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Rich Get Richer

Republican Cuts Reduce Tax Fairness

By David R. Morgan

Everyone knows that the wealthier you are in this country the more taxes you pay, with a few exceptions [thus the alternative income tax]. So the rich earn more and they typically pay more. Sounds fair enough.

But does the system actually work this way? The answer is an emphatic “no” for state and local taxes if one considers the amount of taxes paid as a percentage of family income.

For years, economists have known that state and local taxes are regressive – they take a higher share of income from the poor and middle class than they do from the wealthy.

Even if one doesn’t support the idea of progressive taxation, which takes proportionately more as income levels rise, the upside down nature of state and local taxes seems impossible to defend. Such a system is “astonishingly inequitable,” according to Matthew Gardner of the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy [ITEP].

FREQUENT OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE

Legislatures regularly modify the way the state levies taxes, with Republicans usually pushing for lower taxes especially for the well off. So almost every year or two, states have a chance to create a more equitable tax system. Efforts to achieve fairer taxes are especially difficult, though, if lawmakers have little knowledge of how their state taxes affect various income groups.

It’s no great mystery why Oklahoma’s state budget crisis is the nation’s worst.

– Page 7

A recent 50-state study by the ITEP, a nonpartisan research group in Washington, DC, looks at the fairness of state and local taxes. It provides plenty of valuable information for policymakers who might want their well-to-do citizens to share more equitably in the state’s tax burden. The data are from 2007 but are updated to reflect permanent changes in law through October 2009 [the data also include some very small federal deduction offsets by income group ranging from 0 to -1.25%].

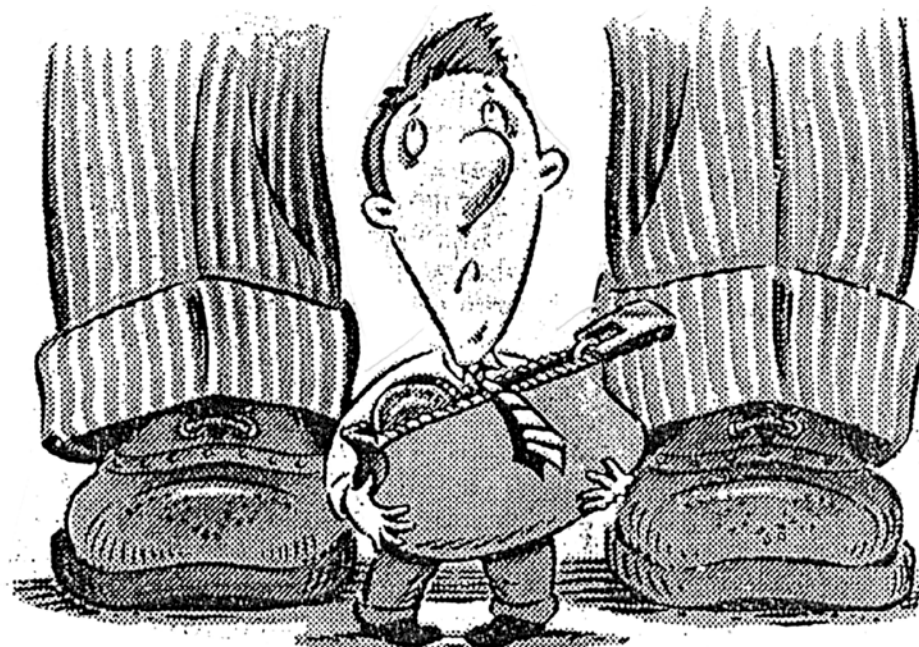
In sum, the study shows that – sure enough – those at the bottom pay a larger proportion of their income in state and local taxes than do their wealthier counterparts. The same pattern prevails in Oklahoma.

COMPARING OKLAHOMA AND NATION

According to the ITEP, state and local taxes as a share of family income for non-elderly taxpayers are as follows:

- The lowest 20% of families pay 10.9% of their income to state and local gov-

See TAXES Page 19



‘Lawsuit Reform’ Highlights Hypocrisy

By Reggie Whitten

As you might have heard by now, Gary Jones, the chairman of the Oklahoma Republican Party, has filed a lawsuit in the district court of Logan County against 12 different individuals and entities alleging a number of causes of action. Chairman Jones’ lawsuit stems from his failed 2002 and 2006 campaigns for the post of State Auditor. Even though he did not receive enough votes to win these elections [and it’s unclear whether he would have], Chairman Jones alleges these 12 defendants committed fraud and caused him damages, including mental anguish, emotional distress and punitive damages.

Some have called Chairman Jones’ lawsuit “frivolous.” The Oklahoman even editorialized that both the chairman of the Republican Party and the Oklahoma courts have “better things to do.”

It seems to me somewhat ironic that the Oklahoman would throw stones at Chairman Jones for filing a lawsuit. The Oklahoma Publishing Company or “OPUBCO” – the entity which operates and distributes the Oklahoman – certainly has no problem seeking relief in the court system when it feels it has been wronged, which is precisely what Chairman Jones did.

OPUBCO’S TRIPS TO THE COURTHOUSE

For example, OPUBCO filed a federal lawsuit last year, alleging punitive damages, against James Conratt, a Nebraska football fan, for publishing a fake Internet article. OPUBCO also filed a bad faith lawsuit in 2003 seeking punitive damages against an insurance company over a disputed claim.

Would OPUBCO like Chairman Jones or anyone else to label their lawsuits as frivolous before even hearing the facts?

I believe that both OPUBCO and Chairman Jones have the right to seek relief in the courts. No one should have the right to prejudge a lawsuit as frivolous. Indeed, in the trial of every case, the court will ask potential jurors whether they have made up their minds already or if they will allow both sides to present all the evidence before they make a decision. What tort reformers do is routinely label everyone else’s lawsuit as frivolous when they couldn’t possibly know all of the facts.

See LAWSUIT Page 19

Observations

Greetings!

With our first edition of the new decade, we welcome hundreds of new readers, many joining us through the generosity of loyal subscribers whose gifts help keep this journal of free voices alive.

In the months ahead, you'll discover The Observer is unlike anything else in Oklahoma.

Most of the state's mainstream media are archconservative and display a single-minded devotion to silk-stocking corporate elites.

We relish debate. We welcome differing viewpoints [libel and slander, excluded]. We don't protect sacred cows. We're not in the hip pockets of either party.

We believe government ought to stay out of private lives. We believe in separation of church and state. And we believe all – regardless of race, gender, sexual preference or social standing – deserve an equal shot at realizing the American dream.

We are social liberals, but we are far more fiscally conservative than our media brethren. We abhor corporate welfare – all-too-often the flag-waving, free-enterprisers are first in line at the taxpayers' trough. We think all should pay their fair share of taxes – to whom much is given, much is expected.

It may take a few issues to get used to The Observer. We are an independent journal of commentary – sometimes provocative, always entertaining, never dull. You won't agree with everything. In fact, some writers likely will make you downright angry. But our journal will make you think.

Welcome aboard!

Genuine Heroes

There are wonderful people quietly doing God's work but they seldom merit Page One coverage in this era of violence, sex and celebrity.

The exception is the incredible generosity of Catholic nuns, priests and monks, donating their brains for research aimed at finding the cause of Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

So far the Religious Order Study has resulted in 1,100 brains dedicated to that research, including nearly 300 examined by the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation.

It's not just a matter of donating a brain – those in the study undergo rigorous mental and physical exams.

Research has already produced results – small strokes can trigger some dementia. There is also a link between weight loss and the onset of dementia.

One day the puzzle that is Alzheimer's will be solved and millions will owe it to nuns, priests and monks serving mankind not only in life but in death.

A Disgrace

A record 49 million Americans had trouble finding enough to eat in 2008. In Oklahoma one in five children go to bed hungry every day.

The USDA's annual food security report showed the number of people who "lacked consistent access to adequate food" soared to the highest level since the study began 14 years ago.

About a third of these people were forced to "skip meals, cut portions or otherwise forgo food at some point in the year" while the other two-thirds generally had enough to eat, but only by eating "cheaper or less varied foods" or by "relying on government aid."

Even more disturbingly, nearly one in four children – almost 17 million – lived in households in which food was at times scarce.

President Obama called the data "unsettling" and restated his commitment to end child hunger by 2015.

How about getting us out of two wars? Then he would have plenty to direct toward ending hunger in America.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack brazenly predicts these numbers will only get worse in the short-term due to 2009's rise in unemployment and



the difficulty charity groups have had keeping up with increased demand.

Food banks across the country, from Tulsa to Atlanta, are reporting an increase in demand for their services of 40% to 50%, and also reporting a drop in revenue.

To say we are disappointed in the President is putting it mildly.

Tom Coburn

Much of the media in Oklahoma – especially the Daily Disappointment – have lionized U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn as some kind of populist hero.

Before you buy into that fakery, check his voting record.

He opposed the lottery for education, saying it would undermine virtue. He co-authored a constitutional amendment to allow prayer in public schools. He pushed for vouchers, including private and parochial schools – costing public education billions.

He supported taking Social Security private, and has a 100% NRA voting record. He voted for the unsuccessful repeal of the estate tax, paid only by persons inheriting more than \$3.5 million.

Coburn is a highly visible member of a Washington cult known as The Family, documented by Jeff Sharlet's best-selling book by the same name.

He has traveled abroad many times in the cult's attempt to "Christianize" the world. If you doubt it, read the book.

He protected a fellow U.S. Republican senator guilty of adultery, claiming doctor-client privilege. Coburn's an OB/GYN. Was the male senator pregnant?

He is a disgrace to Oklahoma, a disgrace to the Congress and – worse yet – a disgrace to America worldwide.

Shafted

Once again American Indians are being financially bludgeoned by the federal government. This time it is a \$3.4 billion recommended settlement resulting from the misuse of Indian trust funds.

More than 300,000 Indians will share the funds, including 50,000 Oklahoma Indians.

That's about 1% of what the feds owe, yet Rep. Tom Cole, R-OK, is praising the settlement despite the fact he is a member of the Chickasaw Nation. He should know better.

This recommended settlement comes after a dragged-out 13-year case in federal court and must be approved by Congress. It was pushed by the Obama Administration.

Beginning in 1857, the federal government literally stole the Indian lands and what they paid for them was put in trust.

The policy was subsequently abandoned but Indians could not access their trust funds. In those days, except for a few thriving tribes, most Indians were bereft of decent education and health programs, overseen by a corrupt Bureau of Indian Affairs.

If Congress approves the settlement – and predictions are that they will – the per capita payments begin at \$1,000.

Many tribes have gone into the profitable casino business, providing health and education for members that would have been available generations ago if not for the federal government.

Feds And NCLB

The Obama Administration will spend at least \$3.5 billion to push local education officials to close failing schools and reopen them with new staff. Why?

Education Secretary Arne Duncan wants the 5,000 worst-performing schools, approximately 1% of all U.S. schools, turned around in five years.

The federal attempt to micro-manage public schools is leading to another disaster. Parents need to speak up about the chronic testing of kids, as opposed to real education.

Since the President doesn't have power to close and reopen schools himself – authority rests with local districts and states – the administration is using financial incentives as a lure. To receive federal turnaround money, a district must fire a school's principal and at least half its staff and reopen with new personnel; turn a school over to a charter school operator or other management organization; close a school and send students to higher-achieving schools in the district; or replace only the principal and take other steps to change school governance.

The President as a candidate pledged to fix public education by riding the nation of NCLB unless he would learn otherwise. There is no "otherwise" – only more money down a testing rat-hole.

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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

We hope you enjoyed the holidays. It's still not too late to include The Oklahoma Observer on your gift list as we continue our struggle to keep this journal of free voices alive. Please help. [See order form on page 18.]

Corrections Director Justin Jones' stunning data: If our felony sentencing was at the national average, 8,000 to 9,000 men and 1,000 women would be instantly released from prison.

Dart: To Reps. Mike Ritze, R-Broken Arrow, and Mike Reynolds, R-OKC, for their attempt to let the Legislature dictate to Oklahoma's judiciary. Hey, guys, read the Constitution.

Want to keep up with almost every detail of state spending? Log on to openbooks.ok.gov.

Laurel: To Midland Management Corp., for an analysis of all state jury awards from 2002 to 2007 - 52 cases with awards totaling \$20 million. That included one for \$18 million. What lawsuit epidemic? Where are the runaway juries?

Laurel: To ex-OKC Mayor Kirk Humphreys for nailing Mayor Mick Cornett for making a mockery of MAPS III by declaring he will ignore the advisory committee.

One million Oklahomans - nearly a third of the state's population - rank at the lowest literacy level nationally. Yet some wonder why they elect extremist incompetents to public office.

Dart: To millionaire ex-Gov. Frank Keating, yammering around the state for eliminating the state income tax - Oklahoma's fairest tax because it is based on ability to pay.

We love public television's OETA, best newscast in the state at 6:30 p.m., but they have more production miscues than a drunk shooting pool.

Laurel: To American public schools, providing more than 800,000 homeless children the only hot meal of the day. That's a 17% increase over last year in the "richest country in the world."

A newspaper chain that owns the dailies in Altus, Frederick and Durant has filed for bankruptcy.

Dart: To state Rep. "Sad Sack" Sally Kern, R-OKC, at it again, this time with House Bill 2279, virtually eliminating incompatibility as grounds for divorce.

Check the kissing-up at the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, honoring tax-cutting Republican Speaker Chris Bengue with a distinguished service [?] award.

Laurel: The Oklahoma City Community Impact Group, a non-profit working on creative solutions addressing the state's No. 1 ranking for incarcerating females.

Wonder what your doctor's discipline history is? The Oklahoma Board of Medical Licensure has whacked more than 300 docs. For info go to www.okmedicalboard.org

Dart: To the hypocrites running the Oklahoma House of Representatives, sitting on a slush fund of more than \$6 million while senior nutrition centers close for lack of state funding.

U.S. Rep Tom Cole, R-OK, must be hard up, using a fund-raising letter from Rep. Joe Wilson, the dipstick who yelled at the President during the joint session of Congress.

Laurel: To Democrats fighting for fair drug pricing in America, \$833 per capita; Germany \$542, Japan \$506, Canada \$433. Republicans and a handful of half-assed Democrats killed it in the Senate.

Nobody works harder than the billionaire Kansas Koch brothers, Charles and David, to keep America in thrall to wealth, and to hell with the poor. They help fund the tea parties and birthers.

Dart: To those criticizing Attorney General Drew Edmondson for his poultry lawsuit. For every \$1 Oklahoma spends on tourism, the state reaps \$54.46 in return. Nothing beats the Illinois River for tourism.

MIKE LUKAICH ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION © ABC.com 12-24-09

OUT WITH THE OLD...



Thanks to the Bush crowd, the national debt has grown from \$1.4 trillion to \$12 trillion. Interest on the debt is \$700 billion a year. Quit blaming President Obama - he's trying to get a handle on it.

Laurel: To Rachel Maddow of MSNBC, calling out Oklahoma's two U.S. senators, Jim Inhofe and Tom Coburn, for obnoxious show-off politics.

Sen. Constance Johnson, D-OKC, is fighting a losing battle trying to remove the governor from the parole process - saving taxpayers a minimum of \$40 million. Oklahoma is the only state that includes the governor in the process.

Dart: To the state of Oklahoma, wasting \$20 million a year by the cap on vendor discounts. [University of Central Oklahoma Policy Institute study]

Sen. Jim Wilson, D-Tahlequah, has pre-filed a bill requiring an amendment to the Open Records Act to include audio and video recordings by the Highway Patrol.

Laurel: To the Center for American Progress, ranking Oklahoma among the six top states in excellence in public education. No state scored an "A."

More than 60% of Americans think the media treats Sarah Palin unfairly - and that includes 53% of Democrats. [Pew Poll]

Dart: To U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn, R-OK, insisting that the Senate health care bill would ration health care, telling seniors, "You're going to die sooner." That's a flat lie.

For the first time in 40 years, a plurality of Americans - 49% - say the U.S. should "mind its own business internationally" and stop trying to solve other countries' problems. [Pew research]

Laurel: To the Oklahoma Energy Resources Board for cleaning up its 10,000th abandoned well - all without a cent of taxpayer dollars.

