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## Giving Thanks In Fearful Times

# The Gift Of Hope

By Judy Ann Eichstedt

Thanksgiving is just around the corner.

In 1621 the Plymouth colonists and the Wampanoag Indians shared an autumn harvest feast that is acknowledged today as one of the first Thanksgivings. We have held to that tradition and celebrate Thanksgiving each year.

People everywhere begin to plan a meal fit for kings. They look forward to seeing loved ones who will come from near and far to share a Thanksgiving meal. Family we have not seen all year will soon show up at our door. We enjoy catching up with what they have been up to since we saw them last. Our houses truly will be filled with laughter and love as we share a bountiful meal together.

This year, however, things are a bit different. Many now are not looking forward to Thanksgiving at all. The reason is very clear: it's our economy.

Far too many human beings have lost their jobs and struggle by on unemployment. They fight to put food on the table. Some have even lost their homes, are feeling a bit embarrassed at not being able to keep a home and will not be inviting anyone over at all.

Some of them no longer have any place to call home and may not want their family knowing how bad it really is on them. I have no doubt at all that far too many people will be eating Thanksgiving dinner at a city shelter for they have nowhere else to go.

Our elderly parents and grandparents will spend this holiday alone because not too many people can afford



to travel. They are trying to survive on an income far too low.

In many homes a meal fit for kings would be far too expensive. People will have to cut back and substitute something cheaper to save money.

Gone are the huge turkey and ham dinners with all the trimmings. In other homes people will use up their week's food budget just for the Thanksgiving Day meal and won't have a clue how to eat the rest of the

week.

So many will be paying a visit to their neighborhood pawn shop to pawn anything in order to get a meal. Others will visit yet again the payday loan business to take out a loan for dinner, not even sure how in the world they will pay it back after the holiday.

Unfortunately right now life is very hard on so many people.

In my own family we, too, have taken hit after hit and wonder when will this end. I have six grown children and three lost their jobs. It took them months to find another job. These three took huge pay cuts yet felt they had no choice. Any job is better than no job. However, they fight daily to just break even.

The three who kept their jobs were stressed out because they knew any day they could walk in to work and be laid off. Something they still worry about today.

One of their employers is thinking of closing down all together. The

hours they all worked have been cut drastically and it's getting harder to pay their bills.

My own fear is that I will lose my house and once again become homeless. It was in 1983 that my six children and I lived in a car because we had no home of our own. My children and I still well remember life in a car. It haunts us all to this very day. It's not something you get over quickly.

We ate out of garbage cans and collected cans and bottles to return for deposit. We stood out with a sign, hoping to get some help. We were cold at night – and, let's face it, it is not easy sleeping in a car in public for all the world to see.

We had to wash up as best we could in gas stations, all the time wishing for a hot bath. People rejected us – even friends we had known for some time.

So many people just passed us by as if we were not even there.

So what is there to be thankful for, I wonder? How do we give thanks when so much has gone so wrong?

Thanksgiving is a holiday to give thanks yet I ask, Is there something to be thankful about?

I traveled back in my mind to a time when homelessness engulfed us all and things looked so hopeless. When darkness was all around and, suddenly, I remembered a woman's face. She had seen us living in the car and brought us some hot food. That night we had nothing at all to eat and she just showed up out of nowhere. She was an elderly woman with such a warm smile on her face that I will remember her always.

Then I recalled the man in the truck who helped fix my old car. He was so cheerful and friendly and just talking to him gave me hope that things would get better soon. It hit me hard that in the pit of despair and the belly of poverty there was something to be thankful about.

Perhaps a huge fault we all have is that when things are bad for us, we center in and focus on the negative around us and become blinded to

See **THANKSGIVING** Page 18

# Observations

## Abortion Protest

We are delighted that a few OU students have found their voice, staging a protest at the State Capitol, taking a stand on Oklahoma's latest Republican antic. They were protesting the new statistical abortion-reporting bill now being challenged in court.

The legislation, HB 1595, is a new provision on Oklahoma abortion laws that requires an official record and reporting system of all abortions occurring within the state. This information would be made public and includes specific demographic information on the women.

The bill also restricts the types of abortions or reasons for women having abortions. In addition, this website will cost upwards of \$281,285 the first year and \$256,285 each subsequent year.

It is the subject of a lawsuit pending in Oklahoma County district court.

Whether you are for or against abortion, this is a huge invasion of privacy, to be posted online.

Although this legislation has been in the works since the beginning of this year, Oklahoma students were shocked to learn the effective date was Nov. 1, with such little public discussion. More importantly, they were surprised that there was not more mobilization around the issues.

"Everybody kept waiting for a response from the community," Sandra Criswell, English and Women's and Gender Studies senior, said. "We were hearing plenty of outrage but there seemed to be no place to focus all of this."

The Center for Reproductive Rights filed a temporary injunction in September and the court will hear arguments for the temporary injunction on Dec. 4.

## Hate Crimes

State Sen. Steve Russell said the new federal hate crimes legislation oversteps the Constitution. He's drafting a bill to be introduced in the State

Senate in 2010, ostensibly to protect Oklahomans from encroachments on speech, assembly and religious beliefs.

What he obviously doesn't know is that there is no specific protection for gay people – all hate crimes are covered. The FBI reports that there are 8,000 anti-gay hate crimes every year.

His proposed bill underlies the real problem – hate crimes against gay people are epidemic and seldom bring prosecution in some jurisdictions.

If, as he says, the law is not needed in Oklahoma then why bother with new legislation? The fact: Russell is further right than thrice-divorced Rush Limbaugh who sees a gay person under every bed.

Despite opposition from the radical religious right and many Republicans, the final House vote was a solid 281-146.

"Oklahoma currently has tough, good laws that include hate crimes laws. Any murder or brutal assault is hateful. That is the problem with singling out something more with this federal law," said Russell, R-OKC.

"I believe this legislation far exceeds the powers of government over states as outlined in the 10th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. I am also very concerned that this loosely defined and ill-conceived legislation could be used to target people's belief, freedom to associate in groups, right to assemble on issues, as well as target people's right to free speech."

Now he's a constitutional lawyer?

Under Russell's proposed legislation, Oklahoma courts would bar the admission of any evidence not directly related to a crime when dealing with issues related to speech, assembly and belief.

"For example, if a minister, rabbi or imam preached to a congregation about immoral issues, and then someone took that message to an extreme and actually committed a crime, neither the minister nor the congregation could be charged themselves," Russell explained.



Virtually ever major religion endorsed the legislation. Even school children know that the First Amendment protects every form of speech except crying "fire!" in a crowded theater.

A further measure of the legislation would protect Oklahoma's right to investigate and prosecute as the state sees fit.

Oh, really? Picking and choosing what "crime" to investigate? This guy's IQ may not exceed his shoe size.

## Poor Timing

State Sen. Debbe Leftwich was justifiably outraged by an unconscionable act by the Department of Human Services – nearly \$200,000 in pay hikes at a time when the agency cut \$7.4 million from senior nutrition programs.

Leftwich said while many employees at DHS and other state agencies are underpaid, raising salaries while cutting senior nutrition is the wrong thing to do. She applauded House member Randy Terrill, R-Moore, for bringing attention to the situation.

"This is outrageous, but it proves what I've said many times – DHS has deep pockets when it comes to something they want, like these raises. We have seniors who are literally going to suffer because of the cuts to the nutrition program, but the bureaucrats claim they couldn't make cuts elsewhere," she said. "This is indefensible."

DHS was at least guilty of poor timing, hiring an outside firm to do a salary study in the midst of horrendous budget cuts. DHS argues the raises were a necessary market-rate adjustment. Twenty-nine of the top 36 administrators at DHS were given raises ranging from \$135 to \$1,894 per month.

State agencies are being forced to leave empty posts unfilled, furlough remaining workers and cut programs, yet DHS proceeded with these raises.

"It's just unbelievable," Leftwich said. "For years I've tried to move state services for seniors out of DHS and other agencies to a stand-alone entity that will make taking care of our older Oklahomans the priority it

should be. As far as I am concerned, this action by DHS just underscores why they should not be entrusted with programs older Oklahomans need to survive."

## Good Luck!

Let's hear it for state Rep. David Dank! The Oklahoma City Republican said he's had it with last-minute hanky-panky in the Legislature.

Among other things he cites last day passage of a 2.25% workers' compensation tax on 20,000 small businesses.

It was on page 114 of a 115-page bill, he said.

This isn't just a Republican problem, although they're acting exactly like the Democrats – year after year.

Reporters have been known to search the Capitol building, hoping to find a subcommittee on appropriations thought to be slicing pork.

We wish Dank good luck, although bad habits are hard to break – especially an addiction to pork barrel politics.

## Don't Do It

One of the corniest cracks on record: If it ain't broke, don't fix it. Why would Oklahoma sell CompSource, the agency the state created to provide workers' compensation coverage for high-risk businesses.

Consider the source: Rep. Dan Sullivan, R-Tulsa, who hauled in an insurance firm for a hearing where it was estimated that Oklahoma might earn as much as \$150 million. How quickly would that be spent?

We checked and the system is working smoothly. Republicans, such as Sullivan, won't be satisfied until the courthouse door is closed. He makes his living representing doctors and hospitals sued for malpractice.

Last year nearly 100,000 were killed due to hospital mistakes – 18,000 due to medical folk not washing their hands.

We smell a rat in the CompSource race to sell off one the best protections working men and women have in Oklahoma – especially in the oil fields.

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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

**Editor's Note:** What makes this journal of free voices sprightly is your letters and articles. Have an opinion you want to express? Fire it to us. Disagree with something you read? Sound off!

**Dart:** To U. S. Sen. James Inhofe, R-OK, boycotting the hearing on the bill to combat global warming. Even when he's there he is the equivalent of an empty suit stuffed with oil and gas money.

Our heartfelt condolences to James Baggett, OK Democratic Party vice-chair, for the loss of his son Ryan in a tragic shooting accident.

**Laurel:** To Rep. Randy Terrill, R-Moore, for blowing the whistle on raises at the Department of Human Services when nutrition centers have closed for lack of funding. They included raises for the brass.

OU President David Boren has put his retirement plans on hold, appointed co-chairman of President Obama's Intelligence Advisory Board.

**Dart:** To Gov. Brad Henry for the astonishing discovery that Oklahoma is in deep financial crisis. What was he thinking when he signed \$770 million in tax cuts, mainly for the affluent?

There are more than 200 Catholic colleges and universities but most have dropped their Catholic identity as a result of a 1990 Papal order that they remain loyal to Catholic beliefs. [*Status Envy*, a new book by Anne Hendershott]

**Laurel:** To Democratic Sens. Kenneth Corn and Tom Ivester, sleeping out on the Capitol lawn to shame the state's so-called leadership for allowing the elderly to go hungry due to \$7.4 million cuts in nutrition centers and meals on wheels.

Speaking of sorry journalism, the Daily Disappointment blossomed with a lead editorial saying Oklahomans should "blame the economy, not tax cuts, for the state's woes." Guess who was enriched by \$770 million in tax cuts?

**Dart:** To the mental midgets who threw huge rocks through the windows of the Cleveland County Democratic HQ. Somebody explain to them that this is the very reason we have the vote and not rock politics.

Barack Obama ran for and won the toughest job in the world, plagued by one disaster after another, with Republicans cheering for him to lose. Whatever happened to patriotism?

**Laurel:** To Education Guru Diane Ravich, nailing Education Secretary Arne Duncan for a two-faced approach to No Child Left Behind, telling one audience it's "toxic" and another that it only needs tweaking.

One in 10 young male school dropouts is in jail or detention on an average day, according to the Center For Labor Market Studies.

**Dart:** To Rush Limbaugh, who denies any racism – past or present. In fact, as a Pittsburgh DJ on Oct. 8, 1990, he told a black caller, "Take the bone out of your nose and call me back."

A new survey by Public Agenda places teachers in three categories – 40% are disheartened, 37% are contented, and 23% are idealists. Only 14% of teachers polled said their principals are excellent and 61% said they lack administrative support.

**Laurel:** To John Snow, inducted into the Oklahoma Higher Education Hall of Fame for his work as dean of OU's College of Atmospheric and Geographic Sciences.

American life expectancy is 78 years. In Japan 83, Singapore 82, France 81, Germany 79, Taiwan 78. Leading cause of lower American life expectancy is obesity, smoking and lack of exercise. [World Health Organization]

**Dart:** To Site Selection magazine, naming Oklahoma one of the Top 20 business climates for, among other things, the "high quality of life." In fact, Oklahoma ranks in the bottom five states for quality of life – especially for its children.



Roughly 15 million school-age children are left unattended after school – up from 14 million in 2004, according to the Afterschool Alliance. Only 4% are elementary students and 66% are high school students.

**Laurel:** To the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitative Services, which quietly goes about helping prepare the disabled for the world of work. Oklahoma has 583,000 disabled citizens. [Census Bureau 2008 survey]

National award-winning journalist Marvin Kalb was in town for a speech at the Oklahoma First Amendment Congress. He said the media is doing a poor job covering government. This is news?

**Dart:** To those who continue to "feed Americans a pack of lies" about Canadian health care – especially Fox News and congressional Republicans. A Canadian health care official, Stephen Lautens, said a tour of America – especially the South – showed how ill-informed Americans are.

Smoking bans in select American cities are the result of 11 studies showing heart attacks and disease linked to secondhand smoke dropped as much as 47%. [Mayo Clinic summary]

**Laurel:** To ex-State Sen. Maxine Horner and Mrs. Mabel Rice, winners of the Outstanding Community Service award by the Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame. Oklahoma musical history is amazing – from country to pop to jazz.

**Dart:** To U.S. News & World Report magazine, saying the problem in education is a lack of quality teachers. Our immigrant ancestors let their progeny know that education, not sports, was the key to success. We have a parent problem today.

OU is halfway through construction of a state of the art Cancer Institute. It may redirect \$1.5 billion spent by Oklahomans each year for out-of-state treatment. The OU Medical Center is fast becoming one of the nation's best.

**Laurel:** To Michael L. Brooks, third-year University of Oklahoma law student, second place national winner of the 2009 Brown Award for Excellence in Legal Writing. He receives \$3,000.

How ironic that Tyson's vice president testifies that the firm leaves litter decisions to poultry growers. That's a legal dodge since those growers are subcontractors. Attorney General Drew Edmondson's lawsuit has been right from the get-go.

**Dart:** To U.S. Rep. Dan Boren, D-OK, one of 28 House Democrats refusing to sign on to a health care reform bill. He would leave 650,000 uninsured Oklahoma's dangling in the wind. What a disgrace.

The Rural Legislative Republican Caucus slammed Gov. Brad Henry for not using \$7.4 million of his \$105 million discretionary stimulus fund to rescue senior nutrition centers.

**Laurel:** To Corrections Director Justin Jones for his in-depth study showing the cost of public beds is competitive, if not cheaper, than space in private prisons. He was bitterly criticized by some Republican leaders but he stood his ground.

U.S. Rep. Mary Fallin, 53, plans to marry again, to attorney Wade Christensen, 54, of Edmond, also a divorcee.

**Dart:** To members of the media and any candidate using the so-called legislative scorecard issued by the so-called Research Institute for Economic Development, a Republican front group. They use a phony method to give only Democrats a bad voting record.

Nearly 3,000 Oklahoma Tea Party folk went to the Capitol to welcome the Tea Party Express bus traveling across America. We defend anyone's right to protest but what do they favor? How would they shrink the government? How would they stop taxation? Rename it the Whiner Express.

