid \$150 each to get in.

The '60s crowd might have lost their idealism somewhere along the way, but their children showed some anti-establishment – or at least anti-social – spirit on the last day of the festival, breaking into a riot, setting fires, looting vendor booths and ATMs, and allegedly raping four female concertgoers.

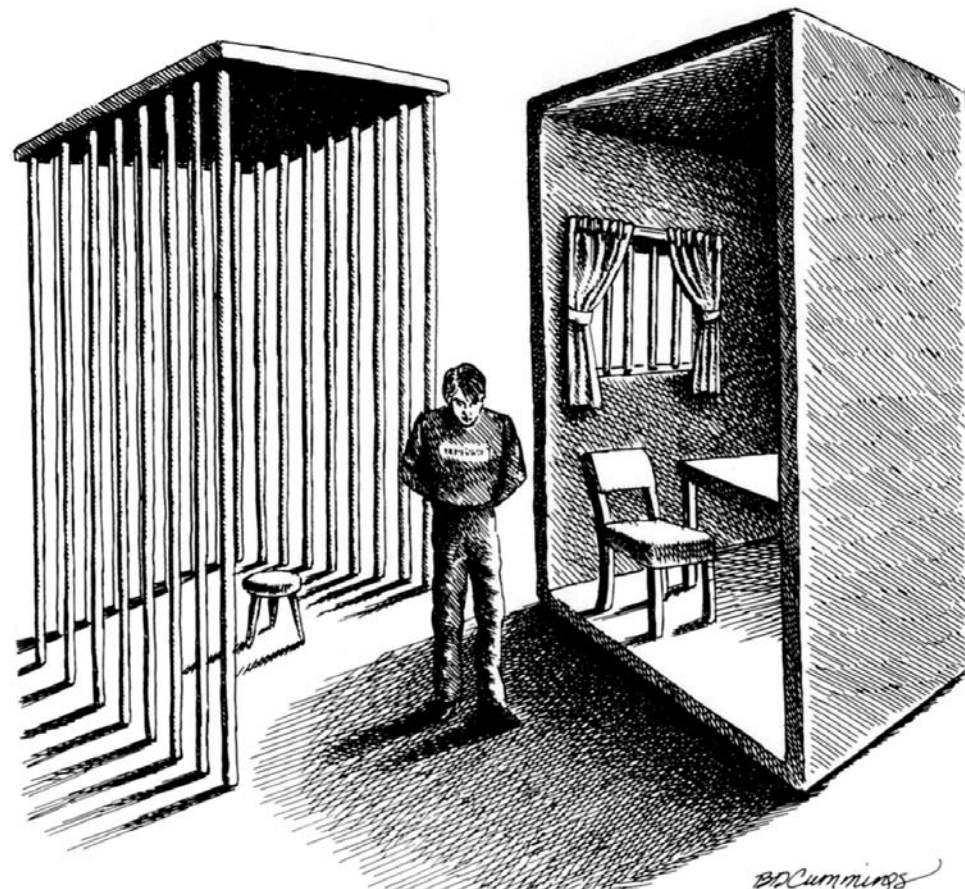
For most of American history, drug-use trends among younger and older people have moved roughly in harmony – if not to the same degree, then at least in the same direction.

The high-school class of '96 was the first one to increase its use of drugs since the across-the-board decline of the 1980s. That group of students had entered kindergarten around 1983, the same year that the Drug Abuse Resistance Education program, now D.A.R.E. America, was founded by Los Angeles Police Department chief Daryl Gates.

The campaign has succeeded on many fronts. In 1992, a Maryland girl told the D.A.R.E. officer that her parents were growing pot, and they each spent 30 days in jail, according to the Washington Post.

Two kids in Boston reported their parents the same year; the year before, a Colorado child called 911 and said, "I'm a D.A.R.E. kid," then told the operator about a baggie of pot that he'd found.

A nine-year-old Georgian called the cops after stumbling on some speed in



Oklahoma was the first state in the nation to pass an anti-bullying law, but it isn't enough to stop an epidemic.

A lot of non-violent kids end up joining gangs for protection and they go on to be involved in assaults, burglary, shoplifting and end up being kicked out of school.

I asked the principal of an alternative school I was visiting what he attributed to the violence endemic in a hefty fraction of today's young people.

He took out a pencil and a sheet of paper and drew a large triangle. At each point he put "parent," "student" and "teacher."

His remarkable explanation cut to the chase. If it were a square I would include society – you and I. Try watching an NCIS episode or any other police blotter TV show – not only are they sickening in the level of violence, but they also enhance it by showing cadavers carved to pieces.

Single moms have a tough row to hoe, especially when they turn to someone in authority to help with an out-of-control child – some as young as 10. Fat chance of getting help.

Oklahoma is woefully short of child welfare workers, truant officers, mental health counseling and cops on the juvenile beat. It's especially hard on single moms – and it won't be getting better any time soon. Forty percent of all Oklahoma births last year were out of wedlock. No dad to defend the kid[s]. Hello gang.

How many of those 15,000-plus murders last year could have been prevented with early intervention? Why is Oklahoma [and America] going broke building more and more prisons?

Sorry, I don't have a pat answer. All I know is that if it doesn't start in the home, or a home bereft of help, odds are that violence will ensue.

How sad.

his parents' bedroom. "At school, they told us that if we ever see drugs, call 911 because people who use drugs need help," little Darrin Davis told a reporter for the Dallas Morning News. "I thought the police would come get the drugs and tell them that drugs are wrong. They never said they would arrest them."

Oops!

### **New Element Discovered**

Lawrence Livermore Laboratories has discovered the heaviest element yet known to science. The new element, Governmentium [Gv], has one neutron, 25 assistant neutrons, 88 deputy neutrons, and 198 assistant deputy neutrons, giving it an atomic mass of 312. These 312 particles are held together by forces called morons, which are surrounded by vast quantities of lepton-like particles called peons. Since Governmentium has no electrons, it is inert; however, it can be detected, because it impedes every reaction with which it comes into contact.

A tiny amount of Governmentium can cause a reaction that normally would take less than a second to take from four days to four years to complete. Governmentium has a normal half-life of two to six years. It does not decay, but instead undergoes a reorganization in which a portion of the assistant neutrons and deputy neutrons exchange places.

In fact, Governmentium's mass will actually increase over time, since each reorganization will cause more morons to become neutrons, forming isodopes. This characteristic of morons promotion leads some scientists to believe that Governmentium is formed whenever morons' reach a critical concentration. This hypothetical quantity is referred to as critical morass.

When catalyzed with money, Governmentium becomes Administratium, an element that radiates just as much energy as Governmentium since it has half as many peons but twice as many morons.

– Thanks to Darla Reynolds Sparks for this gem

# Revisiting The 'No Gifts' Registry



ARNOLD HAMILTON  
Editor

The Oklahoma Ethics Commission is studying ways to simplify its rules, a laudable pursuit so long as it doesn't end up weakening reporting requirements or making it even more difficult for the Average Joe to follow the money in state politics.

It's always risky to open the rulebook to tinkering, especially in a world where some special interests and elected powers-that-be have proven themselves diabolically adept at creating loopholes that undermine the public's right to know and disguise the real sources of financial backing.

Even so, there's a simple rule that commissioners will consider in January that could go a long way toward exposing the often way-too-cozy relationship between lawmakers and deep-pocketed special interests.

It's called the "No Gifts List," a registry for the state's elected class to publicly alert professional lobbyists as well as volunteer favor-carriers that they will not accept anything of value as they pursue the people's business.

The idea has been promoted in recent years by, among others, Rep. Jason Murphey, R-Guthrie, who went so far as to post a sign on his Capitol office door declaring he "does not accept items of value from lobbyist-represented entities."

Murphey also introduced formal legislation to create the "no gifts list" but – surprise, surprise – it wasn't warmly received and didn't advance very far.

More recently, Dr. John Wood, a Common Cause representative and Rose State College political science professor, has worked with the Ethics Commission on the proposed rule that would serve the same purpose.

The Ethics Commission, which administers the state's campaign contribution laws and lobbying requirements, debated the rule last January, but it wasn't approved. Commissioner John Raley, a former federal prosecutor, has asked to revisit the issue this January.

"Why should it be appropriate for any elected official, charged with the responsibility of allocating our tax dollars and writing our laws, to receive money, gifts or things of value from one whose occupation is that of trying to influence legislation?" Raley asks.

"During my seven plus years as a member of the Ethics Commission, no one has satisfactorily provided me an answer to that question."

The Ethics Commission earlier reduced the amount lobbyists can spend on elected officials from \$300 to \$100 per calendar year. [Lawmakers had the power to reject the rule, but – rightly figuring it would stir public outrage – decided to allow it to take effect.]

Yet, each lobbyist, as Dr. Wood points out, still could spend up to \$14,900 [\$100 times 149 lawmakers] a year on lunches, event tickets and other gifts – or about half the average Oklahoman's annual income.

It's no contest, especially when you consider that some lobbyists comb the Capitol full-time during the legislative session, ever-present with a thoughtful card or gift or available to buy lunch when a vote looms on important legislation. It's also an advantage special interests are loath to give up without a fight.

Lawmakers themselves aren't exactly keen on a "no gifts" registry. They know that if one is created, they will be forced to sign up – meaning no more NBA, concert or football tickets or upscale working dinners – or risk the wrath of voters.

Can't you just hear challengers: "Unlike the incumbent, when I'm elected, my first order of business will be to sign the 'no gifts list.' I'll send the signal immediately that I'm there to represent you, the people, not the special interests entrenched in Oklahoma City!" Powerful stuff.

See GIFTS Page 19

## As Rich Get Richer, The Rest Get Stuck

By Wanda Jo Stapleton

On Dec. 2, 2008, Devon Energy CEO Larry Nichols politely told the Oklahoma City Council that his company headquarters would be "more appropriate" in Houston.

Nevertheless, he intended to build a skyscraper office building in downtown Oklahoma City – if, and only if, taxpayers would provide his skyscraper with a 70-acre park [called "Core to Shore"] for a front yard.

The City Council has already approved Tax Increment Financing [TIF] to satisfy part of Devon's request for these "public improvements." This TIF funding is projected to raise \$115 million for Devon's purposes. The TIF money will come from collecting, then redirecting [to satisfy Devon's requests] property taxes inside a large area surrounding Devon's proposed skyscraper [Increment District No. 8].

Without this TIF intervention, those property taxes would have gone mainly to public schools; then to MetroTech, libraries, county government, and the City-County Health Department.

In addition to this \$115 million, Oklahoma City residents will vote Dec. 8 to extend a one-percent sales tax now being paid to fancy up the Ford Center for the Thunder basketball team. This sales tax extension will last for 93 months!

"The average Oklahoma City resident can expect to pay about \$10 per month," according to Dr. Mark Snead, Oklahoma State University economist. In other words about \$930 for each of us average types!

### WHAT WE ASKED FOR

In 2007, Oklahoma City Mayor Mick Cornett asked city residents about their priorities for a MAPS 3 tax, provided we continued the MAPS projects. The people's overwhelming choice was transit [light rail, streetcars, etc.] Second choice was infrastructure, including streets.

### WHAT WE'RE GETTING

Nevertheless, much of MAPS 3 money will go for that 70-acre front yard for Devon and Oklahoma City's third convention center – in addition to the Cox Convention Center and the Ford Center.

### UNMITIGATED GALL

Under the heading of "transit" requested by city residents, the Oklahoma City Council has demonstrated unmitigated gall! After ignoring thousands of requests to save OKC's Union Station rail yard from destruction, the council is asking for our MAPS 3 sales tax money for "a downtown transit hub which will link streetcar, commuter rail and bus systems" – exactly the reason Union Station's invaluable, irreplaceable rail yard was built in the first place.

The Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce spent \$850,000 on publicity during the last election to raise MAPS sales tax for fancying up the Ford Center. The Chamber will probably spend even more this time because at stake is \$930 from each of us "average" Oklahoma City residents.

The OKC Council and the Chamber could not stick us with the bill for corporate enrichment if the people were informed. After all, the people, not the Chamber, hold the power with "one vote, one person."

Whether or not they choose to use it on the MAPS 3 vote on Dec. 8 remains to be seen.

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

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# Reintegration Of Prisoners Studied

An interim study is focused on successfully reintegrating Oklahoma prisoners into society upon their release from the corrections system, according to state Rep. Joe Dorman.

"I think that creating reintegration programs for offenders better attempts to prevent broken families, helps keeps the parolee from returning to crime and aids anti-drug efforts," the Rush Springs Democrat said.

According to statistics presented at the interim study, well over 90% of inmates will be released from prison. Programs are currently in place to assist prisoners, but many feel these programs are not adequate.

Dionne Frankum, executive director for Valliant House, spoke during the study. Valliant House offers substance abuse treatment and prisoner reintegration through the state in McCurtain and Seminole counties.