Thanks to America's lust for drugs, more than 14,000 murders have highlighted the Mexican drug war, including entire families. [NBC News]

Dart: To the Daily Disappointment for chronically bashing President Obama's push for health care coverage for all Americans. Know why? The Disappointment shamefully canceled all coverage for their employees.

An endowed scholarship at the University of Central Oklahoma is underwritten by his family and alumni to honor the late Tommy Beavers, long-time executive secretary of the Teachers Retirement System.

Laurel: To Garth Brooks for filing a lawsuit against Integris Canadian Valley hospital in Yukon for failing to name a new building after his mother, Colleen Brooks. He wants his \$500,000 back.

In the past two years the Pakistani Taliban has destroyed 473 schools - mostly those serving girls - because they are "insufficiently Islamic." [Time magazine]

Dart: To state Sen. Randy Brogdon, R-Owasso, who says one response to the state budget shortfall is to further cut the state income tax. He's a self-made leader who knocked off work too soon.

More than 106,000 Oklahoma poverty-stricken households are being assisted with their heating bills, up 7,000 over last year. [DHS Report]

Laurel: To the Oklahoma State Board of Health for keeping the fire going under a do-nothing Legislature. Oklahoma is now home to 687,625 persons under 65 without health insurance - 22.3% of the state's population.

Sen. Tom Ivester, D-Elk City, is playing with fire with his bill to teach the Bible as history in public schools. It may be legal but schools already face 32 funded and unfunded mandates.

Dart: To Republican legislative leaders who have so drastically cut the state budget that 68 new National Board Certified Oklahoma teachers will not get the \$5,000 bump in pay or even the \$2,500 filing fee.

Laurel: To Sen. Earl Garrison, D-Muskogee, for his bill to reduce the commercial truck speed limit to 65 mph due to the carnage wrought at 75 mph.

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

There has been much talk about the placing of the Ten Commandments Monument at our State Capitol – some talk for and some talk against. But have we truly considered the message of the Ten Commandments? That is the issue to be extolled.

By way of a quick reminder, the context of the Ten Commandments is the revolt of slaves from Egypt with the aid of the God before whom we should have no other gods. The message of the Exodus event is that the Ten Commandments are the work of the God of justice, mercy and revolution.

What the gleeful Ten Commandment waving Republicans need to recognize is that cutting funding for public schools, mental health services, nutrition programs, etc. is to violate the nature of the God of the Exodus. In short, the monument to the Ten Commandments serves to remind the Republican lawmakers that they represent the repressive policies of Pharaoh and not the liberating God of the Exodus.

So, be careful for what you pray for, you may get just the opposite.

Jeff Hamilton
Midwest City

Editor, The Observer:

If anyone has ever read any of my previous comments you should have a clear understanding of where I stand on various issues. That makes this hard to say.

So far this year [2009] has been a giant disappointment. There was zero bold leadership on health care reform from Congress, the Senate and certainly the White House, and the Republicans in the minority won. I voted to end two wars, and one continues while the other is being escalated. It feels just like George W. Bush is still in office. Except for being articulate, I can't spot much difference.

"Change You Can Believe In." Where is it?

Kenny Belford
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

I am a devout reader of The Observer and I never miss an issue – but today I must take issue regarding the little "Gulliver" snippet joke accusing Catholic religious women of sneaking beer into their convent under the guise of shampoo [12.10/25.09]:

In the first place, nuns do not take

vows of sobriety [unless they happen to be in a 12-step program] and many partake within the limits prescribed by a particular monastic rule and monastery. Now it is true that some orders like the Trappists are very strict and do not allow alcoholic consumption – but they are a distinct order.

This joke is based upon stereotypes about nuns, and about Catholics, and it is offensive to Eastern Orthodox sensibilities also. Many orders permit the taking of wine with dinner on major Holy Days of significance to their community – and I know a men's monastery in Three Rivers, MI which has "beer night" on Sundays. It is their relaxed time after a busy Sunday liturgy – "Miller time," if you will.

It is not right to make mockery of peoples religious affiliations – especially when the mocker does not know whereof they speak.

When will our society quit giving its approval to anti-Catholic bigotry – that is what this joke was. What a pity. What a shame.

Janine Taylor Bryant
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Too late for the Christmas dolls edition, but still sooo funny:

Joe Lieberman bobble head dolls – just swing left to right, never up and down.

Dodie O'Bryan
Pawnee

Editor, The Observer:

When divinely inspired Brother Tom Coburn leads a congressional delegation to the Heavenly gates they may well see this sign at the entrance: "In as much as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done unto me."

The 'He' will ask them to remember how they voted on the healthcare bill that would have covered "the least of these!" He certainly will remind them!

Greg Scroggins
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Time magazine announced Fed Chairman Ben Bernanke "Person of The Year." As per script, any person will bring controversy, one-third each – For, Against and Who Cares.

This minuscule corner suggests the award go to those males and females [should that be females and males?] who have accomplished 30 years of



Marital Management. Two people who have two vocations – one, the home; the other, the workplace. And little time for avocations.

In this Marital Management Co., there's tolerance, acceptance, ups, downs, tears, laughter, joys, sorrows, conflicts, and resolutions. Children or none – soccer moms or little League coaches – all cheerleaders for each other.

Kudos and Cheers to these persons, halfway toward the coveted 60th, and all those couples struggling to reach the 30th.

Let There Be Peace in your world, and "Let It Begin With Me" – each person of each generation in this Marital Institution!

Cecil Acuff
Perkins

Editor, The Observer:

Surely someone has poisoned the well from which our dim light Republican legislators drink! What's next? Eliminate public education?

Don Matthews
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

The delinquent car tag fee has been quadrupled to \$9.5 million per year. However, the tag agents will continue to receive 25% or \$2.38 million per year. This amounts to a \$1.78 million raise to the tax agents while the state is skirting bankruptcy. The fee should be revised to its original amount immediately.

Tom Birbilis
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Financial institutions that are "too big to fail" played a major role in undermining the American economy and driving our country into a severe recession.

Huge financial institutions have become so big that the four largest banks in America [JP Morgan Chase, Bank of America, Wells Fargo, and Citigroup] now issue one out of every two mortgages; two out of three credit cards; and hold \$4 out of every \$10 in bank deposits in the country.

Just five banks in America [JP Morgan Chase, Bank of America, Citigroup, Goldman Sachs, and Morgan Stanley] own a staggering 95% of the \$290 trillion in derivatives held at commercial banks. Derivatives are

risky side bets made by Wall Street gamblers that led to the \$182 billion bailout of AIG, the \$29 billion bailout that allowed JP Morgan Chase to acquire Bear Stearns, and the collapse of Lehman Brothers.

No single financial institution should be so large that its failure would cause catastrophic risk to millions of American jobs or to our nation's economic well-being. No single financial institution should have holdings so extensive that its failure could send the world economy into crisis.

It is time to break up the banks and insurance companies which are too big to fail. To accomplish this, urge your Congressperson to vote for passage of The Too Big to Fail, Too Big to Exist Act.

Frank P. Belcastro
Dubuque, IA

Editor, The Observer:

Re: An Un-Christian Goal: Divide and Conquer [12.10/25.09]

Kudos to the writer of that article and may I add a footnote especially for the Christians that may have friends and or loved ones that did not read her article and are wavering in their faith.

Today some people are so confused about what the "Word" of God says. And others are blinded by the fact of what the word of God says. Even to the belief of, is the truth found in the Bible? And if so, which Bible? And they confuse the issue [belief] further by doubting the different translations.

I could refer you to numerous scriptures in the Bible, But unless you are willing to talk to the God of Jesus, and ask him for wisdom to understand His Word, you, too, will continue to be blinded by the truth of who Jesus is and what He says as truth.

And because of that fact, the non-Christian will continue to sway you with a "mixture" of truth and untruth in his [Satan] lies to convince you to doubt the word of God and say his [Satan] words as if it were God's words.

They are confused as to which god is God.

So, for they that are wavering in their faith to think that the Christians of Jesus are haters of homosexuals, etc, are wrong in their thinking.

Jesus hates the sin, not the sinner.
Faye Sherrill
Edmond

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.

Frosty Troy's Notebook

Oral



FROSTY TROY
Founding Editor

I first shook hands with Oral Roberts, the man who claimed he had the ear of God, in 1965 at a meeting with the executive staff of the Tulsa Tribune. I was assistant city editor at the time and we met in the office of Publisher Jenkin Lloyd Jones.

I was surprised to learn that “Jenk” and Oral were social friends. I was a mouse, listening to the banter, including the fact that Oral had caught a little heat because when he opened Oral Roberts University he had specifically given scholarships to bright black students.

Later, as associate editor of the Tribune, I was invited to a cocktail party at Jenk’s home. Oral and his wife were there and I noticed he was drinking chocolate milk.

When I remarked about it to the guy tending bar, he laughed and said, “That’s a Brandy Alexander.”

I was the Capitol correspondent for the Tribune when state Sen. Gene Stipe represented him in his fight to open a medical school. Later he was to lose the medical school, dental school and law school.

Unfortunately, the law school went to Pat Robertson’s Virginia ministry where dozens of young lawyers were cranked out and positioned in key spots in both Bush administrations – causing a lot of mischief in the name of Jesus.

My favorite Oral Roberts story came when I was in Washington for the Tribune. One of the first friends I made was a reporter for United Press International.

He had been assigned to do a story about a tent revival Oral was to hold in northern Virginia. He wanted me to go with him and I agreed.

The tent was huge and it was packed. He was performing his “miracles” of healing amid singing, moaning, clapping and profuse weeping.

As a teenager I had gone to a Pentecostal church service with a buddy so I had an idea of how the proceedings would go. My friend was astonished.

I had to shush him several times because he kept up with, “I don’t believe it!” Or, “How could this many people be fooled?”

We left before the service was over because I wanted to show him something. He followed me around the tent to a much smaller tent in the back. It was filled with people in wheelchairs or on cots. People with visible afflictions.

I had read an earlier story by a skeptic who said there was not one recorded Oral “miracle” involving a visible ailment – skin cancer, deformity, etc.

The truly stricken folks came in no small number and Oral prayed over them – but in a separate tent. It was for “safety” reasons.

Don’t get me wrong, I believe in holistic medicine – often there are unexplained “miracles” in hospitals. The power of prayer is a documented fact, whether or not it is the placebo effect.

Oral Roberts was a sincere fraud. He stayed out of politics, built a first rate university, and didn’t con people out of their fortunes.

His presence in Tulsa had such an impact that he had his own zip code – bag after bag of mail every day – some of it from other countries.

My late wife’s mother was a true believer. Molly would follow his instruction to place her hand on the radio as he prayed. She drew an old age pension but still sent \$5 a month to Oral’s ministry, declining our offer to send it in her name.

It is ironic to read and hear the praise for Oral today but it was not always so. He saw the future of a TV ministry but in the beginning not one station in Tulsa would carry his service.

As for the Prayer Tower, that idea sprang from the brain of one of my friends



who did PR for Oral. He said he suggested that some of the mail be lugged to the top with Oral to follow it and pray over the letters. Wow! It was an instant hit.

Billy Graham lent real credibility to the Oral Roberts Ministry when he helped dedicate the Prayer Tower.

Many a doubter didn’t doubt his financial impact on Tulsa. It was far more than the ministry and university staffs, his annual days of prayer filled every hotel room within miles of Tulsa.

He occasionally let his mouth run away with his brain, such as declaring he would die unless \$8 million was raised. This caused him real grief among Pentecostal clergy, leading to his temporary affiliation with the Methodists. He preached at various Methodist churches across the state – and they had to admit he was a fiery preacher.

When he installed the huge “Praying Hands” a cartoonist pictured them as palms up for money.

His induction into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame and other honors came his way, but his worst black eye was turning the leadership over to son Richard who sat about looting the ministry.

ORU was on the verge of collapse when one of Oklahoma’s richest men, a Pentecostal, came up with \$22 million to wipe out most of a \$25 million debt.

Richard and his wife were sacked. Subsequent stories told of wild spending binges by him and his wife.

One of the stories I never wrote when I was City Hall reporter for the Tribune was the fact that the police commissioner opened a desk drawer and showed me copies of tickets racked up by young Richard. My city editor wasn’t interested.

I believe that the first person to greet Oral in heaven was my mother-in-law, a woman who sincerely found comfort in Oral’s radio program.

Today’s self-styled evangelists continue preaching Oral’s “prosperity” gospel. They are all over the AM radio dial and cable television. The message is simple: send all the money you can and God will double it for you.

At least Oral left a first-rate private university.

Dirty Coal Politics

The coal industry’s prime lobbying group, the American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity [ACCCE], is spending over \$40 million on a campaign to defeat clean energy reform.

Bonner & Associates, a conservative PR firm working for ACCCE, sent forged letters to several members of Congress purporting to be from black, Hispanic, women’s and senior citizens’ groups telling them to vote against the American Clean Energy and Security Act, despite the act’s \$60 billion support for coal technology.

ACCCE knew about the fraud days before the pivotal House vote on the energy legislation, but kept silent until Rep. Tom Perriello, D-VA, independently discovered the forgeries a month later.

While announcing that ACCCE was firing Bonner & Associates, spokesman Joe Lucas claimed that his organization “did nothing wrong.”

Meanwhile, ACCCE continues to employ the notorious voter-fraud company Lincoln Strategy Group to run its “grassroots” campaign. Staffers have been hired across the nation to plant questions at Town Hall meetings while a “Factuality” tour distributes “clean coal” propaganda.

ACCCE’s members include General Electric, Duke Energy, and Caterpillar, who as members of ACCCE have claimed to support aggressive climate action.

The American oil industry, working with a coalition of business interests, is manufacturing opposition to clean energy reform.

The American Petroleum Institute [API] is busing oil industry employees to

“Energy Citizen” rallies targeting U.S. senators in 21 states. API’s membership, which includes ExxonMobil, GE, and Halliburton, has joined allies from a broad range of interests. They include the Chamber of Commerce and National Association of Manufacturing, the trucking industry, the agricultural sector, small business, and many others to create company picnics disguised as grassroots rallies.

Employees of Chevron, Anadarko Energy, ConocoPhillips, and others were bused to Houston’s Verizon Wireless Center to hear billionaire Drayton McLane Jr. attack Obama’s clean energy agenda as an economy-destroying energy tax.

Former House Majority Leader Dick Armey’s Astroturf organization FreedomWorks is inviting tea-party activists to attend the events. In Greensboro, NC, only politicians who opposed energy reform were allowed in.

The American Energy Alliance [AEA], a new polluter initiative, is touring the nation with the “American Energy Express” bus in opposition to clean energy reform. Like other groups, AEA claims that the American Clean Energy and Security Act is a “national energy tax” that will “cripple our sluggish economy.”

AEA is the advocacy offshoot of the Institute for Energy Research, a rightwing oil-industry think tank run by Robert Bradley.

Although AEA claims it has “no ties to any political party,” all of its employees are former House Republican staffers. Its president, Thomas Pyle, is a Koch Industries lobbyist.

Enough said?

Even In Oklahoma, A Battle Over GOP's Soul



ARNOLD HAMILTON
Editor

All-but-lost in the December hand-wringing over the state's budget crisis was an intra-party dust-up among state House Republicans that points to emerging fissures in the GOP coalition.

In a bluntly worded, supposedly confidential, two-page memo to his caucus colleagues, state Rep. David Dank of OKC ripped into Speaker Chris Benge, claiming the speaker "misrepresented" his proposal to freeze property taxes for seniors and limit annual increases for everyone else.

Moreover, Dank effectively urged his GOP comrades to go rogue – somewhere Sarah Palin must be winking, you betcha – against the House leadership, noting "there are 62 Republican members – not one."

"We should be making independent decisions," he wrote, "rather than being dictated to by a chosen few."

Dank's tart memo surfaced less than six weeks after a ferocious behind-the-scenes battle over which Republican will succeed Sen. Glenn Coffee as president pro tempore in 2011 spilled into public view.

The thing is, Republicans don't act like this. At least, they don't, historically.

It's the Democrats who are famous for eating their young. Remember Will Rogers' line? "I am not a member of any organized party. I am a Democrat."

Republicans were the party of lockstep – disagreements quashed in private before they could seep into public. Ronald Reagan's 11th Commandment reigned: Thou shalt not speak ill of another Republican.