**Laurel:** To Gov. Brad Henry for coming up with a plan to salvage senior nutrition centers by letting DHS use \$7.4 million in committed funds if they are replaced before the end of the fiscal year. Now legislative leaders have to sign off.

Some people are upset because the Department of Corrections has ordered 15,000 H1N1 flu shots. The swine flu has already hit one prison, exposing not only the inmates but the guards and other staff.

**THE OKLAHOMA Observer**


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# Letters

MIKE LUCKEVIDICH  
ATLANTA JOURNAL CONSTITUTION @ ATC.COM 11-17-09



Editor, The Observer:

I was up late last night watching some offbeat channel when an ad came on for a penis pump that can be used as an alternative to Viagra. At the end of the ad, it said that Medicare would pay for it!

Is this another Cash for Clunkers program?

Barbara Santee  
 Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Reminder to the Republican Legislature:

*Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,*

*Where wealth accumulates, and men decay:*

*Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade;*

*A breath can make them, as a breath has made;*

*But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,*

*When once destroyed can never be supplied.*

— Oliver Goldsmith, *The Deserted Village*

Jim Drummond  
 Norman

Editor, The Observer:

I first registered to vote in 1950. An Ohioan, I wanted to support Republican Sen. Robert A. Taft. I've been an Independent since I first registered, and I have a degree in political science.

Since then I've learned the following: Republicans "Rule." Thus, they need a following that will obey and follow blindly, just as the "royalist" of old followed a King!

Democrats "Govern." Thus, they are an amalgamation of small self-interest groups and stay in power as long as one group doesn't hog all the glory and money!

Independents can't do either! Independents won't follow blindly, question everything, and can't organize into one unified voice.

I believe our current "recession" isn't over; in fact, the economic downturn is just in the early stages. Democrats don't have all the answers, but Republicans don't even understand the question.

Where is a Robert Taft, a Barry Goldwater, or a Harry Truman when they need them?

In 1953, the year I was graduated from college, graduating engineers were hired by Westinghouse Corp.

at \$4,800 a year. Gwillian Price, the president of the corporation and head of 26 divisions producing everything from light bulbs to electric power through Atomic generation, earned \$96,000 annually. The 26 vice-presidents were paid up to \$84,000.

Yes, they did get bonuses, but nothing like we see today!

This country is in a desperate condition. Greed must be stopped!

What will happen in this country when those who served in Iraq and Iran return home to find they have been used as tools of the greedy?

If a charismatic leader steps forward to lead them it will make the June 17, 1932 march on Washington by World War I veterans look like a picnic.

Bill Sittler  
 Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

I sent the following to the editor of the Minneapolis Star-Tribune:

Because our Oklahoma Congress members seem sadly aligned with the radio shock jocks on the Fox network, I appeal to Minnesotans to redouble your efforts to advocate for what America deeply needs in this troubled time.

May our government officials see their way to support policy helping the bottom half of our population through this recession, and may they support implementation of the regulations that protected our economy 70 years since the Great Depression. May they support health financing reforms including a "public option" for the majority of voters supporting it. May our leaders see that Afghanistan is an insoluble tar-baby eluding military solutions, and requiring new diplomacy and Marshall Plan investments, not more killing. May our leaders support transitions into environmentally sustainable energy and pollution regulation policy. And may we individuals embrace how much difference we make with our diets, purchases, and consumption choices. Earth, and the human family, do hang in the balance.

Nathaniel Batchelder  
 Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

We need to print up wanted posters of Dan Boren ... and paste them all over his district. This poster should have his face with WANTED: A DEMOCRAT TO REPLACE A HYPOCRITE!

He should be eliminated for posing

as a Democrat, revealing by every action since elected that he is a Republican to the core. He must be defeated should he elect to run for his seat again.

Darla Reynolds-Sparks  
 Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

An Open Letter to 60 Minutes:

I used to love 60 Minutes. It has been one of my favorite shows since its inception many years ago. I forgave you for your "slight" misrepresentation of the Chevrolet pickup gas tank many years ago, but I don't think I can ever forgive you for the "yellow" journalism you presented Oct. 23.

Admittedly, I am in favor of either single payer [the best] or a public option [the minimum] as far as the current health care situation goes in Washington. Your coverage of the subject portrayed the federal government as being completely stupid and inept as far as allowing the perpetration of massive fraud concerning Medicare. They could easily fix this problem by requiring "bonding" of all those businesses that expect to receive Medicare payments and a 10-year maximum prison sentence [no time off for good behavior, no paroles for those caught cheating].

The actual result of your show will be to cause millions of people to throw up their hands in disgust at the government's handling of Medicare — start phoning and writing letters to their senators and representatives — telling them to leave health care in the hands of private insurance companies — that the government is completely incompetent.

I don't see how any astute person could think otherwise. The real question is, did the insurance companies pony up a nice chunk of change for you to present it this way? I wouldn't be surprised.

J.A. Gowman  
 Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

David Boren is a man of many talents but he has yet to demonstrate an ability to be in two places at the same time.

Unless he accomplishes this extraordinary feat, Boren will be doing an absentee job of either advising President Obama or his faculty and students as well as us Oklahoma taxpayers.

We hired him for a 24/7 job as president of the University of Oklahoma, our flagship institution of higher learning.

Now, we learn he has accepted the co-chairmanship of the President's Intelligence Advisory Board.

Neither job can be done completely without being on site either in Norman or Washington, DC.

Both OU and the CIA, the Central Intelligence Agency, are in a crisis.

The CIA has been accused of misleading Congress and Boren's once-great OU football team seems likely to lose more than three football games [at press time the number had reached four].

Both scandals require full-time work.

Gov. Brad Henry, higher education Chancellor Glen Johnson and the OU regents should urge Boren to put his national security job first and resign as the university president.

A new OU president can take over building a university for which our Sooners football team can be proud.

And our president can rely on Boren's advice gained from eyeball-to-eyeball observation of how our James Bonds' work.

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner  
 Wagoner

Editor, The Observer:

Despite recent reports of an increasing rate of suicides among U.S. troops and declining troop morale, The Pentagon's recent recruiting and retention report implies success. The facts underlying the statistics offered, however, tell a different story.

The New York Times reports, "The number of waivers granted to Army recruits with criminal backgrounds has grown about 65% in the past three years" and the Seattle Times informs that the percentage of minimally qualified recruits has quadrupled since 2002.

Former Rep. Martin T. Meechen, as chairman of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight, says, "The data is crystal clear; our armed forces are under incredible strain, and the only way that they can fill their recent quotas is by lowering their standards."

Deception by a desperate Pentagon is standard procedure; it is a great role model for our students and citizens.

Frank P. Belcastro  
 Dubuque, IA

## EDUCATION

### America's Greatest Success Story

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

## **Pulpit Politics**



**FROSTY TROY**  
Founding Editor

I was rummaging through the trash when I came upon a booklet that had a lifelong impact on my life.

I was an altar boy at St. John's Church in McAlester. I would run errands for Mrs. Kimes, Father Higgins' housekeeper.

This time it was newspapers and household trash. My eyes fell upon a little booklet that I picked up and began to read.

As I scanned it, it was critical of the Catholic Church. That angered me. I jammed it in my pocket, intending to ask my folks about it.

To cut to the chase, it proved to be from an organization, Protestants And Others United [POAU]. When I handed it to Dad, he took a casual look, then tossed it back to me.

"More anti-Catholic garbage," he said.

That was likely in McAlester, which had very few Catholics but thousands of Baptists – lots

of Baptist churches. In fact, Dr. Augie Henry, pastor of the First Baptist Church, had a five-minute morning show on KTMC, the only station in town.

I paid little attention to him but I heard a lot of criticism from my Dad and Grandmother. He called us "Papists" and said we worshipped the Pope.

Sr. Emily, our principal at St. John's School, said that was nonsense when I mentioned it to her.

Still, I wasn't satisfied. I kept returning to the booklet and the points it made. It didn't criticize Catholics in the style of Dr. Henry, but said we wanted to breach the wall between church and state.

Fr. Higgins taught us religion, using the Catechism, a slim volume that we virtually had to memorize because Father frequently called on students to see if we had gotten the message.

I did so because I was an altar boy and from the sixth grade on I wanted to be a priest. I had to have factual answers since some of my buddies were not Catholic and one said he doubted that we were "the one true church."

The booklet said nobody ought to mix religion and politics. I knew politics pretty well even at that tender age because my Dad talked politics all the time and read everything he could get his hands on.

I went to the library and asked the librarian, Mrs. Andy Gravitt, if she knew about Protestants And Others United. She did and she said as a card-carrying Methodist she didn't believe in mixing churches and politicians.

She asked me to wait and then after a little while she handed me a couple of books on the subject. I read one but the other was too difficult for me so I skimmed through it. I wasn't convinced that the booklet was right but I thought it was pretty fair.

Protestants And Others United was the forerunner of Americans United, today's principal defender of the Constitution and those who would breach Jefferson's wall.

I have become an amateur expert on the subject, even debating a Church of Christ preacher in Lawton when I was a reporter there many moons ago.

Even today America's Catholic bishops push for tax money to pay tuition for parochial students.

As for Southern Baptists, sad to say their once spirited defense of the Separation Clause [mainly in opposition to the Catholic Church] has disappeared and



they are together on most political issues, including prayer in school.

There's not a dime's worth of difference between them and the Catholic Church on cutting edge social issues rending the country. Both Catholics and Protestants are quitting denominational religion, fed up with pulpit politics.

A Catholic example is an order from Catholic bishops that all masses on Nov. 7-8 include a letter read saying legal abortion was in both the House and Senate health insurance reform bills. That's a lie – the House-passed version passed Nov. 7 strictly prohibits using any federal funds for abortions.

Today Americans are force-fed rightwing drivel from radio and TV evangelists and a host of radio talk show hosts. Much of the media are quick to defend the First Amendment but are slow to touch the far more ominous drive of the Religious Right to "Christianize" America.

I made it a point to bone up on the Bible, something we never touched in Catholic school because we were told that the Holy Father and the clergy were taking care of that. It was an absurd position but I bought it until I was in my 20s.

I have read four versions of the Bible, the Book of Mormon and the Koran cover-to-cover. One thing you pick up on is that the Religious Right is quick to cite the Old Testament when it serves their purpose – i.e. capital punishment. When it comes to picking up their cross and following Jesus, well that's a different story.

That is not a blanket condemnation. Some of the most superb people I have been gifted to know are Southern Baptists.

I am talking about the dim lights who actually believe Pat Robertson, Benny Hinn and that ilk. They take their marching orders from the likes of Glenn Beck, a four-alarm mental case. Many refuse to read a daily newspaper or watch network news for fear of being tainted by "liberals."

They invariably listen to and believe Fox News, which is really faux news. The new Catholic majority on the U.S. Supreme Court is scary but only time will tell whether they put the Church first. Jack Kennedy refused to do so and some condemn him today as a "sellout" for political gain.

Re-read his remarkable speech to the Southern Baptist Convention. It ought to be required reading in every Sunday school class and religious education program in the nation. It is what I believe with all my heart. I am still a practicing Catholic, to the dismay of some.

Many of America's pioneers came to this land to escape religious persecution. America is a beacon for religious liberty, unknown in too many lands.

Benjamin Franklin was accosted outside the constitutional convention by a woman who wanted to know whether we were to be a monarchy or a republic.

"A Republic Madam, if you can keep it."

Amen.

## **Why Support Public Schools?**

Bill Cirone, superintendent of the Santa Barbara County, CA public schools, picked up a nifty item from the California PTA. I think it is worth sharing with you:

The California State PTA printed a list of 10 reasons to support public education, focusing on universal concepts shared by community members across our nation. The items bear repeating because in the midst of turmoil and severe financial challenges, it is so easy to lose sight of why public schools are so vital in a democratic nation:

1. An educated population is the cornerstone of democracy. The well-being of the nation depends on the decisions of an educated, informed electorate.

2. Education reduces costs to taxpayers. Every dollar spent to keep a child in school reduces the future costs of welfare, prison, and intervention services that correlate so highly with school dropouts. It costs far less to educate a child now than to support a teen parent or a repeat offender in the future.

3. Public schools must meet the needs of all students – they serve children with physical, emotional, and mental disabilities, those who are extremely gifted and those who are learning-challenged, and everything in between. All these young people need an education.

4. Public schools foster interaction and understanding among people of different ethnic religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds. They are a true melting pot.

5. The future support of our aging population depends on strong public schools. In 1954 there were 17 workers to pay the Social Security cost for each retiree. Now, there are fewer than three for each retiree. The productivity of these three

workers will likely depend on the strength of our public school systems.

6. More than 95% of our future jobs will require at least a high school education. An educated workforce will be essential.

7. The nation pays a high price for poorly educated workers. The cost of retraining and remediation to prepare workers for their tasks is paid by both employers and consumers. The process raises the price of American products and makes it more difficult to compete in the world marketplace

8. The cost of school dropouts affects us all. Our nation loses more than \$240 billion per year in earnings and taxes that dropouts would have generated over their lifetimes. Well-supported public schools can engage all students in learning and graduate productive and competent tax-paying citizens.

9. Children are our nation's future. Their development affects all of us. Good education is not cheap, but ignorance costs far more.

10. Public education is a worthy investment for public funds. We can invest now, or we can pay later. This is the simple fact of the matter.

What makes these 10 items even more compelling is that they have been completed and disseminated by parents and community members who wisely feel that their own best interests are closely allied with the quality of their local public schools.

Efforts to short-change the public school system in this nation strike at the core of who we are as a people and what democracy is all about. We must improve our schools, working together to make them better. If we don't do it because it is right, we must do it because it is in our nation's and our community's economic self-interest.

# Oklahoma's Latest Black Eye



**ARNOLD HAMILTON**  
Editor

It's a safe bet Gov. Brad Henry, House Speaker Chris Benge and Senate President Pro Tem Glenn Coffee and their families already have given thought to their Thanksgiving menus.

In fact, by the time you're reading this, I'll bet they've already stocked up on most of the holiday trimmings – or at least developed a grocery list. [Well, maybe not the governor. There are perks, after all, to life in a mansion, with a staff handling many such mundane chores.]

What's disheartening amidst the holiday cheer is that state government's top elected leaders haven't developed a plan to restore \$7.4 million that was earmarked to provide thousands of hot meals to low-income, often immobile seniors who not only worry every day about what they're going to eat, but also how they're going to pay for it.

Without agreeing on a way to patch the hole in the Department of Human Services budget,

Thanksgiving will highlight Week Four without such vital services as meals-on-wheels.

You're telling me the governor, speaker and Senate president can't find \$7.4 million – out of a \$7.2 billion budget plus hundreds of millions in federal stimulus dollars – to help the least among us, especially as we enter cold weather season?

As the late Minnesota Senator and former Vice President Hubert Humphrey once put it, the "moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the handicapped."

It's such an appalling situation that two state senators, Kenneth Corn of Poteau and Tom Ivester of Elk City, pitched a tent on the Capitol lawn and camped out on a cold November night in an effort to draw attention to the seniors' plight.

The publicity stunt seemed to work: TV cameras showed up, moving the story to the top-of-the-10 p.m. newscast. And the governor himself showed up, just after midnight, with a possible compromise – shifting some DHS dollars temporarily to cover the nutrition programs until the Legislature returns with a permanent fix. Of course, this would require the agreement of legislative leaders, but so far, nothing has been firmed up.

