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# THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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MARCH 10, 2010

## Eliminating Corporate Welfare State's Pot Of Gold

By Arnold Hamilton

The 2010 budget standoff at the state Capitol may be over, but there still is no excuse for not coughing up a measly \$2.5 million to fund desperately-needed senior nutrition programs the rest of this fiscal year.

At least Senate Democrats won assurances from Republican leaders that they would work to provide "fair funding" in the FY 2011 budget for a vital program that provides thousands of low-income, often immobile Oklahoma seniors their only hot meals of the day.

The truth is, meals for needy seniors – and many other worthwhile state services – never should have been at risk in the first place.

The reason: State lawmakers are sitting on a \$5.6 billion pot of gold that not only could rescue the state in these dark economic times, but also chart a fairer, more prosperous course for Oklahoma in the years ahead.

According to new research by the non-partisan Oklahoma Policy Institute [www.okpolicy.org], there are more than 450 tax breaks in state law that carve \$5.6 billion in potential revenues from the state's budget.

Think about it: That's about what the state expects to have to spend in the entire 2010-11 fiscal year.

Some of the breaks – such as home-stead exemption and standard deduction – benefit taxpayers across the economic spectrum. But an increasing number of lawmakers are concerned many of the business incentives are of dubious value – nothing more than a legal looting of the state treasury.

Imagine what Oklahoma would look like if state lawmakers weren't compulsively rewarding their well-heeled campaign donors with corporate welfare.

You certainly wouldn't have the nation's worst bridges or second lowest paid teachers. You wouldn't have child welfare workers juggling twice the recommended number of cases or

senior nutrition programs closing for lack of money.

You wouldn't have the Oklahoma County jail serving as the state's largest mental health facility.

"We simply cannot afford to be giving billions away at a time when we are struggling to find a few hundred thousand dollars to fund our senior citizens nutrition program," noted Tahlequah Rep. Mike Brown, the House Democratic floor leader.

The state's tax breaks for investors and corporations have skyrocketed from \$50 million in 2006 to more than \$210 million in 2008. Coincidence? Hardly. The giveaways began to accelerate when Republicans – already a majority in the House – pulled even in the 48-member Senate, capturing their 24th seat.

What's especially troubling is the state has no mechanism in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the tax

breaks – a fact that doesn't seem to bother the self-styled fiscal conservatives who lead the Oklahoma Legislature.

The reason: every one of these exemptions is somebody's sacred cow.

Did you notice, for example, how the Fourth Estate nearly came unhinged when Sen. Tom Adelson, D-Tulsa, suggested eliminating the sales tax exemption on newspapers, magazines and advertising?

The Tulsa World was especially indignant, editorially decrying Adelson's proposal as nothing more than a tax increase.

"Adelson is free to propose any tax measures he wishes," the editorial huffed. "But it is disingenuous to pretend that adding sales taxes to the cost of products and services such as newspapers, periodicals and advertising is not a tax increase."

The World's alarm is pure demagoguery. The reality is, any decision to eliminate the sales tax exemption on newspapers, magazines and advertising would not occur in a vacuum. It almost certainly would be part of a broad strategy to make the state's tax system fairer – reviewing each of the business tax breaks to determine which work and which don't, which should be preserved and which ought to be eliminated.

Sure, Oklahomans could end up paying sales tax on their newspaper subscription, but they likely would be spared other sales taxes. Can you spell g-r-o-c-e-r-i-e-s?

The Observer would be affected if the sales tax exemptions on subscriptions and advertising were eliminated. But we've consistently argued that it's not fair for us to have such an exemption when Oklahoma mothers are taxed on the purchase of milk for their babies.

Every so often we hear horror stories of corporate welfare gone wild – tax incentives that cost the state treasury significant money, yet failed to produce a single job as promised or that essentially end up lining some schemer's pockets.

See WELFARE Page 19



# Observations

## Conflicts

There it is, plain as day in the Oklahoma Constitution: no members should vote on a bill in which the legislator has a direct or indirect conflict.

We will never know, but odds are that maybe 10% of legislators have read the Constitution.

The Senate Rules Committee unanimously approved two measures to help discourage members of the Legislature from voting on bills that could personally or financially benefit them.

Sen. Andrew Rice, author of SJR 53 and SB 1671, says his bills are an effort to keep members honest while at the same time helping increase public trust in the legislative process.