That was much easier when the GOP was in the legislative minority – a small, tightly knit insurgency lobbing Molotov cocktails against what they decried as the godless, humanist, wild-eyed liberal Democrats.

It's much more difficult now when Republicans, their numbers swelling in Oklahoma, are battling over the spoils of victory – especially the power to control the state's political agenda.

Actually, the internecine warfare here is not significantly different from that plaguing the GOP nationally.

Moderate Republicans – "Rockefeller" or "Country Club" Republicans known for being fiscally conservative and socially liberal – are all but extinct.

Corporate conservatives currently dominate the GOP leadership in Oklahoma [Benge, Coffee, Rep. Dan Sullivan, et al] and nationally, but they cling to power by their fingertips – whipsawed by a volatile coalition of religious fundamentalists, nativists, isolationists, teabaggers and other non-elites who rally 'round the rantings of Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck and Co.

The Tea Party movement is the GOP's most dynamic faction, incorporating some, if not all, of these interest groups. In a Rasmussen survey late last year, a hypothetical Tea Party outpolled Republicans by five percentage points [23% to 18%] nationally. Democrats, by comparison, polled 36%.

Of course, there is no formal Tea Party. And even if one organized, its prospects are bleak – third party candidates in America rarely succeed. In fact, it's safe to say that teabaggers – like their counterparts on the far left – don't really have any place to go: Teabaggers will vote Republican and ultra-liberals will vote Democratic or they won't vote at all.

Which makes this suddenly very public struggle for the soul of the GOP – nationally and here in Oklahoma – so fascinating and important.

Dank, by reflex, is a pro-business conservative, but he occasionally stands to fight for the little guy – a rightwing populist, of sorts. He's knocked heads with GOP leaders over ethics rules and pushed for more transparency so Oklahomans can see for themselves how money affects state politics. And there's no doubt his property tax proposal would benefit cash-strapped seniors, as well as middle and lower-middle class Sooners [though it would cripple public schools and other essential services financed by property taxes].

These days, Dank often casts his lot with a growing, ultra-conservative Republican faction in the House that includes the likes of Sue Tibbs and Mike Ritze

from the Tulsa area and Mike Reynolds and Sally Kern from OKC.

These lawmakers, and a dozen or more like them, are increasingly creating headaches for the corporate conservatives whose primary role is to do the State Chamber's bidding. With increasing frequency, they demonstrate an unwillingness to remain mum and play nice, as Republicans past were expected to do.

And they demand their pet issues be heard – which is why the House, wrestling last spring with the fallout from a collapsing economy, spent so much time on wacky non-essentials including whether to erect a Ten Commandments monument on the Capitol grounds, condemn the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child or demand the federal government not transfer any Guantanamo Bay prisoners to Oklahoma.

The balancing act is even trickier in the state Senate, where the Republican majority is a slim 26-22. Three GOP senators – it would have to be the right three, of course – could band together with Senate Democrats and seize control.

The teabaggers are emboldened by media coverage and rally turnouts. They aren't going to roll over and give Benge, Coffee and Co. unchecked power to control the agenda. They also could sit out next year's elections or turn out en masse for underdog, insurgency candidates – both potential nightmares for a GOP otherwise feeling its oats.

There may not be enough teabaggers to elect their own slate of candidates, even in red state Oklahoma. But there are more than enough – see Rasmussen – to cost the GOP dearly in close races.

League Names 2010 Officers

The non-partisan League of Women Voters of Oklahoma County has announced officers for 2010: Fran Morris, president; Marjorie Ramana, secretary; Dolores Martin, treasurer; Judi Johnson, membership chair; Nancy Cain, program chair; and Dana Orwig and Lorine Powers, legislative chairs.

The group encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

For more information, contact fran.morris@cox.net.

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Tea-Pee

One day my Mother was out and my Dad was in charge of me.

I was maybe 2½ years old. Someone had given me a little "tea set" as a gift and it was one of my favorite toys.

Daddy was in the living room engrossed in the evening news when I brought Daddy a little cup of "tea," which was just water. After several cups of tea and lots of praise for such yummy tea, my Mum came home.

My Dad made her wait in the living room to watch me bring him a cup of tea, because it was "just the cutest thing!" My Mum waited, and sure enough, here I come down the hall with a cup of tea for Daddy and she watched him drink it up.

Then she said [as only a mother would know]:

"Did it ever occur to you that the only place she can reach to get water is the toilet?"

Oklahoma's Budget Crisis

Missing Billion? It's The Tax Cuts, Stupid

By Edwin E. Vineyard

Week after week and month after month of this fiscal year, the Oklahoma media outlets have been filled with the news of revenue shortfalls and cuts in agency budgets. These reports have been followed by stories of the crisis in state services as a result of these budget shortfalls.

Schools and colleges have been faced with first 5% cuts in state funding and now with 10% cuts. Other state agencies and services such as corrections, mental health, social services for children, public safety, Medicaid, and even nutrition programs for the elderly have all made similar cuts. Some have furloughed employees; others have simply reduced services to clients in need.

The Republican leader of the Oklahoma State Senate says that he looks upon this calamity as an "opportunity" to clean up state operations and bring more efficiency to state government. Heavenly Days! This is like the captain standing on the deck of the sinking ship, while crew and passengers slide into the water, and shouting, "Take courage, me hearties, we will be better off for all this!"

BLAMING ONLY THE RECESSION

It is interesting how our media and politicians seem to blame only the economic downturn for our state revenue crisis. No one puts two and two together, it seems. There are bothersome inconsistencies in publicized reports of state economic data that should alert any thoughtful analyst.

As of now, Oklahoma is reported to have the worst revenue shortfall, relative to size, of any state in the country.

Does anyone remember all those reports that said the Oklahoma economy has not been nearly as badly damaged by the recession as the economies of other states? Has anyone looked at reported unemployment statistics in Oklahoma compared to other states? Has anyone noticed that our unemployment rate is one of the lowest?

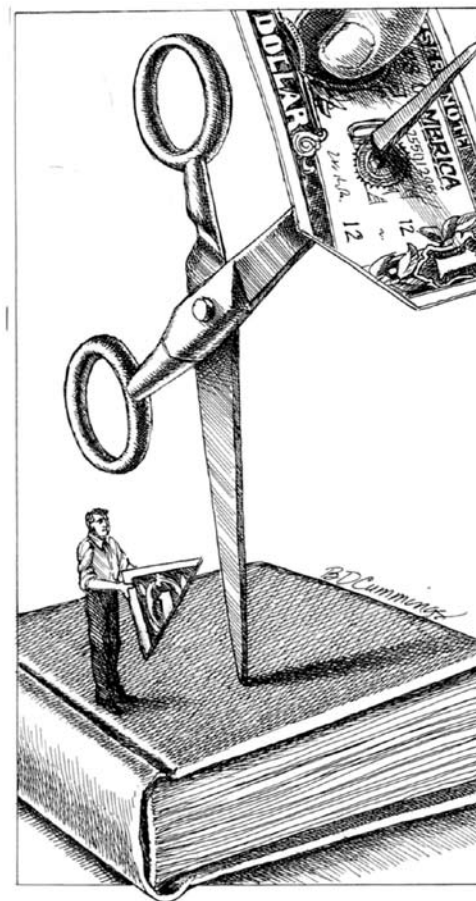
Has anyone wondered how Oklahoma's economy can look relatively good compared with other states, have lower unemployment rates, and yet have the worst revenue shortfall problem in the country? Look no further. The answer is really not all that difficult.

A CASE OF FISCAL FOOLISHNESS

Our current revenue shortfall is something around \$900 million to \$1 billion. Tax cuts by the Oklahoma legislature from 2004 through 2006 amounted to a total annual reduction in revenue of about \$845 million. In 2008 some further tax breaks were given.

It is easy to see that Oklahoma would not be suffering severe budget cuts today if the Legislature had not been shortsighted and reckless with its earlier tax cuts. There would be a bit of a problem, but it would be a relatively minor one to handle.

So, let's quit blaming the recession for everything, and start putting responsibility where it belongs – on the crowd-pleasing, fiscal foolishness of our own



state government.

Another perplexing observation is how so many of our political leaders, media, and citizens are so ready to criticize national spending for the recession stimulus package. They are ignoring the fact that those stimulus funds have already saved the State of Oklahoma from utter and complete disaster. Without stimulus funds we would already be nailing plywood on a lot of schoolhouse windows and public offices, shutting down roads and bridges, and turning convicts loose.

GUESS WHO BENEFITED?

Why are we in Oklahoma so reluctant to give credit where it is due and place responsibility where it belongs?

Now, one would think that since those tax cuts have done the state's finances so much harm, then surely they must have done somebody some good. Right? Well, yes. But perhaps we should look to see who benefited.

Cuts made in state income tax rates reduced revenue a total \$579 million per year. Those in the lower 40% [under \$28,000 income] of Oklahoma families received a cut averaging \$29. Middle-income families [\$28,000 to \$36,000] received savings of \$128. The upper 1% received annual cuts of \$11,200.

But how was the \$579 million split among taxpayers? Which taxpayers walked off with all those tax cut dollars in their pockets? Well, 29% of those dollars, \$169 million to be precise, went to the wealthiest 1% of taxpayers. The predominant part of the money, or \$423 million, went to the top 20% of taxpayers. The

See BUDGET Page 8

Spending, Tax Decisions Hurt Most Vulnerable

By Wallace Collins

I can't help but wonder if the Grinch really did steal Christmas this year.

From a Norman perspective, we see the closing of the Norman Alcohol & Drug Treatment Center [NADTC], the Children's Recovery Center [CRC], and cuts in mental health funding which will result in the loss of 60 adult beds and 40 juvenile beds, causing the loss of over 100 jobs for treatment and addiction recovery.

In addition to these losses, Norman has already suffered the loss of the Enhanced Recovery Center [ERC], which was housed in the old Hope Hall at Griffin Memorial Hospital. And a cap has been placed on the population at Griffin – no more than 120 residents!

There have been times when the population was double that, or more.

FORMER RESIDENT COMMITTED SUICIDE

The ERC was a successful program that allowed people with a mental illness to live in a secure environment and learn how to successfully transition back into society. The idea being that rather than be thrown "cold turkey" into a society that they may not understand – and that most likely would not understand them – they could ease into that society a step at a time.

That program and facility was closed down back in July 2009, with the first wave of budget cuts. "Home" for around 30 people was lost, along with about 100 jobs.

I don't know where those mental health consumers went, but I did learn of one tragic case. An individual whom I was told was doing well in the program at the ERC, had come out of an abusive home, but because of the loss of the ERC, was put on the street, and wound up back in the abusive home.

This person with mental illness eventually committed suicide shortly after the loss of the secure setting they were used to at the ERC. I can only wonder – was this the only casualty of the budget cuts?

WHERE WILL PEOPLE GO FOR HELP?

Now comes the "merging" of the NADTC with the CRC and the closing of the Bill Willis Mental Health Center in Tahlequah, the loss of another 36 or so beds

for consumers and another loss of jobs. Where will these needy people go for the help and assistance they so desperately need? I'm afraid I already know the answer – probably the Canadian River where many homeless people camp, or under the trees at Lake Thunderbird, or in some vacant old building, which may be set on fire as they attempt to stay warm during this cold winter.

This is not, however, the only loss we will suffer with this closing. In talking to a local judge, I confirmed what I thought I already knew with regard to the highly successful programs we are so fortunate to have in Cleveland County. I refer to the mental health court and the drug court that operate here.

Not all counties have these facilities, so I believe we are fortunate to not only have one, but to have both of the programs.

It costs the state about \$5,000 a year to successfully put a person through either of these programs, and the recidivism rate for graduates is very low. Contrast that with the cost of incarceration in our already overcrowded prison system, which costs the state, depending on which facility, and the degree of security, anywhere for \$20,000 to \$60,000 a year to house an inmate.

Plus, the recidivism rate for released inmates is much higher than someone who went through the drug or mental health court. With no place to refer a client, such as the NADTC and CRC, the aforementioned courts will now probably also cease to operate here.

ARE WE SPENDING MONEY WISELY?

There is no doubt about the serious financial problem the state is currently facing, but in these tough times, I can't help but wonder if we as a state are really spending our money wisely.

As I have mentioned before, the House and Senate both have surplus funds, money that was not needed for the continued operation of the Legislature. The House has \$6.4 million, the Senate will not reveal how much it has.

This is money saved from previous years, which is great. But when it comes to seniors losing hot meals, or mentally ill people being evicted and put out on the

See SPENDING Page 8

White Privileged Elite Rule State

By Douglas J. Amy

Second of Two Parts

Oklahoma's wealth to poverty gap is among the highest in the nation, ranking third in the nation. On the flip side of the wealth to poverty gap ranking, Oklahoma ranks second in the nation for inexpensive housing.

However, contrary to the propaganda of Oklahoma's power elite, made up of privileged whites, few Oklahomans benefit from Oklahoma's inexpensive housing.

Oklahoma ranks 49th out of 50 states with the lowest number of towns and cities with per capita incomes above national average and it ranks 44th out of 50 states with the lowest household medium income.

One in six Oklahomans are not earning enough to thrive on, particularly as prices for necessities such as food and gasoline have increased and Oklahoma sits in the bottom rankings of everything having to do with healthcare.

EIGHTH HIGHEST POVERTY RATE

With a poverty rate of 16.2%, Oklahoma has the eighth highest poverty rate in the United States. This is just slightly better than the poverty rates of Kentucky and Alabama.

Oklahoma's poverty rate is 2.6% above the national average. About 557,000 – or nearly one in six – Oklahomans were below the poverty level in the year ending 2008.

Oklahoma's corrupt seats of governance continue to pursue low-wage paths toward economic development, thereby ensuring a cheap, exploited labor pool for Oklahoma's white power elite.

Oklahoma's low wages may have helped raise the job creation rate somewhat above the national average, but clearly low wage jobs keeps Oklahoma on the last rungs of America's prosperity ladder, failing substantially to raise the living standards and quality of life for the mass of Oklahoma's citizens.

NARROW SEGMENT BENEFITS

Unlike the economic diversity that high dollar, manufacturing jobs create, Oklahoma's oil, gas and construction industries highly benefit a distinct, nar-

row segment of the population, ensuring that those generations who have always benefited will continue to be the only generations to benefit.

Unfortunately, those generations are ethnically and racially, homogeneous. Thus, the huge disparities in wealth between Oklahoma's racial and ethnic minorities and Oklahoma's power elites are driven along distinct lines of race and ethnicity, via insidious political policies and practices.

Under the banner name of Jesus Christ, the never ending lies one constantly hears from Oklahoma's white power elite is that the racial disparities exist because racial and ethnic minorities "do not work hard" or they lack the proper "training" or they lack the "relevant experience" or they "lack the required education as demanded by the marketplace."

METRO DAILIES NEVER COVER THE STORY

But the truth of Oklahoma's long-playing history of lying, cheating, corruption and racism never makes it to the front pages of the Daily Oklahoman or Tulsa World.

Oklahoma's charade of Christian Values, American Values and claims of diversity, tolerance and equal opportunity are only seen briefly in sports arenas when OU, OSU and the Oklahoma City Thunder's faces of color take center stage in the spotlights of national television, providing cover for a state that is ranked as the 11th most corrupted out of 50 states.

Oklahoma has the fourth worst incarceration rate for blacks and Hispanics and the No. 1 incarceration rate for women.

Tulsa is the only city to have burned and bombed law abiding citizens out of their homes in 1921 and many Hispanics, blacks and Native Americans say that kind of terrorism still exists in Oklahoma today, except the methods are covert – employing sophisticated acts under policies and procedures designed to bleed and squeeze the opposition out of existence, thus more deadly in obtaining the same end result ... keeping a permanent underclass that will be subservient to and under the control of Oklahoma's white-power elite.

– The author is professor of politics at Mount Holyoke College

BUDGET

From Page 7

bottom 40% of families ended up with just \$17 million of those tax cut dollars. Surely, that is of some interest.

WEALTHIEST THE BIG WINNERS

Disregarding inheritance tax cuts, the second largest source of revenue reduction has been the increase in the standard deduction for taxpayers. When fully implemented, this will total \$266 million a year in cost. While one might surmise that this would really benefit lower and middle income people, it has not turned out exactly so. Of these \$266 million some 60% goes to the upper 40% of taxpayers, and conversely 40% to the lower 60%. Not exactly a level playing field there either, it seems.