This is a no-brainer: It costs about \$25 a week to provide the average Oklahoma senior five hot meals – most delivered by volunteers whose efforts don't cost the taxpayers a red cent. Further, the \$25 spent by the state is matched dollar-for-dollar by the feds, stretching our humanitarian efforts even further.

What happens if we let these seniors slip deeper into "the shadows?" For some, physical and mental health could decline to the point they no longer are able to live independently. Next stop: a nursing home.

Think very many of these poor, elderly Oklahomans could afford the cost of such care? Not likely. Who picks up the tab? The taxpayers. The cost? An average \$910 per week.

It's pay now or pay later. Yes, it's tougher than ever to prioritize spending when state revenues are plummeting, forcing month-to-month across the board cuts in order to keep the state budget balanced. But the long-term savings are potentially astronomical.

The failure to engineer a relatively inexpensive fix now, given the long-term costs of inaction, defies logic, except when viewed through the prism of power politics.

Although seniors typically vote in higher percentages than most other groups, it can be difficult, if not impossible, for many of these lower-income, mobility-challenged seniors to get to the polls. Strike one.

Their meager financial resources relegate them to an after-thought in a political world where sizeable campaign contributions are necessary to open doors and guarantee face time with elected officials. Strike two.

Finally, lower-income seniors tend to vote Democratic, making them a group whose turnout surging Republicans are hardly interested in encouraging. Strike three.

Lest you think all at the statehouse are motivated by such hardball calculations, it's worth noting that lawmakers from both parties are exploring their leaders and the governor to resolve a dire situation that not only affects meals-on-wheels-type programs, but also senior nutrition centers and transportation services.

Republican Sen. Patrick Anderson of Enid is a hero in this fight. He's challenged Henry to redirect a sliver of \$105.2 million in federal stimulus discretionary funds in order to fund senior programs between November and February, when lawmakers return to regular session and can address the problem.

Democratic Rep. Wallace Collins of Norman also took up the cause, pointing out the state House is sitting on a \$6.4 million discretionary fund that previously was used to remodel legislators' offices, among other things. Collins figures the Senate and House are hoarding more than enough money to fund the vital senior programs until February.

"Last year, the House and Senate spent millions of dollars to upgrade their electronics to include the purchase of several large-screen television sets and

additional surveillance cameras in hallways and meeting rooms," Collins says. "Having the latest technology to present bills and count votes is nice, but is it worth the sacrifice being made by older Oklahomans? I think not."

There's no way to put a value on the regular arrival at a shut-in's doorstep of a smiling, interested volunteer. It's a window to the world. It's a reason to get out of bed. It's often the difference between independence and costly nursing home care.

"There are many worthy programs across the state that are suffering because of budget cuts," Anderson says. "But the senior nutrition program is different in that it provides a daily meal directly to those who need it most. During this time of economic turmoil, the senior nutrition program is needed now more than ever."

The AARP estimates nearly 800,000 meals won't be provided over the final eight months of the fiscal year unless funding is restored.

How did we reach a point where thousands of Oklahoma seniors suddenly are at risk of being denied their one hot meal of the day? Yes, the recession is a culprit – but not the primary one. The truth is, the Democratic governor and the Republican-controlled Legislature have no one but themselves to blame. When oil and gas tax revenues were booming earlier this decade, they couldn't resist the temptation to pander to the greedy elite and hoodwink the masses, enacting \$770 million in tax cuts.

The Daily Disappointment editorial page persists in spreading the lie that the state budget crisis – revenues were 26% less than anticipated in the first quarter of the fiscal year – has nothing to do with the tax cuts. Do they think Oklahomans are stupid? Do they think several hundred million lost in tax cuts wouldn't come in handy now in the lean times that always come?

Hubert Humphrey had it right: We'll be judged by how we treat the least among us.

Is Oklahoma up to the challenge?

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# Why OCPA Survey Never Passed Smell Test

By Nate Silver

In detailing some of the evidence against Strategic Vision LLC, a pollster I am now almost certain is disreputable and fraudulent, I pointed in particular to a poll that they conducted on behalf of the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, a conservative-leaning educational think-tank. The poll purported to show that Oklahoma's high school citizens were deficient in some of the most basic aspects of citizenship. Only 23% of them knew that George Washington was the first president, the poll claimed! Just 43% knew that the Democrats and Republicans are the two major political parties!

These conclusions seemed dubious to me on their face. Several years ago, at my old consulting job, I participated in a project for the State of Ohio's public schools which involved sitting down in a third or fifth grade classroom for the better part of a day and seeing how the students were learning. Most of these observations took place in poor, post-industrial towns, which were still suffering the effects of the steel mill or the axle plant that had long ago left town. What struck me, most of all, was how smart the kids were, relative to my expectations. These kids might not have been the highest achievers – but I'm pretty sure that more than 90% of them would have known who George Washington was. And these were third and fifth graders.

There were other hints, too, that Strategic Vision's poll may have been fake. The scores that Strategic Vision claimed the kids had gotten, for instance, were strangely under-dispersed. And they seemed to contradict results from Oklahoma's own standardized testing, which asked much more difficult citizenship questions and found most of the students doing just fine.

## CANNADAY IMMEDIATELY HAD DOUBTS

It turns out that I was not the only person who had doubts about the survey. So did Ed Cannaday, the State Representative from Oklahoma's House District 15.

In a telephone interview, Cannaday told me he was shocked when he heard of the results, which had received widespread media attention. "When I saw the statistics, I was just flabbergasted and said it cannot be true," he told me.

There were two items in particular that sent up warning flags for him: the one claiming that only 23% of the students knew the identity of George Washington, and another that claimed that about one in every 10 students had listed the two major political parties as "Republican and Communist."

"Given the dialogue of today, if they had said Republican and socialist, then maybe," Cannaday told me. "But communist – that's just not something that you throw out there any more. I don't think Sarah Palin even used that term."

Cannaday, 69, would be in a position to know. Before entering the State Legislature three years ago, he had spent decades in education, first as a teacher in a large public school in Kenosha, WI, and then in Oklahoma where he set up an alternative school. After a stint in private business, Cannaday returned to classroom, first as a teacher and then as a principal, and then – finding he missed the one-on-one interaction with his students – as a teaching principal at a small school in House District 15. He now serves on the House's education committee in Oklahoma City, and continues to pay regular visits to the schools in his district. "Most schools like to have me once a month," he says, to talk about legislation pending before the state.

## HOUSE DISTRICT 15 SENIORS SURVEYED

Cannaday therefore had little difficulty setting up an experiment: he arranged to have all the seniors in the 10 secondary schools in his district take the Strategic Vision/OCPA survey. Cannaday tried to replicate the Strategic Vision survey to the greatest extent possible. The same exact questions were used, and as in the case of the original survey, the answers were open-ended rather than multiple choice. The survey was administered to a total of 325 seniors, including special education students.

Cannaday's survey however, found his students doing just fine: They answered an average of 7.8 out of the 10 questions correctly. By comparison, the high school students that were purportedly surveyed by Strategic Vision had gotten just 2.8 out of the 10 items correct. Ninety-eight percent of the students on Cannaday's survey – not 23% – knew that George Washington was the first President. Eighty-one percent – not 14% – knew that Thomas Jefferson had written the Declaration of Independence. Ninety five percent – not 43% – knew that the Democrats and Republicans are the major political parties. There was just no comparison between the two.

Cannaday distributed his results via e-mail to the constituents on his mailing list, including Karina Henderson, who published his findings in a diary at Daily Kos. He also sent hard copies to each of the schools in his district, as well as all of Oklahoma's state legislators. The reaction so far has been entirely positive – "even from the Republicans," said Cannaday, a Democrat.

Cannaday also sent his results to OCPA, the think-tank that had commissioned the survey, but has yet to receive a response. In October, before the results of Cannaday's survey had surfaced, OCPA had told the Oklahoma Gazette that they were taking "a closer look at the raw data and the methodology," behind the Strategic Vision survey but were not yet ready to "toss out" the results.

## STUDENTS WERE REPRESENTATIVE OF OKLAHOMA

House District 15 is generally quite representative of Oklahoma, especially its eastern portion, but is somewhat poorer than the state as a whole. "Rural" was the first adjective that came to mind when I asked Cannaday to describe his district – no town has more than 3,000 people. Most of the residents make their living in the natural gas industry, commute to service-sector jobs in the comparatively large towns of Muskogee or Fort Smith or are engaged in what Cannaday calls "cow/calf operations." The five counties that make up the district range from middle-class to impoverished. Haskell County, for instance, where

the town of Stigler is located, has one of the highest unemployment rates in the state and one of the largest proportions of its students on free and reduced lunch programs, the preferred benchmark of socioeconomic status in public education. House District 15 has no private schools.

Cannaday is proud of the achievements of his students – particularly their low drop-out rate, which is about 5%, and their success in the state's mock trial tournaments, where they've frequently finished in the top five in the state competing against much larger schools. He has seen his students become doctors, attorneys, optometrists and accountants, he told me. "Any time you can have one of

Question	Answer	%of students in OCPA survey answering correct	% of students in District 15 Answering correct
1. What is the supreme law of the land?	The Constitution	28%	78%
2. What do we call the 1 <sup>st</sup> ten amendments to the Constitution?	Bill of Rights	26%	91%
3. What are the two parts of the U.S. Congress?	The Senate and the House	27%	71%
4. How many Justices are on the Supreme Court?	Nine	10%	54%
5. Who wrote the Declaration of Independence	Thomas Jefferson	14%	81%
6. What ocean is on the east coast of the U.S.?	Atlantic	61%	87%
7. Name the two major political parties in the U.S.	Democrat and Republican	43%	95%
8. U.S. Senators are elected for how many years	Six	11%	48%
9. Name the first President of the U.S.	George Washington	23%	98%
10. Who is in charge of the executive branch?	The President	29%	85%
Total % correct		28%	78%

your former students in your district who's on speed dial in Oklahoma City as a physician, that's not too bad," he said.

But the schools in House District 15, which sends 40% to 50% of its students to college and sees 20% to 25% complete it – are not exceptional in any obvious way. The students at Haskell High School, for instance, received below-average scores in five of the seven categories tested by Oklahoma's standard exam, including in U.S. History.

## NO REASON TO EXPECT SUPERIOR RESULTS

There is no reason to think, in other words, that the students in House District 15 should have gotten such profoundly superior results to the "students" in Strategic Vision's survey. Nor could Strategic Vision's results have been the result of any sort of mathematical or methodological oddity. Consider their claim that literally none of the 1,000 students they surveyed were able to answer more than seven of the 10 questions correctly – lower than the average score achieved in Cannaday's test.

There are, rather, only two possibilities. Either the Strategic Vision survey was entirely fabricated – or Cannaday's was.

I would put every dollar to my name on Cannaday, who has kept the surveys and is happy to show them to anyone who comes asking.

Mid-November is Celebrate Freedom Week in Oklahoma, with public schools students to be taught from a special curriculum highlighting the Declaration of Independence. "If we're going to pass education reform then we need to be out in the classroom demonstrating it," Cannaday said of his fellow legislators. "I will be in a classroom Friday," he told me. "I enjoy it."

## POLLSTER PUNTED QUESTIONS TO OCPA

I e-mailed to David E. Johnson, the CEO of Strategic Vision, a draft of this article and asked for any comments. The entirety of his comments were as follows:

"Thank you for the opportunity to respond. Our company did survey the Oklahoma students grades 9-12 for the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs. Our client has all of the raw data, cross tabs, methodology from the survey."

Johnson did not reply to a second e-mail asking for his interpretation of the substantial difference between his results and those found by Cannaday.

– *The author, who earned an economics degree from the University of Chicago, still lives in the Windy City where he is a renowned expert on baseball statistics and partner in the firm Baseball Prospectus. He also operates [along with a DC-based colleague] the politics web site FiveThirtyEight.com, where this article first appeared. The web site is so named because there are 538 electors in the Electoral College.*

## PUBLIC FORUM

# Cole's Just A Guy Who Can't Say Yes

By Joe Carter

Historic legislation to reform health care has passed the House of Representatives. Rep. Tom Cole, who represents Norman, voted against the legislation calling it a government takeover and "socialized" medicine.

If you compare programs this bill represents no more "socialization" of medicine than the current system of U.S. agriculture whose grain subsidies and incentives have only produced the highest quality and least expensive food supply in the world.

In addition, this health care reform legislation is no more "socialized" than the current Medicare system that has brought affordable health care to millions of retirees.

### HEALTH COSTS DOUBLED IN EIGHT YEARS

The reality is our employee's health care coverage has doubled in cost in the last eight years. Our business has been forced to change carriers every two-three years because of insurance company "bait and switch" tactics.

They start the first year with low premiums to attract your business then raise them after a year forcing you to switch to keep costs down, but in doing so exclude anyone that was sick during that time.

Every year over a 1,000 Oklahomans die because they have no insurance to pay for treatment. Every year thousands of Oklahomans declare bankruptcy because of medical bills.

The insurance companies have tried to scare Americans, but the reality is their administrative overhead [i.e. CEO pay] runs about 20% where Medicare runs about 7%.

In many states only one or two insurance companies are providing health care; therefore, there is no competition to keep costs down.

### HIGH COST OF EMERGENCY MEDICINE

We currently care for the uninsured the most expensive way possible: through

## A New Women's Party Just Might Be The Rx

By Barbara Santee

I watched that shameful vote that excluded abortion coverage from the National Health Care Bill. Thirty-nine Democrats voted for it, including Dan Boren of Oklahoma!!

Owning the Republican Party is not enough for the right-wing extremists. They are gaining more and more political power within the Democratic Party, and there is no counter-balancing force on the Left that has the guts to stand up to them politically. It is always the Liberals who are expected to cave [and usually do] for the "higher good."

We have such a force, but it is not organized politically to fight for its own welfare. That force is pro-choice women! Yes, there are issue-oriented organizations like NARAL and Planned Parenthood, but they can only lobby. Not good enough. We need pro-choice women elected to Congress where the real power is, and we need to be organized enough to strike fear in the hearts of candidates and elected officials.

### ALREADY A NATIONAL WOMEN'S PARTY

I've thought for a long time the only way women – particularly pro-choice women – will gain real political power would be to support a new Women's Party. There already is the National Women's Party, established in 1916, that still retains an office in Washington, DC. But during that group's very first meeting nearly 100 years ago, Alice Paul clarified that the party would not be a political party.

Since then, it basically has worked as a lobbying group to pass legislation



emergency rooms instead of regularly scheduled office visits and preventative medicine.

The AARP [American Association of Retired Persons] and AMA [American Medical Association] have both endorsed this legislation and recognize it will slow the rate of growth of our nation's medical costs.

Not to mention, we have a moral obligation as described in the book of Matthew to care for people when they are sick. This legislation covers nearly 100% of Americans and forbids insurance companies from excluding you for preexisting conditions.

Rep. Cole, instead of being the guy that just says "no," needs to support President Obama and his health care reform legislation.

– The author lives in Norman

## State Will Rue Day It Destroyed OKC Railyard

By Tom Elmore

Through the years, it's been widely reported that the "New Crosstown" – Interstate 40 slicing through downtown Oklahoma City – is the most expensive road project the Oklahoma Department of Transportation has ever done.

Recall with me, however, that the "D" Route, the route through the OKC Union Station rail yard – plainly an arbitrary determination on the part of ODOT to needlessly and absurdly destroy the state's longstanding passenger rail center – was explained and justified originally as "being the least expensive corridor for replacement of the downtown section of I-40."

Former OKC Planning Director Garner Stoll challenged that assessment way back in 1999. In fact, he warned, it's the most expensive path.