## IDEAS FOR PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Their primary facilities can treat 40 inpatients and 100 outpatients. They also run a halfway house that can serve 10 people.

"We've been able to find jobs for many of the people who come through our facilities through connections we've developed with several communities in southeast Oklahoma," owner Keith Butler said.

"Through this interim study, we're hoping to give lawmakers some ideas on how to develop private-public partnerships that can help with the reintegration process."

Dorman said he plans to file legislation on this issue in the coming session.

"After considering the information we receive in the study, I believe we can improve the system," Dorman said. "We need to make sure our programs are efficient, and that programs such as the ones established through our churches have a chance to work with their non-denominational volunteers who give their time and effort to help these individuals turn their lives around."

## STATE DROPPED JUDEO-CHRISTIAN ETHIC

Don Duncan, prison chaplain and founder of Destination Character, spoke about the need to change prisoners value systems in order to reintegrate them into society.

Records show that incarceration levels rose drastically in the 1970s, '80s and up until today after remaining steady for years. It came about as a shift away from America's historical Judeo-Christian value system or moral code.

"I just wish that we could get something done to help those who truly want the help," Duncan said.

Dorman has filed resolutions in the past to address this subject through a task force, but the legislation has failed to be brought to a vote thanks to the House Republican leadership.

"I have great hope this time that my fellow lawmakers and I will find workable language in this area," Dorman said.

"Many lawmakers are afraid to address the subject of prisoner reintegration for fear it might be portrayed as being 'soft on crime' with their voters.

"That is far from the case in this issue. We are trying to find ways for those who are released to have a greater chance for success and avoid committing a future crime.

## WHY HELPING PAROLEES MATTERS

"I would like nothing better than to give greater chances to parolees where they will be a contributing citizen, rather than a repeat offender who drains our state resources by returning to prison."

Dorman said that at some point he would like reintegration programs in Oklahoma to be used extensively, both inside and outside of the Department of Corrections system.

"I would eventually like to see one of our current prisons converted to a rein-

# New State Warning On Second-Hand Smoke

Oklahoma health officials are urging Oklahomans with heart disease or elevated risk for heart disease to avoid places where smoking is allowed indoors, citing a major new report on the risks of exposure to tobacco smoke.

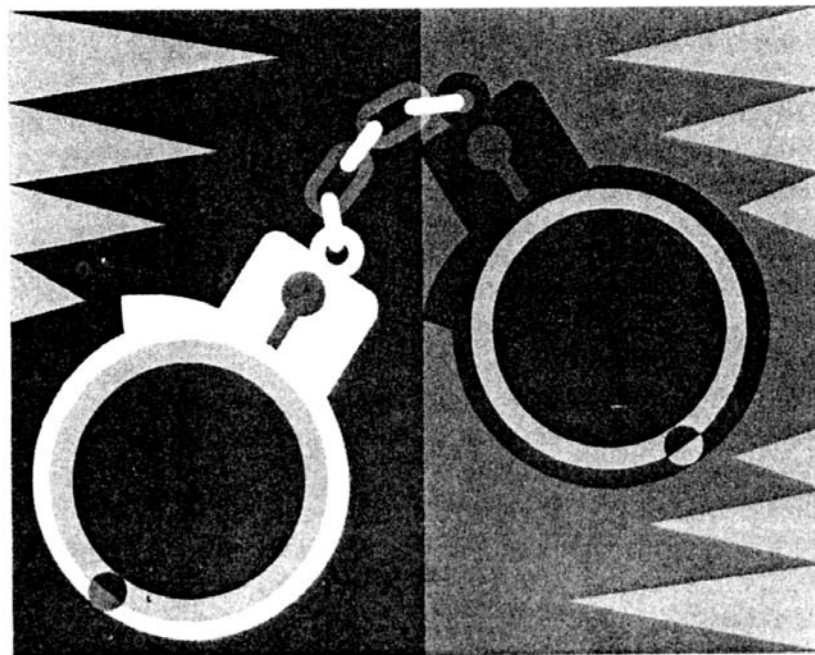
The Institute of Medicine research points out "that even relatively brief exposures" can contribute to heart attacks and deaths, said State Health Commissioner Dr. Terry Cline.

About 700 Oklahoma deaths annually can be attributed to second-hand smoke exposure - most from heart attacks and cardiovascular disease.

In 2007 the State Board of Health recommended changes in state laws to close loopholes that still permit smoking in several indoor workplaces, including stand-alone bars and restaurants with smoking rooms, where thousands of workers are often exposed to tobacco smoke pollution.

According to United Health Foundation, Oklahoma has poor health status - 43rd out of the 50 states - and is second worst in cardiovascular-related deaths. Oklahoma has very low heart health status with 25% higher heart disease and heart attack death rates than the national average.

"This Institute of Medicine report adds another excellent reason why no one should have to breathe these known toxins in order to hold a job," Cline said. "Especially in today's job market, it is not practical to expect Oklahoma workers to quit a job that jeopardizes their health and readily find another job more to their liking."



tegration facility where inmates would go for programs to prepare them for life 'outside the walls' and reduce our recidivism rate," Dorman said.

"Many inmates have never used the basic life skills most of us take for granted, such as balancing a monthly budget or even doing a load of laundry. We need such programs in place which will help these parolees have a better chance of success once released.

"I've been approached by countless citizens asking for help for loved ones," said Dorman. "We have to remember, not all these inmates are hardened criminals and want to make a better life.

"Wiley Post, one of our state's greatest citizens, was a convicted felon who turned his life around and made huge contributions to the world. There are others like him out there and we need to find ways to help them while keeping the prisoners with no chance of rehabilitation locked away."

## Fall Peace Festival



Celebrate Peace & Justice

Saturday, November 14<sup>th</sup> - - 10 am to 4 pm  
Civic Center 'Hall of Mirrors' 201 N. Walker, OKC  
Free Admission - Free Parking at Meters

Booths & Tables of Social Justice Groups  
Artisans & Craftspeople  
Live Music & Entertainment All Day

### Holiday Shopping Opportunities:

Fair trade goods, homemade soaps & candles, books, calendars,  
Central American fabrics, crafts, pottery, African carving, organic  
coffees, live plants, handmade jewelry, T-shirts, bumper stickers

### Supervised Children's Activities Area

Sponsors include The Peace House & Peace Education Institute,  
Social Justice Committee First Unitarian Church, Grateful Bean,  
Oklahoma Campaign for a US Department of Peace,  
Mayflower Congregational Church and Bob Lemon

[www.peacehouseok.org](http://www.peacehouseok.org)

[www.peaceeducationinstitute.org](http://www.peaceeducationinstitute.org)

## PUBLIC FORUM

# Public Ed Haters Besmirch Oklahoma

By Sheryl Melton

Our children recently suffered a grave injustice. They became the punch line of a national joke. The Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs released a survey of 1,000 Oklahoma high school students, and the results were shocking.

According to the survey, only 23% of those students questioned knew that George Washington was our first president. This tidbit quickly spread to all the major networks, news channels, and late night comedians.

When I heard the report, I shook my head. It just didn't ring true. I decided to conduct my own survey. When my students came to class, I gave them a piece of paper and asked them to write the name of the first president of the United States. They all laughed as if it were a joke.

I told them that I was serious, and that it wasn't a trick question.

I polled every student in my class, and 100% of the juniors and seniors at Beaver High School knew that George Washington was our first president.

### **STUDENTS WERE INDIGNANT**

I explained the survey that had been published, and what the nation was saying about Oklahoma students. At first they were indignant; then, an interesting class discussion ensued. One student remarked that if someone had called him on the phone and asked him that question, he would have thought it was a scam of some kind and would have given a wrong answer just to be safe.

They all agreed that if they didn't want to be bothered, they could imagine saying, "I don't know" just to get off the phone. Some wondered where these students lived; surely they weren't from the Panhandle.

One bright student in my class said that technically George Washington wasn't the first president. John Hanson was elected president after the Declaration of Independence was signed. George Washington was our first president under the Constitution. [Look it up. I did, and he was right!]

They recognized the impact this survey would have on Oklahoma in general and Oklahoma students specifically. They worried, "No one will want to hire us when they find out we are from Oklahoma." Businesses won't come to Oklahoma if they think their kids won't get a good education.

They thought it was extremely unfair that this survey that they had nothing to do with would influence the entire nation's opinion. My students understood its significance and were justifiably angry.

### **THOSE BEHIND THE DUBIOUS RESEARCH**

I researched the OCPA, the organization that commissioned the survey, and discovered that they are a conservative think tank that has issued a number of reports criticizing public education. They have supported vouchers for private schools, church schools, and home-schooled students. They lobby to influence voters and legislators.

Strategic Vision, an Atlanta-based research company, had conducted the survey, so I checked into Strategic Vision. I learned that this company had been censured by the American Association for Public Opinion Research for failure to provide sufficient information about its surveying procedures. They had conducted a similar survey in Arizona earlier this year, and the results were compa-



nable to the Oklahoma survey.

I then decided to do an in-depth investigation of the survey itself.

The 10 questions asked: 1. What is the supreme law of the land? 2. What do we call the first 10 amendments to the Constitution? 3. What are the two parts of the U.S. Congress? 4. How many justices are on the Supreme Court? 5. Who wrote the Declaration of Independence? 6. What ocean is on the east coast of the U.S.? 7. What are the two major political parties in the U.S.? 8. We elected a U.S. senator for how many years? 9. Who was the first president of the U.S.? 10. Who is in charge of the executive branch?

### **FIGURES LIE, LIARS FIGURE**

Of the 1,000 students questioned, only six students answered seven of the questions correctly. None answered eight or more questions correctly.

As a teacher of 38 years, I knew that statistic was suspicious. Out of 1,000 students, not one student could answer all of these relatively simple questions correctly? Not ONE student? [Strangely, Arizona had the very same results.]

Some of the other answers were also suspect. With question 7, 43% knew the answer was Democrats and Republicans, but 11% said Republicans and Communists. That means that 110 students gave this truly bizarre response. If the students weren't being prompted and all of these responses were via telephone, how did 110 students come up with Republicans and Communists?

One hundred percent of Beaver High School juniors and seniors know who the first president of the U.S. is, but will that make the CBS Evening News? Will Wolf Blitzer take back his comments on CNN? Will Jay Leno apologize for making jokes about Oklahoma students? No, not likely.

In the world of statistics, if a survey has answers that appear skewed, if the results are questionable, if the surveying company will not reveal its methods, and if the sponsoring organization has a vested interest in the results, that survey becomes an outlier and is discarded.

Instead, this one was broadcast to television, newspapers and the Internet. Our students had nothing to do with this survey, but I fear they will suffer its consequences.

- The author lives in Beaver

# Eliminating 'Cell Hell' On Oklahoma Roads

By Norm Rourke

*An open letter to the Oklahoma Legislature:*

Recently Jennifer Smith stood before the House Public Safety Committee and related an emotional story of how her mother was killed in an auto accident caused by a distracted driver using a cell phone. She tearfully asked if a life is worth a cell phone call or text message.

Technology is a wonderful thing. But when it is abused by drivers using cell phones or text messaging while driving at high speeds, it can be deadly. Those who insist on using cell phones while driving are as much a threat as those who drink and drive. Cell phone and texting drivers weave from one side of a lane or road to the other constantly endangering other drivers and forcing them to make evasive moves that compound the problem.

After Smith's plea for Oklahoma to enact legislation against the use of cell phones while driving, it was stated the matter would require "study."

What's to "study?" This isn't rocket science. It's peoples' lives! Eighteen states have enacted laws forbidding the use of cell phones while driving. Some are neighbors. Why is this dangerous practice not seen as a growing menace by Oklahoma?

### **NO DISTRACTIONS WHEN DRIVING**

Using a cell phone or texting is not any more dangerous than other distractions, one person said. So that makes it all right to use cell phones and text while driving? Any distraction is dangerous when driving. It just so happens that the proliferation of cell phone use and texting has reached epidemic proportions with no sign of abating.

Spending a week driving U.S. 75, aka the Killer Highway, dodging the idiots. You may learn something. This highway is in dire need of more patrolling and arrests. Speeders, quick change lane artists and, yes, cell phones and texting all contribute to a dangerous driving experience.

Is there some magical number of deaths, injuries and property damage that

must be met before the Legislature addresses this growing problem?

### **WEARY OF MULTI-TASKING DRIVERS**

Like many other Oklahoma drivers, I'm tired of dodging careless drivers using cell phones or texting as they swerve into my lane. I'm tired of worrying about the tailgater who is fiddling with their phone while exceeding the speed limit unaware I'm in front of them.

How long before I or someone I care about becomes another statistic because of irresponsible drivers using cell phones? How long before you or someone you care about becomes a statistic for the same reason?

I hope it never happens to either of us. But I'd bet if you or someone you love were the unfortunate victim of reckless drivers using cell phones, you'd be banging on your legislator's desk, calling for immediate action.

