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Wingnuts And Corporatists Session From Hell

By Arnold Hamilton

These are the raw numbers: The Legislature's 101 House members and 48 senators filed 2,235 bills and 59 resolutions in advance of the 2010 session that opens Feb. 1.

Toss in the 1,051 bills and 86 resolutions left over from last year and lawmakers could take up as many as 3,431 measures this year – or one for just about every little Oklahoma town the size of Medford or Fairland, Wister or Hydro.

As impressive – or depressing – as the sheer magnitude of legislative creativity may be, there's really only one number that is important to know heading into this session: 1.3 billion.

That's the size of the projected hole – in dollars – in the 2010-11 budget, down from a \$7.1 billion spending package in 2008 to only about \$5.3 billion available for next year.

With no expectation of additional federal stimulus money to soften the blow and with the state Constitution making it all but impossible to increase taxes, the Grover Norquist, shrink government as much as possible and drown the rest in the bathtub crowd will get to test its theories this year.

Think there was a ferocious backlash over budget cuts that eliminated thousands of hot meals for seniors this winter?

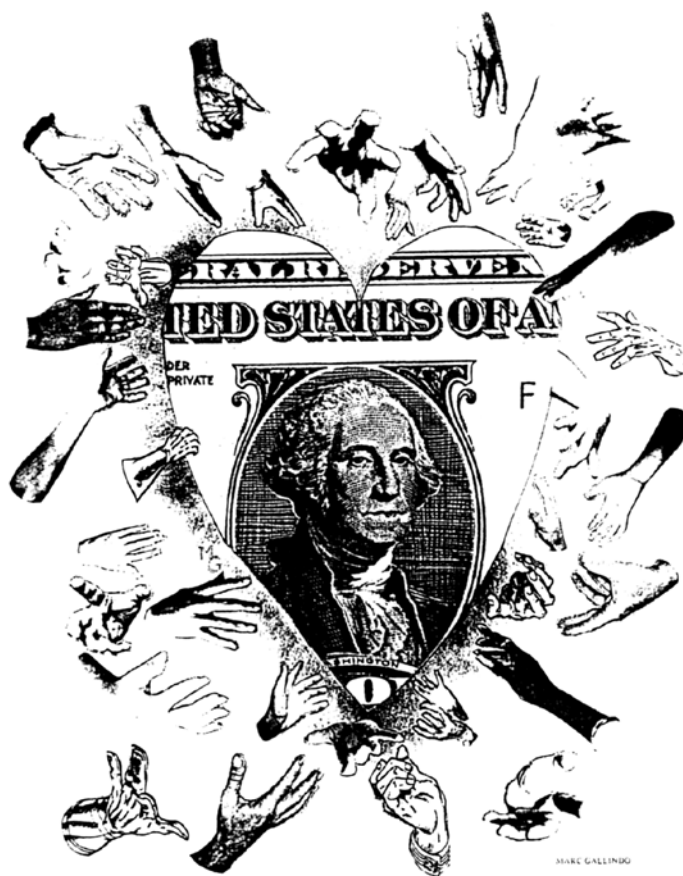
Just wait until lawmakers – prevented constitutionally from deficit spending – begin imposing the draconian cuts and eye-popping fee increases that will be necessary to keep state services on life support.

The glorious era of budget plenty and spirited tax cutting – replete with back-slapping attaboys at the local

coffee shop – is over, leaving the GOP majority and complicit Democrats to answer for their miserable stewardship of the state's finances.

Let's be clear: The \$770 million in tax cuts – most benefiting the wealthiest Oklahomans – are not *solely* to blame for the state's fiscal crisis, judged America's worst by the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Like every state, Oklahoma's coffers are being hammered by the global recession. The state was further vic-



timized by weak natural gas prices that slashed gross production tax revenues as much as 80% in recent months.

The tax cuts, though, turned a crisis into a calamity, Oklahoma's revenue streams slowing to a trickle much faster than state leaders expected.

Worse, the across-the-board 5% budget cuts that doubled to 10% in December are just the beginning of what promises to be Oklahoma's long, economic nightmare. The state's revenue crisis shows no signs of abating in the next couple of years, though increased demand for natural gas – pray for longer, colder winters? – could ease the pain.

Where and how much the Republican-controlled Legislature will cut remains to be seen, though Senate President Pro Tem Glenn Coffee paints the crisis as a wonderful opportunity to create "a leaner, more efficient" government model.

One budget-cramper, however, that

lawmakers consider sacrosanct: corporate welfare.

The state has created a cornucopia of tax exemptions – including sales taxes on newspapers – that benefit the supposedly free-market Chamber crowd. When GOP Sen. Mike Mazzei of Tulsa tried to repeal them and start over, he discovered neither Republicans nor Democrats were much interested in disappointing wealthy business interests and deep-pocketed campaign donors.

Don't be surprised if the GOP leadership targets education, despite lip service to the contrary. The corporatists in charge are not beyond using the crisis to attempt to bring their arch-enemies, the state's teachers unions, to their knees. They'll have plenty of help from Republican theorists who prefer church schools or home schools to public education.

It's even more difficult to predict what will happen because it's an election year and because so many key players in the budget process are either pursuing higher office or are lame ducks, limping to an artificial finish line created by term limits or opting not to seek re-election.

Two key Democrats, Gov. Brad Henry and his brain, state Treasurer Scott Meacham, are in their last year. So are Coffee and House Speaker Chris Benge. House Appropriations and Budget Committee Chair Ken Miller, R-Edmond, won't seek re-election, but instead is vying to succeed Meacham.

The gravity of the budget crisis, however, isn't enough to keep lawmakers from pursuing measures designed to enhance their political power, curry favor with their political benefactors, punish their opponents or create a more perfect [read: theocracy] union.

As always, the GOP leadership is carrying water for the State Chamber and its affiliates. The must-fix problem this year: workers' compensation. Even before Coffee, Benge and Co. began rolling out the Republican legislative agenda for the media, the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber – for one – informed its members in its monthly newsletter that it was their

Observations

Judge Not

They don't come any sicker or more corrupt than televangelist Pat Robertson, a walking, talking reason why so many are losing faith in any kind of religion. As a result of the Haiti tragedy, here's what he said on his broadcast:

"Something happened a long time ago in Haiti and people might not want to talk about it. They were under the heel of the French, uh, you know Napoleon the third and whatever. And they got together and swore a pact to the Devil. They said we will serve you if you'll get us free from the French. True Story. And so the Devil said, 'OK, it's a deal.'

"And they kicked the French out. You know, the Haitians revolted and got themselves free. But ever since they have been cursed by one thing after the other, desperately poor.

"Haiti is in desperate poverty. Same island. Uh, they need to have, and we need to pray for them, a great turning to God and out of this tragedy, I'm optimistic something good may come.

"Because, of course, black people couldn't possibly have the wherewithal to defeat their white oppressors without a little supernatural help – and it sure wouldn't be coming from God, right?"

Every disaster that befalls a nation – hurricanes, floods, terrorism, earthquakes – constitutes God's punishment of a people gone astray, according to Robertson, who famously blamed feminists for 9/11 and gays for Hurricanes Katrina and Andrew.

Every thinking religious person ought to pray that God judges Robertson as he has judged others.

Lost Millions?

Oklahoma made some headlines related to its tax incentive programs but will the 2010 Legislature follow up? It has been estimated the state is out as much as \$2 billion in incentives that didn't create a single job.

Last spring, the Legislature ap-

proved new investment tax credits as a means of persuading Mercury Marine, a boat engine manufacturer, to expand its operation in the state.

Mercury Marine said that despite the tax credits, it was moving a significant number of jobs from Oklahoma to Wisconsin.

Since the legislation authorizing the tax credits explicitly allowed for the state to recover those credits in the event that something along these lines occurred prior to 2012, the company has agreed to refund the credits, with interest.

By tying the credits to some measure of performance on the part of Mercury Marine, Oklahoma was able to avoid a situation where the company could simply take the credits and run.

Given the dire budget next fiscal year, will the Republican-led Legislature check out the hundreds of accounts?

Two Losers

We have in hand two recent mailers by a pair of Oklahoma Republican members of Congress, Mary Fallin and Tom Cole.

The one from Cole is a blatant lie, accusing President Obama of "wasteful spending and massive debt that threatens our future."

Fact: Obama inherited that massive debt from Republican George W. Bush, whom Cole followed like a puppy dog. Bush launched the Wall Street bailout without any safeguards and Obama had to clean up his mess.

As for the stimulus package, what was the President to do? The economy was sinking into a black hole. Yes, it added \$787 billion to the debt – a debt that soared under Bush, who inherited a surplus and a drawn-down on the debt from President Bill Clinton.

Fallin's mailer extolled the virtue of tax cuts – about the last thing America needs today. She can't say enough



kind words about the energy industry, feasting on \$18 billion a year in federal handouts.

It's hard to believe that Oklahoma once had one of the top delegations in Washington, now reduced to jeers – especially the turgid twins, Jim Inhofe and Tom Coburn, who have made Oklahoma the laughingstock of America and the world.

Blue Dogs Lie

We would be more tolerant of Blue Dogs [especially Rep. Dan Boren] if they didn't lie in order to justify voting with the Republicans.

The health care bills are both analyzed by the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office [CBO], and they both reduce the budget deficit [Senate version \$132 billion, House version: \$138 billion over 10 years].

Not only that, but contrary to the ratings of Sen. John McCain, this is no mere accounting trick. CBO estimated that the Senate bill will save \$1.3 trillion in its second decade.

So, how are these bills meaningfully expensive?

If you want to argue that the bills don't bend the cost curve sufficiently, that's fine. But don't call them expensive because that's a lie, a Republican talking point.

If Boren & Co. don't want to vote for health care reform, come up with a real reason. There are plenty to choose from on both the left and the right.

Nutty

Tell us it was just a wild dream – two legislators didn't propose an annual tax cut for people buying guns?

Unfortunately it's true. Sen. John Sparks, D-Norman, and Rep. Wes Hilliard, D-Sulphur, call it a "sales tax holiday."

Are either familiar with a billion dollar black hole in the next fiscal year state budget? Are they aware that murder is skyrocketing, fueled with guns?

Tulsa set a record in 2009 with 70 homicides – 11 were juveniles. Oklahoma City racked up 75 killings, the most since 1994.

Sensible legislators would be working to control firearm ownership, not promoting it.

We realize it's an election year and nothing gilds the lily more than an NRA endorsement. We remember when the NRA was a responsible organization.

With more than 17,000 firearms killings last year, America is the murder capital of the world and the most violent society in the history of man on this planet – from child abuse and murder to the domestic murder and abuse of women.

On a common sense level, Sen. Mike Johnson, R-Kingfisher, said the sales tax is no barrier to buying weapons.

It's just showing off.

Pandering

The showboating never ends in Oklahoma's Republican Party – this time a preemptive strike at a national health care bill that has yet to be finally formulated.

GOP Reps. Mike Ritze and Mike Reynolds have joined with Sen. Randy Brogdon, R-Owasso, to sponsor legislation giving Oklahomans the right to retain their present health care coverage.

We hate to rain on their political pandering, but both the House and Senate bills now in a congressional conference committee already allow retention of existing health plans.

The merged plans at minimum would provide coverage for 30 million Americans who cannot afford it.

Contrary to Sarah Palin's misinformation, there are no "death panels" in either bill.

Normally Oklahomans would be kept informed by the media but the Daily Disappointment has bad-mouthed the legislation from the get-go.

Their reason? They have canceled their employee healthcare benefits, leaving OPUBCO employees scrambling, especially retirees.

What are the odds that Ritze, Reynolds and Brogdon, have not gone online to read the broad outline of the bills in conference?

We have a few questions about the Senate bill but withhold final judgment until there is a final product on the floor of both houses of Congress.

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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

The Princeton Review rates OU and OSU among the 50 best college buys in America. OU tuition is \$7,423 and OSU's \$6,800.

Laurel: To Rolling Stone magazine, naming Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-OK, the No. 1 enemy in a story on climate change. He thought it was a compliment!

Republican legislative leaders tapdanced around budget questions at a press briefing. New figures show the six-month shortfall to be \$756 million – almost exactly the amount of tax cuts they passed, mostly for the affluent.

Dart: To Feed the Children. Among the 50 top American charities, they are the only one to receive an "F." You can check it out in the Nov. 22 Christian Science Monitor, page 15.

No public educator should bad-mouth the Obama stimulus money; it saved or created 325,000 education jobs – almost all of them teachers.

Laurel: To Miami, OK Church of God in Christ for ordaining Johnny Lee Clary. He's the white former leader of the KKK, now ministering in a denomination of six million African Americans.

A national drive is underway by the National Education Association to drop the word "retarded" which they say is hurtful and demeaning. To take the pledge go to www.nea.org/r-word.

Dart: To Oklahoma's Republican legislative leaders, using a meat-ax instead of priorities to cover a \$700 million hole in this fiscal year's budget. Their sorry politics have created a billion dollar hole next year.

Oklahoma's abject poverty now has more than 560,000 people on food stamps. Up 28% and no letup in sight.

Laurel: To a new federal survey of lakes, giving Oklahoma a heads-up that our lakes are in trouble due to plant life and other nutrients. Our lakes are a magnet for tourists – our No. 1 industry.

Voters in seven states, including Oklahoma, have rejected the scam known as the Taxpayers Bill of Rights [TABOR]. Only Colorado adopted it, wrecking their public schools. They quickly repealed it.

Dart: To AG GOP candidate Ryan Leonard, blasting the "legality" of the U.S. Senate healthcare bill. Someone who can talk slow enough tell him it's a work in progress.

Rep. Rex Duncan, R-Sand Springs, will not seek reelection, preferring to run for district attorney. That raises the House I.Q. at least 20 points.

Laurel: To the Guttmacher Institute for pointing out that women who don't want children should take RU 486, the morning-after pill. A survey shows it would have prevented 700,000 unwanted pregnancies last year.

It is a wake-up call for the Oklahoma Corporation Commission, now considering statewide toll-free telephone calling. Cell phones already have that ability so why not landlines?

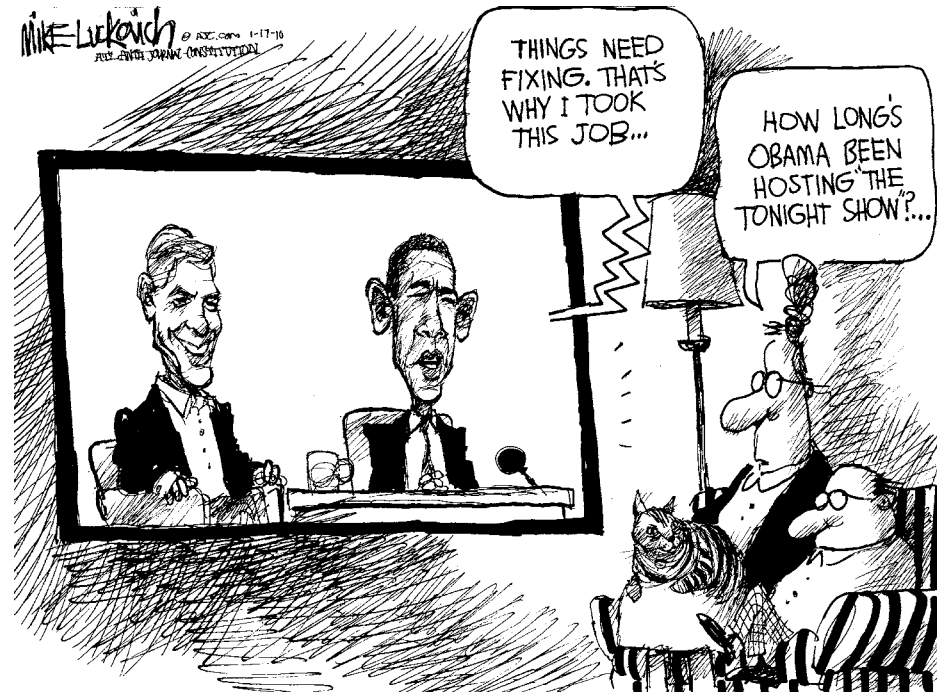
Dart: To the State Chamber, out with its 2010 legislative agenda – more socialism for the rich. They want to protect tax incentives – even those that haven't created a single job.