ODOT originally sold the project as reliably costing "\$236 million."

### MORE EXPENSIVE THAN JUST I-40

That number has long since gone up in smoke. The justification was plainly false – but it was successfully used to get OKC leadership "on the hook" for the destruction of the rail center, a goal which I believe obsessed both Keating-era transportation czar Neal McCaleb and Ernest J. Istook, who funded the project from his seat in the Congress.

However expensive ODOT claims the "New Crosstown project" is – it's actually

considerably more expensive than that.

The highway boys at ODOT, you see, never bothered to discover the cost of replacing OKC Union Station's eight-block-long rail yard. They insisted that it didn't matter – and often indicated that rail passenger service would never again play a significant role in Oklahoma.

### NOW THEY'RE TALKING HIGH-SPEED RAIL?

Ironically, just weeks ago, they were holding "High Speed Rail" meetings in OKC and Tulsa during the very week the bulldozers were rolling on Union Station's magnificent yard.

Treachery? Treason?

You bet – from the highway lobby's better-to-rule-in-hell-than-serve-in-heaven puppets at ODOT.

Today, even the spaghetti-spined dimwits on the OKC Council admit "we're gonna need a rail transit hub," even as ODOT continues to alternately whack and tempt them with the vague, misty hope of a "world-class-boulevard" – whatever that is – someday, sometime, where the "Old Crosstown" is today.

But there's no money for it and it's not in ODOT's seven, or eight, or nine-year

See RAILYARD Page 18

# Oklahoma's 'Christian' Prison

## Religious Loopholes Ever More Creative

By P.Z. Myers

At first glance, I thought this story was good news: A small community Oklahoma, Wakita, is going to build a Christian prison! About time, I thought. I can think of a few Christians who deserve a few years for faith-abuse.

But no ... it's a prison to be administered by Christians to give Christian criminals special privileges. Not quite as appropriate, but more in line with what we've gotten used to from our dominant faith tradition.

We're getting more of the same from Congress, too. Religion is being given permission to intrude on science once again, with the sanctimonious Utah Sen. Orrin Hatch sponsoring a provision in the mangled health care football to allow prayer to count as medicine.

It's specifically a sop to Christian Science, that nonsensical superstition that believes that medicine is a betrayal of faith and that wants to charge sick people money to pray over them ... and also get reimbursement from the government.

### FOOT IN THE DOOR

Let the Christian Scientists get a foot in the door and official recognition of mumbling to Jesus as a billable service, and you know the Scientologists and Jehovah's Witnesses and Amish and Mormons and, of course, the Catholics will be surging through to take advantage of the opportunities.

I may just have to convert to Catholicism under this bill so I can charge the U.S. and my insurance provider to cover my near-sightedness treatments at Lourdes. And the French Riviera.

You laugh. But look at the absurdity of existing loopholes. According to the Chicago Tribune:

*The Internal Revenue Service, for example, allows the cost of Christian Science prayer sessions to be counted among itemized medical expenses for income tax purposes – one of the only religious treatments explicitly identified as deductible by the IRS.*

### PRAYER TREATMENT EXEMPTION

*Moreover, some federal medical insurance programs, including those for military families now reimburse for prayer treatment.*

*The Christian Science religious tradition has always emphasized the role of trained prayer practitioners. Their job, as outlined by the church's founder, Mary Baker Eddy, is to pray for healing and charge for treatment at rates similar to those charged by doctors.*

*Practitioners are not regulated by the government, but many buy advertisements in a leading Christian Science publication. The publication requires an application process for the ads that includes the submission of patient testimonials, a practice that church leaders say is tantamount to a vetting process.*

*[Phil] Davis [a senior Christian Science Church official] has been trained as a practitioner and still occasionally treats the sick. "We'll talk to them about*



*their relationship to God," he said. "We'll talk to them about citations or biblical passages they might study. We refer to it as treatment."*

*During the day, Davis may see multiple patients and pray for them at different moments. He charges them \$20 to \$40 for the day, saying, "I think that it would be considered modest by any standard."*

Modest in absolute terms, but relative to the quality of the "treatment," that counts as a major ripoff.

We can at least hope that the bad publicity this provision is getting will lead to its removal ... and even more optimistically, that it will lead to scrutiny of the unethical fraud of a secular government legitimizing any of these superstitious practices.

I hope the Oklahoma prison for pampered Christians is also found unconstitutional.

– The author is a biologist and associate professor at the University of Minnesota-Morris

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## Asserting Lincoln's Faith Doesn't Make It So

By Danny M. Adkison

When C.S. Lewis was once told that Jesus was a "great moral teacher" he responded by calling that description a "really foolish thing." Would Lewis have said the same thing about Abraham Lincoln?

This year marks the bicentennial of Lincoln's birth. What does that have to do with C.S. Lewis? It has to do with the recent scholarship on Lincoln, and logic Lewis used to establish the divinity of Jesus – and which might suggest that Lincoln was not a religious man.

Anyone familiar with C.S. Lewis' apologetic writings [*Mere Christianity*, in particular] knows that Lewis argued that when Jesus claimed to be God, he was either a liar, a lunatic, or who he said he was.

What he could not be was a man with superior religious convictions. That's because Jesus claimed to be God and a superior religious individual would not lie about such a serious matter. Logic dictates that Jesus was either lying, a lunatic, or Lord.

### 'A VERY RELIGIOUS, MORAL PERSON'

Abraham Lincoln had superior religious convictions. That is not just anyone's opinion. It happens to be the opinion of Reinhold Niebuhr, one of the great theologians of the 20th Century. Niebuhr is best known in popular culture for authoring the so-called Serenity Prayer. He also once authored an article on Lincoln in which he described him as a very religious and moral person.

It is hardly disputed that Lincoln was a moral man. But the literature is split on Lincoln being religious.

For example, there is a story that as a young adult Lincoln had told a close friend that he wanted to enter politics. At this same time Lincoln was reading a great deal of literature that was anti-religious [such as Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason*]. One day, the story goes, Lincoln had been so absorbed in his reading that he showed up with a manuscript he had authored questioning the authenticity of the Bible and Jesus' divinity.

When his friend realized this he grabbed the manuscript from Lincoln's hand and threw it into the fire, telling Lincoln he should never write such things again if he had any hopes of getting elected to office. This story is often told as evidence that Lincoln was a non-believer.

Consider, however, another story from 1846. That year, Lincoln decided to run for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. His primary opponent was Peter Cartwright who was a clergyman.

### SINGLED OUT IN CHURCH

Supposedly, Lincoln, about this time, attended Cartwright's church. During the service Cartwright asked all the believers to stand. Noticing Lincoln had not stood, Cartwright had the audacity to address Lincoln, stating that all of the congregation – excepting him – had stood indicating they were going to heaven, and did Lincoln care to announce where he was going?

Lincoln's response: "I am going to Congress."

Lincoln later noted that Cartwright had started a "whispering campaign" in which Cartwright was accusing him of being an infidel. Lincoln ultimately issued a brief handbill in which he denied this. Still, Lincoln did not go the extra step and call himself a Christian.

The anecdotes on this topic seem endless. For every one that seems to prove that Lincoln was a believer there are those that supposedly prove he wasn't.

Of course, there are Lincoln's speeches and the so-called fragments [writings from Lincoln's notebooks]. Of the latter the most famous in this regard would be his Meditation on Divine Will from 1862.

Many of Lincoln's thoughts in that writing find their way into Lincoln's second inaugural. The second inaugural is considered by many to be Lincoln's most religious speech. He concludes it with these words: "With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in."

### SPEECH CONVINCED MANY OF HIS RELIGIOSITY

Some have asserted, "How can anyone read Lincoln's second inaugural address and not know that Lincoln was a religious man?"

The religious references are certainly there, in great rhetorical flourishes. Using the logic from the author of *Mere Christianity*, if Lincoln was not a believer, he either a liar or he was deluded [a lunatic].

For Lewis there was no other option – since Lincoln never claimed to be God.

See LINCOLN Page 18

## BOOKS

# These Literary Gems Would Make Great Gifts

By Mike Nobles

*Editor's Note: Longtime contributor Mike Nobles annually offers Oklahoma Observer readers his choices for the perfect Holiday gift books. This year's list was divided into two installments – five books reviewed in our Nov. 10 edition and seven in this issue.*

### DAYS I MOVED THOROUGH ORDINARY SOUNDS

*The Teachers of WritersCorps in Poetry and Prose*

Edited by Chad Sweeney

City Lights Foundation

239 pages, \$17.95

The WritersCorps program is a government arts program for writers and teachers that builds on the highly successful Works Progress Administration, which marks its 75th anniversary in 2009.

The WriterCorps program employs accomplished writers to teach creative writing to low-income youth in juvenile detention facilities, homeless shelters, public schools and centers for newly arrived immigrants.

This book is a collection of poetry and prose written by a number of the writer/teachers over the past 15 years and documents their inspiring experiences of teaching, mentoring, and developing lasting relationships with young people from diverse ethnicities, ages, and backgrounds.

The next time you get to thinking such government sponsored programs don't work, check out this book. It will inspire you and make you proud at the same time.

### LIBERTY HYDE BAILEY

*Essential Agrarian and Environmental Writings*

Edited by Zachary Michael Jack

Cornell University Press

312 pages, \$29.95

Chances are the average reader has never heard of Liberty Hyde Bailey. They have likely heard of John Muir, the Sierra Club, and Teddy Roosevelt, but Liberty Hyde Bailey? Doubtful.

I had not heard of him before receiving this book and I thought I pretty much knew about most everyone in the environmental movement, past and present. I was wrong.

Liberty Hyde Bailey [1858-1954] was a pioneer in arguing for sustainable agriculture, protection for the world of nature, and healthy communities and his writings influenced well-known environmental writers such as Wendell Berry, Aldo Leopold, Gene Logadon, and Barbara Kingsolver.

This book is an anthology of Bailey's most important writings and is an introduction to his influential writings on environmental, agrarian, educational, and ecospiritual problems of not only his time but, surprisingly, our own today.

He is a pioneer in the environmental awareness movement that deserves widespread recognition for his groundbreaking work.

### FOR A GIRL BECOMING

By Joy Harjo

The University of Arizona Press

48 pages, \$17.95

This is a children's book by a Tulsa native now living in New Mexico. This book was written for her first grandchild as she progressed from childhood to womanhood and is appropriate for any child beginning to experience the cycle of life, including the special years of youth and the beginning of adulthood.

It is a poem-song that celebrates life's passages and is full of love, praise, and advice that points a child in a positive and loving direction.

It is a wonderful book for children of virtually any age and offers hope and inspiration to others of any age that stand at the door of becoming.

### THE BEST CREATIVE NONFICTION

Volume 3

Edited by Lee Gutkind

248 pages, \$16.95

Creative nonfiction is rapidly becoming a favorite form of writing to legions of readers of this developing genre. What is creative nonfiction? It is work done by writers, both known and unknown, that looks at the richness, absurdities, and grace of real-life experiences in various forms such as meditative essays, hybrid memoir/journalistic investigation, and just about everything in between.

It is difficult to fully describe this type of work but suffice it to say it is a multifaceted genre that must be read to be believed. Sometimes truth is stranger than fiction.

### SAN JUAN LEGACY

*Life in the Mining Camps*

By Duane A. Smith

University of New Mexico Press

181 pages, \$24.95

I recommend this book for a variety of reasons. First, I am a fan of Duane Smith's style of writing. He writes in a style that is reader friendly and seems

to enjoy his efforts. Second, the photographs by John Ninnemann are splendid and complement the text in a special way. And third, many Oklahomans travel to the San Juan Mountain area of southern Colorado and undoubtedly have visited many of the 19th Century boomtowns that are spotlighted in this book.

The lives, legends, and myths surrounding towns such as Silverton, Ouray, Telluride, Creede, and Lake City are discussed in this neat book that will appeal to travelers of all stripes, arm chair as well as boots on the ground.

### THE ANCIENT SOUTHWEST

*Chaco Canyon, Bandolier, and Mesa Verde*

By David E. Stuart

University of New Mexico Press

152 pages, \$18.95

I originally started to read this book because I have an interest in the Southwest in general and in the three locations that are noted in the subtitle.

To my surprise and delight I discovered the author was both a professional anthropologist and award winning newspaper writer. This book turns out to be a collection of the author's newspaper columns written between 1982 and 1985 for the Silver City Enterprise and the New Mexico Independent, both small town New Mexico newspapers.

If you are looking for a great collection of essays and stories, this is the book for you. It will take you on a journey throughout New Mexico to not only the three locations in the subtitle but to the Gila Wilderness, Peach Springs and the Navajo Nation – and a variety of other locations that will have you heading for your car and hitting the road. Highly recommended.

See BOOKS Page 18

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# Climate Change: The Dems Back In Charge

By Raquel Brown

Senate Democrats in the Environment and Public Works Committee finally squelched Republican boycotts and passed a version of the climate bill.

Republican senators refused to show up to committee hearings in an attempt to stall the bill. Brian Beutler of Talking Points Memo notes that EPW has now set "the stage for other panels to amend the legislation."

To no one's surprise, Sen. James Inhofe, R-OK, immediately complained about the legislation on Fox News. Sen. Max Baucus, D-MT, was the lone Democrat that did not vote, which Inhofe interpreted as a sign that the bill is "dead."

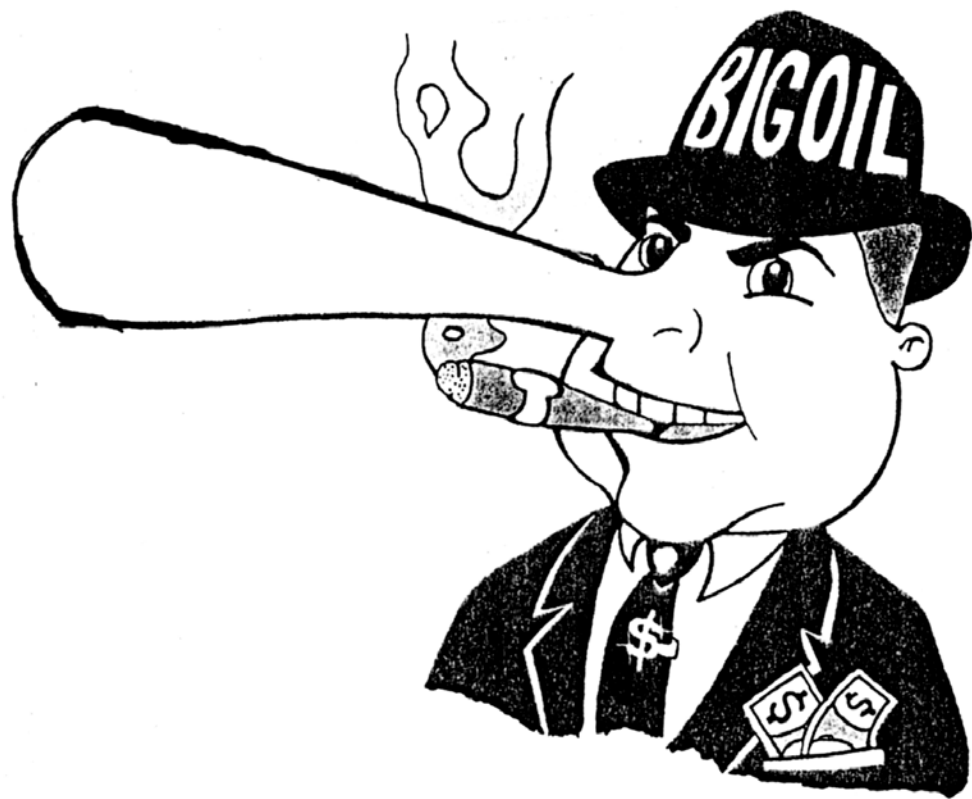
Chairman Barbara Boxer, D-CA, was much more upbeat and argued that the Republican boycott actually marred their credibility.