### **IT'S A NO-COST LIFE-SAVER**

Why not take action now? It's a win for everyone: It won't cost the state money. It will save lives. It will punish offenders [and the punishment should be severe enough to make the point]. And here's the real win for you: More votes from an appreciative electorate.

Don't fritter away the opportunity to make driving in Oklahoma safer. Don't waste time and money with a meaningless "study." Don't worry about political fallout. Do what's good for Oklahoma drivers, not what's politically expedient.

Don't let another person die because of irresponsible and uncaring drivers who are inattentive while using a cell phone or texting.

Although he may not have been using a cell phone or texting, a trucker's distraction cost the lives of 10 people and ruined his. What more reason do you need to act to awaken drivers to the increased danger of using cell phones or texting while driving?

As Ms Smith asked: Is a cell phone call worth the life of one person?

- The author lives in Beggs

Worth At Least \$150 Million

## CompSource Should Not Be Given Away

National American Insurance Company representatives have urged the legislative Task Force studying the privatization of CompSource Oklahoma to adopt a plan of privatization that will result in a sale of CompSource Oklahoma to the highest bidder.

CompSource is the state agency charged with providing workers' compensation insurance to businesses that cannot or choose not to obtain insurance through private companies.

The recommended plan focuses on the following key elements:

1. A fair price to the State of Oklahoma for CompSource determined by competitive bidding.
2. The development of a rate stabilization plan for Oklahoma businesses.
3. The continued employment of most CompSource employees.
4. Guaranteeing the availability of workers compensation insurance to all Oklahoma employers by requiring the successful bidder to remain as the carrier of last resort.
5. Successful bidder must be able to demonstrate to the Oklahoma Department of Insurance, through a FORMAL Hearing, that they have the appropriate capital structure required for the new operations and have a plan to deal with all open claim liabilities that have been generated under previous CompSource policies.

### WORTH UP TO \$200 MILLION

National American's chief operating officer, Lance LaGere, stated that "In a time of budget cuts and deficits a sale of CompSource would likely net the state of Oklahoma \$150 million to \$200 million. There is no question that CompSource is a state agency and if it is a state agency, its assets have to go to the state if it is dissolved."

The Task Force had been told earlier that the issue of who is entitled to proceeds from the sale of CompSource if it is dissolved is a gray area. LaGere states this is not true.

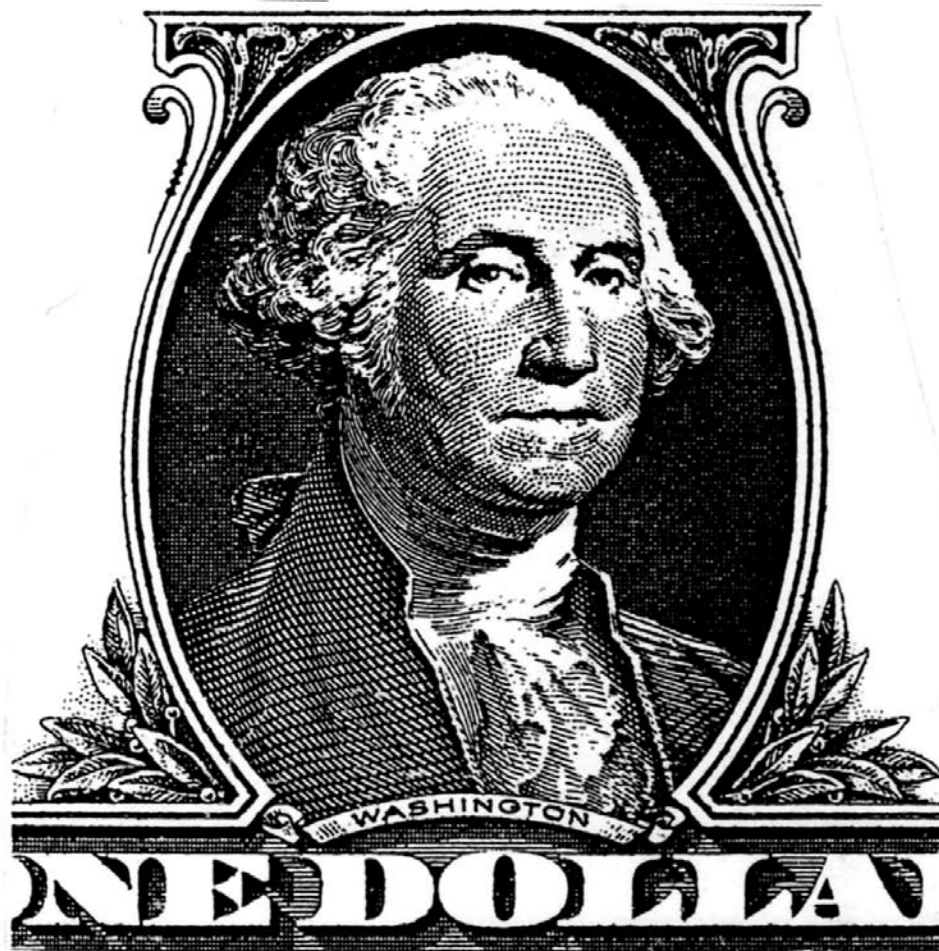
"CompSource claims a federal and a state income tax exemption based upon the fact that it is a component unit of the state and refers to itself as an integral part of the state in order to get the exemption," he said.

"These are tax terms of art and mean that if it is dissolved, sold, or ceases to do business, its assets net of its liabilities revert to the state."

### TRANSPARENT BIDDING IS URGED

A competitive bidding process should require bidders to buy both the assets and liabilities of CompSource with all sale proceeds going to the state of Oklahoma.

The new carrier should also function as the carrier of last resort and be subject to regulation by the Oklahoma State Insurance Commissioner. CompSource is not currently regulated.



LaGere pointed out that private, commercial insurance carriers serve as the carrier of last resort in Missouri and Nebraska. Through better operating efficiencies, privatizations in other states have resulted in reduced policyholder rates, increased policyholder service, increased insurance competition and there has been a decrease in the involuntary market, market share.

Privatization of CompSource through a sale will ultimately benefit the policyholders, the state of Oklahoma monetarily and help attract new industry to the state in the same fashion as it has in other states that have privatized their state insurance funds.

According to LaGere, if there are legal questions, there are mechanisms in place to promptly get the issue of whether the state owns CompSource before the Oklahoma Supreme Court.

"The Legislature shouldn't give away an entity worth at least \$150 million just because someone says there may be legal questions. The stakes are too high to just walk away," he said.

## FOI Fighting For Your Right To Know

By Joey Senat

Freedom of Information Oklahoma's 2009 Black Hole Award was given to the Oklahoma A&M Board of Regents and Oklahoma State University administration for routinely conducting the public's business outside of the public's view.

Winning FOI awards for their commitment to openness and public records were Mark Thomas and Carolyn Kusler.

Thomas, executive vice president of the Oklahoma Press Association, received the Ben Blackstock Award, which is presented to a non-governmental person or organization that has shown a commitment to freedom of information.

Thomas was "recognized for tirelessly protecting the public's right to know from infringements by the state Legislature and others." Thomas succeeded Blackstock, the award's namesake, at the OPA in 1995.

Kusler, the Wagoner County clerk, received The Sunshine Award for her office's efforts to put county land records and other information online [www.wagoner-countyclerk.com](http://www.wagoner-countyclerk.com). The award is presented to a public official or governmental organization that has shown a commitment to freedom of information.

### FOI PRESENTS SUNSHINE AWARD

FOI Oklahoma presented the awards at its Oklahoma Sunshine conference earlier this year.

Before naming the recipient of the Black Hole Award, FOI Oklahoma President Mark Hanebutt noted, "This is not the award you want to get from our organization."

The award was bestowed on OSU's regents and administration based on reporting by the university's student-run newspaper.

In April 2008, The Daily O'Collegian reported that the nine regents, who govern five colleges and universities including OSU, secretly discuss proposals among school officials prior to the public meetings. The newspaper also told of the stance by OSU administrators that the public's business conducted on officials' privately owned smart-phones could be kept secret.

### OSU'S SNEAKY ACTIVITY EXPOSED

The newspaper revealed that when regents object to proposals by the schools they oversee, university leaders withdraw them from consideration before the agenda is made public 24 hours in advance of the meeting.

The result had been almost no discussion in front of the public and only unanimous votes since at least January 2006, the newspaper found.

Regents defended making decisions regarding their \$1 billion annual operation this way because most of their matters are "routine in nature" and it saves time at the formal meetings.

But open government advocates said the regents' decision-making practices hide key discussions from the public and seem to violate the intended spirit, if not the letter, of Oklahoma's Open Meeting Act. Oklahoma legal authorities have articulated the importance of conducting the public's business in public.

### ATTORNEY GENERAL SPEAKS TRUTH TO POWER

"An open deliberative process reveals rejected alternatives about which the public might not know," an Oklahoma attorney general once wrote. "Public access to a mere 'rubber stamp' vote is all but useless."

And more than 30 years ago, the Oklahoma Supreme Court said, "If an informed citizenry is to meaningfully participate in government or at least understand why government acts affecting their daily lives are taken, the process of decision-making as well as the end results must be conducted in full view of the governed."

The Daily O'Collegian also reported that OSU President Burns Hargis and several hundred other university employees conduct the public's business on their smart phones or cell phones.

OSU administrators claimed the related text messages, e-mails and numbers dialed were secret. They contended that the ownership of the cellular device, not the substance of its related records, should decide whether those records are public.

But under that philosophy, open government advocates noted, any university-related documents created by officials on their personal computers would be secret, too.

A formal opinion issued by Attorney General Drew Edmondson in May rejected the reasoning used by OSU officials, holding [OK AG 09-12] that it is the nature of the record created that determines if it is a public record.

- From the FOI Oklahoma newsletter

## BOOKS

# It's Never Too Early To Start Holiday Gift List

By Mike Nobles

### First of Two Parts

Well, it's that time of year again, the time when many of us are wondering what to get at least one, likely more, folks on our gift list. When that funky tie or chartreuse pair of socks don't seem to be exactly the gift you are seeking, allow me to recommend some first-rate books I believe will please the most discerning person on your list.

As always, this is an eclectic list including poetry, a charming children's book by a Tulsa writer, coffee-table size books at affordable prices, and a host of others I believe are worthy of any reader's time.

I recommend them all and wish all readers a wonderful holiday season.

#### MICHENER

*A Writer's Journey*

By Stephen J. May

University of Oklahoma Press

368 pages, \$19.95

This is a highly readable, in-depth biography of one of the most prolific storytellers in American literature. The book not only provides the obligatory biographical information on James Michener but also examines his work in both a biographical and cultural context by describing the creation of each novel and assessing the book's strengths and weaknesses.

There are also insights into his working methods, personal life, and some little known and unflattering revelations regarding his egotism, hypersensitivity to criticism, and sometimes failure to credit contributions of his assistants that will pique the reader's interest.

#### WORK IS LOVE MADE VISIBLE

By Jeanetta Calhoun Mish

West End Press

64 pages, \$12.95

This wonderful book of poetry by an Oklahoma native is a must-have for any reader that enjoys good writing about Oklahoma rural life as experienced by a

## New Book Addresses Religion In Schools

A new book published by Americans United for Separation of Church and State gives educators and families detailed information about the law governing religion and the public schools.

*Religion in the Public Schools: A Road Map for Avoiding Lawsuits and Respecting Parents Legal Rights* is a 129-page guide that provides a clear and concise account of court rulings on a variety of religious issues related to the classroom.

"This book will help educators, parents and students navigate sometimes tricky issues regarding the role of religion in the classroom," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "Given all the disputes about this topic around the country, it is extraordinarily timely."

#### CASES END UP IN COURT BATTLES

Heated controversies over religion and schools have erupted recently in Florida, Texas, Louisiana, Iowa and other states.

Topics discussed in the book include school prayer, the teaching of evolution and creationism, student-run religious clubs, religiously based censorship, teaching about religion as an academic subject and students' religious rights.

Court rulings in these areas and others are surveyed, and what the law allows – and does not – is explained. Legal cases are fully cited with extensive endnotes.

Lynn said the book makes it clear that religion can be studied as an academic subject and that students have the right to pray on their own voluntarily. But, he added, public schools may not promote worship, advocate a theological viewpoint or pressure students to take part in religious activities.

#### AUTHOR BRINGS A WEALTH OF KNOWLEDGE

*Religion in the Public Schools* was written by Anne Marie Lofaso, an associate professor of law at West Virginia University. A Harvard graduate, Lofaso has law degrees from the University of Pennsylvania Law School and the University of Oxford.

Lofaso's book tells what the law says about religion and schools, not what activists on either side of the conflict wish it were.

"All too often, disputes over religion in public schools end up in court," said AU's Lynn. "This book provides a better way. When school officials know what the law says and follow it, everyone benefits."