SJR 53 would amend the Constitution to create more specific guidelines for legislators to determine whether or not a personal or private interest is in fact a legal conflict of interest.

A legislator would have to consider whether the interest impedes his or her independence of judgment; the effect of the member's participation on public confidence in the integrity of the Legislature; and the effect of the lack of representation on the member's constituents if he or she refrains from voting on the legislation.

If the public approved the constitutional amendment found in SJR 53, SB 1671 would create a penalty for those legislators found not disclosing a conflict of interest on a measure and voting on the bill, which personally or privately benefited them.

Currently, there is no punishment for legislators who vote on legislation that benefits them. Under SB 1671, violators would be guilty of a felony punishable by imprisonment in the State Penitentiary up to 10 years, by a fine no greater than \$50,000 or three times the amount of the gain the legislator garnered from the approved legislation, by both fine and imprisonment.

SB 1671 also would allow the Legislature to determine rules of its proceedings to provide sanctions against

members found in violation of this law.

Once in a blue moon a legislator will stand and declare a conflict and refrain from voting. We applaud Sen. Rice because conflicts are becoming commonplace.

## Who Speaks?

Easily the sorriest process in the current legislative session is the Republican drive to fix what isn't broken – worker's compensation.

Even the Tulsa and Oklahoma City Chambers of Commerce are opposed. Out of the blue came word that the State Chamber board voted unanimously to keep the current system.

That leaves Senate Leader Glenn Coffee and the House leadership way out of step with the very business community they say they are helping.

Coffee says the present system is expensive and cumbersome.

His SB 1973 passed the Judiciary Committee. He also authors SJR 66, which would limit claims for legal services for workers' compensation benefits. It cleared the same committee. SJR 66 will go before the full Senate.

Asked about the business community's opposition, Coffee blew it off, noting the State Chamber is just another lobby.

In a press release, he said business owners are reticent to open new business or expand existing business in this state, due to the volatile nature of awards, and the resulting increased costs to conduct business in Oklahoma.

If you had a choice of spokesperson for business would you pick Coffee or the state's chambers of commerce?

## It's Baaaaaack

Here's SB 2330, the son of HB 843, the bill vetoed last session because it would have virtually destroyed public education.



The Senate gave bipartisan support to SB 2330, authored by Sen. John Ford, R-Bartlesville, which supposedly gives "local empowerment" to public schools.

Smarting after last year's defeat, Ford came up with one that actually includes teachers. SB 2330 is a voluntary measure that gives an individual school or a group of schools the opportunity to opt out of programs or state unfunded mandates within their districts.

Once a plan is agreed on by teachers, administrators and the school board, then it goes on to the State Department of Education for final approval.

If approved, the school district would implement the plan and be subject to a review at the end of three years to verify the desired results are being obtained.

As far as we could find, Ford hasn't introduced legislation to do away with unfunded mandates.

## More Crap

There is no end to frivolous Second Amendment legislation as NRA clones struggle to file the most outrageous bills.

State Rep. Lewis Moore, R-Arcadia, has filed legislation to deter lawsuits against gun manufacturers. He said his bill would "stop fanatics from abusing our courts and protect the fundamental constitutional rights of working Oklahomans."

HB 2884 creates the "Oklahoma Firearms Freedom Act," which declares that a "personal firearm, a firearm accessory, or ammunition that is manufactured commercially or privately in Oklahoma and that remains within the borders of Oklahoma is not subject to federal law or federal regulation, including registration, under the authority of Congress to regulate interstate commerce."

His legislation notes that regulation of intrastate commerce is vested in the states under the Ninth and Tenth Amendments to the United States Constitution and that Article II, Section 26, of the Oklahoma Constitution "clearly secures to Oklahoma citizens, and prohibits interference with, the right of individual Oklahoma

citizens to keep and bear arms."

As a result, under the bill, guns manufactured in Oklahoma and sold to citizens of the state would not be subject to federal regulations since "those items have not traveled in interstate commerce."

Guns manufactured would be required to have the words "Made in Oklahoma" clearly stamped on a central metallic part, such as the receiver or frame.

Too bad bills don't carry the warning: "Made Ignorant In Oklahoma."

## Hurt Schools?

Silly Sally is at it again – she wants to hurt public schools by putting school bond elections on general election ballots.