UCLA's Civil Rights Project reports that African-American and Latino school children are more segregated than since the time of Martin Luther King Jr.'s death in 1968 – 40% in schools with 90% to 100% minorities.

Laurel: To State Sen. Jim Wilson, D-Tahlequah, calling for an overhaul of the state's health care system – half of the 651,000 lacking health insurance are children.

The shortage of primary-care doctors is a national crisis, a 30% shortage – none worse than Oklahoma. The state is also short 3,000-plus RNs.

Dart: To House Speaker Chris Benge, R-Tulsa, opposed to insurance coverage of autism. State Sen. Jay Paul Gumm, D-Durant, said he will push a bill again in the next session.



No wonder the GOP Legislature is the toast of the State Chamber – the inheritance tax ended Jan. 1, another \$82 million in the pockets of fat cats. [It didn't kick in until estates worth \$3.5 million.]

Laurel: To Ramona Paul, godmother of Oklahoma's premier early childhood education program, named Oklahoman of the year by Oklahoma Today magazine.

Gee, why bother with a Legislature when we have the Daily Disappointment marching orders for 2010? Their editorial writers are so narrow minded they can look through a keyhole with both eyes.

Dart: To U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn, R-OK, whose opposition to all Democrats is, in his words, "good vs. evil." Don't you wish you could find a beer as cold as Coburn's heart?

The most recent losers in the state budget free-fall are abused women and their children. Project Safe served 1,786 women and children last year. Such services are now in the toilet.

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."

Rupert Murdoch loses \$40 million a year on the far right NY Post, billionaire Richard Mellon Scaife \$2 million to \$3 million a week on the far-right Pittsburgh Tribune-Review and Sun Myung Moon \$3 million a day on the far-right Washington Times.

Dart: To Sen. Steve Russell, R-OKC, filing a bill to permit hunters to use silencers on their weapons. No! No! No! It should be a silencer for Russell's loud mouth.

The new Census Bureau report makes it official – one in five Oklahoma kids lives in poverty, ranking Oklahoma 14th nationally. They get little or no help while the GOP Legislature cuts taxes more than \$700 million for fat cats.

Laurel: To House Speaker Chris Benge, R-Tulsa, touting legislative sessions to be broadcast live on the Internet. And you thought the Legislature couldn't fall any lower in the public's esteem.

Gallup is out with its year-end poll showing 78% of Americans identify as Christians, continuing a decline from 91% in 1948. Only 13% identify themselves as non-religious.

Dart: To Democratic U.S. Rep. Dan Boren, telling the press that if the Congress goes Republican it would be good for him personally and the state. Come on, Dan, register where your heart is.

According to the latest Oklahoma Poll, in a heads-up between U.S. Mary Fallin and AG Drew Edmondson in the race for governor, Fallin leads 51% to 39% with 10% undecided.

Laurel: To the AARP for revealing that drug companies raised prices 9.3% last year in advance of any possible health care reform. Their greed knows no bounds.

A soaring wind turbine – soon to be joined by another – will serve the governor's mansion and the Department of Human Services building. No turbines would be necessary if someone could figure out how to hook up all the legislative hot air.

Dart: To the Henry Administration, leaving office without repairing the disgraceful east tunnel entrance to the Capitol – the one used most by school kids and tourists. It floods after every rain.

Sen. Susan Paddock, D-Ada, will try again this session to ban texting while driving by those 18 and younger. Reps. Danny Morgan, D-Prague, and Sue Tibbs, R-Tulsa, want to extend the texting-while-driving to everyone – and require hands-free devices when talking-while-driving. We applaud their efforts.

Laurel: To Judge Charles Chapel of the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals, retiring after 17 years of distinguished service. Oklahoma is blessed with one of the finest judicial systems in the country.

The average Oklahoma healthcare premium rose from \$6,937 in 2000 to \$11,749 in 2009. That's a 69.4% increase while the median income rose only 25% – up to \$25,984. It's why the poor get poorer in Oklahoma.

Surprise! Sarah Palin will be a commentator on Fox News. If it rained facts Fox would still be high and dry.

THE OKLAHOMA Observer


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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

Although I usually find myself in agreement with your Observerscope hosannas and brickbats, I must take exception to giving Garth Brooks a Laurel for suing his hometown hospital, Integris Canadian Valley, for failure to name a wing after his mother. Why? Frankly, I don't know the details of the conversations or any quid pro quos between Garth and the hospital, but it doesn't seem to me that an extremely wealthy entertainer bringing a lawsuit against a hospital that serves his hometown is praiseworthy in any way.

This has all the outward appearance of a dispute that could be negotiated outside of lawsuits. Notwithstanding the egotism of Mr. Brooks, who apparently helps only those who honor his name, I can't imagine that Integris would prefer a lawsuit to a settlement.

It's also worth noting that the hospital is located on "Garth Brooks Boulevard" [formerly U.S. Highway 92] and is less than one-half mile from a sign trumpeting Yukon as "Home of Garth Brooks." Next, I suppose Mr. Brooks will ask that the Yukon Cemetery be renamed "Garth Brooks's Friends in Low Places."

Hank Batty
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

Let's make one point abundantly clear: There is absolutely no connection between healthcare and elective abortion [or tummy tucks or facelifts or any other cosmetic or elective surgeries.]

People who are connecting the two – whatever side they claim they are on – are liars trying to push their agendas.

Al Engel
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

OK, I've tried to wean myself away from proactive politics. And with the New Year I'm struggling to take the "I don't give a damn anymore because it isn't going to change as long as we have the fools in D.C. running things." But you can see I'm not succeeding. However, I will continue to work on this.

In the meantime here's something for you to think about. Yes, another election is looming. Instead of griping about these bums, why don't

YOU do something about it? Forget party lines ... they're all jerks. If YOU want change, then YOU have to get off your duff and vote for it and demand change. Otherwise the same worthless crowd will continue to drive this country in the ground.

Is that what you want for your kids and grandkids? If you don't care, then let them deal with it.

As a fictional terrorist character in a book I just read said: "American politicians only care about being re-elected ... not about the people they supposedly represent." Think about it.

Norm Rourke
Beggs

Editor, The Observer:

When governments run amuck, they do it in the name of the citizens. We are to blame for we take no interest in "politics," saying "they" are corrupt, saying "they" are dishonest, saying "they" don't do what "they" promised in "their" speeches before elected. Well, folks, it is like Pogo said, "I have met the enemy and they is us!"

Those who do not participate in the election process and in the business of Congress are to blame. Why should those elected do what they promise? No one is holding them accountable.

You chase after the latest fads, the promotions and wage increases and the climb to a better car, a better neighborhood, a better material accumulation, but you don't want to see the foreclosed homes in your neighborhoods, you don't look at the homeless standing in the bread lines, or the ERs full of sick people who have no means to pay for insurance coverage due to lack of benefits provided by a job, etc.

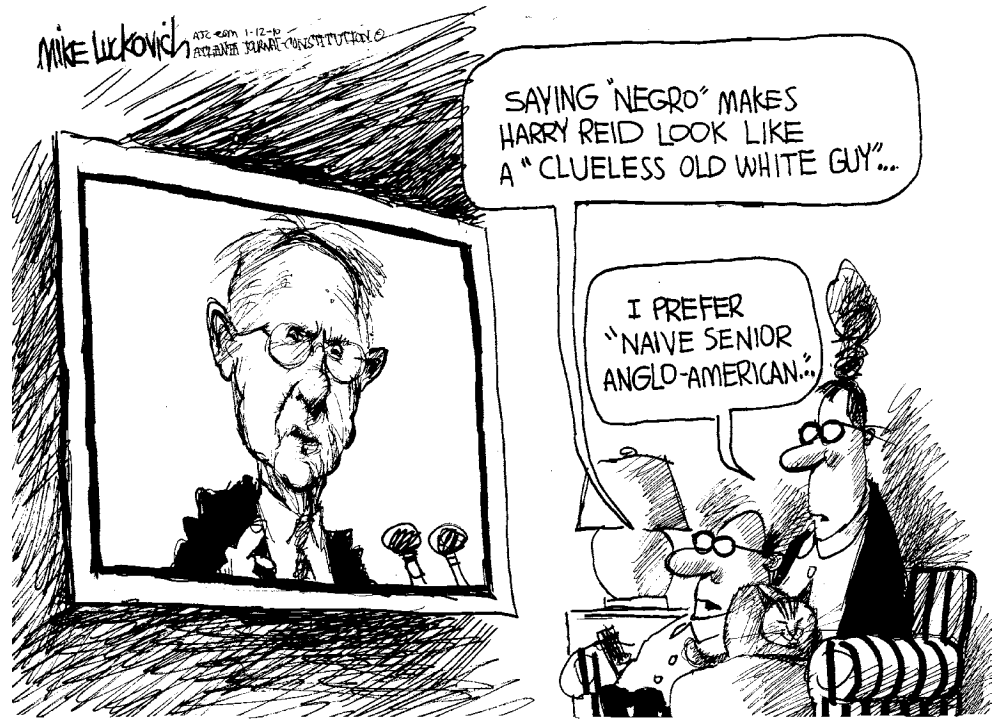
All these things hinge on whom you and I elect to govern and which of us are paying attention after the polls close? It is our business and we are getting what we deserve when we do not take an interest in "politics."

We are the problem – not the corrupted government. They are only doing what they can get away with. Shine the light on their dark little secrets and you can change your own lives!

Darla Reynolds-Sparks
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

Several months ago, I wrote an article for The Observer in which I discussed the lethality of nuclear power.



Counterposed to nuclear energy were solar, wind, and natural gas all of which are abundant in Oklahoma.

I wish to qualify my support for natural gas. This source of power is best thought of as transitional to wind and solar. Natural gas contributes to global warming and will need to be eliminated over the long haul.

For a detailed explanation of how this occurs, see my report at: http://axisoflogic.com/artman/publish/Article_57387.shtml

Morton S. Skorodin
Stillwater

Editor, The Observer:

Three states – Maryland, California and North Carolina – have suspended the use of the death penalty while they study whether lethal injection causes undue pain and whether prison staff are sufficiently trained to carry out the process.

Physicians refuse to participate, using their oath to "save lives, not take lives."

Fifteen states have banned the death penalty.

In Oklahoma, running for governor is Attorney General Drew Edmondson defending lethal injection executions: "I don't think this is the time to soften up on the death penalty." He is calling for the blood of Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, the 9/11 mastermind, and opposing a Congressional bill to give death row inmates more appeal rights.

Here are the other flies in Edmondson's death penalty ointment:

Fly No. 1: I'm opposed to the death penalty because I believe life is sacred. The worst punishment is to take somebody and put them in a small cell for the rest of their life, deprived of their freedom, never to be paroled.

Fly No. 2: Detective Mark Fuhrman, made famous in the O.J. Simpson trial, said in his book, *Death and Justice: An Expose of Oklahoma's Death Row Machine*, "My investigation of the death penalty in Oklahoma County has brought me to this conclusion: Death penalty cases are not investigated or prosecuted at a level that can guarantee justice or even that the accused is actually guilty."

Fly No. 3: Ten inmates were freed from Oklahoma's death row due to new evidence [139 have been freed

from death rows in 26 states].

Fly No. 4: After writing *The Innocent Man: Murder and Injustice in a Small Town* [Ada, OK], author John Grisham said, "As heinous and horrible as some crimes are, if killing is so wrong, then we should not be allowed to kill."

Fly No. 5: What would Jesus do? He would execute no one. Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner
Wagoner

Editor, The Observer:

Referring to Observer readers: If you or your organization have maligned Oklahoma's oil and gas industry as did 12 or 13 Grady County school superintendents when they sued to require the county to hire a company to seek out companies not paying enough ad valorem taxes, then I have zero sympathy regarding your budget failures. In fact, I'm amused. The strong inference was that this was purposeful and widespread.

Homer H. Hulme
Chickasha

Editor, The Observer:

Just a note of appreciation. You all do a bang-up job every issue – always something to help us focus on the local and national disorders the TV and daily papers avoid.

Let me put in a preference for your cultural articles – many outstanding Oklahoma authors to celebrate right now, such as Rilla Askew, author of *Harpsong '07* and Pulitzer Prize-winner Tracy Letts. Not to be scorned, either, are your compilations of Okie dialect. Our own area of southern Delaware County is particularly rich in old-time phrasing which in a blink without somebody to record it will become extinct.

Also a query – what happened to Karen Webb? Her comments about many Bush-era crimes – especially "legal" torture – will not be forgotten.

Joe Cullinan
Kansas, OK

Editor's Note: Regular contributor Karen Webb has recovered from major surgery last fall. Her latest essay – What, No Medal Of Freedom? – appears on page 14. More of her essays can be found at our web site, www.okobserver.net.

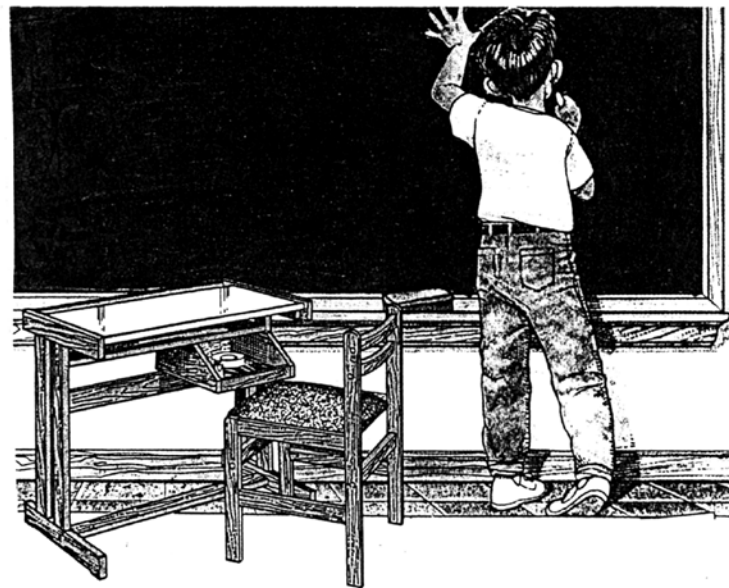
EDUCATION

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

Hurry!



FROSTY TROY
Founding Editor

In my early years of criss-crossing America it was not uncommon to see someone playing a violin, trumpet or saxophone in a busy airport. I always dropped them a dollar.

I'm one of those suckers who always gives a dollar to a street corner beggar. I've been bawled out about it but I can't help myself. Hey, I've only invested a dollar and what if it's really Jesus?

I was captivated by a Washington Post experiment a while back. They approached one of the world's great violinists to play near the Metro Station at L'Enfant Plaza.

It was an early morning at rush hour when famed Joshua Bell played for 53 minutes – six masterpieces. He was in ordinary street clothes with a hat on the ground for tips.

The Post was curious as to whether the passing public would stop to listen or just fly on by. The point was obvious – are we in too

much of a hurry to enjoy the small bounties of life?

Doubtless, the passing crowd would have been more receptive to popular music rather than classical pieces. Still, a few stopped to listen. They donated \$150 – not bad for less than an hour.

As the media reports from time to time, street beggars make a pretty good living – only about 20% are homeless. A more recent trend is a twosome or threesome standing on opposite corners, earning much better than minimum wage.

Hey, it's free enterprise in action. What's the difference between them and their small-time hustle and the Wall Street titans who stole billions?

I confess I'm one of those people always hurrying. Early to Mass. Early to the Capitol. Early to the airport. Always in a hurry.

I've questioned myself a thousands times about my haste, trying to slow myself down. My late wife Helen would remark, "Are we running a race with somebody?"

My kids would moan and groan about being at church 15 minutes early. My answer was always the same: "Pray!"

If they had diagnosed Attention Deficit Disorder when I was a kid I would be the poster boy.

Sister Mildred, my second grade teacher, asked my mother for permission to tie my ankle to my desk with a scarf.

"He won't stay in his seat," she explained. "When he finishes his work he dashes around the room checking other kids' papers. He often heads to the window to give the class a weather report."

Still A Catholic

I ran into an old friend at a chili cook-off the other day. We had barely finished a handshake when he launched into a religious rant.

"You're still Catholic?"

I nodded.