Lynn said print editions of the book will be distributed to educators, school attorneys and others nationwide. The full text is also available online without cost at <http://religionintheschools.com/>

Americans United is a religious liberty watchdog group based in Washington, DC. Founded in 1947, the organization educates Americans about the importance of church-state separation in safeguarding religious freedom.

working class family.

The story of the harsh realities of life in rural Oklahoma with the ever-present poverty and daily exposure to the challenges of the weather along with a dose of love, both for the land and family, family pride, and a tribute to her working-class roots will remind one of why they have an affection for Oklahoma in spite of its recent history.

We will hear more from this Okie poet, much more.

#### DEAD IN THEIR TRACKS

*Crossing America's Desert Borderlands in the New Era*

By John Annerino

The University of Arizona Press

320 pages, \$17.95

Illegal immigration and border crossings have been the lead stories in the media for much of the past few years. The political debate and demonstrations in the streets have intensified and there is no shortage of essays, op-ed pieces, books and other printed materials dealing with the subject.

What does not get much in-depth study is America's killing field, the deadliest immigrant trail in America today: the Arizona border.

This book remedies the shortcoming by providing a first-hand account of the perils associated with crossing the El Camino del Diablo [Devil's Highway] from along the Mexico-Arizona border to Interstate Highway 8.

The author made a 50-mile trek with four illegal immigrants and his narrative is both enlightening and terrifying. It will give you an unforgettable view of the real immigration problem in this country.

You will not know the true story of illegal immigration until you read this book.

See BOOKS Page 11

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# State's Dismal Duo Seeks To Sink Health Bill

Both Oklahoma U.S. Senators, Tom Coburn and Jim Inhofe, are members of The Family, a cult that is vociferously bent on killing any health care reform bill.

With the Senate Finance Committee's passage of its version of health care legislation, expect the debate to flare again as the bill moves to the Senate floor.

The Family's point men – “key men” in the cult's theological lexicon – will try once again to defeat reform in the service of their Supply-Side Jesus.

The Family has spent decades consolidating power within the GOP, and has come to dominate the party, even among those who do not belong to the cult.

## **BARGAINING TABLE FOR A SELECT FEW**

While leaders of the religious right we've come to know assert their claim to “a place at the table,” The Family sets its table for only a select few. They are the nation's powerful: senators, congressmen, business executives and the strong-armed leaders of Third World countries.

Together, in secret, they worship a Jesus unrecognizable to many practicing Christians. [In their secret theology, the leadership model of Adolf Hitler is one of which Jesus would approve.]

Cult members believe themselves to be anointed to their position by Jesus himself – a Jesus who tells them that their constituents' health care dilemmas are of no consequence to God; they are just the natural order of things as deemed by him.

The Jesus worshipped by The Family is neither Jesus the peacemaker, the champion of the poor, nor even Christ the personal savior. He is Jesus the power broker, who works his will through well-situated men committed to free enterprise of a most unregulated sort.

## **GOD ORDAINED THE POOR**

Things are as they are in the world because that's the way God wants them. The poor are poor because God ordained it to be so – a condition that they may have earned through disobedience to the creator.

The powerful are powerful – be they murderous dictators or corporate polluters – because they are God's chosen. Any regulated economic system, according to this theology, is less than godly, because regulation forestalls the exercise of free will.

Sens. Charles Grassley, R-IA, and Mike Enzi, R-WY, Family members who did their bit to slow down reform in their roles on the negotiating team for the Senate Finance Committee health care reform bill, remain unmoved by the 865 preventable deaths suffered each week by people without access to proper health care.

## **GOD WISHED THEM TO DIE**

The God of The Family's teaching would never hold Grassley or Enzi – or any other official – to account for those deaths, because Grassley and Enzi are key men in God's plan.

Even Grassley's dishonest campaign to convince his constituents that President Barack Obama is looking to use health care reform to “pull the plug on Grandma” – God is just fine with that, because Grassley is doing exactly what God wants him to do, preserving the social order.

Sen. Jim DeMint, R-SC, said rightwingers could “break” Obama by defeating health care reform.

Coburn told NBC's David Gregory that members of Congress had “earned” the threats of violence they received at Town Hall meetings focused on the health care bill.

And Inhofe characterized the entire health care bill – not just the contested public option – as creating a “socialized” system.

The Family only comes above ground once a year, sponsoring the annual National Prayer Breakfast, where the high and mighty of government, business and sometimes even popular culture [Bono addressed them in 2006] gather, usually to hear the U.S. president speak to the subject of prayer.

Obama gave his first National Prayer Breakfast speech shortly after his inauguration.

But behind the scenes, in a weekly Capitol Hill meeting of something called the Values Action Team, the two strains – the elite and the populist – are intertwined. Founded by then-House Majority Whip Tom DeLay, R-TX, 10 years ago and supported by Focus on the Family's James Dobson, the VAT is a legislative strategy session that is currently led by Family member Sen. Sam Brownback, R-KS, and was formerly led by Rep. Joe Pitts, R-PA.

## **IT IS ALL PART OF GOD'S PLAN**

What of the poor and suffering, the health care-related defaults on mortgages that claim 60% of all home foreclosures? What of those who have no health insurance? They are simply not among the anointed.

Or worse, according to a report commissioned by The Family, the cause of their poverty, the cause of all poverty, is “disobedience.”

Listen to Oklahoma's Coburn, responding to a woman at an August Town Hall meeting. She was sobbing because the company that insured her husband cut off his nursing home care after a brain injury, sending him to her care with a feeding tube in his chest and no coverage for the equipment or training she would need to care for him.

Nor would they pay for a speech pathologist or a physical therapist who could teach him how to eat and drink again.

## **GOVERNMENT IS NOT THE SOLUTION?**

After telling his constituent that his office would help her, as an individual, to navigate the system, Coburn added, “But the other thing that's missing in this debate is us as neighbors, helping people that need our help ...The idea that the government is the solution to our problems is an inaccurate, a very inaccurate, statement.”

God will provide. Or your neighbors will. Whatever you get, that's what God wanted for you.

While other lawmakers complained they hadn't been given time to read the weighty health care bills on which they were to vote, Inhofe seemed untroubled by that dilemma: his religion would appear to demand that he oppose health care reform as a matter of principle.

As a government disruption of God's free markets, the very concept, by The Family's reckoning, is an abomination.

## **INHOFE REFUSES TO READ THE BILL**

At an August Town Hall meeting, Inhofe told residents of Chickasha, according to the Express-Star of Grady County, that “he does not need to read the 1,000-page health care reform bill, he will simply vote against it.”

Inhofe explained: “I don't have to read it, or know what's in it. I'm going to oppose it anyways.”

Later in the meeting, the senator elaborated.

“People are not buying these concepts that are completely foreign to America,” Inhofe said. “We're almost reaching a revolution in this country.”

Appearing on C-SPAN's Washington Journal, Inhofe was asked by a caller to explain what bearing, if any, his religion had on his politics.

“I'm a follower of Jesus,” he said, “and I'm not embarrassed about it.”

Which Jesus?

# BOOKS

From Page 10

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## **CHACO AND AFTER IN THE NORTHERN SAN JUAN**

*Excavations at the Bluff Great House*

By Catherine M. Cameron

The University of Arizona Press

280 pages, \$75.00

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In my opinion Chaco Culture National Historical Park in northwestern New Mexico is one of the most inspiring and yet mysterious jewels in the National Park System. It was a major center of Puebloan culture from AD 850-1250 and to this day contains more unexcavated than excavated sites and to an extraordinary number of visitors it demands a difficult to explain but very real reverence not found in most parks and monuments.

Many of the unexcavated sites are known as “outlier” Great Houses and this marvelous book details efforts underway to excavate the Bluff Great House in Utah that is helping to clarify the relationship of “outlying” great houses to Chaco Canyon. A must-have book for anyone remotely interested in one of the mysteries and central problems of Southwestern archaeology.

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## **WE'LL FIND THE PLACE**

*The Mormon Exodus, 1846-1848*

By Richard E. Bennett

University of Oklahoma Press

448 pages, \$21.95

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This is perhaps the best account of the Mormon exodus from Nauvoo, IL, to THE OKLAHOMA OBSERVER, NOVEMBER 10, 2009, PAGE 11

their ultimate New Zion in Salt Lake City. The exodus was the link between the near destruction of the church in the east and the successful settling in the west. The period 1846-1848 was a prelude to the founding of the present day state of Utah and the threshold of the Mormon migration that began in 1849 and lasted some 20 years.

This is a highly-readable, fact-filled history of the exodus as seen through the eyes of the true believers that were the forerunners of what is now the fastest growing religion in the world. To truly understand the motivations of these early day Mormons this book is a must read.

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## **OUTLAW JOURNALIST**

*The Life and Times of Hunter S. Thompson*

By William McKeen

W.W. Norton & Company

428 pages, \$16.95

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This is one of the better books about a man Tom Wolfe called “the greatest comic writer of the 20th Century.” Hunter Thompson is not a figure most readers are ambivalent about. They either like him or they dislike him, very much. This biography explores the man and the myths and lays it all out for the reader. The ugly habits such as racial epithets, a less than brotherly love toward his gay brother, and womanizing that he refined almost into an art are here as well as his affection and love for his son Juan, his devotion to fans, and his deep reservoir of friendship. What to make of such a walking contradiction that, in the end, ended his own life? This book begins to provide some answers.

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

# Dems Must Stand For Public Option

By Sharon Martin

*An Open Letter to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid:*

Expendable. That's the word that came to me when I read the headline, Mr. Reid, that said you'd support the public option with state opt-out.

I live in a Red State. Legislators here consistently oppose any legislation for the common good. To them, as an under-insured middle-class American woman, I am expendable.

You are going to allow them to decide if I get health care? Pardon me if I sound angry.

I wrote letters to both of my senators and to my congressman. The senators responded, telling me why I didn't want the government meddling with my health care. I guess they didn't read the part of my letter that said I couldn't get adequate coverage because of a pre-existing condition. Congressman [Frank] Lucas didn't bother to write back. Either he never got my letter or he didn't know how to say politely that he didn't give a rat's ear whether I'm covered or not.

By giving in to those who oppose the public option, Mr. Reid, you are delivering me up to this delegation, men who consider me and anyone who doesn't agree with their classist philosophy expendable. Is this what you intended?

It is our country's shame that we don't take care of the middle class, the working people whose labor makes the wealthy wealthier and whose taxes and contributions give aid to the poor. It doesn't make one a socialist to support the workers; I've always thought that made one a Democrat. If it isn't going to be so, perhaps we need a new party.

Here is my plea to you, sir: rethink your stance toward the public option. Stand



up for the people who elected you and who gave you a majority in the Senate. That includes those of us who are not represented well. The Democratic Party has always been inclusive, and I hope it will continue to be. It is in your hands to see that legislation doesn't leave me out.

My life may well depend on that public option, and if my delegation won't support me and my needs, I hope my party will.

- The author lives in Oilton

## Needed: Health Care From Birth To Death

By Ron du Bois

*An Open Letter to Gov. Henry, Rep. Lucas, Sens. Coburn and Inhofe:*

I just phoned Health Canada to see if it would cover treatment for a male condition called Peyronne's Disease [curvature of the penis].

Any Canadian with this disease would be treated with no out of pocket charges. Why can't we do the same?

In the U.S. if you don't have the money you don't get the treatment.

Sometimes implants are necessary for correction of this condition. The surgery and implants are so expensive they cause bankruptcy - without them you are consigned to a life of celibacy. U.S. private for-profit health insurance companies consider Peyronne's as a "pre-existing" condition and charge more or deny coverage.

We need health care that extends Medicare to all just as all other industrialized nations have done for the last 40 years! Believe me they are not about to trade

their systems for the inadequacy and cruelty of ours.

We need a system that covers everyone from birth to death regardless of ability to pay. That is what every other advanced nation in the world has; it is their philosophy. Why should we be different? Their medical expenses are half ours and their health outcomes and productivity are better than ours. Medicare and Medicaid are only two of a long list of public services we pay for through taxation.

Why are you intractably opposed to extending Medicare and paying for health care for all in the same way we pay for fire, police, military, postal, highways, and education? I urge you not to be part of the national blindness to the long history of democratic socialism in this country.

Like other Oklahomans I look forward to seeing you take the lead as Health Care Insurance Reform moves forward.

- The author lives in Stillwater

## Opt-Out Would Expose GOP's Real Loyalties

By Joe Conason

The Senate leadership's decision to include the "public option" in its health care reform legislation seemed at first almost miraculous, especially to anyone who believed the hundreds of obituaries recited in the media over the past several months. But by acting on their convictions rather than their fears, the Democrats could ultimately find that the politics of consumer choice can be turned to their advantage for years to come.

Prognostications by the Washington press corps are so often wrong that it is usually safe to bet against the pundits - but in the case of the public option, their skepticism was warranted. While polls have consistently showed strong majorities in favor of a Medicare-style insurance plan, the combined opposition of the Republican minority, the right-wing media, and the insurance and pharmaceutical industries appeared easily powerful enough to kill any such proposal.