So, who has benefitted from Oklahoma tax cuts of the last few years? Obviously, the wealthier among us, who would presumably not be greatly hurt at all by paying those taxes, have been the big winners.

Who are the losers in all this? That is easy – everyone who utilizes state ser-

vices is a loser. Every state career worker has a problem. Every school kid is facing austerity. Every family with a college age student is looking at increased tuition, or maybe just passing up higher education. The prison system is in disarray, and becoming ever more hazardous to inmates and possibly the public. Abused and neglected children are left to be abused and neglected. The mentally ill are on the streets with no medication. Old people on Medicaid will be denied nursing home entry. The state's credit rating could go bad, as it fails to support pension systems and honor bond payments from pledged present revenue. Yes, all these and more.

It is easy and popular with nearly everybody to cut taxes. This certainly endears the politicians with the richer, campaign donor class they love so much. But legislative profligacy in tax cuts has its deleterious effects on significant state services. The proof is here.

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

SPENDING

From Page 7

streets, I think this money should be put to good use, saving these highly successful and greatly needed programs and facilities.

In addition to that, I find it strange that the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs [ODVA] continues to spend money attempting to keep a Norman veteran, Mike Simmons, from returning and living in the Norman Center.

As I write this story, I have just learned that after winning in four different court appearances, the Oklahoma State Supreme Court has ruled in Mike's favor, and has required the ODVA to return him to the Norman Center. [He returned on Dec. 23.]

BETTER WAYS TO USE THE AG'S MONEY

One thing many people may not realize is that Mike, and all veterans, pay to stay in the state's seven veterans centers. They are not there by the good graces of the state; they pay according to their ability.

In my opinion, it is like going to a motel to rent a room – you pay for the services. If you do not receive the services you pay for, you certainly have a right to complain.

As required by law, the Attorney General's office has defended the state in these legal proceedings, but at what cost? At a time of such fiscal shortfall, why is ODVA spending so much money trying to keep a Norman veteran away from his home?

In addition to the four appearances in the various courtrooms, it appears that a civil trial is inevitable to determine the final outcome of where Mike Simmons is to live. The reason I bring this up is to point out that through the Attorney General's office a funding grant is given to another much-needed facility here in Norman, the Women's Resource Center, which houses the Battered Women's Shelter and the Rape Crisis Center.

Funding for the Women's Resource Center has fallen dramatically during the

current recession, and a huge cutback in staff and services has been the result. While there is no loss or cutback in the need for these services, the ability to sustain the services is certainly at risk!

SHORE UP OTHER AGENCIES

Probably a little known fact is that nearly half of the funding for the center comes through a grant from the Attorney General's office. If the AG's office is forced to defend the state during a series of legal maneuvers by the ODVA, trying to prevent the return of Mike Simmons to Norman, and a subsequent trial, couldn't this money be better spent shoring up any or all of the agencies I have mentioned that are so desperate for money?

That money could have been paid to retain the staff at the Norman Women's Resource Center and keep the doors open. Wouldn't the public be better served if their loved ones could be served in the NADTC/CRC or the mental health and drug courts?

Mental illness affects about 23% of our population, quite a large number, and yet we continually refuse to fully fund programs to help this segment of society.

But, we have money to defend against letting a veteran return to his home in Norman, or we continue to cut taxes for the rich, while making the claim that these tax cuts will actually increase the state's revenue!

Nonpartisan reports show just the opposite, that as the graduated tax cuts took place, the state revenue has shrunk.

The current budget shortfall is about \$1 billion and that is about equal to the amount of the tax cuts since 2003. Shouldn't the ODVA and the state of Oklahoma be more prudent with your tax money?

– The author, a Norman Democrat, represents District 45 in the Oklahoma House of Representatives

PUBLIC FORUM

Recognizing Malarkey When We Step In It

By Sharon Martin

When I was in Philadelphia the weekend before Thanksgiving, I picked up a copy of the Philadelphia Inquirer in the hotel lobby. A front-page headline blared that the Senate health plan would cost \$900-plus billion over a 10-year period. In small letters it clarified that this would decrease the deficit during the same period.

My son, who works hard for the Democrats in Virginia, exploded.

"Democrats are the worst at spin," he said. "The decline in deficit should have been the big news, not the cost of the plan."

I agree with him. Democrats don't use spin effectively. They can learn a lot from Republicans on that point. They can also learn from George Lakoff and his amazing book, *Don't Think of an Elephant*. Lakoff can teach us how to make a point without using the words of the opposition. I think we should send each Democrat in the Legislature a copy.

WEAPON OF MASS DESTRUCTION

Now that the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs has a presence in the Capitol, the book that should be required reading in school is *unSpun: Finding Facts in a World of Disinformation* by Brooks Jackson and Kathleen Hall Jamieson.

Politicians, retailers, and hucksters of all stripes slant the news their way; opinion cast as news has become a weapon of mass destruction. People need facts, not spin.

Here is a fact: To keep one's health insurance when one is laid off requires 83% of the average unemployment check.

How can we use this fact to drive home the need for universal health care? The high cost of employee insurance, not to mention unattended health issues, can have a devastating effect on a business's bottom line. Why aren't business owners clamoring for universal coverage?

Here's a fact: Oklahoma ranks 49th of 50 on matters of citizens' health. We make several top-tier lists – obesity, teen pregnancies, infant mortality, lack of access to health care.

OKLAHOMA'S GREATEST RESOURCE

How can we use this information to educate the public and our lawmakers that more tax cuts are bad for Oklahoma? We must be willing to invest in Oklahoma's greatest resource, her people.

Now is not the time to cut spending on essential programs and, Mr. Brogdon



[Republican Sen. Randy Brogdon of Owasso], now is definitely not the time to cut ties with Washington or to return the stimulus money.

Another fact: Oklahoma incarcerates a higher percentage of women than any state in the union. Add to this that the United States has a high incarceration rate, and you can see the burden on Oklahoma's resources and on the state's children.

LESS COSTLY, BETTER OPTIONS

How can we use this information? As a teacher, I saw firsthand how our policies devastate families. Education is cheaper than incarceration. Drug treatment is cheaper than incarceration. Perhaps there is an initial cost, but it pays back in both social and dollar dividends.

Until policy makers with hearts and minds attuned to the well-being of ordinary people get it together and learn how to present the facts, spin-masters will continue to exploit those who need help most.

Words have power. The powerful use them well. It's time for the rest of us to learn how to use words wisely and to understand malarkey when we step in it.

– The author lives in Oilton

Once A Democracy, Now An Oligarchy

By Barbara Bannon

The United States of America, the land of the free and the home of the brave! I love that image! It's an image others might want to emulate. Democracy, a way of governing that people choose – it isn't a democracy if it is imposed, right?

Are we living up to this and other images we have of ourselves, or is this an era of self-deception and age of unconsciousness? Wasn't it Socrates who said, "an unexamined life is a life not worth living"? If that's so, shouldn't we take a look at some of the inconsistencies between what we say and do, and how we continue to do things in the same way without questioning why, or does it fit anymore, or is it still working?

When we get into habits we can forget to question or observe. Even when what we are doing doesn't feel as good as it used to we may fail to examine why we are feeling a little uncomfortable.

For example, several years ago when we were preparing to move, we were working with a very talented realtor who suggested some minor changes we could make in the house that would improve the impression on potential buyers. I remember thinking, "Wow, why didn't I think of that?" I didn't think of it because I created the environment and, like Einstein reminds us, "We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them."

QUESTIONS WORTH PONDERING

For instance, how did/do we rationalize invading countries to spread democracy? Isn't invading and imposing what aggressors do? Haven't we strongly opposed this type of behavior when used by others? Wouldn't we strongly oppose it if it were done to us?

Isn't Democracy about choosing? How does demanding a country disarm and then attacking and invading them support our image of the "land of the free and home of the brave"? How did we ever rationalize starting a war/wars without a war tax, and consider ourselves anything but fiscally irresponsible?

How do we continue to allow a few to give their lives in defense of war strategies that are supposed to benefit the many – no draft? How do we continue, as mothers, brothers, fathers, and sisters, to send, essentially, our babies to war?

There may have been good reason for such behavior in the past but I find no good reason to continue it today.

WHO SHOULD FIGHT WARS?

Those who rationalize the reasons for war should be those who go, not the children who have been on earth the shortest amount of time and have had no real opportunity to live their lives.

How do we continue to accept this as an appropriate option? You break it you pay – not your neighbor, not your neighbor's kids, you!

If we levied a tax for war we would not be in the debt we are in today; we probably wouldn't be in a war at all. If we had a draft of those between the ages of 35 and 65 we probably would have a different paradigm for relating to the rest of humanity – diplomacy might be more highly valued. Helping each other might be more highly valued.

It might be more natural for us to spend money on investments in education, preventive and universal healthcare, 21st Century transportation and sustainable jobs. Levying taxes for war and having a draft would be how we share the responsibility for a democracy. This would truly be shared responsibility.

FISCAL CONSERVATISM OR FISCAL IRRESPONSIBILITY?

How did we ever allow ourselves to rationalize a tax system that puts the greatest burden on the people least capable of paying? It seems the contemporary use of the phrase, "fiscal conservatism" has come to mean: to keep taxes low or reduce them.

Sometimes lowering and reducing taxes can be fiscal irresponsibility – look how we've bankrupted our cities and states. We need to practice, starting with a vision of what we want our community to look and feel like, and then create the tax structure we need to support the vision.

We also need to quit rewarding people by giving tax breaks. The reward for paying your fair share of a progressive tax is the ability to develop and invest in the kind of community we want, one that provides access to quality education, healthcare, childcare, animal care, high functioning public services, is caring, supportive of families, fun, one that provides equal opportunity and access to all, where we care for and about one another.

ARE WE AN OLIGARCHY?

How do we continue to delude ourselves into believing we are still a representative democracy when it is clear we have become an oligarchy which is reliant on public ignorance, complicity and complacency to exist.

According to Wikipedia, "Aristotle pioneered the use of the term oligarchy as a synonym for rule by the rich, for which the exact term is plutocracy, oligarchy is not always a rule by wealth, as oligarchs can simply be a privileged group" – such as the corporations hold in America today.

If we want to get back to being a representative democracy we must move to a system of publicly funded elections so that the politicians are beholden to the public and not any special interest group. Moving to a publicly funded system would be the fundamental shift we need to take us to the idealized place our propaganda helps us envision we are, or can be.

– The author lives in Tulsa

BOOKS

Molly Ivins: Rebel With A Cause

By Megan Garber

MOLLY IVINS

A Rebel Life

By Bill Minutaglio and W. Michael Smith

PublicAffairs

360 pages, \$26.95

On July 6, 1964, Henry Holland, the brilliant and eccentric scion of a wealthy Texas family, was driving his motorcycle down a country road when a dog ran into his path. Holland swerved, his bike slammed into a roadside guard rail, and he was killed instantly.

Holland's death might have been lost to history – a meaningless tragedy among so many others – except for the fact that it would go on to produce, in a round-about way, one of the most famous journalists in America. Holland was the boyfriend, and quite possibly the fiancé, and either way the soul mate, of a Smith College sophomore named Mary Ivins. Molly, for short. And his loss, suggest the authors of the new biography *Molly Ivins: A Rebel Life*, turned the future columnist away from the path for which she'd been groomed – a privileged existence among the Texas elite – and toward the one for which she'd be known.

The turnabout wasn't merely a matter of Holland's death, of course. She had shown a flair for writing at an early age, and despite a penchant for reading that would make her seem withdrawn [her family nicknamed her "The Mole"], she aspired to celebrity. Throughout her teenage years, she carried a note, addressed to her future self, folded in her wallet: If she hadn't become famous by the age of 25, she pledged, she would commit suicide.

COMPARED TO TWAIN, MENCKEN, EVEN JEREMIAH

Still, had a dog not crossed her boyfriend's path that day in 1964, Ivins would likely have become Molly Holland – and we, in turn, would likely have been deprived of Molly Ivins, the *Molly Ivins* – the reporter who skewered politics and politicians in Austin and Washington and places in between; the columnist who combined her Texas roots and patrician education to brilliant [and devastating] effect; the advocate who fought relentlessly for civil liberties; the celebrity who, upon her death, was eulogized by everyone from President Bush to Maya Angelou; the writer who was compared, as a stylist, to Mark Twain, Ambrose Bierce, H.L. Mencken, François Rabelais, Lenny Bruce, and the prophet Jeremiah; the charismatic character – six feet tall, with a mega-watt smile and a shock of red hair – who swore with abandon, drank with even more, pattered around barefoot, laughed more loudly than was proper, and had a dog named Sh--.

Ivins was "an extraordinarily fastidious self-chronicler," the biographers Bill Minutaglio and W. Michael Smith note, and their book benefits not only from fresh interviews of Ivins's relatives, colleagues, and many, many friends, but also from the information contained within the thousands of personal documents she donated to the public archives at the University of Texas at Austin – among them phone logs, travel itineraries, reporters' notebooks, memos to and from editors, Broadway tickets, grocery lists, medical records, grade-school report cards, and intimately personal letters. The gift in this case was a nod toward generosity and transparency by a woman who valued both, but also, the authors speculate, a reflection of her desire to demonstrate that "in real life she was far more complex than the public persona familiar to millions of readers."

MOCKING CONDEMNATION, SENSE OF WONDERMENT

If so, they have carried out her wish, and in meticulous detail. Minutaglio and Smith trace Ivins's childhood in River Oaks, the ostentatiously wealthy Houston enclave where she grew up; her education at Smith, where she developed both her confidence as a communicator and her fondness for strong cocktails; and her summer spent in Paris, during which she perfected her French and became enamored of John Steinbeck, James Baldwin, and Charles De Gaulle. An internship at the Houston Chronicle, followed by a year at Columbia's J-School, led to a short stint at the Minneapolis Tribune and a long one at the progressive Texas Observer.

It was at the latter, covering the Austin Statehouse, where she fully developed the writing voice – rollicking, wry – for which she'd be celebrated. The Observer, the authors note, gave Ivins "free rein not just to address issues that barely dented the pages of the mainstream papers – the out-sized issues of poverty, racism, systemic corruption – but to do it with a chiding, confiding derision that two-stepped back and forth between a mocking condemnation and a can-you-believe-it kind of wonderment." And she embraced the freedom. Confronted with the swaggering, booze-fueled theatricality that was the Texas political scene of the early 1970s, Ivins found irreverence. The kind that would lead her, later on, to dub George W. Bush as "Shrub" – and to render such pronouncements as "Ronald Reagan is so dumb that if you put his brains in a bee, it would fly backwards."

IN, BUT NOT OF, ESTABLISHMENT JOURNALISM

Her Observer days solidified both Ivins's opposition to journalistic detachment as a value and a possibility ["There is no such thing as objectivity," she would say; in fact, "I actually think it is pernicious as a goal"], and, relatedly, her progressive politics. It also set the stage for the one-foot-in, one-foot-out relationship she would have, throughout her career, with Establishment Journalism: She worked at The New York Times, but was never really part of it. She was nominated for a Pulitzer, but never won. Friends visiting her Austin home were amused to find that many of the awards she did win had been put to use as coasters, trivets, and serving trays.

In fact, an enduring quality of Ivins's life was, as the book's title makes clear,



rebellion itself. A good many of her quirky Mollyisms were not truly quirks at all, the authors suggest, but minor mutinies that gradually coalesced into personal idiosyncrasies. Her parents named her Mary? She'd go by Molly. Her mother wanted her to become a Lady of Society? She swore, and smoked, and drank, and took up with fellow swearers and smokers and drinkers. Her father wanted her to become a good Republican? She cavorted with leftist radicals during a time when being a leftist radical actually meant something, and went on, sure enough, to become the most famous liberal columnist in the country. Her fans were eager for her to hurry up and finish her next book? She printed – and wore – a t-shirt emblazoned: DON'T ASK ABOUT THE BOOK.

A Rebel Life could easily have reduced Ivins's life to a kind of ongoing dialectic: public persona versus private person, expectations versus here's where you can put your expectations. It could have also devolved into a simple study of the journalist's body of work. But thankfully, the authors resist reductive aesthetics in favor of something both more challenging and more rewarding: empathy. They provide a portrait of their subject that is loving in the most literal sense, one that treats her simply as a person, with the attendant freight of ego and insecurity, strength and frailty.