Rep. Sally Kern, R-OKC, filed legislation to require that school board elections be held on general election dates.

It may sound weird but where that has happened, school bond issues go down in flames.

Today the only folks who turn out for bond elections are those who value public education.

When Arizona redistricted schools many years ago, they included Sun City, a huge retirement facility, and those retirees defeated bond issue after bond issue despite the critical needs of a fast-growing district. It was removed.

HB 3307, by Kern, would combine school board election dates with November general elections in even-numbered years, and require elections in odd-numbered years to be conducted on the second Tuesday of November.

"Presently only about 8% to 15% of eligible voters vote in a school board election," Kern said in a press release.

What a stupid remark – the election is open to all qualified voters!

Kern noted that school bond issues are often scheduled in February and just this year Crutcho passed a \$1 million school bond by a vote of 11 to 3.

HB 3307 passed the Republican House Common Education Committee and now proceeds to the House floor.

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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

**Laurel:** To Diane Walker of Muskogee's Ben Franklin Science Academy, named the Oklahoma Supreme Court Teacher of the Year. Tulsa's Thoreau Demonstration Academy is School of the Year.

**State Senate webmaster Charles Israel** will be sorely missed. He courageously battled muscular dystrophy. He and his dog always warmly greeted everyone. He was 48.

**Dart:** To the Legislature for wasting time criticizing "Obamacare" before a bill had taken shape. How about addressing 600,000 Oklahomans without health insurance?

A column by Sean Carroll in Scientific American magazine starts with this sentence: "The only strong evidence we have that Oklahoma Senator James M. Inhofe isn't a clown is that his car isn't small enough."

**Laurel:** To Judge Charles Chapel, retiring from the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals after 17 years of distinguished service. He often wrote dissents, helping shape the criminal justice system in the years to come.

TV commercials are often an irritant, especially when they come too often. But exceptions are the BancFirst commercials featuring various cities in Oklahoma. Superb!

**Dart:** To Sen. Bill Brown, R-Broken Arrow, for his contemptible refusal to hear Sen. Jim Wilson's bill to prohibit insurance companies from refusing to cover domestic abuse cases.

Addressing Oklahoma's childhood obesity [we rank fifth nationally] has to restore physical education in public schools, according to the American Heart Association. Sen. Harry Coates, R-Seminole, is pushing such legislation, SB 1876.

**Laurel:** To Sen. Patrick Anderson, R-Enid, and Rep. Lee Denney, R-Cushing, for their tireless battle to require a clean-up of Oklahoma's disgraceful puppy mills. Visit one if you think a law isn't needed.

How sad that teachers who work so hard for National Board Certification may end up in court to collect what state law promises them because some school districts unilaterally reduce the funding.

**Dart:** To a Legislature that reduces mental health spending by 7.5%. Largest mental health facility? The Oklahoma County jail with 365 mentally ill inmates out of a population of 2,100.

A new law authored by Senate Leader Glenn Coffee removes the cap on the state's charter schools, allowing mayors in OKC and Tulsa to authorize them.

**Laurel:** To Sen. Tom Adelson, D-Tulsa, for his proposal to save more than \$259 million by doing away with undeserved tax credits for special interest groups. Naturally the Daily Disappointment blistered him.

Oh, no! Not another poor grade! Oklahoma ranks 39th on a new national study on well-being of citizens' emotional and physical health and job satisfaction. One glimmer of hope? Several years ago we ranked 42nd. The national average is 65.9. [Gallup Poll]

**Dart:** To Sen. Earl Garrison, D-Muskogee, for his bill to end common law marriage. When will legislators get out of other people's bedrooms? How about addressing Oklahoma's regressive tax code?

You can now renew your car tag online at [www.cars.ok.gov](http://www.cars.ok.gov). Some of the 305 tag agents say it will hurt their business. There is an additional \$1.50 fee for doing it online.

**Laurel:** To State Senate Democrats for their fierce opposition to the sale of Workers Comp. Even the Tulsa, OKC and State Chamber boards voted opposition to the sale.

Oklahoma's state employee pensions are only 61% funded. A bill in the Legislature to increase retired teachers' cola from 1% to 2% would add \$1.4 billion in unfunded liability.



**Dart:** To Oklahoma's illiterate voters, with 42% saying the GOP would best guide Oklahoma though the fiscal downturn. Republicans caused the downturn! Only 26% picked Democrats.