Besides, too many influential Democrats in both the Senate and the House - notably Connecticut's Joseph Lieberman, whose wife long worked for major health care and pharmaceutical interests - took their direction from lobbyists who want to kill the public option. [Lieberman, the self-styled "independent Democrat," has threatened to join a Republican filibuster.]

### THEME OF 'CHOICE' REBORN

Meanwhile White House political operatives were sending mixed messages, with President Obama's support for the public option subordinated to the illusion of bipartisanship. Propaganda against "government-run health care" has been dominating the debate.

But prospects for the public option brightened when Democrats led by Sen. Charles Schumer fashioned a compromise that would allow states to "opt out" of the public insurance plan. By leaving that decision to the states, the Schumer amendment recapitulates the political theme of choice in health care reform.

Suddenly, Republican opposition to the public option can be seen for what it really is: curtailing consumer choices and coddling insurance monopolies.

### MOST STATES WILL OPT-IN

The reason that Schumer's scheme is superior to other compromises is simple. Unlike feeble alternatives proposed by some of his colleagues - all of which

would delay implementation indefinitely, or diminish the public option's scope - the opt-out plan would allow for success in the real world.

As the default position, requiring specific action to reject the government plan, the public option will have a strong chance of prevailing in most states.

And should most states actually permit the public option to be offered alongside private insurance, the government plan will wield enough market power to reduce costs significantly across the board, just as its proponents expect.

### PROBABLE OPT-OUT STATES NEED IT MOST

Of course, there probably would be a number of states where Republican governors and legislatures decide to opt out, at least initially.

Sadly, the places that most need the public option, such as Mississippi, where insurance monopolies create both poor coverage and poor health, are the most likely to reject it. But over time, if the government plan proves to be cheaper and better than the private monopolies in those states, the demand for change will intensify.

Then families will learn that their friends and relatives in public option states are paying hundreds of dollars less every month for the same coverage [or better].

### SUCCESS WOULD PRESSURE LAWMAKERS

Consumer agencies will report that the government plan, like Medicare, doesn't abruptly cancel insurance for people who become ill or chisel their benefits as private insurers too often do. Business owners will discover that firms in public option states have lower costs - because even companies with private insurance plans benefit from the competitive effect of the government plan.

In a democratic society this experiment - again assuming its success - should result in growing pressure on politicians who insist on frustrating progress. It is hard to imagine an issue that could more sharply frame the division between consumers and labor on one side, and abusive corporate power on the other.

Over time, for struggling Democrats in Republican states, that could mean becoming the party of choice in every sense.

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# Dems Ax GOP Goal To Kill Estate Tax

Sometimes you can't declare victory until the other side concedes defeat. That's what happened in the decade-long struggle over the future of the federal estate tax, our nation's only levy on inherited wealth.

Newt Gingrich, always the servant of plutocracy, dubbed it "the death tax" and the corporate media, including the Daily Disappointment, began chanting that foul lie over and over until the masses began believing it.

The coalition of corporate lobbyists and wealthy families, including that bastion of greed the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and their clone, the National Federation of Independent Businesses, dropped their long call for complete abolition of the tax, a trillion dollars over the next 15 years.

Wealthy families, including 18 dynastic families such as heirs to the Mars candy family fortune, had spent millions in lobbying to save billions in future taxes.

## DELIBERATELY CONFUSING THE PUBLIC

For over a decade, opponents of the estate tax attempted to confuse the public about who really paid the tax. They called it a "death tax" on everyone, when it applied to only a small sliver of multi-millionaires and billionaires, less than 2% of taxpayers.

In the late 1990s, they ran advertisements and a media campaign claiming the estate tax was the death of the family farm. In 2001, Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, David Cay Johnston, exposed this as a sham. His investigative reporting found not a single case of a farm having been lost because of the estate tax. The same is true in Oklahoma.

Proponents of repeal found a friend [surprise?] in President Bush who included a phase-out of the estate tax in his 2001 tax plan. Over the ensuing decade, the amount of wealth exempted by the tax rose from \$1 million to \$3.5 million [\$7 million for a couple] and the rate was cut from 55% to 45%.

At the current level of \$3.5 million only one in 200 taxpayers will owe any estate tax.

## BANS CONCENTRATION OF WEALTH

Advocates for retaining the estate tax have pointed out that it raises significant revenue from those most able to pay. It provides an incentive for the wealthy to give to charity and places a brake on the concentration of wealth and power – which corrodes democracy.

Bill Gates Sr., father of the founder of Microsoft, called the estate tax "a fair tax" and a "mechanism for wealthy people to pay back the society that created the fertile ground for wealth creation."

Warren Buffett testified before Congress that "dynastic wealth, the enemy of meritocracy, is on the rise. Equality of opportunity has been on the decline. A progressive and meaningful estate tax is needed to curb the movement of a democracy toward plutocracy."

If Congress takes no action this year, an unlikely scenario, the estate tax will expire next year, 2010, but only for one year. The entire 2001 tax law sunsets on Jan. 1, 2011, with the estate tax reverting to a \$1 million exemption and 55% rate. This gives advocates of keeping the tax enormous leverage in holding the line against gutting the law.

## RIGHTWING NEVER GIVES UP

The anti-inheritance tax lobby is shifting its considerable resources toward raising the wealth exemption to \$10 million and reducing the rate to 35%. This



additional tax break for multi-millionaires would cost over \$100 billion over the next 10 years.

President Obama has signaled his support for retaining the estate tax at its current \$3.5 million level, while indexing it for inflation. Congress will likely act this fall to continue the existing law for one year, taking up permanent estate tax reform in 2010.

There is a real risk, however, that anti-tax forces will rapidly coalesce around a proposal to permanently raise the wealth exemption and gut the law.

The same wobbly half-assed Democrats who tried to ax the public option out of health care reform – Sens. Max Baucus, D-MT; Blanche Lincoln, D-AR, and Ben Nelson, D-NE – are all likely votes for a bad estate tax bill.

In 2003, anti-tax activist Grover Norquist confidently predicted the demise of the estate tax. He characterized the movement to retain the law a "dead fish."

"They're embarrassing," he told the Washington Post. "They're flipping around like that stupid fish in the boat."

Recently he told Bloomberg News that his coalition, Americans for Tax Reform [joke], was working to get the best possible deal because "this Congress is not going to abolish the death tax."

The dead fish swims again.

# Cracking Down On Off-Shore Tax Evaders

Sen. Carl Levin of Michigan has offered a measure to crack down on offshore tax evasion as a multi-billion dollar revenue-raiser to help pay for health care reform.

"Our bill provides powerful tools to end offshore tax haven and tax shelter abuses [which] contribute billions to the annual tax gap," Levin said.

"With the financial crisis facing our country today and the long list of expenses we're incurring to try to end that crisis, it is past time for taxes owing to the people's Treasury to be collected. And it is long past time for Congress to stop tax cheats from shifting their taxes onto the shoulders of honest Americans."

The measure is called the Stop Tax Haven Abuse Act [S. 506]. It would enact important new rules to deter offshore transactions designed to evade U.S. income tax.

## IT COULD HIT \$100 BILLION

It is estimated that the international tax gap – the amount of taxes American companies and wealthy Americans evade through offshore tax activities – is as much as \$100 billion per year.

A similar bill has been introduced in the House with 59 co-sponsors [H.R. 1265]. Preliminary projection by the Joint Committee on Taxation estimates that the legislation would raise \$29.8 billion in revenue over 10 years.

The ultimate amount of revenue may be many times that. Because these assets and income are not reported to the IRS, the true magnitude of the revenue loss is a mystery.

Enacting the Stop Tax Haven Abuse Act would be a progressive way to help pay for health care reform because it is generally wealthy Americans that are able to take advantage of tax havens.

## HOW THE SYSTEM IS SUPPOSED TO WORK

U.S. citizens and residents are taxed on all their income, whether it is earned

here or abroad. If a foreign government also taxes the income, that tax may be credited against their U.S. tax.

Wealthy taxpayers are able to avoid paying U.S. taxes that they legally owe by moving assets and income offshore to what are known as "tax havens." Tax havens are offshore jurisdictions that have low or nonexistent income taxes as well as bank secrecy laws that they use to justify being uncooperative with investigations by tax authorities from other countries.

Evading U.S. income tax by using tax havens is illegal and U.S. citizens that do it are subject to civil and criminal penalties, including possible prison terms.

The U.S. government's investigation of banking giant United Bank of Switzerland [UBS] revealed that as many as 52,000 accounts there are owned by Americans.

## THE GUILTY PLEAS ARE COMING IN

That's just one bank in one of the dozens of offshore financial centers. Several UBS account owners have already pleaded guilty to tax evasion.

The latest plea came when a Seattle area man, a former sales manager for Boeing, appeared before the court in connection with his plea agreement.

Roberto Cittadini faces possible criminal penalties of three years in prison and a maximum fine of \$250,000.

He has already agreed to a civil penalty for failure to file a Foreign Bank Account Report [FBAR] of up to one-half of the maximum balance of his off-shore accounts which at one time contained as much as \$1.9 million dollars.

The great irony of this particular case is that since Boeing is a multi-billion dollar contractor for the U.S. government, part of Cittadini's salary was paid by the U.S. government.

He moved that money outside of the country to invest it and avoid paying U.S. income tax on the investment earnings.

# Last Flat-Earther? It's Oklahoma Jim

By Dana Milbank

It must be very lonely being the last flat-earthier.

Sen. Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma, committed climate-change denier, found himself in just such a position recently as the Senate environment committee, on which he is the ranking Republican, took up legislation on global warming. Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-SC, was in talks with Democrats over a compromise bill – the traitor! And as Inhofe listened, fellow Republicans on the committee – turncoats! – made it clear that they no longer share, if they ever did, Inhofe's view that man-made global warming is the “greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people.”

“Eleven academies in industrialized countries say that climate change is real; humans have caused most of the recent warming,” admitted Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-TN. “If fire chiefs of the same reputation told me my house was about to burn down, I'd buy some fire insurance.”

An oil-state senator, David Vitter, R-LA, said that he, too, wants to “get us beyond high-carbon fuels” and “focus on conservation, nuclear, natural gas and new technologies like electric cars.” And an industrial-state senator, George Voinovich, R-OH, acknowledged that climate change “is a serious and complex issue that deserves our full attention.”

## ALL ALONE ON THAT LIMB

Then there was poor Inhofe. “The science is more definitive than ever? You keep saying that because you want to believe it so much,” he said bitterly. He offered to furnish a list of scientists who once believed in climate change but “who are solidly on the other side right now.” The science, he said, “already has shifted” against global-warming theory. “Science is not settled! Everyone knows it's not settled!”

Inhofe called for more oil drilling. His aides tried to debunk the other senators' points by passing around papers titled “Rapid Response.” Mid-hearing, Inhofe's former spokesman, now in the private sector, sent out an e-mail – “Prominent Russian Scientist: ‘We should fear a deep temperature drop – not catastrophic global warming.’”

The climate of the hearing itself seemed designed to burn Inhofe. Chairman Barbara Boxer, D-CA, sponsor of the climate bill, insisted on having it in a too-small hearing room, causing the place to overheat from all the bodies. Though none of the committee Republicans are supporting her cap-and-trade plan for carbon emissions so far, Boxer made it clear that her primary grievance is with one Republican.

## BOXER'S TARGET: INHOFE

“Since John Warner retired, I don't have a Republican partner on the committee, but I am appreciative for the productive conversations I've had with Sen. Alexander, about nuclear energy, and for the wide-ranging conversations and meetings I had with Sen. Voinovich,” Boxer said, pointedly omitting Inhofe.

Inhofe began by expressing surprise that Boxer would even use the term “global warming,” asserting that “people have been running from that term ever since we went out of that natural warming cycle about nine years ago.” And he turned with a fury on Graham, his fellow Republican, for an “apparent compromise will also entail a massive expansion of government bureaucracy.”

# Dishing It Out, Faux News Must Take It, Too

By Edwin E. Vineyard

Some of those who are the most prolific advice-givers are the least qualified to be dispensing guidance. So it is with this writer, whose credentials in press relations could be called into question.

This writer recalls that sometime early in his 25-year tenure as a college president, he attended a breakout session at a national conference on the topic of press relations. He recalls well the admonition of that experienced speaker: “Don't get into a fight with a newspaper unless you own one.” It was akin to Mark Twain's advice not to battle with somebody who buys ink by the barrel.

This advice must have been received a while after a certain incident in the writer's early career, or else this writer flagrantly failed to follow it. Just prior to leaving home to attend a banquet of the local Chamber of Commerce, he looked at that day's evening edition of the town news. There on the front page was an attack on the college on some matter of local controversy with city fathers. Anger swelled.

## ANGRILY WAVING THE LOCAL PAPER

That anger had not abated when this writer took the speaker's rostrum, waved the local newspaper at the crowd, including its publisher, and termed it the owner's “yellow scandal sheet.” He said to the folks there that maybe he should apologize for the college cluttering up the east side of their nice town and causing problems.