And since biography is one of the few contexts in which that modern scourge

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Glenn Beck Tops Worst '09 Media Slurs

The Most Outrageous Comment of the 2009 came when Fox News host Glenn Beck asserted that President Obama is a "racist" who has "exposed himself as a guy" with "a deep-seated hatred for white people or the white culture."

Right-wing media figures made plenty of other unhinged remarks throughout the year:

RACIST REMARKS

- Rush Limbaugh on Obama: "We are being told that we have to hope he succeeds, that we have to bend over, grab the ankles ... because his father was black."
- Rev. Jesse Lee Peterson [on Fox News' Hannity]: "I think we all agree that Barack Obama was elected by, mostly by black racists and white guilty people."
- Criticizing federal response in KY, Jim Quinn claimed Obama "basically sees white people as kind of a you know, sort of an evil fact of life."
- Michael Savage: Obama is "biggest liar in the history of the presidency," and he's "getting away with it ... because he's a man of color."

MORE RACISM

- Limbaugh: "In Obama's America, the white kids now get beat up with the black kids cheering."
- Limbaugh: Obama is "the greatest living example of a reverse racist."
- Limbaugh: "Obama's entire economic program is reparations."
- Bay Buchanan on "quota queen" [Supreme Court Justice Sonia] Sotomayor: "Her whole life was dedicated to demanding special privileges."
- Pat Buchanan: "This has been a country built, basically, by white folks."
- Bill O'Reilly tease: "Should white Americans be concerned about Judge Sotomayor?"
- Quinn to "race-baiting" African-American "ingrates": "get on your knees" and "kiss the American dirt" because slavery brought them to the U.S.
- Savage declares: "The white Christian heterosexual married male is the epitome of everything right with America."

WAR ON THE POOR

In the midst of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, some right-wing media figures attacked the poor:

- Bill Cunningham on the poor: "They're poor because they lack values, ethics, and morals."
- Cunningham on Section 8 housing: "I like keeping all those degenerates in one location so we can keep an eye on them;" residents "sit around and fornicate, defecate."
- Cunningham claims stimulus "give[s] ACORN up to \$4.2 trillion" and contains "\$350 million to hand out condoms and birth control pills so the poor can fornicate like rabbits."
- Limbaugh fill-in Mark Davis: Cash for Clunkers "helps your shiftless cousin buy more meth," lets you buy "carton of Luckys."
- Neal Boortz: People living in Katrina trailers, Section 8 housing and on welfare shouldn't be allowed to vote.
- Boortz welfare rant: "human parasitic garbage lining up to get their applications to loot."

WAR ON WOMEN

Right-wing media figures also engaged in sexism and downright misogyny:

- Quinn calls Pelosi "Bolshevik Bitch with a Mallet."
- Limbaugh: If Pelosi "wants fewer births, I have the way to do this and it won't require any contraception: You simply put pictures of Nancy Pelosi ... in every cheap motel room. ... That will keep birthrates down because that picture will keep a lot of things down."
- Limbaugh airs clip of Hillary Clinton, asks his listeners, "Doesn't that remind you of your first, and maybe your second, both, your ex-wives?"
- Limbaugh on Pelosi: "The third person in line for the presidency in this country is a complete airhead."
- Limbaugh: "[Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm's] a ditz. Pelosi is a ditz. Obama is a menace and a danger."

NAVY WOMEN 'WHORES'

- Savage claims that "as a result of women on Naval ships," they have become "floating brothels."

Palin's 'Lie Of The Year' Not Misunderstanding

The St. Petersburg Times' nonpartisan PolitiFact.com named as the 2009 "Lie of the Year" Sarah Palin's claim that Democratic health care bills contain a "death panel."

Now, according to Politico's Ben Smith, Palin says she actually was talking about "the Medicare Advisory Board, in combination with forecasted declines in Medicare spending."

Writing on Facebook, Palin claimed: "Though Nancy Pelosi and friends have tried to call 'death panels' the 'lie of the year,' this type of rationing - what the CBO calls "reduc[ed] access to care" and "diminish[ed] quality of care" - is precisely what I meant when I used that metaphor."

Smith noted that "in the haze of confusion over this issue, some of Palin's defenders had equated her words with a measure, since dropped, to provide for end-of-life counseling."

However, back in September, when asked what Palin was referring to when she



- Limbaugh: Hillary Clinton wasn't let into Marines because "they didn't have uniforms or boots big enough to fit that butt and those ankles."
- The Washington Post's Dana Milbank, flashing Hillary Clinton photo: "We won't tell you who's getting a bottle of Mad Bitch" beer.
- Quinn on Pelosi: "This bitch is trying to get us to lose the war!"
- Laura Ingraham: "Nancy Pelosi basically did everything except sell her own body" to pass health care reform bill.
- Beck on [Louisiana Sen. Mary] Landrieu: "We're with a high-class prostitute."
- Echoing Beck, Limbaugh claims Landrieu "may be the most expensive prostitute in the history of prostitution."

ATTACK ON GLBT FOLK

In addition to a sustained assault on Department of Education official Kevin Jennings, right-wingers made outrageous attacks based on sexual orientation:

- Savage: "One of the reasons America is suffering right now is because so many people who are gay have not had children. ... Some of the most wonderful genetic material is going to waste."
- Sean Hannity and "Great American" panelists fearmonger about Jennings "indoctrinating" children, "promoting homosexuality."
- Limbaugh: "[W]e all know that Barney [Frank] patrols Uranus."
- Quinn : "[T]he last time I checked, two guys doing the bone dance with Mr. Sphincter was not going to produce the next generation of children."
- Pat Robertson: Many "made homosexual because of a coach or a guidance counselor or some other male figure who has abused them."
- O'Reilly again claims that if gay marriage was legalized, "you could have married a duck."
- Pat Robertson suggests "ultimate conclusion" of legal same-sex marriage is legal polygamy, bestiality, child molestation, pedophilia.

PARANOIDS SPEAK OUT

Right-wingers frequently employed paranoid and revolutionary rhetoric and suggested that progressives, including Obama and Democrats in Congress, were betraying America.

- Dick Morris: "Those crazies in Montana who say, 'We're going to kill ATF agents because the UN's going to take over' - well, they're beginning to have a case."
- Limbaugh: "Thank you President Obama. Thank you CNN. You are doing the job that everybody expects of you, taking every tradition and institution that defined this country's greatness and trying to rip it to shreds."
- Limbaugh claims White House is "perfectly timed, perfectly programmed, perfectly educated to destroy capitalism ... and they're in the process of doing it."
- Fox's Charles Payne: "One day, I think that we are heading toward a one-world sort of government. I think Obama probably likes that."
- Limbaugh attacks state of Maine, says "saw the state off and let it float out"

See SLURS Page 17

said that under reform "Obama's 'death panel'" would "decide" whether her parents or her son Trig, who has Down syndrome, were "worthy of health care," Palin spokeswoman Meghan Stapleton responded in an e-mail to ABC's Jake Tapper:

"From HR3200 p. 425 see 'Advance Care Planning Consultation'."

That is, of course, the very provision serial health care misinformer Betsy McCaughey had referred to in claiming that the House health care reform bill would "absolutely require" end-of-life counseling for seniors "that will tell them how to end their life sooner."

The media subsequently debunked McCaughey and Palin's claims more than 40 times.

Either Palin's own spokesperson was caught up in that same "haze of confusion" ... or Palin is cynically changing her definitions in an attempt to preserve her credibility.

Oh, and the Medicare Advisory Board isn't a "death panel," either.

American Workers An Endangered Species

By Phaedra Ellis-Lamkins

To the iconic image of a polar bear struggling onto a crumbling ice floe, or that of a condor chick peering from its man-made nest, we must add another image: that of an American worker at his trade. Endangered species are a concern to all environmentalists, and the plight of the worker should be no different.

This is not hyperbole. The unemployment rate continues to climb, surging into double digits with no discernible impact on its speed. At 10.2%, the official unemployment rate is at its highest point in more than a quarter of a century.

A broader look – one that includes discouraged workers and part-time workers seeking full-time positions – puts unemployment and under-employment at 17.5%.

Meanwhile, the bedrock of our nation's employment, manufacturing, moves in the opposite direction. The stock image of a manufacturing worker is no longer that of a blue collar in Skokie; it is of an assembly line in Tianjin.

CHINESE UNEMPLOYMENT

Chinese unemployment is under 5%. Its manufacturing is growing at its fastest rate in five years, and is leading Asia out of this global recession.

American workers, and by extension, American families, are in a fight for survival – one that requires as much of us as does the fight to protect any endangered species. What is needed is for government, business, and concerned citizens to work together to ensure that a critical part of the ecosystem is saved.

We must build new economic sectors that replace the stability once provided by manufacturing. No sectors offer as much promise as do those of green manufacturing and renewable energy.

Where once we focused on a global arms race, we must now recognize that we are in a race for energy independence, as other countries strive to build this sector – at our expense.

But energy independence offers value beyond the geopolitical. It offers the prospect of long-term, quality employment.

Green Prosperity, a report from Green For All, the Political Economy Research Institute and the Natural Resources Defense Council, shows that clean-energy investment creates roughly three to four times as many jobs as the same level of investment in fossil fuel industries.

HOW TO CREATE MORE JOBS

The report estimates that investing \$150 billion in clean energy – both public and private investment – will create a net gain of 1.7 million jobs.

We must build industries that do what the strongest industries of the last century did: provide a way for every person to ascend into the middle class, offering a better life for their children than they had growing up.

We must build industries that nurture the primary engine of employment and economic production: small businesses. We need to build industries to be strong



now, but that last far into the future. We need to avoid the self-destructive mistakes of the past by incorporating environmental stewardship and restoration into the foundation of these industries.

No industries meet these concerns as completely as those of green manufacturing and renewable energy. And they go a step further. These industries necessitate domestic production. We cannot continue as an import economy predicated on the idea that other countries can be producers while we simply remain consumers.

HOW TO REACH THE GOAL

By including quality and access standards, we can ensure that these jobs meet the goal of replacing quality employment with quality employment.

By including green workforce development resources, we ensure that workers are prepared to excel in the jobs of tomorrow.

By educating Americans about energy-efficiency services that will protect their employment opportunities and pocketbooks, we can add demand for services, increasing the marketplace. Few will disagree that such an increase is needed.

We must all – environmentalists, elected officials, business leaders – come to the aid of an endangered species that shares our natural habitat. This moment is one in which we'll define the future of America's role within the global economy, as well as the shape of our culture.

Acting together, acting responsibly and acting immediately, we can assure that the American worker and American families are able to thrive un-endangered for the entire 21st Century.

– The author is CEO of Green for All

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Hightower's Six Things To Do In 2010

By Jim Hightower

In my travels, I've heard many cries of despair from you good folks about the timorous Obama presidency. On issue after issue, it's been go-slow and don't-rock-the-corporate boat.

"Where's the 'audacity of hope?'" people are asking. "Where's the 'change you can believe in?'"

The answer is that in our country's democracy, audacity and change are where they've always resided: out there with you and me, at the grassroots level. For some reason, the guy who was elected by running from the outside is now trying to govern from the inside – which is where change is taken to die.

The good news is that the American majority is with us on nearly every issue, so the chance for change remains strong – if we can push it. Now is the time for us to be more aggressive, more demanding, more active than ever. Many of you have asked, "Fine – but how?"

Here are some suggestions:

START WITH ONE ISSUE

1. Start by considering what's reasonable for you. Few of us can be full-time activists, and the list of issues and problems is long and complex. So, just take one bite, choosing an issue that interests you the most, then start contributing what you can [time, skills, contacts, money, enthusiasm, etc.] to making progress.

Every little contribution helps – it all adds up. As a young Oregon woman said of her half-day-a-week of volunteer door-knocking in a legislative race: "I was only a drop in the bucket, but I was a drop. And without all of us, the bucket would not have filled up."

2. Inform yourself. A little effort can quickly connect you to accessible, usable information and insights on any given topic, helping you gain a "citizen's level" of expertise so you can talk to others about it. Read progressive periodicals, tune in to progressive broadcasts, get information from public-interest groups and plug in to good websites and blogs.

Don't know how to go online? Nearly all public libraries not only have computers, but also librarians and volunteers who'll help you find the info you want and teach you how to use the machines.

Or, find a youngster [maybe your granddaughter or someone at church] who'll

help you. Yes, you can do this!

JOIN A COMMUNITY

3. Democracy belongs to those who show up. Join with others. Everyone feels better when they're part of a group, a movement, a community [whether real or virtual]. In your own town or neighborhood, many others share your progressive outlook and are either already working together or willing to help form a group – seek them out, maybe at bookstores, book clubs, coffee shops, events, churches, blogs, websites or other meeting places.

4. A community is more than a collection of issues and endless meetings. Get to know each other by combining the serious with the social. Remember the Yugoslavian proverb: You can fight the gods and still have fun! So discuss your issues and strategies at potluck suppers, throw an annual festival of politics, establish sessions of beer-mug democracy at local taverns or political coffee talk at the coffee shop, etc.

5. Become the media. Create a local newsletter, blog, online bulletin board [or, a real one], an Internet radio broadcast, etc. Just as importantly, enlist high school or community college speech and journalism teachers to help others learn how to do radio and TV interviews and how to get local media to cover your issues. Also, get them to train you and others in public speaking, so you can have your own speakers' bureau to address clubs, churches, schools, etc.

FOCUSING YOUR ANGER

6. Hold your own "what to do" sessions in your community. National progressive groups haven't figured out a cohesive strategy for focusing people's anger about the meekness of the Washington's Democratic leaders, so don't wait on them. Instead, have your own discussions about what should be done nationally – if anything – and start zapping those ideas to other communities, heads of national groups, progressive media outlets and so forth. Let the ideas/discussion percolate up from a thousand localities!

If you're looking for genius, don't look up, look around where you are, and trust you're the wisdom of your own community. As Ralph Waldo Emerson put it, "Common sense is genius with its work clothes on."

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Catholic Prelates Hold Politics Hostage

By James Carroll

How reactionary has the Catholic hierarchy become? Let me count the ways: Bishop Thomas Tobin of Providence “respectfully” tells Congressman Patrick Kennedy to refrain from receiving communion, a harbinger of what every pro-choice or pro-gay-marriage Catholic politician faces.

Archbishop Donald W. Wuerl of Washington threatens to cancel Catholic provision of services to the homeless and poor if the DC City Council passes a law giving equal rights to gays.

The Vatican, uneasy with the relative liberalism of American nuns, launches an intimidating investigation of U.S. religious orders of women, which, when criticized by Maureen Dowd, prompts New York Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan to complain of anti-Catholicism in the *New York Times*.

In October, Rome violates a generation-long tradition of inter-denominational respect to invite disgruntled conservative Episcopalians to join a special new wing of the Catholic Church. Hostility to gays and rejection of equality for women trump theology, tradition, and even courtesy.

More than a dozen of the most influential U.S. Catholic bishops [including Dolan and Wuerl] join far-right-wing Evangelicals like James Dobson in “The Manhattan Declaration: A Call to Christian Conscience.” Its co-author Chuck Colson [of Watergate fame] describes “a hierarchy of issues,” but the Catholic Church now has an issues hierarchy.

On Capitol Hill, the Catholic bishops make clear their readiness to scuttle the entire package of health-reform legislation if they do not get their way on abortion restrictions. Health-care reform hangs in the Senate by a thread, which the bishops prepare to cut.

A WATERSHED MOMENT

All of this defines a watershed moment. The Catholic Church is more than its hierarchy. Polls show that most Catholic laity dissent on multiple moral questions. But the bishops define the public face of Catholicism – and that face is now marked by a scowling moralism.

In days past, the immigrant Church was defined by its core commitment to serve workers, the poor, and the marginal. Catholicism was a powerful partner in the New Deal, Labor, War-on-Poverty, and Civil Rights coalitions, and though there were always conservative bishops [like Cardinal Francis Spellman of New York], the Church did not make doctrinal or ethical conformity a precondition of its participation in the struggle for equal justice.

That is why, across the 20th Century, it was a force for progressive social change. That is over.