"Why? I started out as a strict Southern Baptist, then switched to Unitarian," he said, "then I finally gave up. I'm a committed atheist."

Before I could use my typical rejoinder, that it's a free country and you can worship or not, he was obviously on a roll.

"They're just hypocrites," he said. "It's all about money. Money, money. Look around. Hungry people. People hurting, and how do most of the Christians reply?"

"I'll have to give you Catholics this – the new Pope is doing a lot of the right things. Hard to believe he's the same guy who was the enforcer for the previous Pope.

"I think the country needs a religion, a kind of social religion," he said, ending his rant and switching to politics. I had no chance to reply.

It's true that atheism is on the rise in America. A Pew study revealed that a lot of folks are turning off organized religion – as many as 15% of Christians no longer affiliate.

The fastest growing denominations? Two – Roman Catholic and Pentecostal. [Does it seem that every time a large building stands empty, it's filled by "the church of what's happening now?"]

Leaders of the new atheism are clearly authors Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins, selling books and speaking for huge fees.

I've had atheist friends but only one kept hammering me over the head, clearly an agenda of many of the new breed of nonbelievers. I lost his friendship because I grew weary of his criticism.

Talk about militant! In some states they're sponsoring huge billboards. They have a huge web presence. Many on the Religious Right are the most intolerant folk I've encountered in my lifetime. One bigot told me that George W. Bush was chosen of God because he was "born again."

From Pat Robertson to Benny Hinn, Jimmy Swaggart and that ilk, they have turned religion into a money grab – endlessly passing the plate, looting the savings of the unsuspecting elderly.

My mother-in-law was a firm believer in Oral Roberts. She would lay her hands

The scarf worked. Sister knew I was uncomfortable but she made it up to me by giving me the job of dusting the erasers. That meant I was getting out of class 15 minutes early. Wow!

At St. John's School in McAlester we were required to lay our heads on our desk for a few minutes after recess to settle us down.

Not me. Sister would stand by my desk and would gently push my head back down – repeatedly. Looking back, I think she got a kick out of it.

My mother said I was born on "fast forward" and the only one of her nine kids who wouldn't take a nap.

I was too uncoordinated to box, too short to play basketball, too slow to run track. So at the suggestion of Sister Mary Andrew, I concentrated on writing. It eventually paid off.

After we adopted our two children we made every state lodge multiple times, climbed every hill, toured Colorado and New Mexico, swam every summer at South Padre Island.

Marti and Philip turned out splendidly. Parents ought to keep kids busy, busy, busy, doing everything as a family – it's key to raising good kids.

At work I was the same way – first one there. At the Tulsa Tribune I went down on Saturdays although we didn't have a Sunday paper. I was a demon for work.

If I sleep six hours it's a good night. This was a blessing when we started the Observer because I was a one-man editorial department. I was able to speak across the country, cover legislative sessions, and still Helen and I produced an award-winning journal of commentary.

Harmon Phillips, my managing editor at the Tribune [I named my son after him], described me as a "self-starter." I didn't wait for an assignment, I was too busy chasing down tips, producing page one stories.

My "affliction" also made me competitive – I had to be the first with a news story. The Observer has never entered any kind of journalism contest, yet it racked up 48 local, state and national journalism awards. [Helen kept count.]

I know they are a handful, but keep a keen eye on hyperactive kids because they may have a head start – I did.

on the radio when he made his concluding blessing. From a very meager income, she sent him \$5 a month, truly a widow's mite.

Author Max Blumenthal is trying to find a middle ground in his new book, *Patience With God: Faith For People Who Don't Like Religion Or Atheism*. [He explains what is wrong with much of evangelicalism – besides paranoia and hate! – and why he got out.]

He says the new atheist movement is being led by several egomaniac, intolerant fundamentalists and isn't just about non-belief in God. The leaders of this movement make loud, repeated, and bold claims about atheism being better and more moral, more ethical, and a vastly improved alternative to religion. They also name names when blasting religious leaders.

If you are a believer, don't let the faux preachers turn you off. Stick to the basic message of virtually all religions. They are basically good. Remember how the Klan used the cross? The same for some Muslims killing themselves and others.

The money grubbing by TV's Joel Osteen, child-molesting Roman Catholic priests, Islamic suicide bombers, et al, are not representative of the basic beliefs of their religions.

It's just as legitimate to ask about the character of the people pointing out religious people's moral faults and naming names. Check out Larry Jones, the disgraced founder of Feed The Children.

We were early supporters, spending a lot of ink promoting his attempt to feed woebegone children. It grew into a billion dollar a year effort. Then came personal greed. Little wonder he has been ousted by his board. [A lawsuit is pending.]

Many Christians admire atheists David Hume and Daniel Denett, and often agree with their critique of religion. And Lord knows the criticism is justified after the near takeover of America by the Religious Right, birthers, teapartiers, etc., following the attempt to murder Americans 9/11-style. Religious fanatics deserve disdain.

Americans, including me, attempt to paint with too broad a brush stroke when we see a religious figure degrading his or her faith. Remember, the role model is Jesus or Allah, not the followers.

If you're searching for a church, synagogue or mosque, check out their basic beliefs, always remembering what John told Jesus' followers: Not by word but by deed. Anybody can mouth off. True believers live it.

Regarding Life After Brad Henry



ARNOLD HAMILTON
Editor

In less than a year, Gov. Brad Henry will depart his second-floor, east-wing Capitol office for the last time, wrapping up two terms that began and ended in fiscal crisis.

Unlike his predecessor, Republican Frank Keating, known as Gov. Pop-Off or the Mouth of the South, Henry will be remembered as Mr. Nice Guy, so collegial, so bland that it almost seemed his life's mission was to be everyone's best friend.

The voters liked his style. They not only elected him twice – the first time against a pro football Hall of Famer with movie star good looks – but they also didn't tire of him, a remarkable achievement given how many two-term chief executives are wished good riddance as they exit public life.

Indeed, the latest Tulsa World Oklahoma Poll shows that Democrat Henry, despite the gloomy economy, sagging revenues and crippling bud-

get cuts, is still the most popular political figure statewide in Oklahoma.

Of course, it's possible Henry's 67% approval rating says more about Oklahoma voters than it does about him. After all, he scores only two percentage points higher than wacky Republican Sen. Tom Coburn, who manages to embarrass us nationally and internationally almost every time he steps in front of a microphone.

Henry is what he is – one of the nicest people you'd ever meet. You'd love to have him as your next-door neighbor. Two vignettes:

In spring 2008, Frosty, Beverly and I attended the annual Gridiron show at Oklahoma City's Stage Center theater. It was the Thursday night performance, when many of the state politicians traditionally show up, pretending to enjoy their skewering.

The governor was there, and at intermission, he made his way across the auditorium, knelt on one knee and put his arm around Frosty, expressing his heartfelt condolences for the recent loss of Frosty's beloved wife of 54 years, Helen. It was a poignant moment I'll never forget.

Later that year, Bev and I were walking with friends through Seaport Village in San Diego the night before OSU played in the Holiday Bowl. Bev abruptly stopped, turned around and studied a couple and their daughters who had just passed by.

"I think that was the governor," she said.

"Governor," I hollered, and he and Kim and the girls stopped and chatted with us for several minutes.

I've covered seven governors in three states over the last 30-plus years, and it's rare when you see one traveling without security or staff. It was vintage Henry: He and his family out on the town, just regular folks. No pretense, no airs.

That said, Brad Henry is not necessarily the guy you want next to you in the political foxhole. In much the same way I'm often distressed by Barack Obama's proclivity for consensus building, Henry's *Kumbaya* approach to leadership often drives me to distraction.

Sad to say, Henry never embraced the guerilla model that proved so successful for Republican Keating who battled Democratic legislative majorities in both his terms. Keating joined forces with legislative Republicans to create a veto-proof minority that ended up controlling, if not choreographing, much of the legislative agenda.

Henry used his veto pen – and the Democratic minorities of his era – more cautiously, thwarting what he viewed as only the most egregious legislation. He never went looking for a fight.

Still, Henry's insistence on bipartisanship ended up infuriating many in his own party who felt – rightly so – he didn't employ the power of the governorship to support Democratic candidates and causes and help the party's fight to recoup legislative losses.

Indeed, he was less interested in party building than any governor I've covered in Oklahoma, Texas and California.

"My focus is on building a great state, not building a political party," the governor once told me. "I'll leave that to others. I try to do what's right. I sleep very well at night. I know that I'm never going to please the partisans in either party."

It wasn't political spin. He really wasn't much interested in party affairs. To hear Democratic insiders tell it, Henry often was slow to make time to meet with party leaders – or was all-but-dragged into hosting fund-raising events.

Can you imagine Keating – or any Republican governor, for that matter – publicly expressing no interest in helping strengthen his party? Henry's tenure will long be lamented as an opportunity lost for Oklahoma Democrats struggling to get the party back on its feet.

Henry's biggest mistake, though, was getting caught up in the economic good times that arrived midway through his first term, a huge relief after the \$700 million budget shortfall he inherited from Keating. Henry acquiesced to Republican demands to reduce taxes, signing into law about \$770 million in cuts – money that sure would come in handy right now with the state facing a \$1 billion budget hole next fiscal year.

At the time, the governor noted that "you always have to be concerned about a

downturn in the economy. One thing that is inevitable, that I can guarantee you, as we sit here today, that sometime in the future there will be a downturn in our economy. I can't tell you exactly when it is going to be, but it will occur."

So, why didn't he listen to himself? Why didn't he heed Oklahoma's boom-bust history and insist the state take what he knew would be a short-term largesse to invest in education or highways or other critical needs? Why slash already low taxes [Oklahoma is near the bottom nationally in combined state and local taxes], especially since the state's Constitution makes it all but impossible to raise taxes, even in times of emergency?

Just like GOP legislative leaders who thumped their chests over the tax cuts, Henry now is living with a nightmare budget scenario he helped create.

Still, it's hard to imagine where Oklahoma would be if Henry hadn't brandished his veto pen and derailed some goofy legislation churned out by the Republican majority.


Last year, for example, the governor nixed a bill that would have criminalized any form of embryonic stem cell research. Supporters called it a "pro-life" measure, but in truth it was an example of religious zealotry run amok.

"It's important to point out that this legislation does nothing to stop an abortion or save a single life," the governor said, "but it does threaten life-saving research and unjustly criminalizes scientists who perform important work, the very kind of research that is supported by pro-life conservatives like former First Lady Nancy Reagan."

Even the Tulsa and Oklahoma City Chambers of Commerce lobbied against the bill, recognizing that cutting-edge medical research – think Dr. Jordan Tang and Alzheimer's breakthroughs at the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation – is fast becoming an important cog in an Oklahoma economy sorely in need of diversification beyond energy and agriculture.



The conventional wisdom is that Americans love divided government, persuaded it serves as a governor on the excesses of one-party domination. In Washington, Democrats currently control the Congress and the presidency, though their hold on power may be slipping. In Oklahoma, next year's elections could – if early polls are prescient – give Republicans not only control of the Legislature, but also of the governorship.

It's enough to awaken Oklahoma Democrats in a cold sweat. Suddenly, the strains of *Kumbaya* are much more appealing.



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Will GOP Finally Keep Its Health Promises?

By Wanda Jo Stapleton

As Co-President Pro Tempore of the State Senate in 2007, Sen. Glenn Coffee offered this soothing promise in his pre-session press release: "Senate Republicans believe every Oklahoman should have access to affordable, quality healthcare ... and will work to lower the cost of prescription drugs."

Why, then, during the 2007 session did only Republicans – 34 of them – abandon sick children by voting against the "All Kids Act"?

That bill increased the number of poor children eligible to receive health care through Medicaid by up to 42,000 and was financed by a tobacco tax increased by voters in 2004.

Also, in 2007, the Republican leadership refused to even hear three bills filed by Democratic Sen. Andrew Rice – bills that would have prevented unwanted pregnancies, even abortions, by making contraceptives more readily available.

One bill required that health facilities providing medical care to rape victims offer emergency contraception as a treatment option. Another required insurance companies to cover contraceptives at the same rate that they would cover any other prescription drug. The final bill required that pharmacies fill prescriptions for contraceptives and provide availability to over-the-counter emergency contraceptives, or follow guidelines set forth to fill a prescription in a timely manner.

In 2005, Republican Rep. Kris Steele – who will become House Speaker next year – stopped a bill to re-import prescription drugs, an issue pushed by Gov. Brad Henry in his State of the State address.

Steele neutered the bill with an amendment that required approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration [FDA] for any drug re-imported. Of course, the FDA had recently cracked down on drug re-importation by threatening civil and criminal action for companies daring to get drugs from Canada.

Finally, in 2009, Steele helped insurance companies put profits ahead of kids' health by leading the Republicans to kill Nick's Law in the House Economic Development and Financial Services Committee. Nick's Law required health insurance companies to cover children with autism.

Strange that the bill wasn't assigned to the Public Health Committee where it belonged.

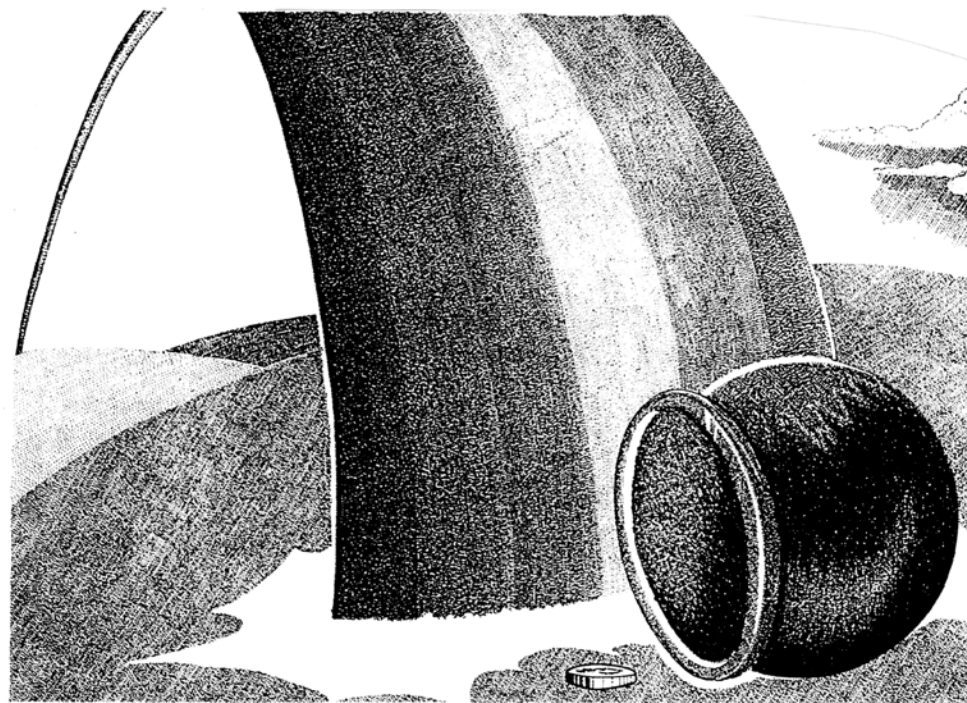
A New Year – a new chance to get it right.

NICK'S LAW

Nick's Law is coming back in the 2010 Legislature. Autism is a "neurological disorder," according to the Autism Society of America. It's a medical problem, which can be treated. Last year's version required various health insurance providers to cover autism treatment for children.

This year's version is in a different format. This new approach gives cover to Republicans who declared Nick's Law dead until 2011.

Specifically, Sen. Jay Paul Gumm, D-Durant, has filed SB 1316 which would add autism to a list of pre-existing conditions covered by the Oklahoma Health Insurance High Risk Pool [OHRP]. This pool, in conjunction with the State of Oklahoma, offers health insurance to Oklahoma residents who have been denied coverage for certain medical conditions listed on the OHRP website. The premium rates are also listed on this website.



Proposed autism coverage will be subject to a maximum benefit of \$36,000 per year and is intended for children, not adults.