This was definitely not the epitome of good public relations, although raves were immediately received from college personnel and many local friends. Somebody needed to call the paper and the local government to task, they said, for mistreating the town's major economic and cultural asset.

Curiously enough, there was a bit more local sensitivity after that. The newspaper owner and I later became friends, and his lovely wife served a very helpful term on the governing board of regents.



Sen. John Kerry, D-MA, the first witness, turned up the temperature further on Inhofe. He gave a Gore-like tour of climate catastrophe: “the science is screaming at us to take action . . . pine beetles have destroyed 6.5 million acres of forestland . . . 180 Alaskan villages are losing permafrost . . . we have columns of methane rising now in the ocean.”

Kerry went on like this for an extraordinary 26½ minutes that included the phrase, uttered with no apparent self-consciousness, “we invented wind.” At various points, Kerry signaled an end with “I'll just close” or “I'll just end on this note” but continued on. This infuriated nobody as much as Inhofe, whom Kerry repeatedly singled out for a lecture. “Sen. Inhofe, you just talked about the costs of doing some of this,” he said. But “the cost of doing nothing,” Kerry countered, “is far more expensive for your folks in Oklahoma.”

Inhofe, who glared back at Kerry, still seethed a few minutes later when he interrupted the chairman. “You know, I sat here for 25 minutes listening to Sen. Kerry talk about me, and I didn't have a chance to respond,” he complained. “I will, however.”

“I so appreciate it,” Boxer said.

## INHOFE'S TEMPER TANTRUM

Inhofe molested the majority by having committee staffers put up on the dais a series of 3-by-5-foot posters with messages such as “Congressional Budget Chief Says Climate Bill Would Cost Jobs” and “U.S. Unemployment High/Why Kill More Jobs With Cap & Trade?” But this failed to cool Inhofe's temper, and by the time his turn came to question the administration witnesses, Inhofe was so steamed that he used his entire five minutes to vent.

He described the Democrats' proposal as “the largest tax increase in – in history!” Agitated, his utterances disjointed, Inhofe went on: “Now, I also was – was kind of – I don't want any of the media to think just because I had to sit here and listen to our good friend Sen. Kerry for 28 minutes, that I don't have responses to everything he said.”

Nobody doubted that Inhofe had a response. The doubt was whether the response would make any sense.

© The Washington Post

Nevertheless, this writer would not normally recommend this as an avenue toward good press relations, although now and then a private talk with press people may help alleviate any growing tensions.

## UNFAIR AND UNBALANCED

In the case of our president, one should not expect any change in the negative treatment of him by Fox “News,” regardless of any positive overtures or straight comments from the White House.

Fox is indeed a network driven by political ideology. It is not going to change if treated with finesse. It will continue to feature negative news and commentary about the Obama Administration and Democrats in general, no matter what.

Fox has shown itself to be anti-government, if the administration is Democratic, by promoting and sponsoring anti-government rallies. That is NOT a news network.

What does the president lose if he “alienates” a non-news network of continuous negativity and personal attack? How can a network which features vicious personal and political attacks become more unfriendly than it already is?

## FAUX NEWS IN SMALL DOSES ONLY

This writer rarely watches Fox “News” more than a minute or two at a time, except when he is an unwilling part of a captive audience in public places such as doctors' offices, hospital waiting areas, and fitness centers. He considers the usual Fox network programming to be offensive, and he has been known to request that the channel be changed.

The President is correct, of course. Fox is not a news network, but it is a video journal of “perspective” as he said. It has been sickening when Fox hypocritically claims itself to be “fair and balanced.” News, often slanted, is interspersed within daytime programming, but the prime time is devoted to rightwing attack

See FAUX NEWS Page 15

## National Disgrace

# U.S. Chamber Used For Private Profit

By Joshua Holland

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is often seen as an extension of the local Chambers with which many of us grew up – the staid, nonpartisan organizations that not only advocated for local businesses, but were also a part of the broader fabric of communities across America.

They lobbied local governments, but they also promoted small towns' business districts, sponsored local parades and outfitted Little League teams.

But that image couldn't be further out of date. The organization was formed some 90 years ago to represent an umbrella group of American businesses' diverse interests.

Under the leadership of Thomas J. Donahue, it has become increasingly partisan, even reactionary, in its steadfast opposition to even modestly progressive proposals in Congress, including those that are in the apparent interests of some of its member firms.

### GUESS WHO IS CASHING IN?

Donahue, resisting calls from his own board members to stop fighting against federal climate policy, is being richly compensated by Union Pacific, a company which – along with some of its key businesses partners – is vigorously fighting against federal climate policy.

The railroad, a major coal hauler, has said that climate-change legislation could “reduce the amount of traffic we handle and have a material adverse effect on our results of operations, financial condition, and liquidity.”

Union Pacific has paid Donahue annual retainers of at least \$1,134,333 since 1998, according to the National Resources Defense Council. The national Chamber of Commerce isn't pro-business -- it's just a fully captured right-wing organization that has been taken over by the Republican Party.

### CHAMBER HAS MASSIVE RESOURCES

What distinguishes it from other conservative lobbying shops is its massive resources – the CoC has a budget of upwards of \$150 million per year, and it throws that into a wide array of affiliate organizations that influence public policy in myriad ways and at every level of government.

Given its reach and impact on our public-policy debates, the CoC has operated under the radar to some degree. But its claim to represent a consensus of American businesses – presumably a pragmatic role, given the diversity of its members' interests – just took a hit.

It was high-profile defections of a number of major firms because of the CoC's unyielding opposition to the very moderate and distinctly business-friendly climate-change bills wending through Congress.

### CHAMBER LOSES MAJOR MEMBERS

Such corporate heavyweights as Nike, GE and Apple – and energy giants like Exxon and Pacific Energy and Gas – have recently either distanced themselves from the Chamber, resigned their seats on its board of directors or quit the organization altogether.

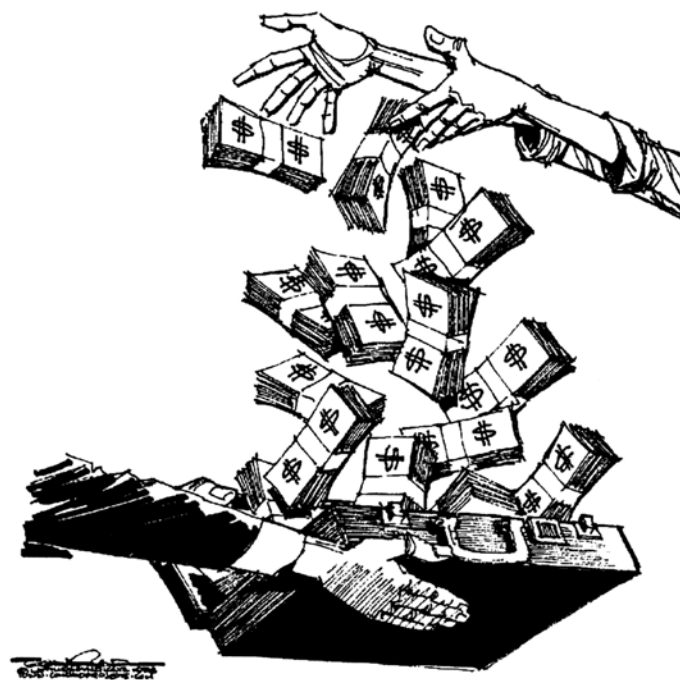
They protest of what PG&E CEO Peter Darby called the CoC's “extreme position” on global warming and “disingenuous attempts to diminish or distort the reality of the challenges it poses.”

Corporations fleeing the Chamber may be acting on genuine principle, but they're also responding to basic business logic.

As Josh Marshall wrote, “It's not hard, for instance, to understand why a company like Nike, which markets overwhelmingly to a younger demographic and to some degree is in the business of marketing cool, would not like to be associated with anti-climate-change science extremism.”

### USING FEAR AS A TACTIC

Earlier this year, the Chamber announced a \$100 million campaign opposing proposals on a range of issues, including climate change. Using the fear tactic, Donahue warned of the risks posed by “attacks by anti-business activists” on “America's free enterprise values.”



Pete Altman, director of the National Resources Defense Council's climate campaign, noted that “Donohue left out businesses ... which support federal climate legislation,” listing around two dozen of the Chamber's own members that had gone on record supporting the proposals in Congress.

In fact, an NRDC analysis of the positions taken by the Chamber's board of directors reveals that opposition to climate-change legislation is hardly a consensus position among American businesses.

The staff of the U.S. Chamber is representing the views held by a small fraction of its board – just four members out of 122 members on the board of directors.

### REPRESENTING THE VIEW OF ONLY A FEW

These views, which question the scientific consensus and reject the need for federal regulation to reduce global-warming pollution, stand in contrast to the views expressed by 19 members of the Chamber's board that support federal regulations with goals to reduce total U.S. global warming pollution.

Altman added: “You read that right: Only 23 members of the U.S. Chamber's board have a publicly stated position on climate change, and more than 80% are not on board with the U.S. Chamber's ‘Dr. No’ position on climate policy action.”

According to a report by Josh Harkinson, the Chamber's leadership, faced with a severe split among its members, may have broken its own internal guidelines in adopting its position on climate change, bypassing a required vote by its board of directors. [Harkinson also disputes the Chamber's claim of three million member firms].

### POSITION FITS WITH DONAHUE'S

While the Chamber's anti-scientific position on climate change may not be in the interest of all of its member firms, it does fit neatly with Donahue's.

A majority of Americans believe climate change is indeed a threat, that the government should indeed regulate greenhouse-gas emissions and that most support the broad outlines of the “cap-and-trade” bills working through Congress.

The Chamber's stance is an example of it fighting against the interests of not only a share of its member firms, but of the lion's share of those firms' employees and customers.

All of which belies the image many still hold of the Chamber as a boring, more or less non-ideological and wholly nonpartisan business association.

While it once fit that description, it has since been co-opted by a more staunchly conservative leadership and swayed by a conservative movement that has become more animated and reactionary in recent decades.

It is no longer an extension of your town's local Chamber, it is a vital cog in the conservative noise machine.

And as the Nikes and Apples jump ship, it may prove to be the Chamber's stance on climate change that proves to be the beginning of the end of its credibility as a non-ideological entity.

*Editor's Note: Oklahoma's State Chamber is on all fours with the U.S. Chamber. Local affiliates ought to check it out.*

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## FAUX NEWS

From Page 14

programming.

It is also true that during the evening hours MSNBC programming has a left-of-center ideological stance. Their early morning seems to the right-of-center, while mid-day programming seems to be normal news coverage. But MSNBC lists its evening programs as “a perspective on the day's news and events.” That is honest.

Except for Lou Dobbs, and maybe other gaffes, CNN is the most “fair and balanced” of the cable news networks. It is in fact worrisome because it compulsively offers two sided arguments about everything. It cannot put on a news report, or its own network news analysts' comments, without some kind of rebuttal included from one or both parties. It becomes a constant, tiresome, annoying harangue. No wonder they are losing viewers.

In spite of popular criticism from the rightwing, the mainstream network television newscasts seem to be the most fair in their coverage and presentations. PBS is remarkably educative without being obnoxious.

Even the newscasts from area television stations sometimes seem to be strick-

en with editorial bias in selection of content, in the language with which issues or scenes are described, and similar subtleties. Then, too, we are afflicted there with features like “my two cents.” But at least those two pennies worth are labeled.

Somehow we need to find a better way of presenting the news of interest in this country. Perhaps we should go back to the concept of well-run, journalistically professional newspapers where they keep their editorial comments on one or two pages and boldly labeled so.

The reader of an ethically-run newspaper can then skip the editorials, which are properly allowed to be politically biased, silly, or just plain annoying. He/she can proceed to read news that is normally properly and fairly collected and presented without bias or selection.

Surely someone can devise a television format for cable network “news” that emulates that conceptual framework.

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

# U.S. Fares Poorly In Child Welfare Survey

America has some of the industrial world's worst rates of infant mortality, teenage pregnancy and child poverty, even though it spends more per child than better-performing countries such as Switzerland, Japan and the Netherlands, a new survey indicates.

The OECD, a Paris-based watchdog of industrialized nations, urged the United States to shift more of its public spending to its youngest children, under the age of six, to improve their health and educational performance.

The report, "Doing Better for Children," marks the first time the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development has reported on child well-being within its 30 member countries.

The U.S. spends an average of \$140,000 per child, well over the OECD average of \$125,000. But this spending is skewed heavily toward older children between 12 and 17, the OECD survey showed.

## CHILDREN UNDER SIX ARE KEY

U.S. spending on children under six, a period the OECD says is key to children's future well-being, lags far behind other countries, amounting to only \$20,000 per child on average compared to the OECD average of \$30,000, the survey showed.

"A better balance of spending between the 'Dora the Explorer' years of early childhood and the teenage 'Facebook' years would help improve the health, education and well-being of all children in the long term," the OECD said.