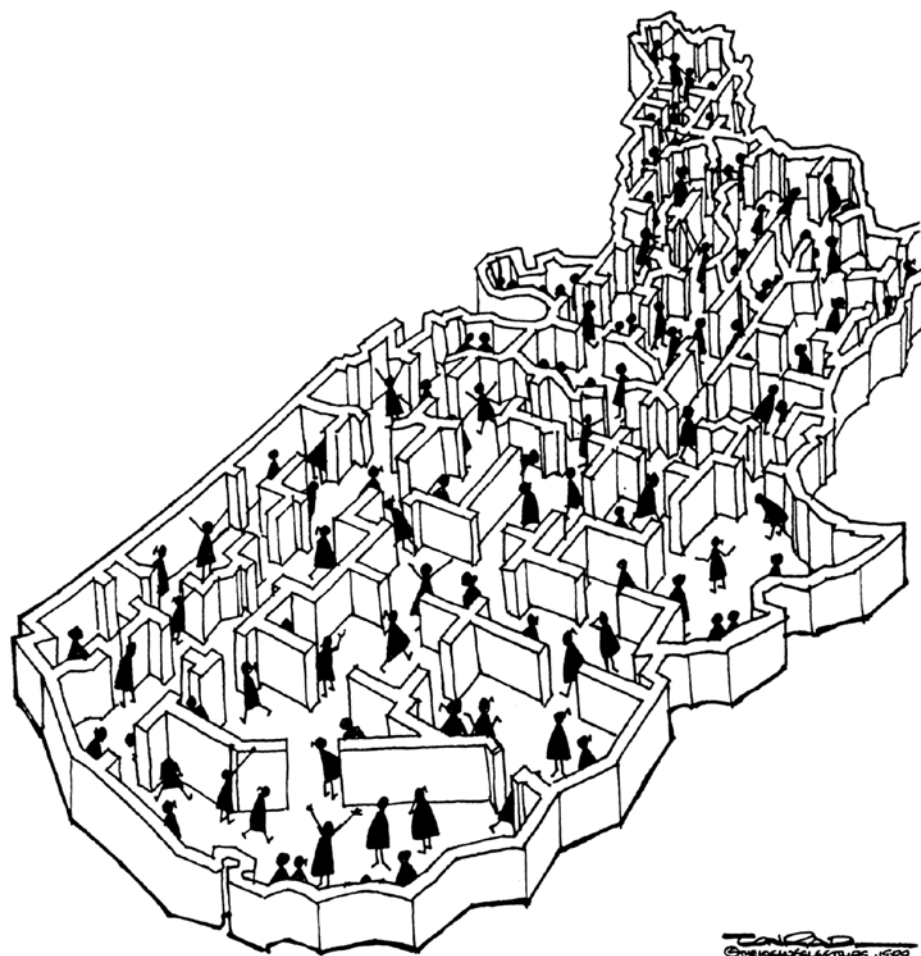
For the first time in its history, the American Catholic hierarchy is solidly right wing. There is not one liberal voice among its members. The bishops are at home with the heirs of a know-nothing fundamentalism that once, by every measure of theology and social policy, embodied the Church’s opposite.

WHY THE REALIGNMENT?

This realignment is the consequence, within Catholicism, of the conservative appointments made to the episcopate over 27 years by Pope John Paul II, but it also reflects the broader, post-Ronald Reagan phenomenon of the arrival of the Religious Right as an establishment force in American politics.

That Catholic bishops are genuinely conservative is beyond doubt, but one might also note how their unprecedented alliance with an already powerful political-religious movement nicely solves the bishops’ biggest problem – the bankruptcy of their moral authority and loss of social clout in the wake of the priest-pedophilia scandal.

New Protestant allies are happy to let go of old anti-Catholic prejudices, even



HOW THE RIGHT TO ABORTION WOULD WORK WITHOUT ROE VS. WADE

those confirmed by priestly child abuse, for the sake of advancing their narrow moral agenda.

Meanwhile, an equally divided political culture puts bishops in the cat-bird seat when it comes to tipping the scales of close elections or contested legislation, and that unexpectedly pivotal role has rescued them.

SPOUTING ETHICAL ABSOLUTES

The self-righteous glee with which they spout ethical absolutes, the fervor with which they threaten excommunication of dissidents, and the chest-thumping with which they mark their decisive influence on urgent legislation all suggest the degree of their relief to be out from under the cloud of contempt in which they were held because of their handling of the sex abuse-crisis. But that crisis, the sources of which have yet to be addressed, is not over.

Many Catholic lay people “of a certain age” are profoundly alienated from the bishops’ worldview and understanding of the Church, but, because of firm clerical control over the institution and the tendency of the secular media to define “the Church” in strictly clerical terms, there is little they can do to affect either.

Catholic young people, meanwhile, are indifferent to what the bishops say and think [only 15% of college-age Catholics attend Mass regularly]. Given the current tilt of Church power, such Catholics are, for now, unwilling hostages of the reactionary hierarchy.

What’s new is that, given the polarity of American politics, the whole nation is their hostage, too. It remains to be seen, though, if the bishops’ embrace of uncompromising extremism will do anything, over the long term, but leave them isolated with their new friends on the fringe, more discredited than ever.

– James Carroll’s recent book is *Practicing Catholic, a story of American belief*. He is a columnist for the *Boston Globe* and *Distinguished-Scholar-in-Residence* at Suffolk University.

© New Catholic Times

Hair Today, Suspended Tomorrow

By Danny M. Adkison

In the mid-1960s the Beatles came to America. It wasn’t long afterwards that young males were starting to imitate the Beatles. I’m not referring to endless hours spent in a garage trying to learn the chords to *Love Me Do* or *I Want To Hold Your Hand*. I’m referring to a constitutional right.

It could have occurred in Anywhere, USA in the mid-’60s. Prior to the beginning of school, students are lingering outside the building, but they are not anxiously awaiting the bell signaling the beginning of class. They were waiting to find out how the school would react. The issue? A young male had decided to let his hair grow, actually hanging slightly over his ears. It was the latest fashion fad sweeping the United States: the Beatles hairdo.

In many school districts males wearing their hair at this length were suspended or even expelled. Looking back it was much to do about nothing since the so-called “long” hair became “short” compared to how males began to wear their hair in the 1970s [more like Jesus than John].

The issue has recently resurfaced in a kindergarten school located in a suburb of Dallas. It seems Taylor Pugh [aka “Tater Tot”] is facing an in-school suspension for wearing his hair long.

LONG HAIR CAUSED DISTURBANCES?

What does this have to do with the U.S. Constitution? The answer to that question surfaced when many families sued school districts for suspending or expel-

ling males who wore their hair longer than school dress codes allowed. Many were litigated in lower federal courts. The arguments presented on both sides of the issue might surprise you.

The schools, of course, had their arguments for why they insisted on regulating hair length.

First, the long-haired males were causing disturbances in school. Gawking students in hallways were causing delays in reaching classes. Second, the long hair created sanitation issues. Long hair could clog the school’s pool filter [just to mention one example].

Finally, long hair on males was dangerous. This was a concern in particular classes such as “welding” where the long hair could catch fire.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Parents who sued school districts [or, rather, the lawyers representing them] had their arguments as well. The primary one was that the students were merely exercising a constitutional freedom or right: freedom of expression. It is not a right explicitly recognized in the Constitution, but it encompasses, in one phrase, freedom of speech, press, and individuality.

This was especially pertinent in the mid-1960s when our country was mired in the Vietnam War. The counter-culture mentality, the generation gap, all these

See HAIR Page 14

Journalist Learns About Union-Busting

By Seth Sandronsky

Sara Steffens, 37, is standing her ground. Once, she was a top reporter covering poverty and social services for the Contra Costa Times in Walnut Creek, CA. Today, Steffens labors as a union organizer.

A lasting lesson about unions came as a journalist organizing her co-workers with the Bay Area News Group, a holding of MediaNews Group, Inc.

The experience transformed Steffens, also a mother of two daughters, June, five months, and Rosie, 3½ years.

"I was so surprised at what an organizing campaign actually looked like and how it worked," she said. "I hadn't come from a labor background. In my head it was going to be an intellectual debate between management and workers. I had this idea about what the best arguments would be for and against unions."

In the months to come, her viewpoint would change along with her working conditions.

During the Guild's drive, MediaNews hired Cruz and Associates Inc., based in Southern California, Steffens said. The firm's Web site touts its skill in "union avoidance [and] counter union communications strategy," adding: "For the majority of our clients, the single largest operating expense is labor costs."

IT IS CONFIDENTIAL

Cruz and Associates declined to comment as to the scope of its work for MediaNews, whose general counsel is Marshall Anstandig. Asked what Cruz and Associates did during the union drive, Anstandig said that was "confidential."

Less confidential is what happens when workers organize, and why employers resist the efforts with such zeal. Workers can bargain collectively with employers to improve pay, benefits and conditions.

"Economic data have long demonstrated a substantial wage premium for unionized workers – on the order of 10% to 20% – relative to non-union workers with similar characteristics," according to John Schmitt, a senior economist at the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington, DC.

As a journalist, Steffens organized with the California Media Workers Guild, Local 39521, The Newspaper Guild-Communications Workers of America, AFL-CIO, CLC unit. Her version of that experience is noteworthy.

UNION HAS NO ACCESS

"It's so difficult and scary to stand up in your workplace to choose a union when employers have constant access to you and control your livelihood," she said. A union has no such access to or control of employees at work. That power rests with employers.

According to Steffens, "What the company actually did was to try and scare people in mandatory one-on-one meetings with their direct supervisors and management from voting for the union. Their message was that a pro-union vote might lead to layoffs and be a bad career move.

"It's not really an open debate between the union and management. The way that our labor law system is set up now almost demands that management respond like that to organizing."

According to Steffens, necessity drove her and her co-workers to launch the organizing campaign. "The company merged a bunch of newsrooms and quit recognizing an existing union," she said. "There was a group of us who saw organizing a new union as a way to keep alive the quality of our papers by exercising the strength of numbers."

NEWSROOMS STAFFING DOWN

Do the math. The number of journalists in the combined newsrooms fell from 300 to 200 during the union drive. This trend reflects the industry's economic instability. It has dual causes. One is a sharp loss of ad revenue to the Internet. That shrinking revenue funds newspapers' operating expenses.

The other is a brutal recession. Eight million jobs have been lost, doubling the ranks of the unemployed nationwide since December 2007. These trends are shaking the foundations of mainstream print journalism and journalists.

Steffens was an organizing co-chair with fellow reporters Karl Fischer, Carl Hall and Michael Manekin during a six-month campaign leading up to a union vote. This is what workers must do to comply with the National Labor Relations Act of 1935. It calls for a secret-election ballot to [not] join a union.

As the ballot date grew closer for Steffens and her workmates, they and management tracked the votes closely. Tensions rose. Livelihoods were at-risk. She and her co-workers won the National Labor Relations Board election of June 13, 2008 by a narrow margin.

BLOOM WAS OFF THE ROSE

The bloom was quickly off that rose, though. A month after winning the vote to unionize, management dropped a figurative bomb in the form of layoffs for Steffens and 28 of her co-workers.

"About two-thirds of those laid-off were union supporters," she said. "Conversely, none of the leaders of the in-house anti-union group were laid off."

Anstandig, who also teaches labor law at Santa Clara University, said there was no "animus to the layoff decision" for Steffens and her co-workers. Rather, the company cutbacks were due to declines in revenue, circulation and "needing to make efforts to cut back on costs," he said.

According to Steffens, the post-ballot layoff was retaliation for her and co-workers' efforts in the union drive. A remedy exists, she said: passage of the Employee Free Choice Act.

The EFCA, which amends the 1935 National Labor Relations Act [NLRA], re-



quires the necessary votes to pass the Senate and House before President Barack Obama signs it into law [which he promised to do while running for that office with major labor union help]. If this comes to pass, workers could have an easier time of joining and remaining in unions.

The EFCA would level the playing field between management and workers in three ways: It gives employees a choice between a secret ballot and checking a union card, imposes stiff fines for employers who violate employees' right to organize and creates a binding, 120-day timeline for negotiating a crucial first-year contract.

Sixty-three percent of employers use mandatory one-on-one, anti-union meetings with employees. Further, 57% of employers threatened to close the workplace, while 47% of employers issued threats to slash benefits and wages, while 34% of employers fired workers during union organizing drives.

THE GUILD AND LABOR LAW

Three months after her 2008 layoff, Steffens landed a full-time job as an organizer with the Guild. Now she works to improve the bargaining power of print journalists employed by MediaNews in Northern California.

About a year after employees voted for a union, they ratified their first Guild contract. "I'm so proud of everybody that's part of that bargaining unit, which covers over a dozen papers in the East Bay Area," Steffens said.

The contract established a minimum rate of pay of \$39,000 per year for journalists. "That means raises for a number of reporters," she said, adding this is not "a huge salary" for area residents.

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HAIR

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things were causing young people to express their individuality. Mary Beth Tinker, an honors student in Des Moines, IA expressed her objection to the war by wearing a black armband to school. She was expelled. Some males wore their hair long as a symbolic protest to the war.

How did the courts respond? Mostly they pointed out the faulty logic of the schools' rules.

For example, federal judges repeatedly pointed out that the disturbances in the schools were not caused by those males with long hair, but from other students who found this weird. As far as sanitation and safety – those issues hadn't been raised with females. They were only raised when males with long hair showed up in school.

WHAT ABOUT NATIVE AMERICANS?

Some federal judges even came up with their own arguments in support of the students. For example, one held up a painting depicting the Founding Fathers and pointed out that most of them, applying current school dress codes, would be expelled from public schools. Sometimes, too, other rights got involved in hair issues. One case, from Pawnee, raised the additional issue of Native Americans wishing to wear long braided hair to school to highlight their culture and religious beliefs. [The U.S. Supreme Court refused to overrule the lower decision upholding the suspension.]

The current Texas case involves a kindergartner, so making the freedom of expression case might be a stretch [the family does assert, however, they that have American Indian heritage]. But the notion of expression has itself expanded since the '60s. One no longer has to have a "cause" to make a case for looking like one wants. In the case of the young Taylor, how does his hair length raise any legitimate concerns that young females, with the same hair length, wouldn't raise?

Adults are constantly seeking to instill individuality into their children. If there is a legitimate reason for keeping hair at a certain length [boys or girls] let the schools make their case. Otherwise, they send the twisted message that you need to look like everyone else so you can be your own unique self.

– The author teaches constitutional law at Oklahoma State University

U.S. Kids Psychiatric Gold Mine For Drugs

By Evelyn Pringle

Prescriptions for psychiatric drugs increased 50% with children in the U.S., and 73% among adults, from 1996 to 2006, according to a study in the May/June 2009 issue of the journal *Health Affairs*.

Another study in the same issue of *Health Affairs* found spending for mental health care grew more than 30% over the same 10-year period, with almost all of the increase due to psychiatric drug costs.

On April 22, 2009, the U.S. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality reported that in 2006 more money was spent on treating mental disorders in children aged 0 to 17 than for any other medical condition, with a total of \$8.9 billion.

By comparison, the cost of treating trauma-related disorders, including fractures, sprains, burns, and other physical injuries, was only \$6.1 billion. In 2008, psychiatric drug makers had overall sales in the U.S. of \$14.6 billion from anti-psychotics, \$9.6 billion off antidepressants, \$11.3 billion from anti-seizure drugs and \$4.8 billion in sales of ADHD drugs, for a grand total of \$40.3 billion.

IT BEGAN IN THE 1980s

The path to child drugging in the U.S. started with providing adolescents with stimulants for ADHD in the early '80s. That was followed by Prozac in the late '80s, and in the mid-'90s drug companies started claiming that ADHD kids really had bipolar disorder, coinciding with the marketing of epilepsy drugs as "mood stabilizers" and the arrival of the new atypical anti-psychotics.

Parents can now have their kids declared disabled due to mental illness and receive Social Security disability payments and free medical care, and schools can get more money for disabled kids. The bounty for the prescribing doctors and pharmacies is enormous and the CEOs of the drug companies are laughing all the way into early retirement.