RE-IMPORTATION OF PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Sen. Jim Wilson, D-Tahlequah, has filed SB 1283 for the 2010 legislative session. This bill authorizes any licensed Oklahoma pharmacist, with a valid prescription, and any licensed wholesale drug distributor in Oklahoma to procure prescription drugs from a certified Canadian supplier. Wholesale distributors can then dispense to licensed pharmacists, and pharmacists can dispense to Oklahomans at dramatically lower prices than they presently charge.

In addition to Canada, pharmacists and wholesalers can procure prescription drugs from a "permitted country" which meets the necessary standards approved by the State Board of Pharmacy.

In closing, I am reminded of the Chinese Proverb: "Talk doesn't cook rice." So I'm trusting that the Legislature will dispense with the hot air and turn up the heat to produce – as Senate President Pro Tem Coffee promised in his 2007 press release cited above – "affordable, quality healthcare" and "to lower the cost of prescription drugs."

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

Taking Vet Medicine Back To Dark Ages

By Ruth Steinberger

Rep. Don Armes, R-Lawton, has previously described himself as a cowboy, saddled up and ready to defend a righteous cause – "let's cowboy up." And while he is undertaking a cause, it's not particularly righteous and, in fact, could put Oklahoma in non-compliance with federal prescription drug laws and all known common sense.

During the last legislative session, Armes along with Rep. Dale Dewitt, R-Braman, proposed a rider to a livestock handling bill which would have deregulated portions of the Oklahoma Veterinary Practice Act, allowing lay people to perform procedures which are currently performed only by licensed veterinarians.

Those procedures are regulated in other states, require prescription drugs and may be painful to animals if these drugs [which are obtained by lay people in violation of federal laws] are used improperly or not used at all.

POOR TREATMENT OF ANIMALS

As a part of the animal welfare community it is easy to see how the deregulation of prescription veterinary drugs, and medical procedures performed by lay people, will lead to a casual treatment of animal medical needs and an overall debased treatment of animals.

Likewise, Oklahomans can continue to be shocked by dark secrets that seem to be commonplace in our state, including the at-home c-sections found in the clandestine puppy mills around Oklahoma – secrets that most Oklahomans would choose to see eliminated, not legitimized.

Armes agenda is multi-faceted, and the legislation he has and is proposing would actually place our state laws in contradiction to federal prescription drug laws, and doing so for the profit of a very few.

This session, Armes is on the bandwagon again.

He held an interim study to justify allowing lay people to operate as unregulated equine tooth floaters. They would be able to sell their services, including administering prescription drugs, with no formal training, no oversight and with-

out malpractice coverage.

ACCESS TO NARCOTICS

In that hearing, the subject was broached regarding having the Oklahoma Veterinary Practice Act revised so as to allow unfettered access to drugs while placing Oklahoma laws in opposition to federal laws. Opening up the veterinary practice act to allow unrestricted access to prescription drugs seems to be Armes' goal.

In the last five years one horse has died and six were severely injured by unlicensed tooth floaters illegally using these prescription drugs. Also in Oklahoma a tooth floater was arrested last year with 11 bottles of horse tranquilizer, a drug commonly referred to as a "date rape" drug, in his truck. Armes' answer to the illegal use of these drugs is to make it legal for lay people to have, use and sell them! It begs asking what his motive is.

During the same time period not one licensed veterinarian was reported for a similar incident occurring during an equine dental procedure.

Federal law requires that prescription labeled drugs for animals may be prescribed or dispensed by a licensed veterinarian only when a valid veterinarian-client-patient [VCPR] relationship exists. This VCPR requirement would be removed from the Oklahoma Veterinary Practice Act.

FDA WON'T HAVE MANPOWER

Perhaps Rep. Armes knows that the Food and Drug Administration does not have sufficient manpower to police the VCPR requirements so hopes to "skate" under the federal law by terminating the state's authority to enforce the law. How this could affect Oklahoma does not seem to concern him.

As a state with near bottom rankings in many quality of life issues, a state lagging behind in money for education and social programs, a law-change designed for the profit of a few, and at the potential expense of everyone but those few, is

See ANIMALS Page 9

Kern's Now Meddling In Affairs Of Straight

By James Nimmo

I'm compatible with Sally Kern!

Yup, you read it right. Though Kern and I are polar opposites religiously, politically, orientationally and educationally, I'm compatible with Oklahoma Republican Rep. Sally Kern and her newly introduced HB 2279 which, if passed, would not allow incompatibility to be used as grounds for a divorce between opposite-gendered [of course] adults.

Kern, who has hyperventilated while sniffing in gay and lesbian closets, has now turned her big nose to sniffing between the sheets of the heterosexual marriage bed.

Pre-existing conditions such as minor children in the household, a marriage of 10 years or longer or written objection by the other spouse would prevent using incompatibility as grounds for an Oklahoma divorce.

I'm so compatible with Kern over her non-divorce bill I could be the son she almost had. Not only that, I'll see her bet and raise her one.

AN IDEA TO EXPAND KERN'S BILL

This being Oklahoma, the third hole in America's Bible belt, I wouldn't bet the rent on this bill dying in committee, the fate of most of the worst of Okie legislators' submissions. Therefore, I'm proposing a bill that would take Kern's aspirations a step higher.

Since a judge, in effect, examines the two people engaged in a divorce proceeding to see if at least one of the parties has sufficient grounds for divorce, why not have a judge examine the proposed bride and groom at the beginning of the procedure when they apply for an Oklahoma marriage license?

Why not head off any incompatible marriages before they become incompatible divorces?

In my bill, the hopeful newlyweds would have to prove to the examiner not only their undying love for each other, but also that their financial prospects are propitious, their religious beliefs are rooted in the Christian Bible, their educational backgrounds are conducive to a lifetime of constructive pillow talk and – above all – both parties are willing and able to produce children as fast as physically possible.

MEDDLING IN THE AFFAIRS OF STRAIGHT

A failing grade in any of these aspects would disallow the issuance of the marriage license.

If Kern wants to meddle in straight people's private affairs just as she's meddled in gay people's affairs, shouldn't she be willing to fully insert the police power of the state right from the beginning of a proposed marriage?

In fact, Kern should revise her divorce bill as a state question needing approval from the voters. If marriage is so important that it must be denied to same-gender taxpayers, as it is in Oklahoma, why not let straight voters police themselves?

As a staunch and starchy "kern-servative" – as she bills herself – shouldn't she be strong enough to impose the state government into all aspects of married life?

SCHIZOPHRENIC VIEW OF PRIVACY

She claims her bill will alleviate many of Oklahoma's societal ills: "... [I]f we could reduce divorce in Oklahoma we would also reduce our prison population and welfare rolls while benefiting families and children. That's a goal worth pursuing."

She continues, "If we can lower our divorce rate, our quality of life will improve and we will also reduce the need for many state services in this time of budget shortfall, freeing up money to go to core services such as schools and roads."

Dank To Bengé: Step Up Or Step Down

The state representative who has been most active in pushing for property tax reform is urging House Speaker Chris Bengé to "step up on this vital issue or step down and let someone else lead the House" in enacting it.

"I was frankly astonished by the Speaker's recent statements in opposition to these simple and fair reforms," said state Rep. David Dank, R-OKC, who has authored measures that would cap annual property tax increases at 3%, and freeze those taxes for seniors over 65.

"Not only are his statements out of touch with the core Republican principle of limited government we were sent here to espouse, they are factually incorrect," Dank said.

He said his property tax reforms would result in no revenue reductions to schools or counties, and would have no impact on the state budget. Bengé was quoted as claiming they would "reduce revenue."

BUILT IN TAX HIKE

"How is a 3% annual increase a reduction?" Dank said. "The simple truth is that we have a built-in annual tax increase for literally thousands of Oklahoma homeowners during a severe recession.

"At the current 5% rate of increase, when you compound it, that amounts to doubling everyone's property taxes every 13 years. That's just wrong and I am baffled that a Republican Speaker is opposed to alleviating it.

"Speaker Bengé needs to step up on this vital issue by allowing the House to vote on it or step down and let someone else lead the House to make it happen," Dank said. "It is especially troubling that he continues to oppose sensible property tax reform when the Senate Republican Caucus has made it a centerpiece of their 2010 legislative agenda.



Who knew that keeping children in a warring household with two unhappy parents was the solution that would help reduce Oklahoma's budget deficit?

Again, Kern is using children as a shield for her schizophrenic view of privacy.

Remember in 2009 she proposed and passed a legislative resolution objecting to a United Nations project to protect children from violence. If she wants to protect children from the harms of divorce, why is she against protecting children from violence?

KERN'S VIEW OF U.S. EXCEPTIONALISM

Remember the joke that was going around concerning the mock acceptance of same-gender marriage? It went something like, "Why should gays and lesbians be spared the pitfalls and expense of married life?"

My new version of that joke is, "Why should straights be spared the intrusiveness of Sally Kern poking her nose into their marriages or divorces?"

Or here's another joke, this time from one of Kern's heroes, Ronald Reagan. In one of his speeches, he said, poking maliciously at government programs, "I'm from the government and I'm here to help you." Isn't Sally Kern from the government? Is she here to help you?

Among many religious fundamentalists and political conservatives [but I repeat myself] there is the thinking that America is an exceptional country. Now I know what they mean by that. They're saying, "America must play by the rules I set down, but when it's convenient, I get an exception."

In Kern's case she claims an exception for her divorce bill and its intrusive meddling in the private matrimonial affairs of adults.

– The author lives in Oklahoma City

"Honestly, either he just doesn't get it or he is carrying water for those special interests who think the higher the taxes, the better. I know I am not the only one in the House who is terribly disappointed with Speaker Bengé."

HE HAS THE VOTES

Dank said many of his fellow GOP House members have told him they are eager to support the two property tax reforms. He said several Democrats have also voiced their support.

"I am convinced the votes are there in the House and Senate to send these reforms to a vote of the people," he said. "Right now, one man is standing in the way.

"When I discussed this initially with Speaker Bengé he told me that if we put these two measures on the ballot to let the people decide, they would pass," Dank said.

"I told him that was the whole idea. We're here to represent the taxpayers, not the special interests."

Dank's twin measures "are not tax cuts, but tax restraints," he said. "All we are asking is that we slow the annual growth in property taxes and freeze these increases for seniors, who are often on fixed incomes. These measures would not reduce ad valorem revenues by one thin dime. They would have zero impact on the state budget. The Speaker is simply wrong on that."

WILLING TO WORK WITH HIM

Dank said he would be happy to work with Bengé on repealing a number of questionable tax credits which are costing state coffers millions in annual revenue.

See SPEAKER Page 9

Workers' Comp On Chamber's Hit List

The Oklahoma State Chamber and their lackeys in the Legislature won't be happy until injured workers are left without help.

A so-called "overhaul" of Oklahoma's workers' compensation system is said by Republican legislative leaders to be "essential to economic development in the state and will be one of the top priorities of House Republicans this legislative session."

Bills have been filed changing the workers' comp system to profit businesses.

"Making Oklahoma more business-friendly is critical to our state's long-term economic stability and allows for an opportunity for economic growth in the future," said House Speaker Chris Benge, R-Tulsa.

BUSINESS IS UNHAPPY

He claims that there is currently deep business dissatisfaction with the workers' comp system, which is "plagued by fraud and high costs and rarely produces consistently fair and equitable results."

He failed to cite a single example of waste or fraud – because there are none. Rep. Dan Sullivan, who has sought changes to the court in the past and chaired an interim study on the issue last year, will attempt again this session to shore up the system, eliminate fraud, reduce costs and protect workers.

Sullivan, R-Tulsa, has repeatedly attempted to protect fat cats from lawsuits.

At least he's blunt, saying, "many of the bills filed this year are based on months of collaboration with his working group of longtime industry professionals and The State Chamber."

CHANGES PLANNED

The changes being sought will include defining the term "surgery" for purposes of compensation, strengthening the value-added attorney fee provision and capping the time for temporary total disability.

A reduction in the number of workers' comp judges may also be considered, coupled with a more equitable distribution of judges between Oklahoma City and Tulsa.

"Countless hours have gone into crafting these changes. They are not haphazard, and seek to protect workers over attorneys," said Sullivan.

Another option that may be considered would be a move to an administrative workers' compensation system.

Currently, attorney involvement is 50% higher in Oklahoma's workers' comp



system than the national average, said Rep. Mark McCullough, R-Sapulpa.

Despite the fact that the benefits specified in state law are comparable to workers comp benefits in other states, the actual cost of those benefits in Oklahoma is the most expensive in the nation, Republican lawmakers contend.

The current system is not broken. The State Chamber won't rest until their lackeys in the Legislature further reduce what is owed to injured workers.

Would media please quit calling it "reform."

Gumm Re-Introduces Children's Cabinet Bill

Oklahoma can and should do a better job of helping vulnerable children with existing resources – that's according to state Sen. Jay Paul Gumm who has reintroduced legislation to create Oklahoma's first-ever Children's Cabinet.

His measure had bipartisan support last year, winning unanimous approval in the Senate, but was never given a hearing in the House of Representatives.

"Politicians love to talk about family values and how important children are to the future of this state – but facts show Oklahoma has not done a good job of making those words and ideals a reality," said Gumm, D-Durant.

"When you look at the number of our children living in poverty, languishing from abuse and neglect, the low birth-weights, teen death rates, and high number of drop-outs, it is obvious that this state has a lot of work to do," he said.

Gumm explained the Children's Cabinet proposal contained in SB 1276 is mod-

eled after those in other states and would help streamline services for agencies and organizations that currently serve Oklahoma's children.

The children's Cabinet would include 15 top ranking officials whose agencies have interests in children's policy in Oklahoma. Support staff would be provided by the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth.

"I believe we have many of the tools in place to make a significant impact that will improve the lives of thousands of Oklahoma children – it's simply a matter of making it a higher priority in government," Gumm said.

"This would not create more bureaucracy or require additional funds – it's simply a matter of creating public policy that will enable us to better focus on our common goal which is to improve the lives of this state's children, and in doing so, create a better future for all Oklahomans."

ANIMALS

From Page 7

reminiscent of frontier day politics. Oklahoma cannot afford legislators bent on destroying infrastructure.

The overuse of drugs in food animals has sparked nationwide concern. However, if Armes prevails, the consumer can wind up with food containing residues or microbes with increased resistance to critically important drugs that are normally used to treat diseases.

Likewise, unregulated diagnosis and treatment of animals by lay people is very likely to increase animal suffering. In a broader sense it weakens our state's ability for early recognition of devastating animal disease threats.

PRACTICING WITHOUT A LICENSE

The bottom line is that Armes' agenda would allow laymen [his neighbors] to perform veterinary procedures, and charge for them, yet have no regulatory oversight. All of the procedures require the use of veterinary drugs that lay people cannot be licensed to obtain and sell.

Some of the drugs cannot be prescribed, thereby requiring illegal use of the drugs or doing without; potentially horses could have teeth pulled with no sedation and puppy mill dogs would continue to have C-sections on the home kitchen table.

It's about the profit motive and the spirit of the Tea Party movement by people who feel that government should not be allowed to regulate them.

The taxpayers of Oklahoma have for 60 years supported a veterinary education program with the anticipation that the graduates will protect the health and well-being of their animals.

They have also funded award winning veterinary technician programs where students are educated to prevent and relieve animal suffering under the supervision of licensed veterinarians.

Individual legislators now want to undermine these training programs in veterinary medicine to satisfy the wishes of a few.

Likewise, although many Oklahoma counties do not have even one veterinarian, Armes' proposals would further erode the income base of rural practitioners.

Scuttlebutt has it that Armes and friends have their sights set on directing the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture if things go their way in the upcoming governor's race. It will be vital for Oklahomans to press the gubernatorial candidates for clear positions on these issues and to hold them to their promises.

– The author lives in Bristow

SPEAKER

From Page 8

"Unfortunately Speaker Benge was the House author of a bill that authorized some of these costly transferable tax credits that drain millions from the state budget without any transparency, accountability, and without creating a single job," Dank said.

He said if the Legislature fails to act on his twin property tax reforms, a much more drastic limitation similar to California's Proposition 13 is likely to be introduced by initiative petition.

"People see school districts giving large raises to superintendents and counties trying to raise executive salaries at the same time they are pleading poverty and threatening to lay off front line workers. Taxpayers have simply had enough," he said.