The Census Bureau reports that poverty in the U.S. has climbed to 40 million persons - 13.2% of the population, up from 12.5% in 2007.

**Laurel:** To Oklahoma Close Up, celebrating its 30th birthday. Literally thousands of school kids have shadowed elected official for four days, learning civics on the scene.

Good grief! As we went to print, nine state questions were slated for the November ballot - several more are pending in the Legislature. Aren't we electing them to do the job instead of passing the buck to us?

**Dart:** To the Oklahoma Tax Commission for refusing to allow Keith Kimmel to have a IM GAY license tag. He has filed a lawsuit because the Tax Commission said "it may be offensive to the general public."

Oklahoma's graduated driver's license plan is paying off. Fatalities involving 16- and 17-year-olds has decreased from 75 in 2000 to 39 in 2008.

**Laurel:** To Rep. Kris Steele, R-Shawnee, for his bill to help keep nonviolent offender mothers out of prison and with their families. Oklahoma leads the nation in the percentage of females in prison - 131 per 100,000. National average: 69 per 100,000.

The Corrections Department has had 116 employee buyouts but has to cut 59 more positions, taking a \$33 million hit. Sadly, it includes librarians and sex offender specialists.

**Dart:** To GOP Gov. Rick Perry of Texas, saying his state would never take federal health care. They have more than 1.5 million uninsured children and 4.2 million adults, leading the nation. He's a national embarrassment.

Guns do not protect the armed person from assault, but in fact raises their risk by four times or more. - The American Journal of Health

**Laurel:** To Gov. Brad Henry, telling the annual Associated Press gathering that health care reform is a federal issue. He applauded President Obama for addressing the issue.

Oklahoma's property tax averages \$486, with seven neighboring states averaging \$819. Oklahoma's is the fourth lowest in America. National average: \$1,134. [Oklahoma Policy Institute]

**Dart:** To American Airlines for charging \$8 for a blanket. Since they are a major presence in Oklahoma, we wonder who is advising them on public relations?

A six-district pilot program for merit pay is in the works with the backing of teacher unions as long as it includes teacher input on how to pay one teacher more than the one next door.

**Laurel:** To dentists participating in the Oklahoma Mission of Mercy, providing free dental care to more than 1,800 Tulsa patients. It will expand to OKC in the near future.

U.S. Rep. Dan Boren advises President Obama to seek advice from Sen. Tom Coburn. To Boren, politics is a game with two sides and a fence.

**Dart:** To Sen. Gary Stanislawski, R-Tulsa, for his ill-fated bill for 12-year term limits for those appointed to state boards. This new breed of legislative Republicans would term limit the Pope.

Eyebrows shot up at the Capitol when a new Oklahoma Poll revealed that State Question 744 carried by 61% to 23%. It would bring per-pupil funding to the regional average at a cost of \$850 million a year.

**Laurel:** To the Tulsa World's Susan Hylton for her strong reporting on a proposed coal-fired plant at Panama. AES Shady Point dropped the plan.

President Obama isn't the only one facing down a Supreme Court majority for unleashing corporations with unlimited spending power. A new Gallup Poll shows 65% of Americans are opposed.

## THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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# Letters

Editor, The Observer:

Oklahoma City Democratic Rep. Rebecca Hamilton is at it again and she should be watched as closely as we watch the machinations of GOPer Rep. Sally Kern [OKC]. Hamilton refers to females who have passed the age of consent as "girls" and Kern gets the cart before the horse by thinking adults who can easily marry should divorce with difficulty.

Case in point is a very good editorial from the Tulsa World ["Hams and Eggs: Oklahoma Lawmakers Play Doctor Again," 2.27.10]. It rightfully points out the hypocrisy of Hamilton's viewpoint that women, or "girls" as she's quoted saying, should not be allowed to sell their eggs for human fertility clinics. These "girls" can donate for absolutely no "valuable consideration" their eggs and at the same time Hamilton has failed to consider the other half of her privacy restricting equation in that no mention is made of men [or "boys" to use her odd parlance] who donate sperm to fertility clinics.

This points out her dedicated hatred and diminution of women who want to make private decisions concerning the use of their own bodies for peaceful, humane purposes.

The bill in question is HB 3077.