"The absence of the Republicans during the Environmental Protection Agency's presentation was a clear message that their criticism of the EPA analysis was not a substantive one," Boxer said. "We are pleased that despite the Republican boycott, we have been able to move the bill."

Inhofe also condemned Boxer for passing the bill through the committee unconventionally. Aaron Wiener writes for The Washington Independent that, "Without a quorum that included at least two Republicans, the committee was unable to open formal debate on amendments to the bill."

"But passage requires just a simple majority, and Chairman Boxer and the Democratic leadership chose to forgo amendments in order to move the legislation quickly, given that the end of the GOP boycott was nowhere in sight."

Luckily, now that the bill is moving on to other committees, Inhofe and his Republican colleagues will no longer have much of a say on the bill's final out-



come.

*Editor's Note: Inhofe and his colleague, Sen. Tom Coburn, R-OK, are politically owned body and soul by an oil industry that would have to clean up its act under provisions of the bill.*

*Inhofe is famously known for saying that climate change is a hoax. Tell that to the polar bears drowning while in search of ice. They were just put on the endangered species list for the first time ever.*

## GOP's Toxic Tea Party Stars Palin, Beck

By Joe Conason

When Newt Gingrich warned Republicans that they were making a grave "mistake" by driving out moderates and enforcing the angry orthodoxy of the far right, the sober tone of his remarks was stunning.

This is a politician who is no stranger himself to the wilder shores of extremism, a populist and a purist who rose to great power against the GOP establishment, and a demagogue whose lexicon lacerated the "Democrat Party" as decadent, elitist, unpatriotic and immoral.

In his day, Gingrich channeled the same phobias and fury as the Tea Party activists whose growing influence in Republican ranks seems to have shaken him so badly. Why is Newt scared now?

Despite his habitual ranting against the Eastern elites, the former House speaker is a professional historian and an intellectual with wide-ranging interests – making him a figure of potential suspicion to radio talkers without much formal education and the raving mobs that follow them.

### PALIN, BECK NEW HEROES

Much as he exploited the prejudices of the religious right and fantasies of the conspiracy crowd, Gingrich has always affected a more sophisticated and urbane attitude. He may be troubled to realize that he suddenly ranks far lower than Sarah Palin, who can barely muster a coherent political thought, or Glenn Beck, who enralls his audience with weird, weepy rants.

Leaving aside any lingering presidential ambitions, Gingrich understandably feels that brand of leadership will have a very limited appeal for most Americans – and that the more voters see of it, the less they will like it.

Is it fair to stigmatize the tea-baggers and their leaders as a movement of the fringe? In New York's 23rd congressional district, Douglas Hoffman, the right-wing carpetbagger who drove out moderate local Republican Dede Scozzafava, apprenticed himself to Beck, obsequiously flattering the Fox News host as his "mentor."

### IN BECKWORLD, ALL DEMS ARE MARXISTS

Hoffman signed a pledge to uphold the "912 principles and values" endorsed by Beck – a juvenile tract that demands honesty, thrift, humility and charity even as it complains that government forces citizens to "share" when they don't want to. [As far as Beck is concerned, all Democrats are "Marxist" and almost all Re-

publicans are "Marxist lite."]

No doubt Hoffman is eagerly studying the collected writings of the late Cleon Skousen, the Beck-endorsed prophet whose speeches used to stir up meetings of the John Birch Society, mostly against Republicans of the Rockefeller and Kissinger variety. He has plenty of time for reading now, after losing the special election to Democrat Bill Owens.

If the revival of Birchite mania troubles Gingrich, then the Palin phenomenon, now breaking loose with the publication of her memoir, must be equally disturbing. The former Alaska governor has a long, Beck-like history of affiliation with bizarre causes and characters, including an Alaskan secessionist party and a Kenyan witch-hunting evangelist who conducted an exorcism rite in her Wasilla church. She will ignore or minimize those episodes in *Going Rogue*, but putting extra lipstick on this pit bull may not help.

### TEA PARTY IDEOLOGY ISN'T SELLING BROADLY

Most Americans don't know much yet about the idiosyncratic ideology of the Tea Party crowd, beyond their conviction that President Obama was born in Kenya [and that his birth announcement in the Hawaii newspapers is therefore part of a plot that dates back to the Kennedy era]. But what they have seen so far, they don't seem to like: The more that Beck, Palin and kindred spirits appear to represent the Republican brand, the less appeal that brand possesses.

From the perspective of Gingrich and other veteran Republicans, there is deep irony in these untoward developments. Many of the Tea Party types actually hate Republican politicians, unless, like Ronald Reagan or Barry Goldwater, they are already dead. They hate Democrats, too, of course – and lots of other people – but their invective against Republicans is suffused with special outrage.

If they have their way, every Republican who doesn't adhere to the Beck canon will be driven out at the end of a pitchfork, just like poor Dede Scozzafava.

Fifteen years ago, when Newt rode to power on the resentments of the religious right, the gun lobby and the economic royalists, he celebrated their extremism as the political style of "normal Americans." Today when he hears the violent rhetoric, the hateful threats and the fanatical intolerance, he knows they are talking about him, too.

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## Let's Really Calculate What Teachers Earn

Teachers' hefty salaries are driving up taxes, and they only work nine or 10 months a year! It's time we put things in perspective and pay them for what they do – babysit!

We can get that for less than minimum wage. That's right. Let's give them \$3 an hour and only for the hours they worked, not any of that silly planning time. That would be \$19.50 a day – 7 a.m. to 3:30 [or so] p.m. with just 25 minutes off for lunch.

Each parent should pay \$19.50 a day for these teachers to baby-sit their children.

Now, how many do they teach in a class, 30? So that's \$19.50 x 30 = \$585 a day. However, remember they only work 180 days a year! We're not going to pay them for any vacations.

Let's see ... that's \$585 x 180 = \$105,300 per year. What about those special teachers and the ones with master's degrees?

Well, we could pay them minimum wage, and just to be fair, round it off to \$7 an hour. That would be \$7 x 6.5 hours x 30 children x 180 days = \$245,700 per year.

Wait a minute – there's something wrong here! The average teacher salary is \$50,000 for 180 days that equals \$277 per day for teaching 30 students = \$9.23/6.5 hours = \$1.42 per hour per student.

A very inexpensive baby-sitter and they even try – with your help – to EDUCATE your kids!

What a deal ... and the parents don't even have to buy them pizza!  
Make a teacher smile; send this to someone else who appreciates teachers.

# A Pure Fake Glenn Beck Wins TV Crying Rights

By Alexander Zaitchik

Fox News host Glenn Beck has done all the necessary spadework to position himself at the center of a brewing and increasingly paranoid rightwing insurgency.

From challenging Democratic Congressman Keith Ellison to prove he isn't working with Al Qaeda, to taking tearful stands against Barack Obama's Democratic Reich, the self-described "rodeo clown" is pushing his televised tirades and skits closer to the angrier, more unhinged fare of his daily talk radio show.

Beck has been honing his confessional Molotov-throwing shtick for a decade and is deft at making himself an elusive and slippery target.

As media watchdogs and satirists step up their attacks on Beck's blubbing baboonery, the host has countered with well-practiced public relations Aikido.

## HE SAYS HE IS CRAZY BUT IS HE?

He has embraced comparisons between himself and Network's Howard Beale, who rode an on-air crack-up to record ratings. On his shows and in print, he has claimed at turns to be "crazy," "borderline schizophrenic," and "just a clown."

But is he really? After all of the Comedy Central satires, the studious cataloging of falsehoods and outrages, and the public back-and-forth about his mental state, the big questions about Beck – Who the hell is this guy? And is he for real? – remain largely unanswered and even unasked in any serious way.

Fortunately, Beck has actually gone far toward answering these questions himself. Between his thousands of hours of TV and radio recordings, his semi-annual stage tours, and a surprisingly frank memoir, he has provided enough information to piece together the puzzle of the "real" Glenn Beck.

## MENTAL ILLNESS RUNS IN HIS FAMILY

The first casualty of any study of Glenn Beck is the idea that he is cracking up, a la Howard Beale. Mental illness runs in Beck's family – his mother and brother suffered from depression and committed suicide, and he himself considered suicide in the mid-90s – but Glenn Beck is not crazy.

His frequent choke-ups are no more the early signs of a looming crack-up than his best-selling-author status portends a National Book Award.

Glenn Beck has been fake crying for years. It started on his radio show in Tampa, where he first turned the confessional mode of the support-circle into fodder for self-denigrating humor and ratings gold.

## CRYING IS HIS PERSONAL BRAND

After 10 years, the fake crying is best seen as a corporate brand handle. It differentiates him from tough-guy competitors in a conservative media universe dominated by manly men and manlier women.

Even Beck himself is becoming increasingly open about this. The plug for his upcoming "Common Sense" comedy tour describes him as "America's favorite hysterical, fear-mongering, TV and radio crybaby."

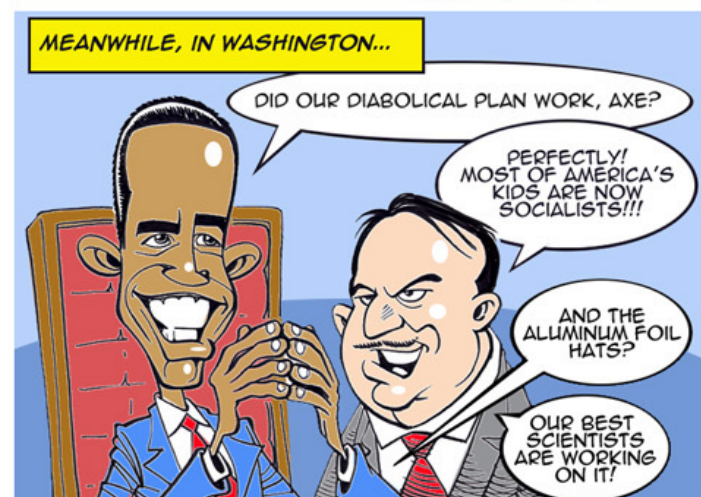
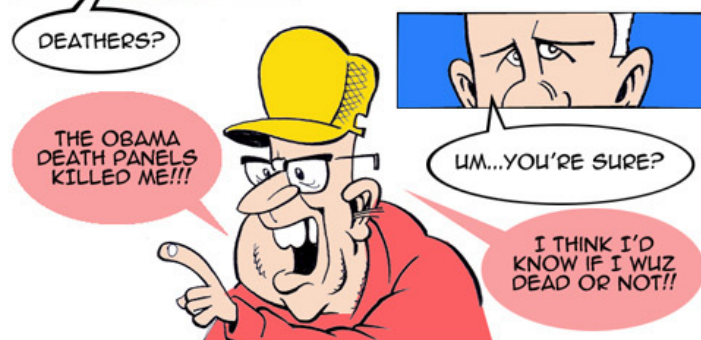
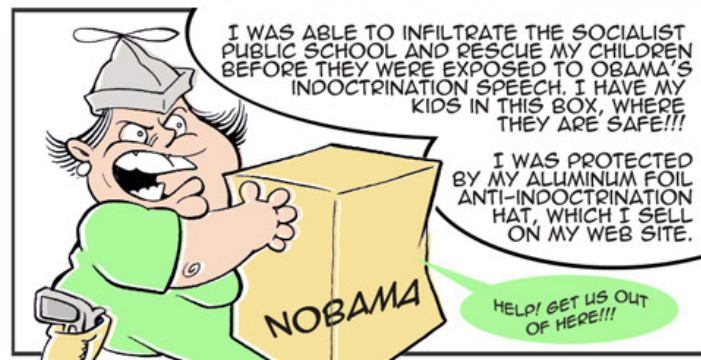
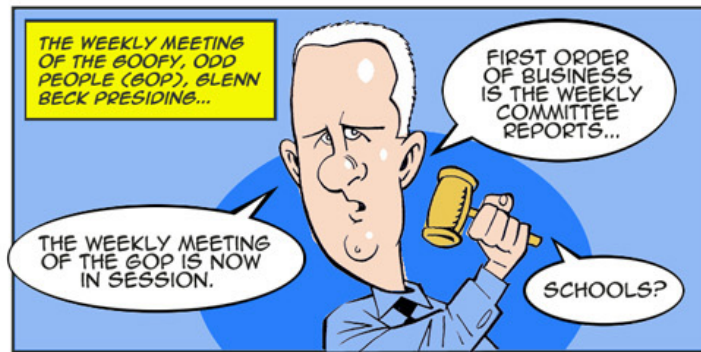
Those who take a single drop of Beck's tears seriously need simply watch recordings of his stage shows. As he paces the stage, Beck switches the tear ducts on and off like a switch, sometimes as many as six times in a single hour.

## MEMORABLE FREUDIAN SLIP

There is the memorable Freudian slip Beck dropped on Fox in early February, while recounting the story of a missing girl.

"Two years ago, I made the father a promise," Beck says, choking up, "that I would not let this story dry – or die ..."

To understand Glenn Beck, you just need to



– Steve Hill

fade out the apocalyptic hysterics and pull back the Patton-size flag. Do that, and staring back at you are three words: Mercury Radio Arts. Therein lies everything you need to know about Fox's new megastar.

Beck founded Mercury Radio Arts in 2002, the year his talk radio show went national. The name is a respectful nod to the Mercury Radio Theater, the New York drama company founded by Orson Welles most famous for producing a 1938 broadcast of War of the Worlds.

## HE ONCE CONSIDERED SUICIDE

Beck's self-image as an entertainer is rivaled only by his self-image as a businessman. He admits as much in his 2003 book, *The Real America*, which alternates between shlocky by-the-numbers conservative homily and frank autobiography.

Despite a quick and promising start in radio – Beck was making six-figures and riding limos in his early 20s – he bottomed out in 1994 working a tiny market in suburban Connecticut. He flirted with killing himself, but cleaned up instead and found a new ambition.

Beck finally got his big break in 1999. That was the year Clear Channel bought Tampa's WFLA, home to the popular liberal talk legend Bob Lassiter. Lassiter was squeezed out within a year of the sale and replaced by Beck, who jerked Tampa talk radio to the right.

He is remembered by locals during this time for his skits depicting Satan writing love poems to Hillary Clinton, and for dangerously stoking anti-Democrat sentiment in Florida during the tense 2000 election recount.

His new masters were pleased. Just weeks after the 9/11 attacks, 18 months after he took his first caller, Beck signed a national contract with Premiere Radio Networks, a Clear Channel subsidiary.

## \$50 MILLION A YEAR CONTRACT

His "Rallies for America" were the precursor for Beck's newest self-promotional patriotic initiative, the "9/12 Project," which is an attempt to literally stamp his brand on the very memory of 9/11. If this seems shameless, it is. Without 9/11, Beck's newest Premiere contract would almost certainly not be worth \$50 million.

Howard Stern and Rush Limbaugh still make more money than he does.

Beck's obsession with getting as rich as possible also runs through his Mormon Christianity, which he adopted in 1999, which incidentally is the same year he got married and launched his talk radio career.