"These sensible reforms would allow reasonable revenue growth and curtail those abuses. I call on Speaker Benge to bring them to the floor early in the 2010 session or return to the ranks and allow us to choose a Speaker more in tune with the people's will."

BOOKS

A Guilty Pleasure, But What's The Point?

By Tim Rutten

GAME CHANGE

Obama and the Clintons, McCain and Palin, and the Race of a Lifetime
By John Heilemann and Mark Halperin
HarperCollins Publishers
448 pages, \$27.99

Nearly 50 years ago, the political journalist and historian Theodore H. White was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for his insider's account of John F. Kennedy's presidential campaign, *The Making of the President 1960*.

His success with that and subsequent campaign chronicles helped establish topical nonfiction as a distinct genre, situated somewhere between journalism and history, that later practitioners such as David Halberstam, Neil Sheehan and Bob Woodward have used to make substantial contributions to our civic conversation.

Game Change: Obama and the Clintons, McCain and Palin, and the Race of a Lifetime may be the logical extension of White's project. And yet, this book by two extraordinary political journalists, New York magazine's John Heilemann and Time magazine's Mark Halperin, nonetheless achieves a kind of decadence.

This is a volume that might best be characterized as poli-porn.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

That's not to say it isn't deeply and knowledgeably reported and presented with all the cool sophistication one would expect from two accomplished political reporters. But the question that begs to be answered is: To what end is all this effort and ability expended?

Had we known many of the things Heilemann and Halperin disclose before the last general election, people would have had a chance to weigh the implications and vote accordingly. A year into Barack Obama's presidency, a great deal of this sensational material, while in all likelihood true, seems prurient.

Is there really any living American beyond the age of reason who doesn't know that there's a disparity between the lives our political leaders actually live and the ones they attempt to project in public? Is there any serious student of politics who doesn't know that most national political campaigns are snake pits filled with dysfunction and back-biting?

If they weren't, who would be around to tell reporters like Heilemann and Halperin all these juicy inside stories?

A GUILTY PLEASURE

Still, if you're a political junkie – as this reader is – their book, while a guilty pleasure, also is compulsively readable. Once begun, you can't put it down. Poli-porn.

Given the nonstop publicity that's attended this book's rollout, you're probably already familiar with many of *Game Change's* more sensational revelations. Some of the politicians embarrassed on these pages already are into their second round of apologies; others are having their remarks debated on Larry King, which is the contemporary equivalent of being sentenced to the stocks.

One thing that gives *Game Change* its tabloid tang is the authors' decision to build so much of their account around the candidates' marriages. It's interesting but odd, given that political journalists of this experience are bound to know that we've had at least as many successful presidents who were miserably or indifferently married as we've had those who were happily attached.

Based on Heilemann's and Halperin's reporting, by the way, the best couple won. By their account, Barack Obama is deeply devoted to our current first lady and she to him. They enjoy each other's company and counsel more than that of any other person and both dote on their daughters.

THE COUPLE FROM HELL

By contrast, former North Carolina Sen. John Edwards and his wife, Elizabeth, come across as the couple from hell. As reported in these pages, he is delusional, megalomaniacal, self-absorbed and breathtakingly irresponsible; she is condescending, viciously insulting and shrewish – Lady Macbeth with magnolias. It's hard to imagine two people whose public personas have been more at odds with the private reality than apparently has been the case with these people.

Similarly, Sen. John McCain and his wife, Cindy, are reported here to quarrel incessantly, when they're not ignoring each other. At one point during the campaign, McCain's top aides became so concerned about reports that she was carrying on a long-term affair with a man in Arizona that they forced the candidate to confront her over it.

Hillary and Bill Clinton inevitably come in for their share of scrutiny, particularly surrounding the now well-rehearsed revelation that her campaign had to set up a secret three-person war room to handle what they expected to be a scandal over the former president's "serious" romantic infatuation with another woman . . . as opposed to his garden-variety messing around.

CLINTON'S MUSCULAR LIBIDO

Dealing with the implications of her husband's muscular libido is reported here as just one source of the now-secretary of state's habitual paranoia and grudge-nourishing. Resentment and self-pity are reportedly her default emotions, and her fondness for conspiracy theories apparently was abetted in this campaign by writer Sidney Blumenthal, a longtime aide nicknamed "Grassy Knoll" by other campaign workers.

Hillary Clinton and Blumenthal were convinced that Michelle Obama had used the epithet "whitey" in an address to college students and spent an inordinate

amount of time beating the bushes for a nonexistent tape. The candidate's paranoia extended to the press, whose coverage she labeled "a total hit job, day in and day out."

For sheer corrosive power, however, nothing in the book quite matches the portrait of Sarah Palin, whom McCain dragged into the race less than a week before the convention, after it became clear the party never would accept his pal Joe Lieberman, the Democratic defector, as his running mate.

[There's an unconsciously funny anecdote in which GOP strategist Karl Rove calls Lieberman and asks him not to accept the nomination for the sake of his good friend McCain, since it would split the party and doom his candidacy. Wow, did Rove ever misjudge his man on that one.]

WHY ARE THERE TWO KOREAS?

McCain's aides were taken aback by Palin's lack of knowledge [they couldn't, for example, get her to understand why there were two Koreas], her childish petulance and her sullenly uncommunicative behavior. Some came to wonder if she was mentally unstable or perhaps suffering from post-partum depression.

Even so, it's hard to come away from this account without feeling a stir of sympathy for an unprepared woman, plucked from obscurity and thrown into the shark-filled deep end of the pool, when she didn't even know she couldn't swim.

Now, of course, she's a Fox News commentator, and one can only look forward to the upcoming segment in which she teaches Bill O'Reilly to field-dress a moose.

Heilemann and Halperin have said elsewhere that they wrote *Game Change* because "what was missing" from the 2008 political coverage and what "might be of enduring value" was "an intimate portrait of the candidates and spouses who [in our judgment] stood a reasonable chance of occupying the White House."

Well, now we have that and – though many will be entertained – it's a bit harder to see how we're better off.

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Loopy Congressmen Reflect Their Voters

By Saul Friedman

How come Oklahoma, where the waving wheat sure smells sweet, has produced two of the worst and most ineffective members of the United States Senate in Dr. Tom Coburn and James Mountain Inhofe? They make the rest of their Republican colleagues seem moderate – well, sort of.

In his latest caper, Inhofe went to the Copenhagen climate change summit as a self-described, one-person “truth squad.” As the top Republican on the Senate Environmental and Public Works Committee, Inhofe could bring responsible criticism, even skepticism to the issue of climate change.

Instead he has chosen to be a flat earther, calling former Vice President Al Gore “full of crap” and declaring global warming “the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people.”

BLAME IT ON HOLLYWOOD

When he was asked in Copenhagen [for four hours!] who perpetrated the hoax and why, Inhofe replied, “it started in the United Nations and the one in the United States who really grabbed ahold of this is the Hollywood elite.”

A Der Spiegel reporter, who doesn’t play by the neutered American rules, told Inhofe, “You’re ridiculous.”

Coburn is an ob/gyn known as “Dr. No” because of all the bills and nominations he has held up because he doesn’t believe in government [which pays him well and he is supposed to serve].

During the last days of the long health care reform debate, Coburn, who has sworn the Hippocratic oath to “do no harm,” suggested quite clearly that the American people should pray that one of the Democrats would not be able to make it to the Senate to cast the 60th vote to break a Republican filibuster.

There was no mistake that he was referring to the dean of the Senate, Democrat Robert Byrd of West Virginia, who is 92.

A WEAK DENIAL

Coburn’s one-man “Death Panel” took place on the floor of the storied Senate chamber, but no Republican stepped forward to remonstrate Coburn [Democrat Dick Durbin of Illinois asked Coburn to explain himself; Coburn said he meant no one to come to harm.] But I think he did.

The Republicans could have signaled they would not filibuster the procedural vote so that the frail, wheel-chair bound Sen. Byrd need not make the trip from his home on a snowy night.

But if Byrd did not attend to vote, the health care bill would have been stopped. So almost as if they were conspiring to worsen Byrd’s health, the Republicans repeatedly insisted on the procedural votes for which the Democrats needed Byrd.

BYRD WHEELED IN

But in defiance of Coburn’s call to prayer, Byrd was wheeled in for the 1 a.m. Monday vote and the health care bill was on its way to passage on Thursday. As it turned out, Inhofe was absent on one vote, as if it were a devilish answer to Coburn’s prayer.

I’ve gone on at length into the antics of these two men, who were elected to legislate and not make fools of themselves and Oklahoma voters, because I have great respect for democratic institutions like the U.S. Senate, in which only a few Americans get to serve.

But what strikes me about Coburn and Inhofe and their not-so-merry band of right-wingers is what they have in common.

They are virulently and absolutist anti-gay, anti-abortion, anti-taxes, anti-government and pro-gun. And these things they believe, they have said, because they purport to be Christians.

NOT JUDGMENTAL

I say “purport” because, as a Jew and lay person [who majored in philosophy], I cannot judge what is and what is not “Christian.” All I know, and value, is the Old Testament’s Ten Commandments and, in the New Testament, Jesus’ admonition that we should love one another.

Now to get to the controversial part of my rambling. When I asked a knowledgeable, church-going friend what sets Inhofe, Coburn and the rest of the very conservative southern Republicans apart from much of the rest of the country, he said, “They’re Christians,” as if that explained everything.

It is true that both Oklahomans are members of Washington’s “C-Street group,” a residence for fundamentalist Christian lawmakers who, under the guidance of a minister-adviser, try to impose their religious, theocratic values on policy. They make it a point to say they do not believe in the separation of church and state.

REFLECTING VOTERS BACK HOME

They may seem loopy, but according to a recent poll by the Pew Research Forum, they – and their right-wing cohorts in the House and Senate – appear to reflect constituents in their states and the region.

It’s hard to escape the conclusion that there is a correlation between the region’s religious fundamentalism and its preference for right-wing politics.

A new Gallup survey concluded that with 80% of Americans identifying themselves with Christian religion, “the United States remains dominantly a Christian nation” with the highest proportion in the traditional Bible Belt states of the South. Here’s how the Pew poll sums up its December findings:

“At least 85% of people living in Mississippi, South Carolina and Alabama say they are certain that God exists. By contrast, in Maine, Connecticut/Rhode Island



and New Hampshire/Vermont, fewer than six in 10 express absolute certainty of belief in God.”

OBVIOUS DIFFERENCES

The political differences are obvious.

More specifically, Oklahoma ranks 11th among the states in the percentage of people [80%] “who say they believe in God with absolute certainty,” seventh in the percentage of people [69%] who say religion is “very important in their lives” and seventh [50%] in the percentage of people who say they attend services at least once a week. All these percentages are well above the national average.

RANKING THE STATES

But more deeply religious on all measures are:

- Mississippi, which is No. 1, Republican Sens. Thad Cochran and Roger Wicker;
- Followed by South Carolina, Republican Sens. Lindsay Graham and James DeMint, said to be the most right-wing member of the Senate;
- Alabama, Republican Sens. Richard Shelby, who questioned President Obama’s citizenship, and Jeff Beauregard Sessions, who was denied a federal judgeship because of his racist past and who was criticized by Rush Limbaugh for asking Judge Sonia Sotomayor during her Supreme Court confirmation hearing, to pretend to be white and if she thought “Latino women were more qualified to be hair dressers or housekeepers;”
- Tennessee, Republican Sens. Lamar Alexander and Bob Corker, both of whom were among the 30 [mostly southern] Republicans to vote against legislation giving a rape victim the right to sue an employer who was responsible;
- Georgia, Republican Sens. Saxbe Chambliss and Johnny Isakson who have sought to bar their state from using any federal health program;
- Kentucky, Republican Sens. Jim Bunning and Mitch McConnell, the minority leader who has enforced the unanimous opposition to Obama among Republicans;
- Texas, Republican Sens. Kay Bailey Hutchison and John Cornyn.

A FEW EXCEPTIONS

There are a few exceptions – Democrats Blanche Lincoln in Arkansas, Mary Landrieu in Louisiana, Kay Hagan in North Carolina – all of whom serve with more conservative Republican colleagues from their states.

One particular exception seems to prove my point: Utah, of course, is not in the south. But it’s among the most religious states in the Pew poll because of the dominance of the Mormon Church.

Its Republican senators, Orin Hatch and Robert Bennett, while not as loony as some of their right-wing colleagues, are nevertheless unswerving conservatives who joined the rest of Republicans in opposing health care reform and virtually every Obama initiative.

BLACK CHURCHES LED

I may be on thin ice, but I don’t believe this says anything about Christianity. After all, the southern-based civil rights movement came from the mostly black Christian churches with help from white clergy, Protestants, Catholics and Jews.

But the white fundamentalist deep South is not only conservative, and often racist, it is also plagued by persistent poverty, which is worse in the south than any other region, and the greatest number of citizens without health insurance, with a minimal education.

That’s fertile soil for the demagoguery, political and religious, of right-wing politics.

– The author is a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter and columnist
www.timegoesby.net

High School Grads 234% More Likely Jobless

By Adele M. Stan

You know how bad the economy is, right? Maybe your 401(k) has tanked. Perhaps you were out of work for a few months. You could have a mortgage under water. Or your health insurance has an impossibly high deductible. Yeah, we're all singing the blues.

I've gotten out my violin to play a mournful accompaniment to our collective angst.

Wait, what's that I hear in the distance? A dissonant, thundering chord someone just hammered on the piano – a harsh interruption of my languid dirge. Now it repeats, getting louder and nearer.

It's the sound of rage, of people I don't know – millions of them – unable to make rent or feed their families. Why don't I know them? They don't have college degrees, and nearly everybody I know does.

The truth is, brothers and sisters, however much we the degreed are suffering, we don't know the half of it. And unless we familiarize ourselves with the other half very, very soon, what was supposed to be a new progressive era could quickly give way to the rage of the Tea Party.

UNEMPLOYMENT HIGH

We all know that unemployment is high – 10% nationwide, and higher than that in certain geographic pockets. [Michigan tops the states with more than 15%.] Economists tell us that when you factor in all the underemployed people, and those who have given up looking for work, the national employment picture is more like 17% who are either out of work or barely working.

But chances are, if you're at all like me, those numbers tell you that something's terribly wrong, but your day-to-day life is more or less holding together. Those who do not possess a college diploma are having a far more visceral experience of this recession.

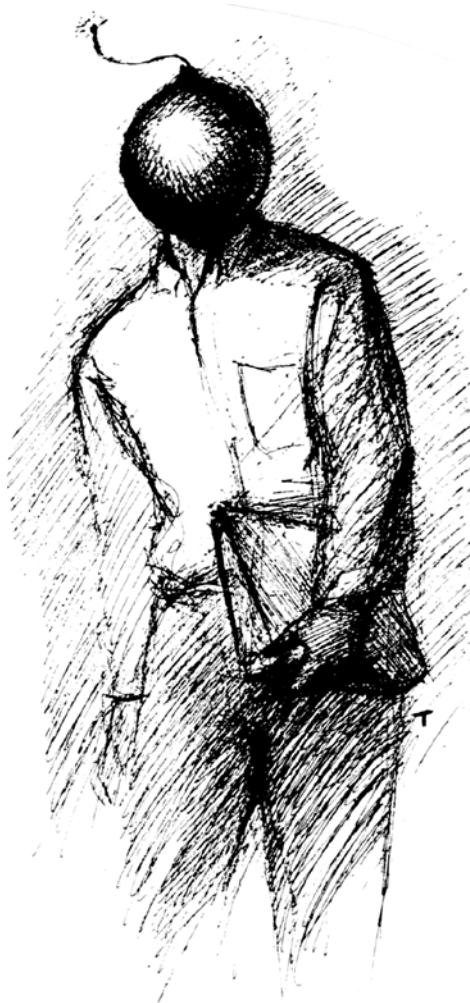
Among college graduates, the unemployment rate for October was 4.7%, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. For people with some college or an Associate's degree, the rate is almost doubled, at 9%.

Among high school graduates who never went to college, 11% are unemployed, while high-school dropouts show a whopping 15.5% unemployed.

YOU HAVE NO IDEA

So, unless you know a lot of people who never graduated college, you really have no idea just how bad things are.