James Nimmo  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer

If President Obama cured cancer the Republicans would criticize him for it. Whatever happened to McCain's campaign slogan, "Country First?" I guess the hollow, bumper sticker patriotism of the Republicans only applies as long as we have a white president.

I observed them during the State of the Union address. The elderly white men on the Republican side of the isle looked as if their doctor had just refused to refill their Viagra prescription. It is apparent they can barely contain their contempt for the president.

How dare this black man try to run the country using brains and intellect! Doesn't he know the president should be some good ole boy that people would like to have a beer with?

That's what they told us about Boy George and look how great that turned out!

At least this time none of them yelled at the president. Instead, they followed the State of the Union by having white Republican Bob McDonnell

deliver the State of the Confederacy speech from down in old Virginia.

What a pathetic display.

This country has operated with a budget deficit almost continually, except when Bill Clinton was president. Draft dodger Dick Cheney said deficits do not matter. But suddenly the party of no and their teabagging buddies are outraged about the deficit and government spending.

Where were they when George W[orst] Bush blew through the Clinton budget surplus, ran up debt as far as the eye could see and started two wars? Nowhere to be found. Not a word. But now that we have a black president they are furious!

The head of the Republican Party, Boss Hogg Limbaugh, has even said on his radio show that he wants the President to fail. We've all seen the racist signs at the teabagger rallies. We heard the bigoted, hate filled speeches at their convention in Nashville.

It is sickening to hear the names they call our president. They would never have dreamed of saying anything like that about Dubbie Bush. And they certainly never questioned the birth certificate of any other president. Never. But now, I guess it is OK. Now that we have a black president.

Deborah Lewis  
Garland, TX

Editor, The Observer:

Does the state Supreme Court's decision to reject [Corporation Commissioner] Bob Anthony's request for reconsidering the 1989 rate case involving AT&T pass everyone's smell test?

Was the deciding vote cast by former Commissioner Bob Hopkins? Was he the one later imprisoned for taking bribes from AT&T?

I know Ma Bell packs a wallop but has she got everyone scared to death?

Al Engel  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

The dental community in Tulsa assisted many citizens who could not afford dental care. At best it helped stop the pain and decay for many who could ill afford the extremely high cost.

Since only one procedure per patient was allowed, hundreds of teeth were not saved but extracted which will probably not be replaced.

With dental costs rising at an expo-



MIKE LUCKOVICH

mental rate this problem will only get worse.

Does the fault lie with the patients or the programmed software that spits out \$1,000 charges for crowns and root canals with thousands more for a partial?

Tom Birbilis  
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

We need to fire the old men who chase after ruling the world and building empires, while they send our youth to fight so they can keep their bank accounts full. Defending their right to pump oil and enrich themselves from others' assets should not be the job of these brave soldiers. We should bring all these soldiers home.

Darla Reynolds Sparks  
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

A recent article in the Tulsa World was headlined, "I-244 Bridge to be Replaced" [2.18.10]. Further on, it explained that this work is a result of a \$49.5 million federal stimulus project. Why did that headline not highlight that this was from the stimulus package championed by the Democrats and signed into law last year by President Obama? "The Stimulus Package at Work in Tulsa!" should have been the headline.

Many people only read headlines and don't dig deeper into the article. So those folks will have no idea that this money is a result of the Obama stimulus package, and will continue to believe the Republican propaganda that the stimulus is a failure.

"Where are the jobs?" is a mantra of the right-wingers. There will be thousands of new jobs coming to Tulsa because of this project, but the Republicans had nothing to do with it. As a matter of fact, they tried every trick in the book to defeat this legislation.

Not a single Republican voted for the stimulus package. What do you want to bet that Jim Inhofe [voted no], Tom Coburn [voted no], and John Sullivan [voted no] will be in front of the cameras handing an over-sized check to the Department of Transportation, praising the fact that these funds are coming to Tulsa, and taking credit for this windfall? They will be fostering a lie. They had nothing to do with this. Remember that when you see their smiling faces bragging about how

great this project will be for the Tulsa economy.

These are the hypocrites Oklahomans voted into office. They have done nothing but throw roadblocks in the way of progress in this country. They need to be kicked out of office on their collective fannies.

At the very least, the World should remind its readers when the glowing remarks come from these three that none of them voted for the stimulus.

Barbara Santee  
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Glenn Beck must be a really slow learner.