In *The Real America*, Beck briefly describes his semester studying religion at Yale at age 30. [His enrollment was made possible by a letter of recommendation written by Joe Lieberman]. Here's Glenn Beck, theologian:

It's interesting to me that Jesus said, 'Inside my Father's house there are many mansions ... That means that wealth and riches are not bad things ... God believes you deserve a mansion. Do You? ... There is a universe full of money. There are riches beyond your wildest dreams. God doesn't give you a taste of ice cream unless he's willing for you to have the entire cone.'

Nothing is sacred in Glenn Beck's business strategy to grow his company by stoking rightwing anger, anxiety, and paranoia. This is true even of those things he wants us to believe he holds most sacred.

So make fun of him all you want but Glenn Beck is not crazy. He is a very wealthy and possibly visionary fraud, the Bernie Madoff of conservative anger and fear in the Obama era.

He is laughing and crying in the plush backseat of his stretch limo right along with you, all the way to the bank.

© Independent Media Institute

## First Responders

# Libraries Playing A New Social Role

By Susan Saulny and Karen Ann Cullotia

The public library in Arlington Heights, IL, had just closed its doors one evening when two homeless men who had been using the stacks as shelter from the cold got into a fight on the outside steps.

What began as bickering took a violent turn when one of the men pulled out a knife and stabbed the other six times, leaving him bleeding beside the book drop.

Like libraries across the country, Arlington Heights Memorial had strived to keep pace with the changing times, ensuring its relevance in the digital age by becoming something of an indoor town square, and emphasizing that its money-saving services catered to the community's needs.

### BEYOND REFERENCE HELP

These days, however, community need reaches far beyond reference help – and in many libraries, it is turning a normally tranquil place into an emotional and stressful hotbed.

As the national economic crisis has deepened and social services have become casualties of budget cuts, libraries have come to fill a void for more people, particularly job-seekers and those who have fallen on hard times.

Libraries across the country are seeing double-digit increases in patronage, often from 10% to 30%, over previous years.

### NEW POPULARITY IS OVERTAXING

In some cities, this new popularity – some would call it overtaxing – is pushing libraries in directions not seen before, with librarians dealing with stresses that go far beyond overdue fines and mis-shelved books.

Many say they feel ill-equipped for the newfound demands of the job, the result of working with anxious and often depressed patrons who say they have nowhere else to go.

The stresses have become so significant here that a therapist will soon be counseling library employees.

"I guess I'm not really used to people with tears in their eyes," said Rosalie Bork, a reference librarian in Arlington Heights, a well-to-do suburb of Chicago.

"It has been unexpectedly stressful. We feel so anxious to help these people, and it's been so emotional for them."

### LIBRARIANS SEEING NEW CHALLENGES

Urban ills like homelessness have affected libraries in many cities for years, but librarians here and elsewhere say they are seeing new challenges.

They find people asleep more often at cubicles. Patrons who cannot read or write ask for help filling out job applications. Some people sit at computers trying to use the Internet, even though they have no idea what the Internet is.

"A lot of people who would not normally be here are coming in to use the computers," said Cynthia Jones, a regional branch manager in St. Louis. "Adults complain a lot about kids just playing games and you know, 'I need to do a resume,' or 'I need to write, I need some help,'" Ms. Jones said.

"There's a bit of frustration."

### STAFF TOLD TO TREAD CAREFULLY

Ms. Jones instructed her staff to tread carefully. "You don't want to upset people," she said. "You don't know what might set somebody off."

Paul LeClerc, president of the New York Public Library, said resume writing had become a major use of library computers, and every librarian in the system had received training in how to better assist patrons conduct job searches.

The 40 million visits to New York libraries over the past year, he said, is the greatest ever in a 12-month period.

In Arlington Heights, newly homeless patrons are showing up in their business suits, said Paula Moore, the library's director.

"They are living in their cars after losing a job they had for a number of years," Ms. Moore said.

### SOCIAL ILLS IN NEWFOUND POPULARITY

The American Library Association does not keep statistics on incidents in and around libraries, but anecdotal evidence from around the country suggests that some libraries are struggling with their newfound popularity and the social ills that can come along with it.

In Los Angeles, the police say the Central Public Library has become a magnet for thieves, and that, excluding shoplifting at stores, there were more thefts of personal property at the library last year than any other location in central Los Angeles.

"We hope things get better," said Lt. Paul Vernon, a spokesman for the Los Angeles Police Department, noting the difficulty of policing libraries. "The library is a place where people tend to congregate, and from a public and government standpoint, you can't really restrict people."

### THIEVES STRIKE LIBRARY BRANCHES

In Sacramento, two branches of the public library temporarily stopped accepting cash as fines for overdue books, after thieves struck three times since June – in one instance, taking off with a safe filled with money.

In Lynchburg, VA, a gunman shot a man outside the public library on a Monday afternoon in late January. The victim, who survived, staggered into the library bleeding and looking for help. Since then, an off-duty police officer has been hired by the library for extra security.

In Quincy, MA, where a man was arrested in the library and charged with as-



sault and battery with a dangerous weapon, among other offenses, a police officer on beat patrol now walks through the library during operating hours.

### STABBING RESULTS IN MORE SECURITY

Though homelessness is not new to Arlington Heights, security at the library has been tightened since the stabbing. [The man was charged with attempted murder, and the victim survived.]

Although such violence is unusual, a library patron, Judi Crawford, said the scene around the building still made her uncomfortable.

"I don't like my 16-year-old son to study at the library at night anymore," Ms. Crawford said. "If he is studying here, I make sure he stays inside until he sees me pull up, and he can just run out and get in the car."

Other things have changed at the library here, too. It has tried to anticipate the new needs of its neighborhood. Next to its welcome desk, it created a job-search desk, and it has recruited volunteer professionals to review resumes, set up a support and networking group for the unemployed, and assembled a Web site offering the best of its online resources.

### LIBRARY USAGE SOARING

Officials said the library was experiencing double-digit increases in the circulation of DVDs, CDs and books on tape.

The library's many children's programs and cultural arts events are also filled to capacity, reflecting a growing demand, linked to the economy, for free entertainment.

With an estimated 2,500 patrons visiting the library every day, employees must now park at a parking lot at a nearby church.

"When you walk by our new job-search desk, you see people in line and even waiting on the benches for assistance," said Ms. Moore, the director of the Arlington Heights Memorial Library.

A therapist is planning to give a workshop at the library called "Finding Hope After Losing a Job," while also offering advice to library employees who are increasingly being thrust into the role of first responder to emotionally distraught patrons who view them as confidantes.

"I've had people come in and talk for hours," said Barbara Vilck, a librarian specializing in business at Arlington Heights. "More and more people are in need of help and direction."

© The New York Times

## A Dying Priest's Last Wish

The old priest lay dying in the hospital. For years he had faithfully served the people of the nation's capital. He motioned for one of his aides to come near.

"Yes, Father," said the aide.

"I would really like to see George Bush and Dick Cheney before I die," whispered the priest.

"I'll see what I can do, Father," replied the aide.

The aide sent the request to Capitol Hill and waited for a response. Soon the word arrived. Bush and Cheney would be delighted to visit the priest.

As they went to the hospital, Cheney commented to Bush, "I don't know why the old priest wants to see us, but it will certainly help our images after all the bad press we've been getting."

Bush couldn't help but agree.

When they arrived at the priest's room, the priest took Bush's hand in his right hand and Cheney's hand in his left. There was silence and a look of serenity on the old priest's face.

Finally, George Bush spoke: "Father, of all the people you could have chosen, why did you choose us to be with you as you near the end?"

The old priest slowly replied "I have always tried to pattern my life after our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

"Amen," said Bush. "Amen," said Cheney.

The old priest continued, "He died between two lying thieves. I would like to do the same."

# Tea Party Returns To Its Racist Roots

By Michelle Goldberg

Now that popular conservatism has given itself over so avidly to racial resentment, it's curious to remember how hard the right once tried to scrub itself of the lingering taint of prejudice.

Indeed, for a decade and a half the Christian right – until recently the most powerful and visible grassroots conservative movement – struggled mightily to escape its own bigoted history.

In his 1996 book *Active Faith*, Ralph Reed acknowledged that Christian conservatives had been on the wrong side of the civil rights movement.

"The white evangelical church carries a shameful legacy of racism and the historical baggage of indifference to the most central struggle for social justice in this century, a legacy that is only now being wiped clean by the sanctifying work of repentance and racial reconciliation," wrote Reed.

## A BUZZ PHRASE

"Racial reconciliation" became a kind of buzz phrase. The idea animated Promise Keepers meetings.

"Racism is an insidious monster," Bill McCartney, the group's founder, said at a 39,000-man Atlanta rally. "You can't say you love God and not love your brother."

The Traditional Values Coalition distributed a video called "Gay Rights, Special Rights" to black churches. It criticized the gay rights movement for co-opting the noble legacy of the civil rights struggle.

Throughout the Bush years, homophobia and professions of anti-racism were twinned in a weird way, as if the latter proved that the right wasn't simply still skulking around history's dark side.

At a deeply surreal 2006 event at the Greater Exodus Baptist Church, an African-American church in downtown Philadelphia, leaders of the religious right invoked Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks on behalf of gay marriage bans and Bush's judicial nominees.

## JOINING HANDS IN PRAYER

At the end of the evening, several dozen clergymen, black and white, joined hands in prayer at the front of the room.

"Black Americans, white Americans," said a beaming Tony Perkins, leader of the Family Research Council. "Christians, standing together."

The whole premise of compassionate conservatism – which shoveled taxpayer money towards administration-friendly churches like Greater Exodus Baptist – was that the right cared as deeply as the left about issues like inner city poverty.

What a difference an election makes. Even if you believed that compassionate conservatism was always a bit of a con, it's amazing to see how quickly it has vanished, and how fast an older style of reaction, one more explicitly rooted in racial grievance, has reasserted itself.

## STONE AND RHETORIC DIFFERENT

Today's grassroots right is by all appearances as socially conservative as ever, but its tone and its rhetoric are profoundly different than they were even a year ago. For the last 15 years, the rightwing populism has been substantially electrified by sexual anxiety. Now it's charged with racial anxiety.

By all accounts, there were more Confederate flags than crosses at the recent anti-Obama rally in Washington, DC. Glenn Beck has become a far more influential figure on the right than, say, James Dobson, and he's much more interested in race than in sexual deviancy.

For the first time in at least a decade, middle class whites have been galvanized



by the fear that their taxes are benefiting lazy, shiftless others. The messianic, imperialistic, hubristic side of the right has gone into retreat, and a cramped, mean and paranoid style has come to the fore.

## RACISM HAS ALWAYS BEEN INTERTWINED

It's not, after all, as if the Christian right was something completely removed from the old racist right – rather, as Reed acknowledged all those years ago, they were initially deeply intertwined.

The Columbia historian Randall Balmer has shown that Christian conservatives were not, contrary to their own mythology, initially mobilized by their outrage at *Roe vs. Wade*.

Rather, what spurred them into action was the IRS's attempt to revoke the tax-exempt status of whites only Christian schools, schools that had been created specifically to evade desegregation.

The Christian right was always rooted in an older style of reactionary politics. Before he became a political organizer himself, the Rev. Jerry Falwell – who ran one of those Christian segregation academies – attacked Martin Luther King Jr. for his political activism. ["Preachers are not called to be politicians, but to be soul winners," he said.]

## KKK WIZARD SOLD MAILING LIST

Before Tony Perkins was basking in homophobic interracial amity, he paid Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard David Duke \$82,500 for his mailing list. In 2004, David Barton, then the vice president of the Texas GOP, spoke at an event featuring white preachers and ministry workers dropping to their knees before their black brethren to plead for forgiveness.

Thirteen years earlier, Barton had twice been a featured speaker at meetings of the Christian Identity movement, which preaches that blacks are sub-human "mud people." One could go on and on.

As racism grew politically unacceptable, the Christian right was able to channel resentment over the decline of white male privilege into a *Kulterkampf* directed at more acceptable enemies, like gays and lesbians.

The movement borrowed heavily from Catholic theology and convinced itself that it was in a righteous struggle against a culture of death, not a culture of diversity.

Now the mask is off. One wonders if 15 years from now, they'll bother apologizing all over again.

– Michelle Goldberg is a senior correspondent at *The American Prospect*. She is also the author of *Kingdom Coming* and *The Means of Reproduction*.

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# A Godfather-like Feel To Mexican Life

By Norm Rourke

Mexican border towns are not the best examples of the country. But for many of us, they are the best we can do on limited budgets. They offer tourists an opportunity to at least say they've been to a foreign country.

Commerce is no more intense than it is in a Mexican border town. Shopkeepers, street vendors and even pricey boutiques are all crammed into the few blocks of a main street that runs from the border entry.

A recent visit to Progreso, Mexico reminded me of past visits. The sights, sounds and smells of border town Mexico awakened memories. Old hangouts, restaurants, shops and landmarks were recalled. The cacophony of Spanish and English speaking hawkers, traffic, police whistles and music had not changed over the years when we had visited the city before.

A new reality was unexpected although often reported on the evening news. Soldiers were positioned in the middle of the street where it divided between those walking or driving across the border and those leaving.

An armored vehicle manned by a machine gunner on top looked down the choked street. Off to the side of the vehicle and its gunner was a machine gun bunker manned by a soldier in full battle gear. Watching from the second story balconies of several buildings were armed snipers.

This is now Mexico's life shared – or controlled – by drug cartels. Across the border at Brownsville [25 miles southeast of Progreso], Matamoros has experienced street gun fights between rival cartels in turf battles. Not long ago one threatened to spill over into Brownsville.

Progreso has become the border town of choice for Winter Texan visitors because of the violence, kidnapping and other cartel wars in Matamoros. But

even this small town has not gone untouched by the growing problem of cartel control.

A Progreso businessman told me that a few months earlier one of the drug cartel's people told every business if they paid the cartel, they would be safe and have no need for government protection. This sounds like something from *The Godfather*. Instead, the military moved in and established a presence giving an appearance of being in control. Unfortunately the history of corruption in the Mexican government and military do not assure the Mexican business people.

All this is an unfortunate part of the times in which we [and the Mexicans] live. The Mexican people are gracious, friendly, appreciative of the tourists and patient with those of us with limited Spanish language skills. They are hard working, creative artisans and craftsmen. Many are well-known writers, poets, singers, musicians who contribute to the creative arts.

It is sad they are so poorly governed and the richness of the land and people are squandered. Perhaps this is why Mexico has had frequent revolutions and upheavals. The people eventually tire of being taken advantage of and kept abysmally poor.

I will return to Progreso again if only to enjoy the food and hospitality of Auturo's and Angels restaurants. I will return to Progreso to remind myself of the importance of being a courteous guest in a foreign country.

I have never been ill treated by these good people and I hope I will never treat them badly. It is a reminder that we are all part of a shrinking world.

– The author lives in Beggs

# Two Studies Show Art Audience Decline

Two separate national surveys gauging youth and adult participation in the arts reported that visits to art museums are declining.

A study of nearly 4,000 eighth-grade students, part of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, found dwindling field trips over the past decade.

"The percentage of eighth-graders who reported that they visited an art museum or gallery with their classes dropped from 22% in 1997 to 16% in 2008," said Stuart Kerachsky, the acting commissioner for the National Center for Education Statistics, which administers the assessment.

## ADULT PATRONAGE ALSO OFF

The National Endowment for the Arts also released new data showing that fewer adults are choosing an art museum or a visual arts festival as a leisure-time destination.

From 1992 to 2001, 26% of adults reported that they visited such attractions, but the number for 2008 dropped to 23%. The decrease is small, but it may portend coming declines as the most loyal part of the museum audience ages.