The rate of Americans disabled by mental illness has skyrocketed since Prozac came on the market in 1987. Further, the number of mentally disabled people in the U.S. has been increasing at a rate of 150,000 people per year since 1987, representing an increase of 410 new people per day. The disability rate also has

Sex Education Victory Brings Common Sense

After a decade of denial and ideological assault on science-based public health, the passage of the omnibus appropriations bill represents a major win for youth advocates who support rights-based, evidence-based sexual and reproductive health programs.

The Observer has been fighting for no-nonsense sex education since then-Gov. Frank Keating took \$10 million to promote abstinence only.

Since then the Oklahoma teen birth rate has soared, not to mention a crisis for birth-defect babies.

Not only did the legislation "flip the switch" on \$114 million in federal spending from abstinence-only-until-marriage programs to comprehensive teen pregnancy prevention and sex education programs, it also established an office on adolescent health within the office of the secretary at HHS.

The state's Republican-controlled Legislature will no longer get a handout from Uncle Sam to promise not to tell kids the truth. Will truthful sex-ed replace the bogus abstinence-only subject?

BAD LAW IS HISTORY

Congress and the Obama Administration removed all direct funding [\$99.5 million] for the ideological-based and harmful Community-Based Abstinence Education program and in its place provided \$114.5 million for more comprehensive, evidence-based teenage pregnancy prevention.

This is a great first step and a sea change from the Bush Administration. However, we know that young people are not just facing problems related to unintended pregnancy, but also HIV and other sexually transmitted infections [STIs], and that's why it is important that these funds also be used for comprehensive sex education programs that can address a number of sexual health needs.

Second, Congress placed this sexual health initiative in the newly established Office of Adolescent Health [OAH] under the Secretary of Health and Human Services. This is a major step forward in ensuring that the sexual and reproductive health of young people will be monitored by public health professionals rather than ideologues as in the past.

A FACT-BASED ATTACK

According to the conference summary, "the conferees intend that the Office of Adolescent Health shall coordinate its efforts with the Administration for Children and Families, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and other appropriate HHS offices and operating divisions."

We also know that this new Office of Adolescent Health will integrate and coordinate a broad array of adolescent health issues, including wellness, substance abuse, mental health, obesity, etc. This holistic approach is welcomed since it treats young people as human beings rather than as a set of independent, isolated "risk factors."

KEY PRINCIPLES

As the administration begins to structure the Office of Adolescent Health, there are a few key principles that we would encourage them to adopt from its inception:

1. Youth Leadership – Young people should be engaged as partners from the very beginning. Too often, governments develop programs and policies that im-



continued to increase and one in every 50 Americans is disabled by mental illness.

The statistics above beg the question of how could this happen when the so-called new generation of "wonder drugs" arrived on the market during the exact same time period. The truth is, the "wonder drugs" cause most of the bizarre behaviors listed by doctors to warrant a mental illness disability.

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pact young people without ever hearing from young people themselves. Establishing a youth advisory committee should be a priority for OAH. Youth should not be seen and treated just as part of the problem; they must also be seen and treated as part of the solution.

2. Diversity – When it comes to sexual and reproductive health, one program is not enough. What works in urban areas, may not work in rural areas. What works for African-American youth may not work for Latino youth. What works for heterosexual youth may not work for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender [LGBT] youth. The Office of Adolescent Health needs to ensure that funding and program development encompasses the needs and concerns of all young people, especially those living in communities with the greatest health care disparities.

3. Evidence-Based AND Rights-Based Science must be the foundation of all decisions related to funding and programs. We have just emerged from 10 years of pseudo-science and ideological politics. We must ensure that any program that addresses the sexual and reproductive health of America's youth be grounded in fact, including those that may qualify for the "innovative strategies" grants. Democrats must also ensure that policies are based on the fundamental rights of young people to complete information about their sexual health and access to confidential services.

4. Transparency – There should be clear documentation about how funding decisions are made and what programs are being funded. The OAH should conduct regular update meetings with public health and youth advocates to ensure that communication is open and policy guidelines are clear.

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REBEL

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– voyeurism – is an asset rather than a weakness, *A Rebel Life's* candor is immensely valuable, if sometimes also uncomfortable in its intimacy. The book shares, in searing detail, Ivins's many brushes with tragedy. In addition to Holland's death, there was the alcoholism ["I have wasted so much time getting drunk," she wrote in a note to herself. "I have wasted so much time hating myself for it the next day"], there were the bouts of depression, the loss of friends to illness and accident, the breast cancer that would weaken her for years before taking her life, the suicide of a nephew she loved as a son, the relationship with her domineering father that ranged from tense to turbulent to, the authors suggest, traumatic.

In that sense, the biography is like its subject: unrelentingly honest, unapologetically unfiltered. For it, this is how it was. Though Ivins may be remembered mostly for her work and, with it, her wit, her biography remembers her in the way that she probably would have preferred: as someone who fought against the pressures placed on her by retreating into, and then projecting out, her own humanity. By laughing. By listening. By being a good friend. And by combining those things in the most productive way she knew how: by writing.

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Unhealthy Food Undermines Military

By Jill Richardson

Michael Pollan coined the term “vegetable-industrial complex” to describe our corporate-driven food system decades after President Eisenhower warned us of the “military-industrial complex.”

For much of that time, one served the other. President Truman created the National School Lunch Program in 1948 to ensure that young men were healthy enough for military service and as a subsidy to agribusiness. Feeding hungry children was not reason enough to justify the creation of the program.

Mark Winne, author of *Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty*, says, “That so many young men had such substandard diets that they were unfit for military service [during World War II] was a matter of national chagrin and a threat to national security.”

FIT TO FIGHT

This was the impetus for the creation of the national meal program to feed malnourished children and thus to ensure the nation’s future soldiers were fit to fight its battles.

America has come a long way since then. Nowadays, diet-related diseases are due to eating too much food, not too little. As such, the vegetable-industrial complex and the military-industrial complex have collided head on.

Many of today’s would-be recruits are too fat to serve, according to a new report by the non-profit Mission: Readiness. The report found that 75% of young people ages 17 to 24 are unable to enlist in the United States military.

Over one-third of those unable to serve are unfit because they are overweight. The military turns away 15,000 potential recruits every year because they are too heavy.

MORE ON DEFENSE

The U.S. spends more on defense than the entire rest of the world combined, and while much of our military largesse consists of machinery and contractors, the military still relies on a steady stream of recruits.

This is particularly true now, as troops cycle through Iraq and Afghanistan again and again until many are no longer physically or mentally capable of returning for another tour of duty.

To find out how this happened, we should go back to the beginning of both “complexes” – World War II. As the U.S. rapidly expanded its production capacity for the war effort, it essentially built up an industry that would have no one to sell to once the war was over. What do you do if you’re a fighter jet manufacturer and your nation is no longer at war?

TWO COMPLEXES

Demand for your products is inherently going to be limited. You might even go out of business! That’s where the two complexes come in. In some cases, the industries feeding the war effort just continued to grow and prosper as the U.S. entered into the Cold War and continued to stockpile arms and prepare for the war with the Soviet Union that Americans were told was just around the corner.

Just as the military-industrial complex relies on a bloated U.S. defense budget to keep it in business, the vegetable-industrial complex relies on the American people to purchase the massive quantities of food corporate farmers produce.

Whole grains are refined and combined with sugar and artificial flavors and colors to make nutritionally lacking breakfast cereals, for example. Whereas the breakfast cereal is less healthy than its whole grain ingredients, whole grains cannot be branded, advertised, and sold for premium prices like Froot Loops or Lucky Charms.

OBESITY EPIDEMIC

Furthermore, for food companies to report increased earnings to Wall Street



every quarter, the U.S. population must eat more and more. And we do. In the last three decades, obesity has doubled among adults and tripled among children.

The U.S. government played a role in the buildup of the vegetable-industrial complex from the start, legalizing and promoting pesticides and fertilizers and then making policies that would favor large farms while putting small and mid-sized farms out of business.

On the other end, the U.S. government approved processed foods containing questionable if not downright unhealthy ingredients, sometimes even after the ingredients were proven harmful. For example, artificial food dyes are linked with behavioral problems in children, and while they are illegal in some countries, they are perfectly legal here.

THE WRONG SCHOOL FOOD

The U.S. government also buys up surplus commodities and distributes them to the National School Lunch Program. The commodities purchased for the school lunch program turn the food pyramid on its head, providing schools with a lot of meat and dairy but very few fruits and vegetables.

While that made perfect sense back when we were a nation worrying about having enough to eat, it no longer makes sense now that we are a nation plagued with obesity. Feeding our kids too much of the wrong foods is causing massive problems, as obesity skyrockets.

Unfortunately, these two “complexes” share the same target: teenage boys. The same segment of our population that the military wants to enlist is also remarkable in its ability to eat large quantities of unhealthy food. [This is true to a lesser extent with teenage girls.] Thus, the two complexes have collided head on.

Spending half of our budget on defense serves nobody except for defense contractors, and the food produced by corporate agriculture has resulted in an epidemic of diet-related health problems.

In order to raise healthy young people who are capable not just of military service but of leading productive lives in all segments of society, we must take measures that will reduce the profits of the vegetable-industrial complex and create a food system in which health comes before the corporate bottom line.

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It Costs \$57K Per Minute For Afghan Surge

By Jo Comerford

A total of \$57,077.60. That’s what we’re paying per minute. Keep that in mind – just for a minute.

After all, the surge is already on. By the end of December, the first 1,500 U.S. troops will have landed in Afghanistan, a nation roughly the size of Texas, ranked by the United Nations as second worst in the world in terms of human development.

Women and men from Camp Lejeune, NC, will be among the first to head out. It takes an estimated \$1 million to send each of them surging into Afghanistan for one year. So a 30,000-person surge will be at least \$30 billion, which brings us to that \$57,077.60. That’s how much it will cost you, the taxpayer, for one minute of that surge.

But perhaps this isn’t a time to quibble. After all, a job is a job, especially in the United States, which has lost seven million jobs since December 2007, while reporting record-high numbers of people seeking assistance to feed themselves and/or their families. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 36 million Americans, including one out of every four children, are currently on food stamps.

WHAT SAFETY NET?

On the other hand, given the woeful inadequacy of that “safety net,” we might have chosen to direct the \$30 billion in surge expenditures toward raising the

average individual monthly Food Stamp allotment by \$70 for the next year; that’s roughly an additional trip to the grocery store, every month, for 36 million people.

Alternatively, we could have dedicated that \$30 billion to job creation. According to a recent report issued by the Political Economy Research Institute, that sum could generate a whopping 537,810 construction jobs, 541,080 positions in healthcare, fund 742,740 teachers or employ 831,390 mass transit workers.

For purposes of comparison, \$30 billion – remember, just the Pentagon-estimated cost of a 30,000-person troop surge – is equal to 80% of the total U.S. 2010 budget for international affairs, which includes monies for development and humanitarian assistance.

WHAT IT COULD HAVE BOUGHT

On the domestic front, \$30 billion could double the funding [at 2010 levels] for the Children’s Health Insurance Program and the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program.

Or think of the surge this way: if the United States decided to send just 29,900 extra soldiers to Afghanistan, 100 short of the present official total, it could double the amount of money – \$100 million – it has allocated to assist refugees and returnees from Afghanistan through the State Department’s Bureau of Popula-

See SURGE Page 18

What's Really In Senate Health Bill

We're hearing a lot about what's at stake politically for President Obama, the Democrats who are fighting alongside him, and the Republicans who have lined up in opposition. But let's talk about what's really at stake for America with the Senate health reform bill. It would:

- Extend coverage to 31 million Americans, the largest expansion of coverage since the creation of Medicare.
- Ensure that you can choose your own doctor.
- Finally stop insurance companies from denying coverage due to a pre-existing condition.
- Make sure you will never be charged exorbitant premiums on the basis of your age, health, or gender.
- Guarantee you will never lose your coverage just because you get sick or injured.
- Protect you from outrageous out-of-pocket expenditures by establishing lifetime and annual limits.
- Allow young people to stay on their parents' coverage until they're 26 years old.
- Create health insurance exchanges, or "one-stop shops" for individuals purchasing insurance, where insurance companies are forced to compete for new customers.
- Lower premiums for families, according to the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office – especially for struggling folks who will receive subsidies.
- Help small businesses provide health care coverage to their employees with tax credits and by allowing them to purchase coverage through the exchanges.
- Improve and strengthen Medicare by eliminating waste and fraud [without cutting basic benefits], beginning to close the Medicare Part D donut hole, and extending the life of the Medicare trust fund.
- Create jobs by reining in costs.
- Fostering competition, reducing waste and inefficiency, and starting to reward doctors and hospitals for quality, not quantity, of care.
- Cut the deficit by over \$130 billion in the next 10 years.

It's a long list but that's only because this bill represents the most significant



health reform our nation has seen since the creation of Medicare. And it's important that every American knows what's really at stake with this legislation.

– Thanks to Faye Sherrill of Edmond for sharing this information

SLURS

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to sea.”

• Claiming Obama is “letting our troops literally bleed and die” in Afghanistan, Beck suggests he will “pay for it” in afterlife.

MARTIAL LAW LOOMING?

• Savage: “Likelihood is very high” that “martial law will be declared” after “equivalent of the Reichstag fire” occurs.

• Savage: “There are internment camps being planned” and the National Guard is going to “run” them.

• Limbaugh: “If we had any good luck, Honduras would send some people here and help us get our government back.”

• Beck guest Michael Scheuer: “The only chance we have as a country right now is” for bin Laden to “detonate a major weapon” in U.S.

• Beck: “[I]f we don't have some common sense, we're facing the destruction of our country ... it's coming.”

• Lee Rodgers: A “few million dead Americans” will “wake up” public “to the fact that they have elected an anti-American President.”

• CBS golf analyst David Feherty: “[I]f you gave any U.S. soldier a gun with two bullets in it ... there's a good chance that Nancy Pelosi would get shot twice, and Harry Reid and bin Laden would be strangled to death.”

IN BED WITH THE ENEMY

• Morris on Obama's foreign policy: “If you're an enemy of America ... he's in bed with you ... The way to get popular with this administration is to be an enemy of the United States.”

• Beck: “You can't convince me that the founding fathers wouldn't allow you to secede.”

• Beck imitates Obama pouring gasoline on “average American;” says “President Obama, why don't you just set us on fire? ... We didn't vote to lose the Republic.”

• Newsmax columnist: Military coup “to resolve the ‘Obama problem’” is not “unrealistic.”

BIRTHERS

Conspiracy theories about Obama's birth certificate were conclusively debunked during the 2008 campaign, but that didn't stop several right-wing commentators from continuing to push the smear:

• Limbaugh: “Barack Obama has yet to have to prove he's a citizen. All he'd have to do is show a birth certificate.”

• Lou Dobbs asks: “[S]hould he produce his birth certificate – the long form, the real deal? Should he be a little more forthcoming? ... What is the deal here? I'm starting to think we have a – we have a document issue. Do you suppose he's un – no, I won't even use the word undocumented. It wouldn't be right.”

• G. Gordon Liddy claims Obama “born” in Kenya; warns guest to “to avoid the corpses of the illegal aliens” while passing through desert.

• Limbaugh: “God does not have a birth certificate. Neither does Obama.”

• Hannity: Given his father's birthplace, what's wrong with asking if Obama has

a “legitimate birth certificate?”

NAZIS, FACISTS, COMMIES

There were far more attacks on Obama and other progressives as Nazis, fascists, communists, Marxists, socialists, and similar labels than we have space for, so here are some of the most ridiculous examples:

• Days after decrying those who say Democrats are “trying to turn us into communist Russia,” Beck claimed Obama “has Marxist tendencies.”

• Beck continues long history of invoking Nazis by comparing Obama Administration treatment of Fox News to Jews during the Holocaust.

• Quinn agrees with caller that Democrats “took over the country without firing a shot,” adds “so did Hitler.”

• Savage: Obama “is a neo-marxist fascist dictator in the making.”

• In CNBC host Jim Cramer's “U.S.S.A.”: “Comrade” Obama is a “Bolshevik” who is “taking cues from Lenin.”

• Limbaugh: “Adolf Hitler, like Barack Obama, also ruled by dictate.”

• Hannity suggests SCOTUS nominee will be “somebody extremely radical” since Obama's policies have been “radically left” and “socialist.”

• Dick Morris' self-confessed conspiracy theory: Obama “wants his plan to fail ... so that he can make the case for bank nationalization and vindicate his dream of a socialist economy.”