Case in point: On his radio show, Beck said this recently about President Obama: "He chose to use his name, Barack, for a reason. To identify, not with America - you don't take the name Barack to identify with America. You take the name Barack to identify with what? Your heritage? The heritage, maybe, of your father in Kenya, who is a radical? Really? Searching for something to give him any kind of meaning, just as he was searching later in life for religion."

What an idiot. You just have to wonder how they would have run with it had Obama changed his name. Then it would be, "He changed it to hide his true identity."

Karen Webb  
Moore

Editor, The Observer:

Former Secretary of State Alexander Haig is now posthumously being recast as the quintessential soldier-patriot.

The truth is, he had a dark side: wiretapping for Richard Nixon, facilitating the operations of a military spy ring that stole classified documents from the White House and sent them to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, sabotaging peace negotiations over Vietnam and détente with the USSR, and unduly hastening Nixon's exit from office.

Some have said that Haig acted imperially and hastened Nixon's exit to protect the country. But as the evidence in *The Forty Years War* makes clear, Haig's aims in the Nixon White House in 1973-74 were always to protect himself and aggrandize his own power. No tears for Haig.

Frank P. Belcastro  
Dubuque, IA

## Frosty Troy's Who Killed Free Enterprise?

For more than 50 years Frosty has covered the Legislature. He tells the truth - fact for fact - about the so-called free enterprise system in Oklahoma.

Call Frosty at 405.760.1843 to book a speech.

## Frosty Troy's Notebook

# Downsizing



**FROSTY TROY**  
Founding Editor

Phil Berkenbile shakes his head in sorrow. As director of Oklahoma's superb CareerTech, the state budget shortfall is taking a terrible toll on his agency.

No cut is more pitiful than closing of four prison-based programs at Enid, Alva, Stringtown and Granite. That leaves more than 200 inmates with no chance of picking up a marketable skill to be used when they term out.

These skills centers sharply reduce recidivism – not just because 90% have jobs awaiting them on the outside, but the fact that 60% are school dropouts.

Remember that biblical injunction about visiting the prisoners? Oklahoma has been doing something about it.

Birkenbile must also contend with thousands of high school students who want CareerTech training. Also applying last year were 700 school dropouts but “there was no room

in the inn.”

Meanwhile, 19 Career-Tech employees took a buyout and others had to be fired. It saved the agency \$2 million.

Imagine you're doing a good job but you're fired because you aren't eligible for a buyout? It's happening across state government.

Berkenbile put it just right: “They [the skills instructors] give people hope. If you don't have hope, what's going to prevent you from coming back?”

I'm sick of a crew preaching family values but failing to make appropriate priorities due to a budget shortfall largely of their own making. Oklahoma leads the nation in its budget shortfall.

Republicans curse the Obama stimulus but it's the only thing preventing total disaster. It enabled the Legislature to finally reach a balanced budget agreement with Gov. Brad Henry.

Hundreds of teachers are still teaching and our sorry highway system is being repaired – all thanks to the stimulus money, \$3.4 billion.

I am as worried about the soaring debt as Obama's critics are. But what was he supposed to do, let America slide into another Great Depression?

You can expect the crime rate to go up as more and more Oklahomans lose their jobs. It is ironic to hear some say Oklahoma isn't as bad off as California and other states. Is that supposed to hearten a person desperate for a job, whose children are hungry?

Few are hit as hard as the state's mentally ill. Oklahoma ranks first in the percentage of the population with serious mental illness.

Yet, while our erstwhile leaders were cutting the Department of Transportation 5.3%, mental health was cut another 7.5%. They can't afford high-powered lobbyists.

You've said it all when the Oklahoma County jail is the state's largest mental health facility, averaging 350 mentally ill inmates.

Mental Health commissioner Terri White made her case before a House committee, to no avail. She noted that these are “real people” and not just statistics.

I suggest that every legislative leader spend 24 hours in Oklahoma County Sheriff John Whetsel's jail.

I did a similar duty a few years back when a social worker said I was always fighting for teachers but never mentioned social workers.

So I took up her challenge and drove to Enid. I spent the day with her, although names and places were off the record.

I was stunned at the emotional toll it took on me – the weeping teen mother of two whose husband had abandoned them. A young girl in a poverty area who wanted to know about female hygiene



From that time forward I have had two sets of heroes – public school teachers and social workers. They are both underpaid and overworked, easily the most dedicated in Oklahoma.