The exception, the NEA said, is in the DC metropolitan area, where 40% of adults said they had visited a museum in 2008 – reflecting tourism and free admission at most major museums.

In addition, the agency noted sizable declines between 1982 [when it first started documenting arts participation] and 2008 in almost every performing arts field. It reported double-digit rates of decline for classical music, jazz, opera, musical theater, ballet and dramatic plays.

## AUDIENCES ARE CHANGING

The NEA survey "shows that audiences for the arts are changing," said Patrice Walker Powell, the acting NEA chairman. "While many now participate in arts activities available through electronic media, the number of American adults who are participating in live performing and visual arts events is declining. The findings underscore the need for more arts education to foster the next generation of both artists and arts enthusiasts."

The National Assessment of Educational Progress report is part of a periodic federal look at how America's students fare in various subjects. Arts education was last measured in 1997, but because of budget constraints, the survey was limited this time to music and visual arts. The schools and students were selected at random, said a spokeswoman, and the questions took various forms.

## BASIC SKILLS IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT

Results indicated that students need improvement in basic skills. In NAEP's visual arts component, students were asked to do a self-portrait. Only 4% received the highest mark of "sufficient," while 57% received a "minimal" rating, the third-best ranking.

General accessibility to arts instruction remained constant, the NAEP report said. Music instruction was offered at least three or four times a week in 57% of



the schools and visual arts instruction in 47%.

Yet there were several gaps in student scores. Whites and Asian/Pacific Islanders scored 22 to 32 points higher than black or Hispanic students.

On music questions, public school eighth-graders scored 14 points lower than private school students and nine points lower than their private school counterparts in the visual arts sections.

"School budget cuts are underway, with more projected next year," said Eileen Weiser, a member of the National Assessment Governing Board, speaking of the economic climate in Michigan.

David W. Gordon, superintendent of the Sacramento County Office of Education, said California is cutting back on school buses, which would further jeopardize school trips.

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# DC Vouchers Are Academic Failure

By Joe Conn

Washington, DC's federally funded school voucher plan has not improved student performance for targeted students and serves mainly to subsidize religious education with tax funds, Americans United for Separation of Church and State told a Senate subcommittee.

Americans United offered written testimony to the U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations' Financial Services and General Government Subcommittee.

In its observations, AU asserted that the voucher program, which pays tuition at religious and other private schools, has proved detrimental to education in the nation's capital.

"Quite simply, the DC voucher program has failed," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "We believe it's time to shut it down and move on."

## PASSED IN THE DARK OF NIGHT

The controversial program, promoted by the Bush Administration, passed the House of Representatives by one vote in 2004 on a night when many voucher opponents were away from that chamber.

Republicans held the vote open for more than 40 minutes to gather the necessary votes. It later cleared the Senate only as a result of a procedural move.

In its testimony, AU traced the history of the program and noted that objective studies by the U.S. Department of Education show that voucher students from troubled public schools show no significant improvement in reading or math achievement when they enter the voucher program.

## SCHOOLS ALLOWED TO DISCRIMINATE

Furthermore, the program permits religious schools to discriminate on the basis of religion when hiring staff and fails to provide parents with a true choice. Parents may even be steered toward religious schools.

"The DC voucher program has not improved the DC school system and has not improved the educational achievement of DC voucher participants," asserts the testimony.

"Furthermore, the program is constitutionally suspect. The federal government should be funding public schools rather than funneling taxpayer funds to private schools that lack accountability, religious liberty and civil rights standards."

The program was due to expire last year, although Congress has continued to fund it, and President Barack Obama has proposed extending funding of the plan

for students already in it until they graduate.

Under Obama's proposal, no new students would enter the program. Americans United says the voucher scheme should be allowed to expire.

– 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.

## Headlines Prove That Proofreading Is Dying Art

Some head-scratching headlines:

- Man Kills Self Before Shooting Wife and Daughter
- Something Went Wrong in Jet Crash, Expert Says
- Police Begin Campaign to Run Down Jaywalkers
- Panda Mating Fails; Veterinarian Takes Over
- Miners Refuse to Work After Death
- Juvenile Court Will Try Shooting Defendant
- War Dims Hope for Peace
- If Strike Isn't Settled Quickly, It May Last Awhile
- Cold Wave Linked to Temperatures
- Enfield Couple Slain; Police Suspect Homicide
- Red Tape Holds Up New Bridges
- Man Struck By Lightning; Faces Battery Charge
- Obesity Study Looks for Larger Test Group
- Astronaut Takes Blame for Gas in Spacecraft
- Kids Make Nutritious Snacks
- Local High School Dropouts Cut in Half
- Hospitals are Sued by 7 Foot Doctors

And the winner is ...

- Typhoon Rips Through Cemetery; Hundreds Dead
- Thanks to Nathaniel Batchelder for sharing these jewels

# Health Care Debate Misses The Point?

By Marie-Josée Kravis

The U.S. spends much more on health care services as a percentage of GDP than other developed countries, and yet in life expectancy it lags most of these others.

A specious connection built around these two facts has become a staple of discussions about health care, even though health care is only one of many determinants of life expectancy.

Life expectancy measures the average number of years remaining at a given age. It changes over time.

The sum of your age and your expected remaining years tends to rise after the first year of life and after puberty, and if you get to 65 the prospects of a longer life are higher still.

U.S. life expectancy at 65 [17.1 more years for males and 20 for females] is higher than in the U.K. and Germany. The more important point, however, is that life expectancy reflects not only health care but also diet and lifestyle. A raw match of life expectancy against health care spending is naive.

## ROAD FATALITIES WOULDN'T DROP

Take road fatalities: The U.S. holds the unenviable record of one of the highest rates in the developed world. Its road mortality rate is 15 per 100,000 people compared with 6.6 in Japan, partly because we drive more.

Would universal health care shorten commutes or stop speeding? Would driver-distracting cell phones be shelved and more seat belts worn if there were universal health insurance?

Now to the homicide rate, 10 times as high in the U.S. as in the U.K. Will insurance cards replace guns? Can anyone credibly argue that health care reform will lower the homicide rate?

The Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development reports that 32.2% of Americans are obese. The rest of the world averages 14.6%, with Japan at 3%, France 9.5%, Germany 13.6%, Canada 18% and Australia 21.7%.

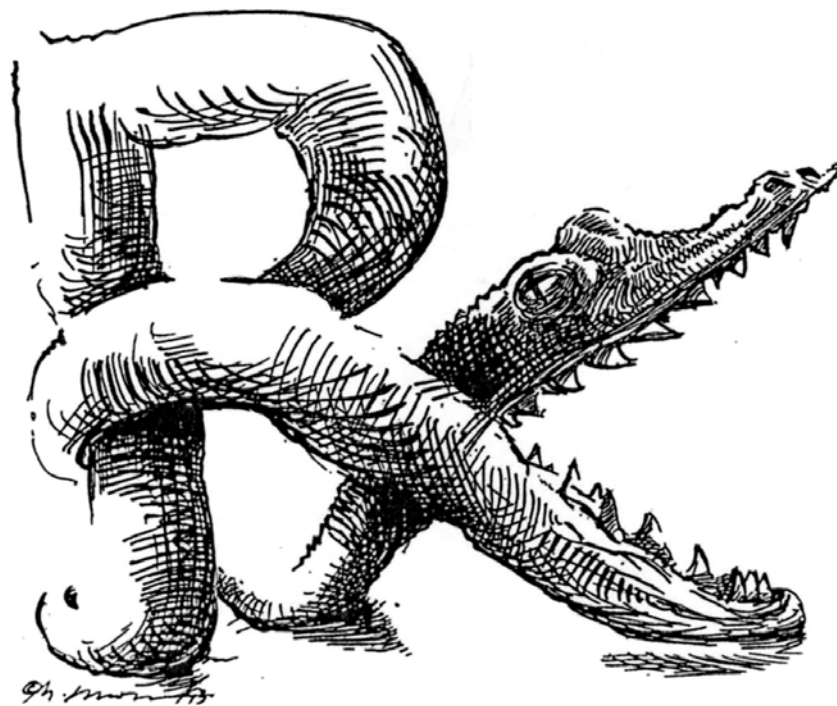
## OBSIDITY WOULDN'T DROP WOULD IT?

Obesity isn't caused by the health care system, but it does reduce life expectancy. It's a lifestyle choice whose expenses are borne by everyone. Costs attributable to obesity account for almost 10% of health care spending in the U.S. In Canada the corresponding figure is from 2% to 3.5%.

Obese Americans spend an average of 36% more for health services and 77% more for medications than people of normal weight. They are 20 times as likely to develop diabetes, 2.5 times as prone to heart disease and twice as vulnerable to cancer, hypertension and asthma. Will health care reform cut portion sizes?

A more pertinent question: Will obesity be classified as a preexisting condition preventing insurance companies from providing incentives for healthier life choices?

Smoking, drugs and alcohol are other lifestyle choices that can lower life ex-



pectancy irrespective of the health care regime. They bloat the cost of health services but aren't a function of whether we rely on private plans or government-backed insurers.

## WHY DOES THE SOPHISM PERSIST?

Why, then, is the sophism relating U.S. spending on health care and life expectancy so persistent?

OECD recently began a review of health care indicators among its members. Preliminary findings show U.S. mortality rates for all cancers to be 166.3 per 100,000, compared with an average of 171 in OECD countries and a rate of 173.2 in Canada, 170.2 in France and 175.6 in the U.K.

Last year the journal *Lancet Oncology* found that Americans have a higher survival rate for 13 of the 16 most common forms of cancer. Are these results worth the relatively higher cost of U.S. health care? Not for me to put a price tag on life.

This leaves the argument that infant mortality rates in the U.S. are higher than in most other developed countries. Proponents of health care reform will flag this as proof of our defective health care system.

But the U.S. has a much more diverse population than other developed countries, and infant mortality rate is decidedly a function of the mother's choices [notably, age, marital status and drug use]. Teen pregnancy rates are higher, and pregnant women in the U.S. are more likely to be living alone than in other countries.

These facts provide a partial explanation – not an excuse – for the comparatively higher rate of U.S. infant mortality. They point to the need for substantial changes in public health, education and medical practices but also remind us that complex socioeconomic problems will not be resolved solely by changes in the health care system.

– The author is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute

# Why Not An American Health Care Revolution?

By Stefan Jonasson

If the Scottish journalist Charles Mackay were alive today, he would undoubtedly devote a chapter of his landmark book, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, to the current health care debate in the United States.

Between the failure of the news media to report honestly and the deliberate manipulation of politicians and corporate interests, it seems that many – perhaps most – Americans have succumbed to cultivated ignorance about how their health care system compares with others around the world, while they seem paralyzed by fear at the thought of meaningful health care reform, which is demonized as socialism by those who would rather suffer than change.

I don't know which delusion is worse – many Americans' allergy to government or their fetish for private corporations – but taken together they border on madness when it comes to health care.

## MISINFORMATION AND FEAR-MONGERING

Beyond Rep. Dennis Kucinich and Sen. Bernie Sanders, I wonder if there are enough American politicians committed to universal health care to fill a minivan. Both Kucinich and Sanders have expressed a preference for a single-payer system and both have been working to preserve the ability of individual states to implement single-payer systems, even though federal legislators lack the courage to go there.

At first I was amused by many people's reaction to a single-payer system but, after several months of freely-expressed ignorance, I'm troubled by the proliferation of misinformation and fear-mongering.

Living in Canada, with a single-payer system, I've always been able to choose my own doctors and no medical procedure has ever been denied me in a timely manner. No government official has ever interfered with my medical treatment.

Those who naively believe that Americans are somehow freer to choose their doctors, or that insurance companies aren't more like George Orwell's "Big Brother" than governments, are living in a fantasy world.

## BEWARE THE INSURANCE BUREAUCRACY

American health care is the most bureaucratically-driven health care system

anywhere in the industrialized world. The negative aspects of bureaucracy have never been the sole preserve of government and the private insurance industry has been far less accountable to the public than any government agency.

Canada's health care system isn't perfect, but it's decent. I don't mean decent in the sense of merely acceptable or average – I mean decent in the sense that people are treated decently when seeking medical care. Our medical practitioners are able to treat us as individual patients without worrying about whether or not they'll be paid for their efforts.

Yes, we Canadians have our complaints about health care in our own country. But if you listen to us closely, our complaints are, more often than not, those of people whose basic care has already been well provided for, but whose sense of personal entitlement exceeds real and reasonable needs.

We Canadians don't choose between keeping our homes, or our jobs, and caring for a sick family member.

## EVEN CANADIAN CONSERVATIVES SUPPORT IT

One significant measure of Canadians' satisfaction with our public health care system can be seen in the fact that even most Canadian conservatives support its basic principles and practices. Most of its critics support refinement and amendment, not fundamental change – even though a few of us may sometimes invoke the words "fundamental change" as a grandiose gesture!

Public health insurance is as "natural" as public roads, public libraries, and public schools.

Is there room for private insurance? Yes, but not when it comes to the provision of basic medical care! Private insurance is valuable precisely in those areas where an individual's sense of entitlement or privilege exceeds reasonable standards for public health care.

My wife and I carry supplementary insurance so that we can enjoy the privilege of being in a semi-private room in the event of being hospitalized. This coverage also reimburses us for the deductible amount on prescription drugs and covers certain cosmetic procedures.

See **REVOLUTION** Page 17

# Koch Billionaire Funding Far Right

By Lee Fang

Americans for Prosperity [AFP], the corporate front group founded in the 1980s by Koch Industries billionaire David Koch, worked closely with Rep. Michele Bachmann, R-MN, to orchestrate the big anti-health reform rally earlier this month.

AFP had been encouraging right-wing activists to board their buses – free of charge – to attend the rally. While AFP does not disclose all of its corporate donors, foundations controlled by David and Charles Koch provide millions in yearly funding, and David continues to chair the AFP foundation and preside over AFP's annual convention.

Think Progress found at least a dozen AFP staffers standing at their designated bus drop off point near the Capitol, handing out signs, directions, talking points, petitions, and donuts to protesters.

Many of the people who work at AFP are longtime Republican operatives, like Ben Marchi, the AFP Virginia director who previously worked for the National Republican Congressional Committee and for Rep. Tom Delay, R-TX. Victor Zapanta produced this video report of AFP staffers talking about their exploits at the rally:

AFP STAFFERS: We have 25 buses just from Pennsylvania, New Jersey we probably have five or six from Maryland.

AFP STAFFERS: We have about 40 buses coming.

David Koch's AFP has a long history of marshaling "grassroots" support for GOP objectives. In the early 1990s, AFP, then known as Citizens for a Sound Economy, worked secretly with then-Rep. Newt Gingrich, R-GA, to organize angry crowds following the Clintons as they touted their health reform bill.

Industry money from health insurance, telecommunications, oil, and other companies has flowed freely to AFP over the years to help AFP promote an agenda of boosting the rich, stripping consumer safeguards, and maintaining corporate monopolies.

Phillip Morris rented out AFP from the Koch family, contributing millions to the organization in exchange for AFP to build opposition to tobacco regulations.

AFP's daily activities are managed by Tim Phillips, an infamous astroturf lobbyist who built a career using Christian front groups to wage stealth campaigns.

For example, his work includes fighting under the radar to promote energy deregulation for Enron and helping Jack Abramoff clients continue forced abortion sweatshops in the Northern Mariana Islands.

Will the media report on the true driver of the rally? Or will they leave David Koch out of the equation, despite his hand-in-glove involvement.