OTHER

Plenty of other remarks defied categorization but certainly merited mention among the Most Outrageous Comments of 2009:

• Limbaugh likens Democrats to murderers, rapists, and “this Muslim guy” that “offed his wife's head.”

• Limbaugh on Employee Free Choice Act: “One day Tony Soprano will walk in with a lead pipe and he will start beating people upside the head to vote to unionize.”

• Ingraham guest host Tammy Bruce on the Obamas: “We've got trash in the White House.”

• Beck portrays Obama, Democrats as vampires “going after the blood of our businesses,” suggests “driving a stake through the heart of the bloodsuckers.”

• Beck: “Nobel Peace Prize should be turned down by Barack Obama and given ... to the Tea Party goers and the 9/12 Project.”

• Former Bush White House spokesperson Dana Perino: “We did not have a terrorist attack on our country during President Bush's term.”

• Fox's Wallace on ACORN booking: I wish we “were going to have the prostitute [Hannah Giles] because she's pretty cute.”

• Beck encourages “day of Fast and Prayer for the Republic” on Yom Kippur.

• Dobbs on Howard Dean: “[H]e's a bloodsucking leftist – a I mean, you gotta put a stake through his heart to stop this guy.”

• Brandishing bat, Beck declares, “Anyone not on board, look out, because you too could be the next victim of the killing spree.”

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Billion People's Water At Risk From Melting

Climate guru Al Gore warned UN climate talks that record melting of Polar and Himalayan ice could deprive more than a billion people's access to clean water.

Adding to an avalanche of bad scientific news over the last two years, the former U.S. vice president cited new research showing that the Arctic ice cap may have shrunk to record-low levels last year.

"2008 had a smaller minimum, probably, than 2007," Gore said at the release of a report he co-sponsored with the Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Store, called *Melting Snow and Ice: A Call for Action*.

"These figures are fresh, I just got them yesterday," Gore said, alluding to work led by Wieslaw Maslowski of the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, CA.

"Some of the models suggest to Dr. Maslowski that there is a 75% chance that the entire polar ice cap during some of summer months could be completely ice free within five to seven years," Gore said.

"There are more than a billion people on the planet who get more than half of their drinking water - many of them all of their drinking water - from the seasonal melting of snow melt and glacier ice."

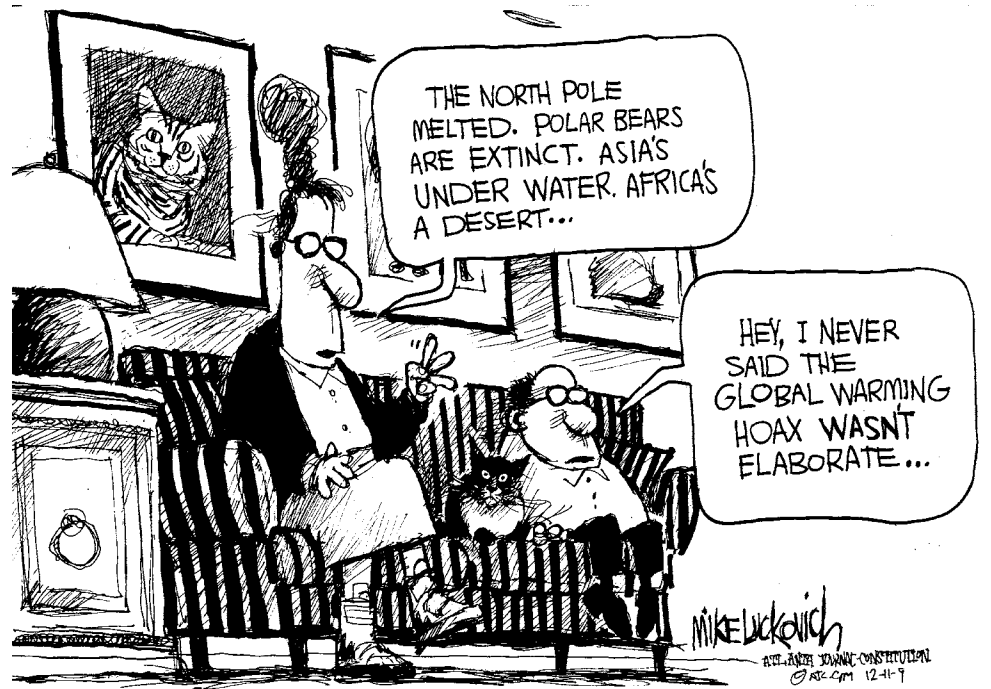
Scientists reported last September that Arctic ice cover - which helps beat back the sun's heat-delivering rays back into space - had reversed course after 2007, when it had shrunk to its smallest size ever.

But when measured by volume, the 4.5 million sq km [1.7 million sq miles] area in 2008 was actually smaller than the year before.

The Arctic ice cover does not affect sea levels, but is a critically important barrier to global warming.

Intact, its white surface acts as a mirror, but when the ice disappears it becomes a sponge.

"Instead of 85% of the solar energy being reflected, 85% is absorbed in the



Arctic Ocean," said Gore, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007 for his work on warning of the threat posed by climate change.

Co-author Robert Corell of the H. John Heinz III Center for Science, Economics and the Environment in Washington pointed to another threat: the massive, accelerating loss of mass - measured in hundreds of billions of tonnes per year - from ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica.

Combined with the expansion of ocean water due to global warming, the continent-sized ice sheets were expected to contribute to a global sea level rise of about a meter by the end of 2009, double the mid-point prediction of the UN's benchmark science report in 2007.

"A one meter rise equals 100 million people who will have to move, 100 million environmental refugees," said Corell.

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SURGE

From Page 16

tion, Refugees and Migration.

Leaving aside the fact that the United States already accounts for 45% of total global military spending, the \$30 billion surge cost alone would place us in the Top 10 for global military spending, sandwiched between Italy and Saudi Arabia. Spent instead on "soft security" measures within Afghanistan, \$30 billion could easily build, furnish and equip enough schools for the entire nation.

WORTH IN SILVER DOLLARS

Continuing this nod to the absurd for just one more moment, if you received a silver dollar every second, it would take you 960 years to haul in that \$30 billion. Not that anyone could hold so much money. Together, the coins would weigh nearly 120,000 tons, or more than the poundage of 21,000 Asian elephants, an aircraft carrier, or the Washington Monument. Converted to dollar bills and laid end-to-end, \$30 billion would reach 2.9 million miles or 120 times around the Earth.

That \$30 billion isn't even the real cost of Obama's surge. It's just a minimum, through-the-basement estimate. If you were to throw in all the bases being built, private contractors hired, extra civilians sent in, and the staggering costs of training a larger Afghan army and police force [a key goal of the surge], the figure would surely be startlingly higher.

In fact, total Afghanistan War spending for 2010 is now expected to exceed \$102.9 billion, doubling last year's Afghan spending. Thought of another way, it breaks down to \$12 million per hour in taxpayer dollars for one year. That's equal to total annual U.S. spending on all veteran's benefits, from hospital stays to education.

SO MUCH FANTASY

All of this is, of course, so much fantasy, since we know just where that \$30-plus billion will be going. In 2010, total Afghanistan War spending since November 2001 will exceed \$325 billion, which equals the combined annual military

spending of Great Britain, China, France, Japan, Germany, Russia, and Saudi Arabia.

If we had never launched an invasion of Afghanistan or stayed on fighting all these years, those war costs, evenly distributed in this country, would have meant a \$2,298.80 dividend per U.S. taxpayer.

At just under one-third of the 2010 U.S. federal budget, \$1 trillion essentially defies per-hour-per-soldier calculations. It dwarfs all other nations' military spending, let alone their spending on war. It makes a mockery of food stamps and schools. To make sense of this cost, we need to leave civilian life behind entirely and turn to another war.

We have to reach back to the Vietnam War, which in today's dollars cost \$709.9 billion - or \$300 billion less than the total cost of the two wars we're still fighting, with no end in sight, or even \$300 billion less than the long war we may yet fight in Afghanistan.

- The author is executive director of the National Priorities Project Friends Service Committee's justice and peace-related community organizing efforts in western Massachusetts

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Notable Quote

"Americans who profess no religion affiliation now make up 15% of the population. Given their rapid growth, their numbers might soon surpass the nation's largest denominations. But get this: 24% of 'Nones' say they believe in a higher power but no personal God, the belief system that used to be described as Deism. They don't believe in Scripture, or cotton to organized religion. But in the privacy of their home, they think that the distant, aloof God occasionally checks in to listen to their prayers." - *Beliefnet founder Steven Waldman*



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TAXES

From Page One

ernments.

- The second 20% pay 9.9%
- The third 20% pay 9.4%
- The fourth 20% pay 9.3%

Among the top 20%, the higher the income the lower the tax burden:

- The third highest group [15%] pays 7.4%
- The second highest group [4%] pays 6.7%
- The top 1% pays 5.2%

The situation in Oklahoma using the same categories of income is:

- Lowest 20% pay 9.9%
- Second lowest 20% pay 9.5%
- Middle 20% pay 9.0%
- Fourth 20% pay 8.2%
- Next 15% pay 7.1%
- Next 4% pay 5.4%
- Top 1% pay 4.8%.

This comparison shows the Sooner State pretty close to the U.S. average by category of income.

In Oklahoma, the lowest group is slightly better off than the national average, paying only 9.9% of income for state and local taxes in contrast to 10.9% for the bottom group nationally. But, for the top categories, wealthy taxpayers in Oklahoma pay even less of their income compared to the average state.

The highest 1% nationally pays about 5.2% of income compared to 4.8% in Oklahoma.

EXAMINING THE TYPES OF STATE, LOCAL TAXES

If we look at the basic types of state and local taxes, we can get a better idea of which of these levies is more regressive than the others. The main culprit is the "sales and excise tax" category. Nationally, that tax takes about 7% of the income of the lowest 20% of family earners versus about 1%-2% of the top 20% of taxpayers. The same situation prevails in Oklahoma.

The property tax, while still taking a larger proportion of income from the less well off, is not quite as regressive as the sales tax. The range here is about 4% for the lowest income group but only about 2% of the income of the highest 20%. Again, the situation in Oklahoma generally matches the national picture [about 3% for the lowest set of taxpayers compared with about 1% for the high-income group].

The state is so much below the national norms for a simple reason: Oklahoma has much lower property taxes than the average state.

ONLY INCOME TAX IS PROGRESSIVE

The income tax is the only state and local levy that is slightly progressive both for all states and for Oklahoma. Nationally, income taxes take only about 0.2% of the poorest 20% of families compared to about 3.5% of the wealthiest group.

In the Sooner State, income taxes are even more progressive. The percentage for the bottom group is actually a negative: -.5%. For the richest 20% of families,

the proportion of income tax is about 3.5%, the same as for all states.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Most people would agree that taxes should be "fair." Some might even contend that every family or group should pay about the same percentage of their income for taxes. Economists call such an arrangement "proportional" taxation – everybody pays at the same rate.

But in this country, many authorities would argue that, overall, the wealthy should pay a higher share of income to taxes – a progressive system.

Almost no one would favor a scheme that requires the poor to pay proportionately more than the rich. Yet when it comes to money for state and local services, that's the situation in this country and in the Sooner State. It favors the rich and punishes the poor.

One could argue that these governments ought to rely less on sales tax, an especially regressive tax. Yet abundant research shows that people consider such a levy the fairest tax.

It's not hard to see why.

WHY SALES TAX IS REGRESSIVE

No matter how rich or poor you are, with the sales tax, people pay the same rate when they buy something. But lower- and middle-income groups spend a larger share of their money on everyday necessities than do the rich. So they end up paying a larger share of their assets for state and local public services.

Politically, lawmakers would be unlikely to favor any change in tax structure that would reduce the reliance on sales and excise taxes [e.g., cigarette and liquor taxes] especially if it meant raising income taxes.

Federal income taxes, along with property taxes, are disliked more than any other public levy according to most surveys. Still, Gardner insists, "Shifting state and local revenues away from sales and excise taxes, and towards the progressive personal income tax, will make tax systems fairer for low-and moderate-income families."

In recent years, the Sooner State has taken steps to alleviate the revenue burden on low-income families. According to a post from the OK Policy Blog, the state increased the standard deduction and created a tax credit for families below the poverty level so they pay no state income tax.

MAKING SYSTEM LESS FAIR

Still, other changes in state law have made the tax system less fair. Over the past few years, the Legislature has reduced the state income tax, which especially benefits well-off families.

One can make a powerful argument that recent Republican-dominated state Legislatures have gone too far in reducing state taxes. And, unfortunately, they cut the fairest tax of all.

Any future effort to modify the state tax structure certainly should avoid any further reductions in the state income tax.

– The author is retired from the political science department at the University of Oklahoma

LAWSUIT

From Page One

No matter what your personal beliefs are regarding the merits of his case, Chairman Jones has just as much of a right to have his day in court as any other citizen in this state, including OPUBCO! Chairman Jones has rights under the U.S. and Oklahoma Constitutions that he should be allowed to exercise. If his lawsuit is eventually deemed by the court to be frivolous, he will pay dearly, just as any other litigant would, due to the laws already in place to deal with frivolous suits. However, he should be given the opportunity to allow his case to play out.

Unfortunately, the Republican Party, of which Chairman Jones is the leader, does not agree. The Republican Party is still talking about tort reform even though they passed comprehensive tort reform last session. Staunch tort reformers, those who cry about caps and limits on damage awards, would deny the rights of litigants before they are even harmed. There is a little girl or boy out there right now who will be killed or severely injured through no fault of their own. His or her rights will be limited by tort reform measures and the Republican Party is working every day to further limit those rights. ALL citizens of this state deserve their day in court and Chairman Jones is no different.

THE HYPOCRITE'S MANTRA

The hypocrisy is evident: the mantra of the Republican Party is that frivolous lawsuits abound. Indeed, when the chairman of the Republican Party or OPUBCO speak out in favor of tort reform, it appears that everyone's lawsuits are frivolous. However, when they are wronged and when they seek to have their wrongs addressed, they have no problem seeking relief at the courthouse, implying that at least their lawsuits are meritorious and warrant the imposition of punitive damages.

This situation reminds me of a cautionary tale I read in a book recently by Stephanie Mencimer. In the introduction to *Blocking the Courthouse Door: How the Republican Party and Its Corporate Allies are Taking Away Your Right to Sue*, Mencimer tells the story of Frank Cornelius, one of the leading lobbyists in the mid-1970s who helped push through significant changes to Indiana's medical malpractice laws. Among these changes was a hard cap on all damages, including medical bills and lost wages, at \$500,000. Pain and suffering awards were completely abolished.

Later on in his life, in a great twist of irony, Cornelius was the victim of medical

malpractice. He was also a victim of the very laws he pushed through. He injured his knee in 1988, and through a series of subsequent negligent medical treatments, was left wheelchair-bound with a stack of \$5 million in medical bills. After Cornelius filed a lawsuit against his doctors, he realized exactly what he had done. Cornelius ultimately was forced to settle his lawsuit for \$500,000 because this was the most he was entitled to.

INDIANA LAW WAS A SHAM

Cornelius subsequently became a consumer rights activist and fought against tort reform. In 1994, he wrote a piece in the New York Times, admitting that the law he helped pass was not worth it and that it was a sham.

Cornelius eventually committed suicide in 1995 and his suicide note consisted of a letter to the Indiana Legislature, which was considering further limitations on lawsuits.

The story of Frank Cornelius is one that all tort reformers, including Chairman Jones, should think about very carefully. Most tort reformers do not have a clue about the impact their actions will cause in the future to innocent victims and hopefully they will avoid the karmic effects that Cornelius suffered.

– The author is an Oklahoma City attorney and president of the Oklahoma Association for Justice

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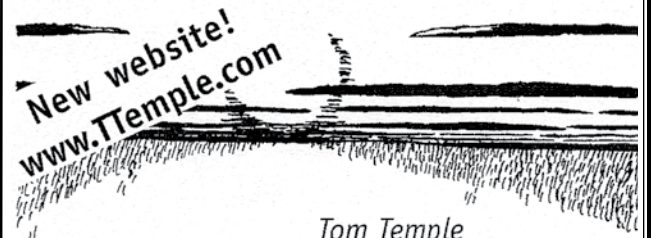
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