As a result, it says, infant mortality in the U.S. is the fourth-worst in the OECD after Mexico, Turkey and Slovakia. American 15-year-olds rank seventh from the bottom on the OECD's measure of average educational achievement. Child poverty rates in the U.S. are nearly double the OECD average, at 21.6% compared to 12.4%.

The rate of teen births in the U.S. is three times the OECD average, with only Mexico recording a higher rate among OECD countries, the report said.

## AMERICA'S FLAWED MIX

Timothy Smeeding, author of *Poor Kids in a Rich Country: America's Children in Comparative Perspective*, said America's troubles stem from a flawed mix of government spending and not enough help for the working poor.

"Most of what we spend is for health care, so there is less money to spend on income support programs, to keep the incomes of the poor up. We do spend highly on education – but it's off the charts on health care," he said by telephone from the United States.

Some European countries have public preschools and day cares, for example.



[Oklahoma is far out front on this program.]

"The parents in Europe aren't as poor. They have universal health care, and it's understood that you have access to health care without recrimination ... They have children when they're ready," said Smeeding, who also heads the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

## POOR AND UNWED MOTHERS IN AMERICA

"A lot of kids born in our country are accidents," he said. "Young women need to learn to wait to finish their education, not have a kid at 18 or 19. And it is these poor, unwed mothers having most of the babies in the U.S."

Among other OECD countries, France, Germany, Britain and Belgium spend more on their children than the U.S., while Switzerland, Ireland, Australia and Italy spend less, according to the survey.

The countries that spend the most on early childhood include Hungary, Finland and the Slovak Republic, which each devote well over a quarter of all childhood spending to children under the age of six.

Britain also spends more than the OECD average on its children, and like the U.S., devotes most of this spending to its older children between the ages of 12 and 17.

But Britain is plagued by high underage drinking and teenage pregnancy rates. British teen drunkenness, as measured by the number of 13 and 15 year olds having been drunk at least twice, topped the charts at 33%, far above the OECD average of 20% and the 12% rate recorded in the U.S.

Associated Press

# Treating Children As Property Not Uncommon

By Jack Crawford

The recent controversy in the Oklahoma Legislature over the United Nations Resolution "The Rights of the Child" [HCR 1033] revolves around the use of semantics, with its narrow focus on meaning, to guide the public discussion into artificial areas.

I must disclose here that I have a vested interest in this discussion, both in my personal history, but also the several homeless, parentless kids which I have influenced and guided through the worst part of my life and theirs – being either homeless outright or having a roof over your head, but without a parent present for several hours at a time.

I cannot go into the many reasons for these situations. I would rather concentrate on the way that semantics are being used and what the effect these words and the perception they generate have upon those youth which are all around us.

## SPANKING, WHIPPING, PADDLING

Without belaboring the question, terms like "spanking, whipping or paddling" have a great amount of latitude in the public mind and often times are interchanged freely. In my observations of families over 47 years, most of these words were used in a "if you don't do [blank], I'll spank you."

If the punishment came, it was a usually a soft swat across the Gluteals, meant more to embarrass than to harm. Such was the method of Mother Superior of the hospital where I worked. A nurse had just walked by and saluted me; I responded in kind just as Mother Superior turned the corner. "Young man, hold out your hand." I did so and she gave me a sharp rap with a wooden ruler across my offending knuckles, causing me to wince and wimper in pain! Did it ever sting – for a minute.

From that moment on, Mother Superior treated me like a doting mother treats her often wayward, basically good spiritual son ... and I never got my knuckles rapped again. I made sure of it.

## FULL-TIME WORK AT AGE 11

There is a darker side to all of this. Before I continue, I must state my credentials: I was required to go to work at a full-time job at age 11 as a paperboy so that our family would not get our gas shut off during the winter; part of this job was approaching my customers for payment, meaning that I was often invited into the customers house and out of the foul weather outside.

For the next five years, I observed hundreds of households first-hand, most being quite comfortable for then-children. Even when I was turned out of my parents' house and had to steal out-of-date food from a grocery store dumpster, I held onto the images that I had seen of loving families who fussed and loved

and laughed together, sending me along with a tip and some hot cocoa. I still hold onto those visions like my most precious jewels in the deepest part of my heart.

Later, as a police medic, I was often summoned to a citizen's home and I found the home situations nearly the same; most families are good places for children to grow.

I try to forget the images I've seen in the other families, the ones whose children were often in trouble at school, whose house stank in filth as the mother and father either stared at the TV or barked out orders with degrading sarcasm.

Many of these children were embarrassed that I was seeing the way they had to live; just like years before when I, as a fellow student, knew about the frankly abusive conditions in which they lived, so I kept it to myself, just like I kept my homelessness a secret from everyone else.

## KEPT A DARK SECRET

I kept this dark secret as I grew, went to school and stayed alone in my apartment when everyone else was going home for the holidays. When I pursued emergency services through both fire and police systems, I was once again thrust into peoples lives seeing them as they really are.

Once again, I was entering a family's home due to a medical emergency; an emergency caused by the same unhealthy conditions that I had observed many years earlier. These individuals also thought that a good whipping was good, often citing heroes like "Old Hickory" Andrew Jackson or old sayings such as "spare the rod, spoil the child."

In these households, the parents beat their children with rods, razor straps or a wide leather belt [my parents' favorite tool]. I would be called into the house when discipline turns into dangerous physical abuse, requiring emergency care for a broken arm or burn on a child "who would not learn their lesson."

I held my revulsion for these people in iron-plated reserve, telling them only to expect a visit from Child Welfare; sometimes the police would arrest one parent, sometimes the male, sometimes the female.

## CHILDREN AS PROPERTY

These people were of all shades of beliefs, whether they were godless alcoholics or were religious fundamentalists, but they hold one thing in common: they all feel that children are a possession which they, as parents, can use and treat as property.

I only had to get a full-time job, live in abandoned cars or on friend's couches,

See CHILDREN Page 18

# Forbes 400 Richest Raked In \$30 Billion

By Les Leopold

It's great to know that during the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, the wealth of the 400 richest Americans, according to Forbes, actually increased by \$30 billion.

Well golly, that's only a 2% increase, much less than the double digit returns the wealthy had grown accustomed to. But a 2% increase is a whole lot more than losing 40% of your 401k. And \$30 billion is enough to provide 500,000 school teacher jobs at \$60k per year.

Collectively, those 400 have \$1.57 trillion in wealth. It's hard to get your mind around a number like that. The way I do it is to imagine that we were still living during the great radical Eisenhower era of the 1950s when marginal income tax rates hit 91%.

Taxes were high back in the 1950s because people understood that constraining wild extremes of wealth would make our country stronger and prevent another depression. [Well, what did those old fogies know?]

## IF THE TOP TAX RATE HAD BEEN KEPT

Had we kept those high progressive taxes in place, instead of removing them, especially during the Reagan era, the Forbes 400 might each be worth "only" \$100 million instead of \$3.9 billion each.

So let's imagine that the rest of their wealth, about \$1.53 trillion, were available for the public good. What does \$1.53 trillion buy?

It's more than enough to insure the uninsured for the next 20 years or more.

It's more than enough to create a Manhattan Project to solve global warming by developing renewable energy and a green, sustainable manufacturing sector.

It's more than enough to endow every public college and university in the country so that all of our children could gain access to higher education for free, forever!

## WHAT HAPPENED TO THE TAX CODE

Instead, we embarked on a grand experiment to see what would happen if we deregulated finance and changed the tax code so that millionaires could turn into billionaires.

Even after that experiment failed in the most spectacular way, our system seems trapped into staying on the same deregulated path.

Instead of free higher education, health care and a sustainable economy, we got a fantasy finance boom and bust on Wall Street which crashed the real economy.

We have our 400 billionaires, and we have 29 million unemployed and underemployed Americans. We have an infrastructure in shambles. We have an environment in crisis. We have a health care system that would make Rube Goldberg



proud. And we have the worst income distribution since 1929.

I hazard to guess that each and every Forbes 400 member could get by with a net worth of \$100 million. I don't think that would kill their entrepreneurial drive or harm our economy – in fact it would be a major boon to the economy to step back from the edge of such massive concentration of wealth.

## IKE'S TAX RATE WOULD BE GOOD

The real problem is getting there from here. A wealth tax that kicks in when you become worth more than \$100 million would be a good start. The Eisenhower tax rate on adjustable gross income over \$3 million a year would help as well.

And please let's not call it socialism, now that we've placed the entire financial sector on welfare to the tune of over \$13 trillion in subsidies and guarantees.

[By the way, the yearly budget outlays for means tested programs for low income citizens is about \$350 billion per year. So Wall Street's welfare is about 37 times as large as welfare for poor.]

So if narrowing the income/wealth gap isn't socialism, what is it? It's the America that thrived in the 1950s and 1960s. It's the America that created a middle-class and vowed never to let the financial gamblers return us to another depression. It's an America that put its people to work and built an infrastructure that was the envy of the world.

Where's Dwight David Eisenhower when we need him?

– The author is executive director of the Labor Institute and Public Health Institute in New York

# A Corporate Monster Vs. The Vermonster

By Jim Hightower

Where are those lawsuit abuse groups when you really need them?

Chance are that you've seen ads, letters-to-the-editor, op-ed pieces and other materials put out by outfits with such civic-sounding names as Citizens Against Lawsuit Abuse.

By whatever name, the message is always the same, usually delivered in a sort of urgent, basso profundo voice saying something like this: "Bloodsucking lawyers are constantly filing frivolous lawsuits against beleaguered corporations. Stop these lawyers and their loser clients – demand that your lawmakers cut them off from the courthouse."

## WHO ARE THESE GUYS?

Hmmmm. Stop consumers from bullying big business – now there's an improbable populist cause if I ever heard one! Who are these "citizens" who've formed such noisy lawsuit abuse groups?

Well, they're just neighbors, we're told by the groups. Yeah, assuming you have a neighbor named Philip Morris. In the mid-'90s, this tobacco giant was still fighting off class-action lawsuits from hundreds of thousands of Americans who'd been addicted to, sickened and killed by the corporation's murderous products.

Unable to win in court, Philip Morris and its corporate allies secretly launched a nationwide campaign to rig the rules of judicial access in their favor. Philip Morris itself put up \$16 million in 1995 to hire a PR firm to create faux "grassroots" fronts in every state under the banner of Citizens Against Lawsuit Abuse.

These CALA front groups [which continue to demonize consumer lawyers and fight for new laws to take away our fundamental right to seek legal redress against corporations that injure us] are funded and controlled through another corporate front named ATRA – American Tort Reform Association. Its backers include a who's who of big business brand names, from Anheuser-Busch to Wyeth Pharmaceuticals.

## HOODWINKING THE PUBLIC

The lawsuit abuse groups are innately dishonest, not only because they deliberately hide their special-interest parentage from the public, but also because they're not really against abusive lawsuits. It's only legal actions *against big corporations* that get their knickers in a knot.

On the other hand, when those same corporations turn their powerhouse legal departments against the hoi polloi [consumers, small businesses, environmen-

tal groups, etc.], we never hear a peep of complaint from a CALA about abuse.

Curiously inconsistent, huh?

For example, where is their outrage about Hansen Beverage Inc., the nationwide, billion-dollar marketer of "Monster" energy drinks? This Goliath has unleashed its legal hounds to go chasing clear across the continent to take a big bite out of a tiny David in Morrisville, VT.

## THIS 'MONSTER' A BULLY

There, Matt and Renee Nadeau have created a local business producing artisan beers. Their Rock Art Brewery employs seven people, and they make a terrific brew with the bodacious name of, "The Vermonster."

When this label hit the sensitive radar of Hansen Beverage, the corporate lawyers fired off a nuclear e-mail to the Nadeaus, demanding that they cease and desist from using the Vermonster name – or be sued.

Sued for what? For infringing on Hansen's "Monster" trademark, barked the cross-country lawyers, adding that Rock Art's use of "Vermonster" would "undoubtedly create a likelihood of [consumer] confusion" between the two brands.

Uh, we make a beer not an energy drink, replied the Nadeaus – and our beer comes in a 22-ounce brown bottle that looks nothing like a Hansen product.

## THE ADVANTAGE OF DEEP POCKETS

Commonsense, however, is not spoken by corporate lawyers, and the Hansen gang promptly shifted from frivolous to abusive, demanding the surrender of the label, plus compensation to cover Hansen's high-priced legal fees.

Corporate executives and lawyers know that they can drag out cases like this for years. The timeline takes no skin off the nose of billion-dollar outfits with their own legal staffs, but a protracted fight can quickly bankrupt a small business. Thus, even though the corporate power is in the wrong, it can usually bully the innocent into submission.