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## Getting Religion Right Before The Fight

By Charles C. Haynes

Antonio Peck was in kindergarten in 1999 when his family filed suit against the Baldwinsville, NY, school district. Antonio is in 10th grade now – and his family is still waiting for the case to be resolved.

At this rate, he'll be a college graduate when the courts finally render a decision.

On Oct. 15, the Peck family's legal marathon took another turn when a federal appeals court heard oral arguments in Peck v. Baldwinsville School District for an astounding third time in 10 years. In the unfortunate history of lawsuits over religion in schools, the Peck case ranks as one of the most wasteful, divisive and unnecessary of all time.

### DISPUTE OVER KINDERGARTEN POSTER

At the heart of the dispute is a poster created by kindergartener Antonio to fulfill an assignment designed to show what he had learned about protecting the environment. Antonio depicted people picking up trash and recycling, but he also included a figure of a kneeling man that Antonio meant to be Jesus.

When it came time to put the poster on the school wall alongside 80 other student posters, school officials folded Antonio's picture in half to hide the kneeling man in flowing robes.

Why? Because the school was worried about appearing to violate the establishment clause of the First Amendment.

This is the kind of case that gives the First Amendment [and public schools] a bad name.

### JUDGE'S RULING OVERTURNED TWICE

It's hard for me to imagine how any reasonable observer could walk by a wall of 80 student posters about the environment, see an unlabeled kneeling figure on one child's poster, and conclude that the school was somehow promoting or endorsing religion.

But U.S. District Judge Norman Mordue obviously disagrees. He has now ruled three times that the school has the authority to censor the poster. Twice the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals reversed his decision and sent the case back – and each time the judge continued to support the school district. Now the appeals court has taken up the case yet again.

What's wrong with this picture is not Antonio's poster, but school district officials' insistence that the First Amendment gives them the right to keep all refer-

ences to religion out of student assignments.

I'm convinced that Antonio's family [and common sense] will ultimately prevail. But meanwhile they have had to endure a 10-year court battle that could easily have been avoided years ago with the teacher's saying, "Thank you, Antonio, for your nice poster."

### AVOIDING A COSTLY COURT FIGHT

School districts must find a way to get this right before the fight. Most legal experts agree with the current U.S. Department of Education guidelines, which state that "students may express their beliefs about religion in homework, artwork, and other written and oral assignments free from discrimination based on the religious content of their submissions."

In my view, Antonio fulfilled the assignment by creating a poster showing people protecting the environment. He should not have been censored for adding an image reflecting his belief that Jesus also has something to do with saving the environment. Antonio's poster is not government speech.

Of course, there are other times when student religious expression crosses the line and triggers an establishment-clause violation by a public school. Students don't have the right, for example, to compel a captive audience to participate in prayer or listen to a proselytizing sermon.

### WHAT STUDENTS CAN'T DO

A few weeks ago, I wrote about the cheerleading squad at a Georgia high school that was barred from holding up banners with Bible verses for the football team to burst through when taking the field every Friday night.

Although the cheerleaders are students, they represent the school at the games and, in that role, may not proclaim a religious message week after week.

How can public schools avoid divisive fights over art projects and football-game cheers – and save hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees? By adopting sound First Amendment policies that clearly distinguish between school-sponsored religious speech, which the establishment clause prohibits, and student religious speech, which, in many circumstances, the free-exercise and free-speech clauses protect.

If school officials need help understanding the difference, they should ask Antonio. After all, this is something he learned in kindergarten.

– The author is senior scholar at the First Amendment Center

## REVOLUTION

From Page 16

And since I travel extensively, both for work and pleasure, our supplementary insurance covers any medical charges I incur which might exceed the normal rates here in Manitoba. After all, why should Canadian taxpayers pay extra for my privileged travel habits?

### WHY NOT MEDICARE FOR ALL?

So even under a so-called single-payer system, there can be room for private insurers – just not at the expense of providing everyone with basic medical care.

I worry that the opportunity for meaningful health care reform in the United States has already passed. It's unfortunate that health care reform wasn't pursued under the banner, "Medicare for everyone," since the competing proposals for reform have become a race to the bottom, as even a watered-down version of the public option is in jeopardy.

That's often the way it is with reforms: they favor tinkering with worn-out parts over creating new mechanisms, or utilizing established mechanisms for new purposes.

It's got me thinking that maybe what's really needed isn't health care reform at all – perhaps it's time for a health care revolution!

In the Declaration of Independence, the Founding Fathers of the United States correctly observed that "mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed."

The health insurance industry is counting on the truth of this observation, aided by timid elected officials masquerading as leaders. But too many have suffered too much and for too long!

### CENTURY-OLD FIGHT TO PRESERVE STATUS QUO

Since Theodore Roosevelt first proposed a national health insurance plan in 1912, vested interests have succeeded in defeating virtually every initiative to move in the direction of universal health care.

Instead of tinkering with incremental reform, perhaps the time has come for Americans to let their most progressive leaders in Congress take charge of the agenda, "abolish the forms to which they are accustomed," and embrace Medicare for everyone.

Now that would be a revolutionary and transformative change for the better!

– The author is a Unitarian minister in Winnipeg, Manitoba

# Real Recovery Is Easy To Spell: J-O-B-S

By Jim Hightower

The recession is over! The economy is growing! The Dow Jones is above 10,000! Bankers are pocketing profits and fat bonuses! Happy days are here again!

Unless, of course, you're just a regular working stiff struggling with falling income and rising unemployment – and sensing that your family's grip on middle-class life is steadily slipping away. Welcome to America's tinkle-down economy.

The latest job numbers mock the smiley-faced claims of economists and politicians that the Great Recession is over:

- 10.2% of America's workforce is officially unemployed – nearly 16 million people.
- Another 15 million people are either so discouraged by their fruitless job search that they've quit looking, or they've had to settle for part-time jobs when they want and need full-time employment. Add the discouraged and underemployed to the number of the officially unemployed, and the percentage of our people who can't find the work they need rises to 17.5% – one out of every six workers.
- More than a third of the officially unemployed have been jobless for more than half a year – a new record for long-term joblessness.
- Nearly 15% of the unemployed have college degrees, and many more of the

## THANKSGIVING

From Page One

anything positive at all.

I began feeling a bit guilty for my own personal pity party that started me singing the song "Woe With Me." A tune we all sing far too much.

Remembering the faces of all the strangers who reached out to help us when we were homeless helped me to realize all of us have something to be thankful for, no matter what our circumstances.

Just the gift of another day opens the door to possibilities.

My family, as is the case with so

many others today, is struggling through a dark time, yet there is hope and that, too, is a great gift that we all need to be thankful for.

Perhaps many of us will not be sitting down to a meal fit for a king, yet no matter what you're eating on Thanksgiving, at least we did not have to grab our guns and go out and hunt for food as the early settlers had to.

Let's face it: if we had to hunt for game and grow our own food many of us today would really be hungry.

– *The author lives in Tulsa*

## RAILYARD

From Page 8

plan, whatever ODOT claims it is today.

It was former ODOT Director Jack Crowley, the only "Doctor of anything" who ever directed ODOT, who said after his stint there – "There IS no planning at ODOT beyond the next election."

### MOST EXPENSIVE ROAD PROJECT IN STATE HISTORY?

Regardless of the stated cost of the road project itself, what ODOT is doing will be the most expensive project in state history – not because of what's being built, but because of what they are hell-bent to destroy – the state's historic, irreplaceable passenger rail center. And it's being destroyed in typical "highway lobby fashion," exactly when we need it most.

There's no doubt ODOT's debt-kings know that – and no question they've done precisely what they intended to do right along.

Remember, too, some of the "most expensive projects in state history" – like the infamous "Belle Isle Bridge," a hyper-expensive bridge-over-nothing in north-west OKC, as it turned out, as the lake over which it was built was drained soon after its completion.

Why didn't ODOT "see that coming?" Because ODOT's job is seeing nothing but the expensive projects it lets and the money-money-money it removes from the pockets of the taxpayers and their offspring for the benefit of its "good pals," the highway contractors.

There is no hope for better government, better transportation, or a significantly improved state economy in Oklahoma until the state Department of Transportation is yanked up short and brought to account for such crass treachery.

– *The author lives in Moore*

## LINCOLN

From Page 9

There is no other explanation. Or is there?

### BIBLE WAS AVAILABLE

Nearly everyone knows that as a young man Lincoln was a voracious reader. Yet, his access to books was limited. The book he read and reread as a young man [and continued to read as an adult] was the Bible.

As an adult, when he wanted to make a point it was easy, one might say natural, for him to use the Bible as a reference point. This was not necessarily evidence of his belief.

Perhaps, relying on Lewis again, the best way of putting it would be to call him America's "merest Christian."

– *The author teaches constitutional law at Oklahoma State University*

college-educated are underemployed.

• October was the 22nd straight month that the U.S. economy lost jobs – the longest streak since 1939. About 7.3 million jobs have been eliminated since December 2007, when the recession began. In this same time span, 2.8 million new workers have come into the job market, meaning our economy is now 10.1 million jobs short of the number needed just to get back to even.

• While average wages have risen slightly in the past year, average weekly pay has stagnated because workers have had their hours cut.

So please excuse our country's workaday majority for not cheering the news that prosperity has returned to those at the tippy top of America's economic pyramid. And – please – do not continue to insult workers with the dismissive declaration that the economy is experiencing a "jobless recovery." Not only is that an oxymoron, it is moronic.

If most Americans have not recovered, then neither has our economy. [Imagine a situation in which working families were prospering, but corporate profits were down for 22 straight months – do you think economists and politicians could get away with labeling it a "profitless recovery"?]

Especially galling is the fact that the talk of recovery is mostly based on the resurrection of Wall Street profits. Conveniently ignored by exultant bankers is the reality that they would have no profits [and no banks] except that Washington has propped them up with some \$13 trillion in public bailout money.

The rationale for this unprecedented rescue of failed bankers was that they would reciprocate with a vigorous lending effort to businesses, which then could start hiring and rebuilding the grassroots economy that Wall Street greed crushed. But astonishingly, the giveaway to bankers came with no strings attached! So, instead of pouring capital into the American countryside, they've gone right back to casino-style speculation – while pocketing more than \$100 billion in bonuses for themselves.

These people are thieves. They've stolen our public funds, our jobs and our middle-class aspirations. It's time to grab them by the short hairs, forcing them to make the loans that our real economy needs – or have their banks shut down and their capital turned over to community banks, credit unions and others who will invest in America's productive businesses and workers.

After the latest jobless numbers came out, President Obama said, "I will not rest until all Americans who want work can find work." Excuse me, but that's like a lawyer saying to his client, "I'll get you out of jail if it takes me the rest of your life."

America's workers and communities don't need presidential assurances, they need action, bold and immediate. As Obama said in last year's campaign, "We need to pass an economic rescue plan for the middle class, and we need to do it not five years from now, not next year, we need to do it right now."

Where did that guy go?

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## BOOKS

From Page 10

### YOGI BERRA

*Eternal Yankee*

By Allen Barra

W.W. Norton & Company

451 pages, \$27.95

My friend Dr. Davis Joyce says no list would be complete without a baseball book and this biography should be a hit for anyone interested in the game.

The author traces the life of baseball's winningest player [14 pennants, 10 World Series, three MVPs] – from "Dago Hill" in St. Louis to his pivotal role for the Yankees during the unsurpassed 1949-53 period when they won five consecutive World Series.

It's all here, his early years in St. Louis, his minor league efforts that were interrupted by service in World War II, his Hall of Fame career, and his mixed results managerial record.

Oh yes, not to forget his unforgettable famous sayings such as "It ain't over till it's over" or "You can observe a lot just by watching." The author has done a good job of chronicling Berra's life and the book will appeal to any baseball fan. The book has, as Yogi would say, "Deep Depth."

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

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# Helping The Observer Fight The Good Fight

The e-mail was so poignant I simply had to read it again.

"Budget cuts at the federal level in the previous eight years and at the state level this year, together with cuts from the local United Way, have meant very difficult times," wrote the executive director of a non-profit agency that helps victims of domestic violence.

Last summer "brought budget freezes in all but the most essential expense categories and staff all received salary cuts from 30% to 50%, including me. There is no one here who has not been touched by the economic downturn.

"Unfortunately, 'Dues and Subscriptions' is one of the 'frozen' categories and so we will not be able to renew our subscription to The Observer" after more than 30 years. This is one of the cuts that have been the most difficult to make and a letter most difficult to write, but you deserve more than the word 'CANCEL' written across our overdue bill."

Each year, as the holiday season nears, we ask you, our Observer family, to dig deep to ensure this journal of free voices survives. For more than four decades, you've responded – not only renewing your own subscriptions, but also gifting The Observer to neighbors and family, schools and libraries.

Moreover, you've given scores of undesignated gifts that help provide subscriptions to those who love The Observer, but cannot afford it – like this deserving non-profit group, shattered by budget cuts, that we were able to keep on the mailing list.

We at The Observer are not immune to the economic realities facing America, generally – and the news media, in particular. In the last three years, we've absorbed hefty increases in postal rates and printing costs and endured declining circulation – down more than 25% [a number similar to many other newspapers, magazines and journals].

We work hard to stretch every dollar you send us, but our future isn't guaranteed.

When Frosty and Helen Troy launched The Observer, their mission was simple, yet profound: give voice to the voiceless, prick the pompous elites and tell the stories no one else would tell. When Beverly and I accepted the torch in 2006, our goal was to build on Frosty's and Helen's legacy and secure The Observer's future for generations to come.

We miss Helen's friendship and counsel – her unexpected death two years ago is still hard to believe – but we are grateful for Frosty's unwavering commitment to The Observer and to us as we press on in these difficult economic times.

Our commitment to The Observer and its long-term future is even stronger, if possible, after two significant personal events this year: the arrival of our first grandchild, Maddox James Hamilton, and the passing of my mother, Josephine, who instilled in me a lifelong love of politics.

Though Maddox does not currently live in our beloved Oklahoma, his presence is a constant reminder to Beverly and me that we must do all we can to ensure he inherits a more just, fair and peaceful world – values that always have been at The Observer's core.

Though Mom is no longer with us in this realm, her belief that all – regardless



## HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM THE HAMILTONS

From Left: Maddox, Ashley, Andy, Arnold, Beverly and Matt

of race, religion or socioeconomic status – deserve an equal shot at realizing the American dream is ageless wisdom that also dovetails perfectly with The Observer's mission.

We're fighters, but we can't do it without you. In this holiday season, won't you consider gift subscriptions for family and friends who aren't already receiving The Observer? Perhaps you know of a struggling school or local library or other worthy organization that would appreciate The Observer and its varied viewpoints. If you don't have someone specifically in mind, we'll be happy to get The Observer into deserving hands – like the non-profit center helping victims of domestic violence.

Your generosity also earns a spot in Helen's Hall of Fame, cherished forever as Friends of The Observer.

These are tough times, but together, we can secure The Observer's voice for future generations and help Oklahoma become all it can be.

Won't you join us in the fight?

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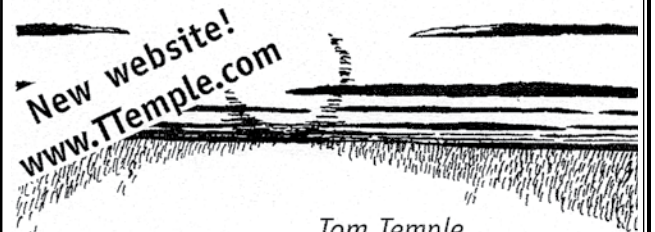
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