Maybe that's why the political es-



tablishment in Washington, DC, was stunned when members of the Black Congressional Caucus came together in the House Financial Services Committee to halt a financial reform bill put together by committee Chairman Barney Frank, D-MA.

While CBC members took issue with some specific provisions in the bill, the real intent of the caucus members' stalling was to protest the administration's lackluster response to the growing jobs crisis within their constituencies.

Among African Americans, the unemployment rate for October was 15.7%, according to BLS, compared to 9.5% for white people. According to a 2003 survey by the U.S. Census, 17% of blacks had college diplomas, compared to 27.2% of whites.

MANY FAMILIES AFFECTED

A poll released by ABC News and the Washington Post found that 30% of Americans say that either they or someone in their household has lost a job in the past year, a finding the pollsters present as a new high. But, because it's an average, that figure tells only part of the story.

Those losses are not evenly distributed across the economy; pollsters found that people living in

households with income of less than \$50,000 were twice as likely to have experienced a job loss by a member of their household than those with earnings above that threshold.

Among the unemployed, 90% describe themselves as stressed, according to the ABC News/Washington Post poll. Of those stressed-out people, 58% say they're depressed, and 62% say they're angry. That's a lot of angry, depressed, stressed-out people.

The right is clearly much more aware of the popular unease, and its leaders are organizing, organizing, organizing. That's what the Tea Party movement is all about: it taps into that vein of seething discontent and redirects it toward racial resentment and distrust of the government.

MAJOR AFRO-TURF GROUPS

Using corporate dollars, leaders of the right have built an impressive infrastructure comprising two major astro-turfing groups – Americans for Prosperity and FreedomWorks – whose efforts are trumpeted through the megaphone of FOX News.

Then there's the community organizing done by FOX'S Glenn Beck through his own FOX television show, his radio show and his

9/12 Project Web site – in addition to the free publicity granted AFP and FreedomWorks on nearly all the FOX News programs.

The left has been building its infrastructure, too, but it's one that speaks to the college-educated, full of smartypants Web sites and a couple of elite think tanks, largely populated by people like me – and maybe you.

By that I mean people who don't live day to day, among the struggling parents of four or five kids, parents who used to earn a living in retail, or driving the trucks that stock the stores, or cranking out the cars we used to drive to the stores. Our distance from this reality leads us to the realm of wonkery and big ideas, perhaps willing to scuttle a health care bill if it has no public option, even if it would secure health care to millions for whom it is now out of reach.

HOPELESSLY ABSTRACT

We debate climate change and net neutrality, both of which seem hopelessly abstract to people who are facing eviction from their homes.

Meanwhile, the administration is buckling to Republican pressure to trim the deficit – at the very moment when we need deficit spending for the creation of a massive jobs program. If progressives put the same level of energy and resources into demanding a jobs program as they have a public health plan, the prospects for a progressive era would be greatly improved.

But what about the unions, you ask? Progressive leaders organize the working stiffs through labor unions, right? Well, not exactly. While unions expend plenty of muscle on behalf of working people – and do it smarter and better than they have in the past – unionized workers today account for only 12% of the workforce. And unions should not be expected to carry the burden alone of energizing the entire population of displaced workers around a larger political agenda.

IGNORING THE UNEDUCATED

When we progressives organize, we're largely organizing the educated, whose hard times lack the urgency of those without college diplomas. We are simply not present in their world. Progressive writers rarely appear on the opinion pages of local newspapers [with the notable exception of David Sirota], and the progressive movement is rarely represented on the local television news. And that's

See GRADS Page 14

American Kids Less Educated Than Parents

According to a recent report, Americans aged 25-34 have attained less education than their parents' generation.

If the data cited by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities [AASCU] Commission report is correct, the United States and Germany are the only two nations in the world where this holds true.

Indeed, while the United States ranks second among all nations in the proportion of population aged 35-64 with a college degree, we rank 10th in the percentage of those aged 25-34 with an associate's or high school degree.

To make matters worse, there's been a steady decline in American students pursuing degrees in science, technology, engineering and mathematics – while places like China and India are investing heavily in their infrastructures to sup-

port premier programs in those courses of study.

So while the U.S. presently continues to attract more international students than anywhere else, more and more of the best and brightest foreign students may be tempted to stay in their home countries, making it less likely that they'll bring their technical expertise to the United States' workforce.

The report doesn't really try to guess why this lower educational attainment and lowering interest in science, math, and engineering degrees have come about, but does note that tuition has increased at a pace that may make an education a non-option for many. Indeed, between 1958 and 2001, tuition increased at about double the rate of inflation.

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Teaching Is More Than Taking Tests

By Sister Helen P. Mroska

He was in the first third grade class I taught at Saint Mary's School in Morris, MN. All 34 of my students were dear to me, but Mark Eklund was one in a million. Very neat in appearance, but had that happy-to-be-alive attitude that made even his occasional mischievousness delightful.

Mark talked incessantly. I had to remind him again and again that talking without permission was not acceptable. What impressed me so much, though, was his sincere response every time I had to correct him for misbehaving: "Thank you for correcting me, Sister!"

I didn't know what to make of it at first, but I soon became accustomed to hearing it many times a day. One morning my patience was growing thin when Mark talked once too often, and then I made a novice-teacher's mistake. I looked at Mark and said, "If you say one more word, I am going to tape your mouth shut!"

CHUCK RATS HIM OUT

It wasn't 10 seconds later when Chuck blurted out, "Mark is talking again."

I hadn't asked any of the students to help me watch Mark, but since I had stated the punishment in front of the class, I had to act on it.

I remember the scene as if it had occurred this morning. I walked to my desk, very deliberately opened my drawer and took out a roll of masking tape. Without saying a word, I proceeded to Mark's desk, tore off two pieces of tape and made a big X with them over his mouth. I then returned to the front of the room.

As I glanced at Mark to see how he was doing, he winked at me. I walked to Mark's desk, removed the tape, and shrugged my shoulders. His first words were, "Thank you for correcting me, Sister."

At the end of the year, I was asked to teach junior-high math. The years flew by, and before I knew it Mark was in my classroom again. He was more handsome than ever and just as polite. Since he had to listen carefully to my instruction in the "new math," he did not talk as much in ninth grade as he had in third.

THINGS DIDN'T FEEL RIGHT

One Friday, things just didn't feel right. We had worked hard on a new concept all week, and I sensed that the students were frowning, frustrated with themselves – and edgy with one another. I had to stop this crankiness before it got out of hand.

So I asked them to list the names of the other students in the room on two sheets of paper, leaving a space between each name. Then I told them to think of the nicest thing they could say about each of their classmates and write it down.

It took the remainder of the class period to finish their assignment, and as the students left the room, each one handed me the papers. Charlie smiled. Mark said, "Thank you for teaching me, Sister. Have a good weekend."

THE ENTIRE CLASS SMILED

That Saturday, I wrote down the name of each student on a separate sheet of paper, and I listed what everyone else had said about that individual. On Monday I gave each student his or her list. Before long, the entire class was smiling.

"Really?" I heard whispered. "I never knew that meant anything to anyone!" "I didn't know others liked me so much."

Black Teacher May Get 15 Years In Prison

By Devona Walker

Think about the story of Heather Ellis, then think about the fact that half of the people in the United States prison system are black folks, even though we make up just 13% of the population. Then, ask yourself if our criminal justice system is operating the way it's supposed to operate.

Three years ago, Heather Ellis, a college student at the time, was waiting in line at Wal-Mart. She decided to get into another line, then got into a verbal altercation with customers. The cops were called. And she is facing a possible 15-year sentence in prison.

Black folks keep focusing on Ellis' background – she's a young school teacher in Kennett, MO, a suburb of St. Louis. She has no record. Seemingly a good person, right?

IT SHOULD BE IRRELEVANT

While that is true, my point is that should be irrelevant. Even if Ellis were a convicted felon, even if she had been stuffing DVDs down her pants, she should still not be facing 15 years in prison.

Our criminal justice system is supposed to work for all of us, not just the good blacks, not just those of us with character above reproach.

If you believe Ellis' side of the story, she got out of her original line at Wal-Mart to join her cousin in a line that was moving more quickly. When she did, Ellis was pushed by a white customer, hassled by store employees, called racial slurs and physically mistreated by white police officers.

If you believe law enforcement's side of the story, Ellis shoved merchandise off the conveyor belt, became belligerent when she was confronted, told the police she would beat them if they touched her, refused to leave the store and resisted arrest.

IF IT SOUNDS FAMILIAR

The whole thing is strikingly similar to the Henry Louis Gates Jr. story. A



No one ever mentioned those papers in class again. I never knew if they discussed them after class or with their parents, but it didn't matter. The exercise had accomplished its purpose. The students were happy with themselves and one another again.

That group of students moved on. Several years later, after I returned from vacation, my parents met me at the airport. As we were driving home. Mother asked me the usual questions about the trip – the weather, my experiences in general.

A SIDE-WAYS GLANCE

There was a lull in the conversation. Mother gave Dad a side-ways glance and simply said, "Dad?" My father cleared his throat as he usually did before something important.

"The Eklunds called last night," he began.

"Really?" I said. "I haven't heard from them in years. I wonder how Mark is."

Dad responded quietly, "Mark was killed in Vietnam. The funeral is tomorrow, and his parents would like it if you could attend."

Dad told me about Mark. I had never seen a serviceman in a military coffin before. Mark looked so handsome, so mature. All I could think at that moment was, "Mark, I would give all the masking tape in the world if only you would talk to me."

The church was packed with Mark's friends. Chuck's sister sang "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." The pastor said the usual prayers, and the bugler played taps.

ONE BY ONE

One by one those who loved Mark took a last walk by the coffin and sprinkled it with holy water. I was the last one to bless the coffin. As I stood there, one of the soldiers who acted as pallbearer came up to me.

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black man [in this case, woman] sees the situation through one lens, while a white officer [in this case, white officers and white Wal-Mart customers] see things through a different lens.

Back then, I argued that perhaps Gates did get angry, perhaps he did say something to that officer that he should not have said, but the reality is that calling a cop a racist is not against the law, disturbing the peace and causing a public nuisance are not things you can do inside your own home.

In this case, even if Ellis did resist arrest, she still should not be facing a 15-year sentence.

Once again, law enforcement is concentrating on how someone reacted, and they are not addressing the concept of a punishment that fits the crime.

Let them present any evidence of someone with no criminal record receiving a 15-year sentence for resisting arrest. Force them to release the Wal-Mart surveillance video, which the district attorney has refused to do.

PUNISHMENT UNJUSTIFIED

Let's, for the sake of argument, assume everything Ellis says is false and everything law enforcement says is correct. She resisted arrest. She yelled. She shoved someone else's merchandise to the floor. None of that justifies the punishment they're seeking.

The prosecution of Heather Ellis is unfair, merciless and, I think, constitutionally illegal. It is Jena 6 all over again.

Unfair prosecutions and public debates about them are the lynching parties of the 21st Century. This is how they teach us to know our place. And this is what they try to do to Heather Ellis and the rest of us when we speak up.

– The author is TheLoop21.com's senior financial and political reporter. She has worked for the New York Times Co. and The Associated Press.

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PUBLIC FORUM

What, No Medal Of Freedom?

By Karen Webb

If there were a guy in charge of the department that oversees airport screening, George W. Bush would have given him a Medal of Freedom to show how much confidence he had in him – or at the very least he would have given him an “ataboy.”

Former envoy Paul Bremer and ex-CIA Director George Tenet both got Medals of Freedom for overseeing screw ups and Michael “Brownie” Brown got an “ataboy” for New Orleans. And former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld had job security well past the time he should have been canned.

There is no one to give a medal to because South Carolina Sen. Jim DeMint wants to make sure screeners can't have a union to ask for safety regulations, better pay or benefits. DeMint gets to raise his own pay and increase his own benefits. In most cases DeMint isn't required to face down, pat down or confront possible bombers. Why don't they put all congressional pay raises to a vote of the people? As far as I am concerned airport security should be paid more than DeMint or maybe even the president.

SAME OLD OBAMA LINE

That was a really good and forceful speech President Obama delivered [on intelligence failures leading to the Christmas Day attempt to bomb a Detroit-bound jetliner] and I wish I could give him an “ataboy.”

He is less interested in blaming someone or bringing the responsible person to account than he is in fixing the problem [which is what he has said from the day he was sworn in]. That is one of the most purely politically motivated statements I have ever heard, and he uses it regardless of whether he is talking about starting wars, torturing people or leaving the masses without food and water in the aftermath of a hurricane.

What would I do if my chief of police said, “I am less interested in finding the person who set fire to your house or beat your neighbor to death than I am in making flameproof houses with burglar bars or putting more policemen on the street”? I believe I would be calling for a recall vote.

MORE LOST PRIVACY

All kinds of people are trying to make ME feel secure about relieving ME of more of MY rights to privacy. The Today Show did this by having a guy, who is trying to sell scanners, show us his scanner. It should be noted that he was not the person who stepped in front of the scanner, but he did say it was no big deal.

They made a point of saying privacy isn't that much of a concern, but they had to block out the guy's genital area in order to show it on TV. This fellow had a pretty good body.

Ann Curry didn't step up there to show us what you see when a woman goes through. Maybe she was on the rag and didn't want to show off her Maxi pad with wings. Could you get powder through a scanner if you are wearing a Maxi pad with wings or a Depends?

The guy says you can't see anything below the skin, like breast implants, but what could you put in a tampon? If you go through and they see the string from your tampon will they think it is a fuse of some sort?

OLD FASHIONED INTELLIGENCE

If you are suicidal anyway why not do what drug mules do everyday and put it in a baggie and ram it up where the sun don't shine? People are suggesting drug dogs, which is not a bad idea.

Call me silly, but I still think good intelligence is the way to go. The 23-year-old

TEACHING

From Page 13

“Were you Mark's math teacher?” he asked. I nodded as I continued to stare at the coffin.

“Mark talked about you a lot,” he said.

After the funeral, most of Mark's former classmates headed to Chuck's farmhouse for lunch. Mark's mother and father were there, obviously waiting for me.

“We want to show you something,” his father said, taking a wallet out of his pocket. “They found this on Mark when he was killed. We thought you might recognize it.”

HE SAVED THE LIST

Opening the billfold, he carefully removed two worn pieces of notebook paper that had obviously been taped, folded and refolded many times. I knew without looking that the papers were the ones on which I had listed all the good things each of Mark's classmates had said about him.

“Thank you so much for doing that,” Mark's mother said. “As you can see, Mark treasured it.”

Mark's classmates started to gather around us. Charlie smiled rather sheepishly and said, “I still have my list. It's in the top drawer of my desk at home.”

Chuck's wife said, “Chuck asked me to put his in our wedding album.”

“I have mine, too,” Marilyn said. “It's in my diary.”

Then Vicki, another classmate, reached into her pocketbook, took out her wallet and showed her worn and frazzled list to the group. “I carry this with me at all times,” Vicki said without batting an eyelash. “I think we all saved our lists.”

That's when I finally sat down and cried. I cried for Mark and for all his friends who would never see him again.



Nigerian, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, should have been on a list and at some point you just have to refrain from saying, “don't do this again” and fire someone.

Someone misspelled the guy's name at the State Department. I can understand that; my spell checker is still kicking out Barack Obama as a misspelled word.

Have we ever had a suicide bombing attack that involved a Cuban or Cuba? Exploding cigars don't count, do they? When they did hijack planes it was to get a ride to Cuba, not to explode the plane or to crash it into a building. Cubans just never appeared to be that suicidal.

POTENTIAL FOR MISCHIEF

Oh, and as soon as you pass the scanner your image is deleted. Right, and if someone gets by with some sort of contraband, the security people who sold the scanner do not want proof that they did scan this person and you couldn't see the contraband. Maybe they will delete it because proof the thing doesn't catch everything will be bad for sales. The idea that they might destroy evidence of a possible crime or the proof they need to make sure they aren't sued or prosecuted is absurd.

They are going to put the people who are looking at my body in a room far away from the action so I won't hear them giggling or getting excited. If they get excited they have a worse problem. It doesn't see breast implants, but if you wear a padded bra, stuff it with TP or wear falsies they will have to do a strip search to make sure you aren't carrying powder. What about exploding nursing pads?