Maybe not this time, though. "Corporate America can't be allowed to do this," declared a defiant Matt Nadeau. So the feisty couple has mounted an online campaign to rally us consumers and others to push back against the abuse of the Hansen "monster." They won't get the support of the CALA frauds, but maybe they'll get yours. Check out their revolt at [www.rockartbrewery.com](http://www.rockartbrewery.com)

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# New McCarthyism Opposes Science

By Peter Gleick

As more and more of the world looks to knowledge, education and science as the routes out of poverty and conflict, parts of America seems to be slipping back toward the Dark Ages – impoverishment of civilization that had lasting effects for centuries.

I've recently returned from northern Europe, and a series of scientific water meetings and discussions with people from over 130 countries.

They read the news from the United States with incredulity. America is still seen as the place to come for aspiring students and scientists around the world.

Our public universities, despite assaults on budgets, independence and knowledge, still struggle to maintain their excellence.

## SHOCKED BY AMERICAN LUDDITES

My friends and colleagues from overseas are increasingly shocked, as are many of us in the U.S., by the expanding efforts of home-grown extremists to undermine rational discourse, eliminate the use of fact and science in policy making, and shut down public debate over the vital issues of our times through hate, vitriol, and ad hominem attacks.

Looking through the eyes of my overseas colleagues, what do we see?

We see a debate over providing health care to every American that is based – not on facts or civilized discourse – but on screaming mobs shutting down public discussions and the use of straw man arguments to promote fear among the public and policy makers.

Every major country of Europe provides basic health care for its population.

## SCIENCE ADVISOR IS ATTACKED

We see President Obama appoint one of the nation's best scientists in the areas of energy, environment, and national security – Dr. John Holdren – to be his Science Advisor, and then have right-wing mouthpieces like Glenn Beck spread ad hominem lies about him because of their fear that facts and actual science may once again inform presidential action.

This should be a recognizable tactic to us – lying about a person to diminish their effectiveness. In fact, these extremists want to undermine the forward-looking policies that would prevent the very draconian measures they say they deplore.

We see unambiguous evidence that climate change is already affecting human



health and the global economy – evidence often collected by world-leading American scientists and scientific institutions.

## AMERICANS ARE MISLED BY EXTREMISTS

Public opinion polls show that the American people continue to be misled about the risks facing us by conservative pundits who ignore, misunderstand, or intentionally misuse that science to mislead the public into fear of change.

We already see huge economic and environmental opportunities in adapting to the reality of climate change.

Fear is an effective tool – as hate groups and extremists know. It is no accident that repressive regimes of all kinds – fascists, the Nazis, Stalin, religious states, madrasses – use tools of hatred, anti-intellectualism, and fear to control knowledge, universities, and intellectuals.

Fear grows best when sown in fields of ignorance, while science, rationality, and education are the greatest weapons modern societies have against irrational fear.

No wonder Beck and his ilk have intellectuals in their sights; so do the leaders of Iran, and Burma, and the Taliban, and North Korea, for similar reasons.

– Dr. Peter Gleick is president of the Pacific Institute, an internationally recognized water expert and a MacArthur Fellow

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## What We're Missing In Fast-Paced World

It was the Washington, DC Metro Station on a cold January morning in 2007. He played six Bach pieces for about an hour.

During that time approximately 2,000 people went through the station, most of them on their way to work.

After three minutes a middle-aged man noticed there was a musician playing. He slowed his pace and stopped for a few seconds and then hurried to meet his schedule.

Four minutes later, the violinist received his first dollar – a woman threw the money in the till and, without stopping, continued to walk.

Six minutes later, a young man leaned against the wall to listen to him, then looked at his watch and started to walk again.

Ten minutes later, a three-year-old boy stopped but his mother tugged him along hurriedly as the kid stopped to look at the violinist.

Finally, the mother pushed hard and the child continued to walk, turning his head all the time.

This action was repeated by several other children. Every parent, without exception, forced them to move on. The musician played on.

## FEW STOPPED, FEW DONATED

Only six people stopped and stayed for a while. About 20 gave him money but

continued to walk their normal pace. He collected \$32.

After an hour he finished playing and silence took over. No one noticed. No one applauded, nor was there any recognition.

No one knew this but the violinist was Joshua Bell, one of the finest musicians in the world.

He played one of the most intricate pieces ever written, with a violin worth \$3.5 million. Two days before Joshua Bell sold out a theater in Boston where the seats averaged \$100.

## IT WAS A SOCIAL EXPERIMENT

This is a real story. Joshua Bell playing incognito in the Metro Station was organized by the Washington Post as part of a social experiment about perception, taste and people's priorities.

The questions raised: in a common place environment, at an inappropriate hour, do we perceive beauty? Do we stop to appreciate it? Do we recognize talent in an unexpected context?

One possible conclusion reached from this experiment could be: If we do not have a moment to stop and listen to one of the finest musicians in the world playing some of the finest music ever written, with one of the most beautiful instruments ... How many other things are we missing?

## CHILDREN

From Page 16

but these kids live with constant, demeaning verbal or physical abuse, unable to escape their parents unless they run away from their slave-like conditions. And the parents do not recognize nor would they care about the damage they are inflicting on their own children's future.

Such a case was a soft-spoken artist who was named Butch by his parents. Wow! Could Butch draw!

We knew he was gifted with talent that the rest of us could only wish for. He started showing us his bruises and the cigarette burns, then he moved away. Years later, I found him as an owner of a sign shop, maker of really fine signs with no independent artistic projects. When asked why he didn't continue his art work, he looked at his shoes and told me that he wasn't that good, no one liked his art, that he had robbed a store ...

"You know, the kids were hungry and we were hungry ... we were desperate."

## RICH AND POOR ABUSERS

Just like Butch, many otherwise very talented individuals, whose gifts would be of great value to the rest of us, have to give it all up so they can survive.

Later, as a medic, I found myself performing emergency counseling to these

victimized children, even as I applied treatment to their burns or injuries. There are many of these abusive households in this state, from the poor and destitute to the high and wealthy, and they all share the same philosophy: that children are property which may be treated anyway the adults wish.

Statements released by the UN on the rights of children are meant to be a public statement of basic principles and are not government intrusions into the family as the paranoid argue; these are the same principles which most parents practice without thinking, being based on love and respect for children.

Until we speak out or take action on these people as a society, we will always have battered children in our lives and those politicians who insult the UN resolution with support for HR 1033 are the unwitting pawns of those who abuse children.

They are politicians whose stance is guided more by appearance than by research and deliberative reason.

Remember to consider the results of your actions. Dumpster diving for dinner is hell. And the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

– The author lives in Norman

# IRAQ

From Page One

Afghanistan – is not without controversy. While the strategy is credited with helping reduce violence and restore normalcy in Iraq, it cannot erase the reality that the U.S. went to war against Saddam on trumped up charges. Further, it only heightens the debate over what critics view as an American foreign policy bent on imperialism.

In fact, it's easy to see why some regard the Human Terrain Teams as even more insidious than a traditional military invasion – because it's in effect a kinder-gentler means of achieving the same goal: remaking a sovereign nation in our image.

For Kerr, it's hardly a black-and-white debate. The decision to radically overhaul the war strategy – including the reliance on Human Terrain Teams – “finally created a way forward that I could buy into.” But he acknowledges it is hardly a perfect scenario, especially for a PhD who's trained “to go through an internal board to make sure I'm not hurting anybody” with

his research.

“When I'm out there asking somebody a question, are they giving free consent to talk to me when I had a gun?” says Kerr, who wore an Army uniform and protective gear in public. “As an academic, it's expected you'll do no harm ... you'll use your education not to harm people.”

Still, Kerr believes he did the right thing because: “What we did not only saved American soldiers lives, but also Iraqi lives.”

It could be argued that the Human Terrain Teams strategy fits into the notion of “public diplomacy,” a 1960s-era vision of international relations in which governments and individuals would engage other governments and individuals in hopes of improved understanding and reduced conflict. Others dismiss the idea as a propaganda tool that merely disguises imperialistic intent.

Kerr, though, argues the new approach to war makes more sense than the old American model, driven by a

military industrial complex that's addicted to wars and weaponry. Indeed, he contends the U.S. military is far ahead of the nation's elected officials who are loath to turn down requests from defense contractors who write big campaign checks and constituents whose jobs depend on building tanks, fighter jets and bombs.

It costs much less, he says, to train soldiers in various cultures, languages and religions – and to imbed Human Terrain Teams – than it does to build high-tech weapons that may or may not be valuable in fighting the “small wars” of the 21st Century.

Further, a better understanding of other peoples and cultures could help avoid future wars.

It remains to be seen, Kerr says, whether the Human Terrain Teams concept can work as effectively in Afghanistan as it has in Iraq. After all, the two countries are hardly comparable: Iraq has an educated middle class essential to quickly rebuilding a nation, Afghanistan doesn't.

Even so, he says, “If we do what the Soviet Union did [in Afghanistan] and try to win with sheer military might, there's no way we can win it.”

Kerr is much more optimistic about Iraq – not only because of his years of academic interest in Middle East affairs [no doubt born of the fact he was raised in Detroit, a city with perhaps the nation's largest Muslim population] but also because of the progress he witnessed first-hand and the relationships he maintains with Baghdad area residents.

“We've done for the Iraqis what we can do for them,” he says. Now it's up to them to do what they can for their country. I'm confident that we have taken the steps to make sure that when we pull out, we can leave with our heads high. We've made what could have been a very bad situation not so bad.

“While things in Iraq aren't perfect, I'm cautiously optimistic things in the next 10 years will certainly be better than the last 10 years.”

## Tips For Making Your Life Better

Here are some great ways of dealing with the burdens of life:

- Accept that some days you're the pigeon, and some days you're the statue.
- Always keep your words soft and sweet, just in case you have to eat them.
- Always read stuff that will make you look good if you die in the middle of it.
- Drive carefully. It's not only cars that can be recalled by their maker.
- If you can't be kind, at least have the decency to be vague.
- If you lend someone \$20 and never see that person again, it was probably worth it.
- It may be that your sole purpose in life is simply to serve as a warning to others.
- Never buy a car you can't push.
- Never put both feet in your mouth at the same time, because then you won't

have a leg to stand on.

- Nobody cares if you can't dance well. Just get up and dance.
- Since it's the early worm that gets eaten by the bird, sleep late.
- The second mouse gets the cheese.
- When everything's coming your way, you're in the wrong lane.
- Birthdays are good for you. The more you have, the longer you live.
- You may be only one person in the world, but you may also be the world to one person.
- Some mistakes are too much fun to only make once.
- We could learn a lot from crayons ... different sizes, different colors but all living in the same box.
- A truly happy person is one who can enjoy the scenery on a detour.

## GIFTS

From Page 6

It's made even more powerful by Oklahoma's embarrassing history of political corruption.

In recent years, two statewide elected officials, Auditor and Inspector Jeff McMahan and Insurance Commissioner Carroll Fisher, were convicted and imprisoned in corruption scandals that involved such “gifts” as trips, furniture and jewelry from special interests.

If there's one thing Oklahoma voters won't tolerate, it's elected officials living a champagne diet on the taxpayers' budget.

Remember U.S. Rep. Mickey Edwards? The eight-term Oklahoma City Republican was defeated for re-election in the early 1990s after it was learned he had bounced checks to the House bank, which allowed members to overdraw their accounts without penalty.

Yet, I detect a growing despair among political outsiders with whom I visit that the system is hopelessly partisan and hopelessly corrupt – not only in Washington, but also in Oklahoma City.

Lawmakers are just people. They love to be fawned over. But it would go a long way toward reshaping public perception – and changing the system for the better – if they would get on board with the “no gifts” registry. And really, it shouldn't be all that difficult for the vast majority of lawmakers, given that nearly half of all gifts [48.4%] in spring 2009 went to just the top 10 – i.e. most powerful – legislators, according to Dr. Wood.

Rather than having to counter criticism of excessive special interest influence at the Capitol, wouldn't it be easier – not to mention, more ethical – to just say no? If a working lunch or dinner is required, for example, make it Dutch treat.

Most Oklahomans can't afford elite football seating at OU or OSU, or courtside or luxury box seating at a Thunder game, but legislators – the people's elected representatives – are given special access by those whose business regularly takes them into legislators' offices?

That's not about one-time access to discuss a specific issue. That's about long-term relationship building aimed at protecting a power advantage in the legislative process.

The new buzzword in American politics is transparency. What could be more transparent than a system that simply forbids lavishing gifts on elected officials?

If lawmakers aren't willing to police themselves, perhaps the Ethics Commission, come January, will.

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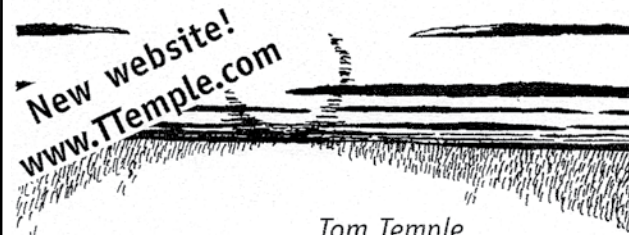
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