These days, someone will always find a way to hack into whatever electronic device you have. Look what happened when people took cell phone pictures and videos at Abu Ghraib. Someone who cares about rights will always mess you up. There will always be someone to tell you if Angelina Jolie has a ticket today and when she will show up. Someone will say, “Hey, guys, there is a real babe 20 people down the line.” There will be people who take cell phone pictures of the scanning unless you scan the scanners.

NO PERFECT SECURITY

There will be cell phone videos of the guys laughing in the airport scanning booth. What a job for guys who like Playboy! Somehow the Christian right should be refusing to allow good Christian boys to do this job of looking at all these bodies. They might be tempted. They should be refusing to allow their women to go through these.

There is no such thing as perfect security. The president has a right to refuse to have his picture or his wife's picture used to sell things or ideas, even if they agree with them and I should not have to show off my entire body to get on a plane. I should also not be put on a terrorist list for disagreeing with the government.

I live in the Oklahoma City area and I had a relative killed in the 1995 Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building bombing, so when are they going to put blond, blue-eyed guys traveling from Arizona or Kansas on a no-fly list or scan them driving across the border?

– The author lives in Moore. More of her essays are available on-line at www.okobserver.net

GRADS

From Page 12

our fault.

The truth is, we'd rather just talk to each other than engage with the people whose plight we claim we wish to improve.

In the meantime, the President's approval numbers are falling precipitously among white people and independents. Since his inauguration, Obama's approval numbers, according to a Gallup poll, have fallen more than 20 points among whites.

It's time for liberal leaders to embark on a path that connects

progressive goals to the plight of everyday people; one that channels the fierce urgency felt at the ground level to an enormous push for a major jobs program [and the deficit spending it will require], and that has progressives talking to people in their own neighborhoods via local media.

More than anything, we need to get over the notion that we know how bad it is. Time to pull the iPod buds out of our ears and meet the thundering dissonance.

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PUBLIC FORUM

Republicans Forever Living In The Past

By Deborah Lewis

Thank God that's over with!

The lost decade, the decade from hell, the squandered decade. A more accurate name would be the decade when the Republicans, in two very questionable elections, crammed George W. Bush down our throats for eight years.

Yes, more than anything it was the Decade of Dubble.

A decade that started with peace, prosperity and a significant budget surplus, all thanks to Bill Clinton, and how did we end up? Back breaking debt, record unemployment, extreme drop in home values, a decade when this country did not create one job! Not to mention two wars and a president who neglected his job to vacation and clear brush down on the ranch.

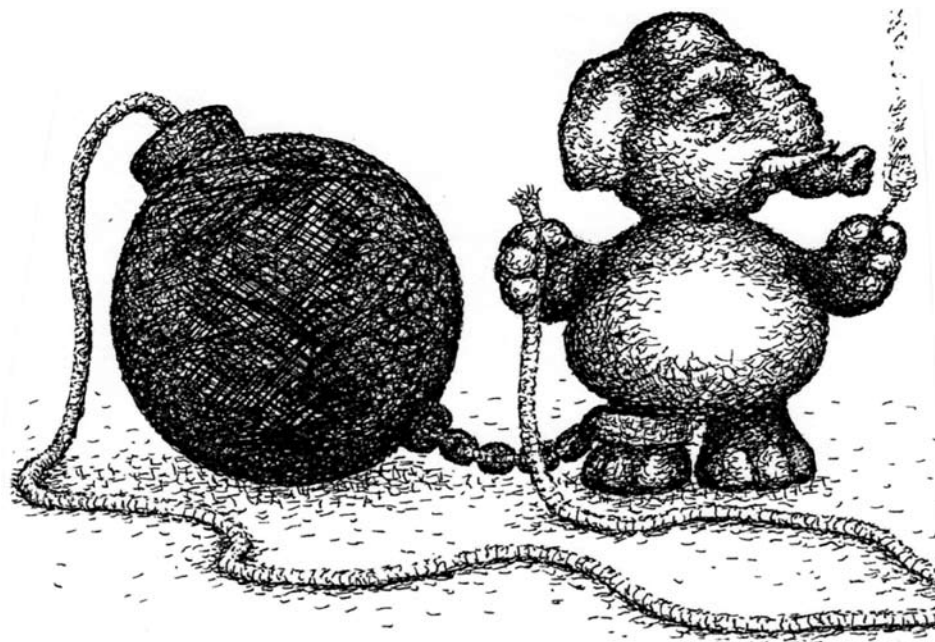
LIVING IN SEGREGATED PAST

But now, the party of no, as usual, wants to go backwards. Remember when Bob Dole wanted to be a "bridge to an earlier time." And Pappy Bush wanted to "go back to a kinder, gentler America."

These people live in the past. They quote Reagan and talk about his agenda leading them forward. I wonder if they know Reagan is dead?

All they talk about is how they want "their" America back. What that really means is segregated America. You know, back when blacks, Hispanics and women were kept in "their" place and not in the White House, the State Department and the Supreme Court. Or the good old days as the Republicans see it.

The GOP [grumpy old people] can't deal with any woman unless it's some ex-



beauty contestant bimbo like Sarah Palin, Gretchen Carlson or Carrie Prejean.

HAPPINESS IS AMERICA IN REARVIEW MIRROR?

I am proud of President Obama and support him in his efforts to fix the catastrophe left to him by the Bush/Cheney regime. But some people prefer to hop into the Republicans' DeLorean, pop in an eight-track tape of a speech by the "still dead" Ronald Reagan and go back to the future. For the party of no, the future is in the rearview mirror.

They can have it. I prefer to look forward to a better time for our country. The Republicans can dwell in the past, but they need to be careful, because that's where they'll run into Richard Nixon, George W. Bush, Dick Cheney and the not-so-great Ronald Reagan.

- The author lives in Garland, TX

What It Will Take To Get Health Reform

By Ron Du Bois

I was driving in Washington, DC recently, and happened to pass the Holocaust Museum. I was struck by the title of the current exhibition, "State of Deception: Power of Nazi Propaganda."

A "State of Deception," of course, characterized the Holocaust era. Nazi scientists believed in eugenics through which a master race could be created. They believed that some races were superior to others and that Jews were an infectious virus that needed to be wiped out. They convinced themselves that genocide was necessary for humankind to be "healthy."

These ideas, shared by the majority of the German lay public, were also shared by more than a few American scientists and lay citizens of that era.

HEALTH CARE DEBATE

I couldn't help but connect the Holocaust Museum's "State of Deception" exhibition to the health care debate being played out in Congress. Wasn't it in the same league as past discussions by German scientists about eugenics, racial superiority, death camps? In other words, wasn't it equally psychotic, irrational, unenlightened?

With regards to the Nazi era, the lies and deceptions have been unmasked over time, yet German society, with few dissenters, was fervently delusional about them at the time. In the future, will not the remarkable exercise in ignorance, lies, and deception we call the "health care debate" be viewed as equally psychotic and deceptive?

As Winston Churchill said, "Americans will eventually get it right, but only after they have tried everything else." Sadly, as far as healthcare is concerned, "getting it right" is on hold.

"Getting it right" will come when society:

- Sees that a seven-page document, like the Canada Health Act, is superior to the 2,000-plus pages of the wildly complicated House and Senate documents.
- Sees that everyone has health insurance without leaving out 20 million souls.
- Sees that paying for your neighbor's healthcare costs far less and contributes to the strength of the nation.
- Believes that paying for healthcare through public taxation [in the same way many social services are paid for] costs less.
- No longer excludes health experts from nations with successful healthcare systems from participating in the debate.
- Understands that a "State of Deception" contributes to weakness, not strength.

HEALTH CARE AS 'BIRTHRIGHT'

- Sees health insurance to be a birthright, not something government forces you to buy.
- Understands the power of deception and propaganda over our lives and thinking.

As long as we are deaf and blind to the meaning of Winston Churchill's words, it will take a delusional and deceived America a long time to finally "get it right."

To my mind both current healthcare deception and the Nazi "State of Deception" illustrate the social pathology of legislation and law.

- The author, co-founder of Oklahomans for Universal Health Care, lives in Stillwater

Oh, For A Return To Civil Discourse

By Edwin E. Vineyard

Too often today's television news channels are simply a cacophony of critics. Participants vie for attention and air time, and those who are the rudest and the loudest win. Moderators consistently reach for criticism, rather than honest discussion about governmental, educational, business or any other leadership issues in our society. TV news cynics demand that everybody must be either a critic or an apologist.

Controversy is too often the goal. They think that "sells." Few seem to be really into valid information dissemination, which the "communications" industry is supposed to be about.

News channel programming and issue discussions don't have to be a cacophony. Nor does a news channel have to be utterly partisan like Fox in order to avoid the constant harangue of arguments between guest partisans like CNN has become, by their effort to be "balanced." There has to be a better way. And, its focus needs to be on honest coverage of news events and information about issues - not one-sided partisanship, and not a cacophony.

TUNED TO FOX NEWS

Recently, this writer visited a friend in his home. We are of different political persuasions, but we often have cordial and interesting discussions of state and national affairs. Of course, I could not help but notice on entering the room that the television set was on the Fox News Channel. In a way, that accounts for many

of our differences. But sometimes he likes to bring up questions.

It was not too long until he began raising questions about the health care bill in Congress. Noting that everybody seems to be against the health bill, he asked if I knew what was in it and why everybody was mad about it. That was a good question. I wish I could have answered it well. I doubt I did.

First, I said that it was not final, and nobody really knew for sure what would end up in it. Then I said that not everybody is against it, and most people actually favor the main provisions when polled separately and non-politically. However, some television channels, and certain special interest advertisers, had been very busy telling people that it was bad, and that they should be against it. If anything is actually said about what is in it, then that is frequently misrepresented - such as it hurting Medicare for old people.

TOO EARLY TO JUDGE

On the other hand, I noted that we have a lot of folk telling us that it is good for us all, but usually mentioning only a few features over and over. Not much is said about the details, nor about the methods of financing to avoid increasing deficits.

I said that we needed to communicate more real information about the bill. However, it is difficult to communicate too much about details of a bill that is not

See CIVIL Page 19

Envelope, Please: The 2009 P.U.-Litzer Prizes

For 17 years our colleagues Jeff Cohen and Norman Solomon have worked with FAIR to present the P.U.-Litzers, an annual review of some of the stinkiest examples of corporate media malfeasance, spin and just plain outrageousness.

Starting this year, FAIR has the somewhat dubious honor of reviewing the nominees and selecting the winners. It's a dirty job, but someone has to do it. So, without further ado, we present the 2009 P.U.-Litzers.

THE REMEMBERING REAGAN AWARD

Winner: *Joe Klein, Time*

Time columnist Joe Klein [12.3.09], not altogether impressed by Obama's announcement of a troop escalation in Afghanistan, wrote that a president "must lead the charge – passionately and, yes, with a touch of anger." He described the better way to do this: "Ronald Reagan would have done it differently. He would have told a story. It might not have been a true story, but it would have had resonance. He might have found, or created, a grieving spouse – a young investment banker whose wife had died in the World Trade Center – who enlisted immediately after the attacks ... and then gave his life, heroically, defending a school for girls in Kandahar. Reagan would have inspired tears, outrage, passion, a rush to recruiting centers across the nation."

Ah, Reagan – now there was a president who could inspire people to fight and die based on lies.

THE CHENEY 2012 AWARD

Winner: *Jon Meacham, Newsweek*

Newsweek editor Jon Meacham declared [12.7.09] that Dick Cheney running for president in 2012 would be "good for the Republicans and good for the country." He explained that "Cheney is a man of conviction, has a record on which he can be judged, and whatever the result, there could be no ambiguity about the will of the people ... A campaign would also give us an occasion that history denied us in 2008: an opportunity to adjudicate the George W. Bush years in a direct way."

THE THEM NOT US AWARD

Winner: *Martin Fackler, New York Times*

The New York Times describes the severe problems with Japan's elite media – a horror show where "reporters from major news media outlets are stationed inside government offices and enjoy close, constant access to officials.

"The system has long been criticized as antidemocratic by both foreign and Japanese analysts, who charge that it has produced a relatively spineless press that feels more accountable to its official sources than to the public. In their apparent reluctance to criticize the government, the critics say, the news media fail to serve as an effective check on authority."

The mind reels.

THE THIN-SKINNED PUNDITS AWARD

Winner: *Dana Milbank, Washington Post*

Washington Post reporters Dana Milbank and Chris Cilizza got into trouble when, in an episode of their "Mouthpiece Theater" web video series, they suggested brands of beer that would be appropriate for various politicians. What would Hillary Clinton drink? Apparently something called "Mad Bitch."

The video, unsurprisingly, was roundly criticized, and was pulled from the Post site. So what lesson was learned? Milbank complained [8.6.09] that "it's a brutal world out there in the blogosphere ... I'm often surprised by the ferocity out there, but I probably shouldn't be."

Yes, the problem with calling someone a "bitch" is the "ferocity" of your critics.

THE SHEER O'REILLYNESS AWARD

Winner: *Bill O'Reilly, Fox News Channel – TWICE!*

1. Asked by a Canadian viewer, "Has anyone noticed that life expectancy in Canada under our health system is higher than the USA?" Fox's O'Reilly [7.27.09] responded: "Well, that's to be expected, Peter, because we have 10 times as many people as you do. That translates to 10 times as many accidents, crimes, down the line."

2. Drumming up fear of Democrats' tax plans: "Nancy Pelosi and her far-left crew want to raise the top federal tax rate to 45%. That's not capitalism. That's Fidel Castro stuff, confiscating wages that people honestly earn."

Perhaps Castro was president of the United States in 1982-86, when the top rate was 50%. Or maybe all of the 1970s, when it was 70%. Or from 1950-63, when it was 91%.

THE LESS TALK, MORE BOMBS AWARD

Winner: *David Broder, Washington Post*

Post columnist Broder expressed the conventional wisdom on Barack Obama's deliberations on the Afghanistan War, writing under the headline "Enough Afghan Debate" [11.15.09]:

"It is evident from the length of this deliberative process and from the flood of leaks that have emerged from Kabul and Washington that the perfect course of action does not exist. Given that reality, the urgent necessity is to make a decision – whether or not it is right."

THE RACISM IS DEAD AWARD

Winner: *Richard Cohen, Washington Post*

Post columnist Richard Cohen wrote [5.5.09]: "The justification for affirmative action gets weaker and weaker. Maybe once it was possible to argue that some innocent people had to suffer in the name of progress, but a glance at the White House strongly suggests that things have changed. For most Americans, race has become supremely irrelevant. Everyone knows this. Every poll shows this."



For the record, "every poll" does not actually show this; the vast majority of Americans continues to recognize that racism is still a problem. Cohen went on to write months later – still presumably living in his racism-free world – that he did not believe Iran's claims about its nuclear program, because "these Persians lie like a rug."

THE WHEN IN DOUBT, TALK TO THE BOSS AWARD

Winner: *Matt Lauer, NBC News*

Today show host Matt Lauer announced a special guest on April 15: "If you really want to know how the economy is affecting the average American, he's the guy to talk to."

Who was Lauer talking about? Wal-Mart CEO Mike Duke. The ensuing interview touched on the Employee Free Choice Act, which Lauer noted was supported by many unions but opposed by some large corporations – leading him to ask Duke, "What's the truth?"

Yes, look for "the truth" about a proposed pro-labor bill from the new CEO of an adamantly anti-labor corporation.

THE IRAQ ALL OVER AGAIN AWARD

Winner: *Too Many to Name*

After the invasion of Iraq, countless journalists who had treated allegations about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction as facts were embarrassed when there were no such weapons to be found. So you'd think they'd be more careful about thinly sourced claims that Iran is seeking nuclear weapons. But in 2009, many journalists are still willing to treat such allegations as facts.

NBC's Chris Matthews [10.4.09]: "As if Afghanistan were not enough, now there's Iran's move to get nuclear weapons."

NBC's David Gregory [10.4.09]: "Iran – will talks push that country to give up its nuclear weapons program?"

Fox News Channel's Bill O'Reilly [9.25.09]: "All hell breaking loose as a new nuclear weapons facility is discovered in Iran, proving the mullahs have been lying for years ... Iran's nuclear weapons program has now reached critical mass. And worldwide conflict is very possible."

THE TALKING LIKE A TERRORIST AWARD

Winner: *Thomas Friedman, New York Times*

In a Jan. 14 column, New York Times superstar pundit Tom Friedman explained Israel's war on Lebanon as an attempt to "educate" the enemy by killing civilians: The Israeli strategy was to "inflict substantial property damage and collateral casualties on Lebanon at large. It was not pretty, but it was logical."

Friedman added, "The only long-term source of deterrence was to exact enough pain on the civilians – the families and employers of the militants – to restrain Hezbollah in the future." That strategy of targeting civilians to advance a political agenda is usually known as terrorism; Osama bin Laden couldn't have explained it much better.

THE IT ONLY BOTHERS US NOW AWARD

Winner: *Wall Street Journal editorial page*

When Barack Obama only called on journalists from a list during a press conference, the Wall Street Journal did not like the new protocol [2.12.09]: "We doubt that President Bush, who was notorious for being parsimonious with follow-ups, would have gotten away with prescreening his interlocutors."

Actually, Bush was famous for calling only on reporters on an approved list; as he joked at a press conference on the eve of the Iraq War [3.6.03], "This is scripted."

THE NO COMMENT AWARD

Winners: *MSNBC's Mika Brzezinski and Rush Limbaugh*

When asked by Politico [10.16.09] to name her favorite guest, MSNBC host Mika Brzezinski named arch-conservative Pat Buchanan "because he says what we are all thinking."

Rush Limbaugh on Obama [Fox News Channel, 1.21.09]: "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."

– FAIR, the national media watch group, has been offering well-documented criticism of media bias and censorship since 1986. It works to invigorate the First Amendment by advocating for greater diversity in the press and by scrutinizing media practices that marginalize public interest, minority and dissenting viewpoints.

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Reproductive Freedom is a vital part of Religious Liberty.

ON THE
37TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE LANDMARK
ROE v. WADE
SUPREME COURT DECISION
JANUARY 22, 1973

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Ken Ackley & Karen Pope
Jon Adams AKA El Hombre Lobo
Lee Agnew
Charlotte Alexander
Jan & Jack Alexander
Charlotte Alexandre
Janet Staudt Allen
Steven K. Allen, J.D.
Gary Allison & Barbara Bannon
Sue & Roger Ames, In memory of
Margaret & Bill McCright and Betty
Anne Davidson
Dianna L. Anderson
William & Ellen Anderson
Jo Angelina
Helen & M.E. Arnold
Claudia Arthrell
Dr. Paul M. Ashby
Pam Ashby
Lugene Asher
Tara Austin (and Jayln & Joseph)
Estelle & Allan Avery
Charlotte M. Bailey
Mona Baird
Steve Baker
Harold Battenfield, D.O.
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Mary Ellen Jones
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Myrna Jones & Steve Cranford
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Shelia, Kevin & Ian Kittell
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Acquainting Blue Dog Boren With The Truth

Blue Dog Democrat Rep. Dan Boren of Oklahoma falsely stated the agenda favored by Democratic leadership in Congress "would not do a lot to help the economy."

In reality, the economic recovery, health care reform, and clean energy bills pursued by congressional Democrats would create millions of American jobs.

According to the Tulsa World: "[Boren] pointed to new figures on job losses and described his party's legislative agenda last year as one of missed opportunities on the economic front.

"I think the House Democratic leadership along with the administration made a very large mistake by focusing on a lot of different pieces of legislation that would not do a lot to help the economy," Boren said.

TOP OF THE LIST

At the top of that list of mistakes, he places health-care legislation, which is expected to pass Congress in the coming weeks, and the cap-and-trade measure, which passed the House but is not at this point expected to come out of the Senate with the cap-and-trade provisions.

The reality is, Democratic initiatives in Congress would create millions of jobs under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

According to the nonpartisan Con-



gressional Budget Office, "CBO now estimates that in the third quarter of calendar year 2009, ARRA's policies raised real GDP by between 1.2% and 3.2%, lowered the unemployment rate by between 0.3 and 0.9 percentage points, and increased the number of people employed by between 600,000 and 1.6 million compared with what those values would have been otherwise." [CBO, 11.30.09]

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Health care reform could create up to 400,000 jobs within the next 10 years.

According to the Center for American Progress, "Clearly, health care reform that reduces premium growth is economic policy as well as health policy.

"The reform goals of a healthier America are well understood.

"We demonstrate a less emphasized point about the health care reform legislation currently before Congress – if successful, its provisions can lower the costs of business and increase both the number of jobs by 250,000 to 400,000 annually over the next decade and increase wage growth.

"Health care reform that includes even more robust measures to contain health care costs could further enhance job creation. In an economy that has lost five million jobs in the past year and where wages have stagnated for many years, this is a strong reason to pass health care reform that contains growth in health care costs and modernizes the U.S. health care system." [Center for American Progress, *New Jobs Through Better Health Care*, January 2010.]

CLEAN ENERGY LEGISLATION

Investment in clean energy technology will create over 1.7 million American jobs.

According to the Center for American Progress, "Investments in a clean-energy economy will generate major employment benefits for the entire U.S. economy.

"Our research finds that spending \$150 billion on clean-energy investments would create roughly 1.7 million jobs.

"This is even after assuming a reduction in fossil fuel spending equivalent to the increase in clean-energy investments." [Center for American Progress, *The Economic Benefits of Investing in Clean Energy*, 6.17.09]

Every single state will gain jobs from an investment in clean energy technologies.

Media Matters Action Network

Health Reform Bill Challenged By AGs

A Progress Report analysis has found that politicians behind the under-the-radar campaign to invalidate health reform through the legal system have been bankrolled by the health care industry.

Thirteen Republican attorneys general – many of whom are seeking higher office – have threatened a lawsuit to challenge the constitutionality of a deal secured by Sen. Ben Nelson, D-NE, to fund his state's Medicare expansion.

Oklahoma Attorney General Drew Edmondson, a Democrat who is running for governor, has joined the GOP AGs.

They call the measure "constitutionally flawed" and are demanding that it be removed from the final bill.

Meanwhile, legislatures in approximately 14 states – organized by the American Legislative Exchange Council [ALEC], a "business-friendly conservative group that" coordinates activity among statehouses" – have introduced initiatives to ratify constitutional amendments that would repeal all or parts of the pending health care reform legislation.

The effort may win favor with the right-wing Tea Party activists and Tenters,

but the legal reasoning behind it has scant support beyond the far-right fringe of the Republican Party – and the health care industry.

As the New York Times reported, "The states where the [constitutional] amendment has been introduced are also places where the health care industry has spent heavily on political contributions."

And an analysis conducted by The Progress Report of available campaign finance disclosures for seven of the 13 Attorneys General challenging the constitutionality of reform [the others were not readily available] shows the health industry has donated heavily to them.

For instance, Pennsylvania Attorney General Tom Corbett [who is also running for governor] accepted \$24,300 from the health care industry for his campaigns, including \$10,300 from Pfizer PAC, \$3,500 from Aetna Inc. PAC, and \$2,500 from United Health Group Inc.

Washington Attorney General Rob McKenna received nearly \$25,000 from the industry and North Dakota Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem received \$20,700. The others took over \$10,000, on average.

Gay Marriage A Matter Of Due Process?

By Danny M. Adkison

Not so long ago they were arguing about the legitimacy of inaugurating George W. Bush as the 43rd president. Now they are working hand-in-hand to prevent what they both see as a travesty. Controversy over the meaning of the U.S. Constitution can have that impact on people.

In November and early December of 2000 the American people got a textbook lesson on how the electoral college works. This was because of the ballot debacle in Florida that ended up pitting Sen. Al Gore against Gov. George W. Bush in a lawsuit that ended up in the U.S. Supreme Court.

Two of the principal lawyers in that lawsuit were Theodore Olson [representing Bush] and David Boies [representing Gore]. These two are once again in a federal courtroom – only this time they are sitting at the same table.

Olson and Boies are heading up a lawsuit in California challenging the constitutionality of Proposition 8, which outlawed same-sex marriages. The people of California approved that Proposition in 2008 in a statewide vote [52% of those voting supported it].

The case could end up before the justices of the U.S. Supreme Court. How might they rule?

EQUAL PROTECTION, DUE PROCESS

The New York Times reported that Olson and Boies were going to rely on the Fourteenth Amendment to challenge the constitutionality of Proposition 8. There are, they argue, two clauses in that Amendment which the Proposition violates:

the equal protection clause and the due process clause.

Using the equal protection clause to challenge the Proposition would seem to be the weaker argument. The government discriminates all the time [10-year olds can't drive a car nor vote]. For a law to violate the equal protection clause it has to discriminate in an unreasonable way. Cases involving racial discrimination are the only ones in which the Supreme Court assumes, without even hearing the facts, that the case is unconstitutional [unless the lawyers can convince them otherwise].

Granted, the Court does scrutinize gender cases more severely than ordinary discrimination cases, but even in gender cases the government can win by showing a law furthers important governmental interests.

Olson and Boies will probably have better luck arguing that the Proposition violates the "due process" clause. They will argue that deciding whom one wants to marry is a right everyone has and since this Proposition denies this it is unconstitutional. Are there any precedents for this type of argument? Plenty.

OKLAHOMA STERILIZATION CASE

For critics of Proposition 8 the bad news is that many of the precedents relating to this argument were decided during the late 1800s [dealing with economic regulations] and have since been overruled. The good news for the Proposition's critics is that this case is not primarily concerned with economics and in a

See GAY MARRIAGE Page 19

SESSION

From Page One

No. 1 priority.

The chamber and their lackeys won't be satisfied until injured workers are left without help. [See 'Hit List' on page 9]

Concerned about dangerous bridges and crumbling prisons, dwindling mental health services and overcrowded classrooms? Alas, many elected state leaders aren't focused on the complexities of the fiscal crisis, but rather on sideshow issues like tax-free holidays for gun sales, teaching the Bible in public schools or wresting power from the state's criminal court judges.

"This session is a choice between awful and terrible," says state Rep. Ryan Kiesel, D-Seminole. "I start with the assumption that all legislation is egregious at this point."

Consider Rep. Sally Kern's latest idea. The OKC Republican – infamous for asserting that gays and lesbians are greater threats to America than terrorists – now wants to make divorce

all-but-impossible in Oklahoma. [See James Nimmo's essay on page 8.]

There's room for serious discussion about a serious problem: Why is Oklahoma's divorce rate perennially among the nation's highest? Why do so many marriages break up and so many families disintegrate in a state that fancies itself as a buckle on the Bible belt?

But Kern's proposal isn't rooted in reality. She would prevent judges from granting divorces on the grounds of incompatibility if there are minor children in the home, the marriage has lasted at least 10 years or if either party objects to the divorce. Sorry to say, but some marriages are so bad that it's worse for children to be trapped in such a volatile home. Further, can't you imagine an abusive, controlling spouse refusing to let the other escape?

"Frankly, I don't know when Rep. Kern finds the time to dream up this bizarre legislation," said Rep. Al

McAffrey, D-OKC. "Our state is facing a budget crisis and several other significant challenges. Given the state of our economy, we need steady leaders in the Legislature that are ready to create serious solutions, not political side shows."

Not surprisingly, guns and God are popular election year topics for lawmakers, as well.

Sen. Tom Ivester wants to create elective Bible classes in state schools, though the Elk City Democrat is quick to point out that he envisions it as a history – not a religion – course.

Ivester is playing with fire. Churches and Sunday schools are in place to teach the Bible the way each denomination sees fit. Oklahoma educators have enough problems without being thrust into the middle of this quagmire. Just ask Texas, where schools have been tied in knots over this issue in recent years.

Meanwhile, two other Democrats, Sen. John Sparks of Norman and Rep.

Wes Hilliard of Sulphur, want to create a "Second Amendment Weekend Sales Tax Holiday" that would give Oklahomans a sales tax break on handguns, rifles and shotguns one weekend each year. [See "Nutty" on page 2]

Helping parents get their children ready for school is a noble idea. Helping hobbyists save a few bucks is not. What's next? A tax-free weekend for golf equipment?

How about this instead: If you're hellbent on cutting taxes at a time when the state already is having trouble paying its bills, why not finally give working stiff and the poor a break by eliminating the sales tax on groceries? That would probably win more gratitude and votes than playing to the NRA crowd.

What's next? Legalizing the use of silencers?

Oh, wait – Republican Sen. Steve Russell of Oklahoma City has filed a bill that would allow hunters to do just that.

CIVIL

From Page 15

finalized yet. Likewise, it is a little early to condemn it.

Finally, I did try to name a half-dozen or so provisions of the senate bill. I pointed out that it was hard for anybody to be against those, and that most people are not actually against them.

Then I mentioned financing proposals having to do with surtaxes on incomes of \$250,000 a year or more [House version], and taxes on gold-plated benefits programs [Senate version] for high paid managers and for members of some unions – amounting to two or three times ordinary family health insurance premiums.

THE CASE FOR PUBLIC FINANCING

I suggested that it was from those business and corporate sources, plus the insurance industry, that much of the money came to pay for all the negative advertising against health care. Money corrupts politics, and it buys politicians, I said.

In due course in our conversation, he asked what I thought could be done. I replied that nothing can be done until we get the money out of elections and finance campaigns totally with public money and conscripted time from elec-

tronic media. The McCain-Feingold bill in its base form would have helped, but it was contaminated with loopholes and rendered ineffective.

We had a good, healthy discussion. Nobody got angry. Nobody's feelings were hurt. We parted cordially, and we look forward to another visit. That is as it should be.

On the subject of corruption of politics with money, there is a so-called "free speech" case now before the United States Supreme Court. It is being taken there by wealthy individuals and by corporations who claim that their "free political speech" is being unconstitutionally limited by laws limiting their campaign contributions and political spending.

Some of us fear the conservative Supreme Court may be about the rule out all limitations on political contributions and spending. More money – more corruption!

God help our democracy if that happens!

– The author, aka *The Militant Moderate*, lives in Enid. More of his essays are available on-line at www.okobserver.net

GAY MARRIAGE

From Page 18

famous footnote the Supreme Court all but said it would strike down such discriminatory laws.

If, that is [a huge "if"], the law violates a fundamental right. The law would have to violate a fundamental constitutional right. Does Proposition 8?

To answer this, let's think about a 1942 Supreme Court decision in an Oklahoma case. In this case [Skinner v. Oklahoma] a constitutional challenge was made to a state law which allowed sterilizing men and women who had three felony convictions [of a certain type].

The first sentence of that case states, "This case touches a sensitive and important area of human rights." Really? And what right would that be? The right to select a partner and procreate. And where is that in the Constitution? It isn't. And, yet, the Supreme Court found a way to declare the Oklahoma law unconstitutional.

NOT IN THE CONSTITUTION

The right to vote isn't specifically referred to in the Constitution until the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868. The right to travel, the liberty of contract, and the right of privacy are not mentioned in the Constitution. A person in the U.S. accused of a crime is innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. That isn't in the Constitution, either.

Where has the Supreme Court gone to justify each of these non-specified rights? Logically, it should have found them in the Ninth Amendment; yet, no case has ever been decided using only the Ninth Amendment.

And probably never will be. That's because the Court has found these in the "due process" clause. Having done so, that is where they mostly likely would find a right for a person to decide whom he or she wishes to marry. If this were the 1960s there is little doubt how the Court would rule.

In the Skinner case the Court ended by stating, "We are dealing here with legislation which involves one of the basic civil rights of man: marriage and procreation." It soon may have to take the first step and decide merely the former.

– The author teaches constitutional law at Oklahoma State University

The Economy Is Soooo Bad ...

- I got a pre-declined credit card in the mail.
- I ordered a burger at McDonalds and the kid behind the counter asked, "Can you afford fries with that?"
- CEOs are now playing miniature golf.
- If the bank returns your check marked "Insufficient Funds," you call them and ask if they meant you or them.
- McDonalds is selling the quarter ounce.
- Parents in Beverly Hills fired their nannies and learned their children's names.
- A truckload of Americans was caught sneaking into Mexico.
- Dick Cheney took his stockbroker hunting.
- Motel Six won't leave the light on anymore.
- The Mafia is laying off judges.
- ExxonMobil laid off 25 congressmen.

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