I have been warned that if I think this year is bad, wait until next year when the budget hole will be even bigger, with no federal stimulus rescue.

While the Republican leadership [aided and abetted by too many Democrats] was playing Santa Claus with tax cuts for the affluent, the waiting list for the developmentally disabled hit 5,300.

The Department of Human Services is so shorthanded that a single social worker has hundreds of children on his or her caseload. More cuts are in the works.

It's easier to curse DHS Director Howard Hendrick than it is to adequately fund the agency. He's accused of playing politics by closing nutrition centers. In fact, he had little choice.

Check the Department of Corrections – a horrendous lack of guards and other professional staff. Holidays are ignored and unpaid overtime is chronic.

I arrived at the Capitol in 1962 when Gov. Howard Edmondson was at mid-term. His courageous and successful battle modernized state government and cleaned up endemic corruption in the county commissioner system.

Edmondson and the state's first Republican governor, Henry Bellmon, were willing to spend their popularity to achieve important milestones in state government.

Bellmon pulled public education up out of the mud with HB 1017. How sad he would be to know that it has withered away under Republican legislative leadership.

Most Republicans at the time were furious at Bellmon for raising taxes to fund public education. He drew scattered boos and hisses when he attended his last GOP state convention.

My most fervent prayer: Please Lord, send us more Edmondsons and Bellmons, leaders unafraid to do the right thing even when they know it hurts them politically.

Henry Bellmon taught me a good lesson when I congratulated him on his superb service in the U.S. Senate.

“After the election is over we shouldn't be Democrats or Republicans but Oklahomans and Americans fighting for a better state, a better country.”

Amen.

## Sen. Coffee's Crap

Nobody passes the buck quicker than a politician, and the master in Oklahoma is Senate Leader Glenn Coffee.

Without seeing the finished product, he's already blaming the Democratic Congress and its healthcare bills for Oklahoma's woes.

“This is the ultimate Dirty Santa gift that we can't pass off to someone else,” Coffee said in a press release.

This is the same Glenn Coffee who has presided over an Oklahoma budget black hole of \$1.3 billion, not to mention 657,000 Oklahomans without health insurance.

That is reason enough for a federal bailout given the horrendous cuts state agencies have already faced and will face next fiscal year – about 20% to 25% cuts. That includes more than 35,000 seriously mentally ill who are going without treatment.

The sagging economy would have hurt the state – but not as much when you consider more than \$771 million in tax cuts Coffee and his fellow Republicans handed out – mostly to the affluent.

The last word anyone should use to describe the current legislative leadership

and Gov. Brad Henry is “conservative.”

They left tens of millions of unpaid state bills while playing Santa for the State Chamber and their rich buddies.

Consider, among others, more than \$160 million in infrastructure repairs desperately needed at the decrepit State Capitol building.

It is no accident that Oklahoma leads the nation in lack of good health – look at the chunks taken out of budgets that would make a difference.

Brace yourself for a torrent of ignorant editorials in the Daily Disappointment.

Coffee moans about Democrat Ben Nelson getting \$100 million in Medicaid assistance for his state. How about the \$2 billion in tax credit handouts by Coffee & Co., with no jobs created?

We don't defend waste, graft or corruption in either party, but records prove that under the Coffee crowd, waste, graft and corruption have been institutionalized in Oklahoma.

By the way, whatever happened to the Ethics Commission probe of Coffee?

# Enough Wine-ing! Update The Laws Already



ARNOLD HAMILTON  
Editor

I haven't formally researched this, but I'd be willing to bet one of the most Tweeted topics in the session's first month was Sen. Andrew Rice's proposal to allow grocery stores to sell wine and high-point beer.

The idea was corked in a Senate committee, thanks in part to the political muscle applied by the state's liquor retailers who aren't all that bubbly over the possible competition.

Even so, I can't shake the feeling that we haven't heard the last of SJR 62 [or some variation] this session.

It's true that the Legislature's rules make it difficult for the subject to be revived. But it's not impossible. And it's more than remotely probable when you know who's interested in seeing it become a reality.

Does the name Aubrey McClendon ring a bell?

It turns out one of the state's energy barons is

working to locate a Whole Foods Market on land adjacent his Chesapeake campus, near the affluent north Oklahoma City suburb of Nichols Hills.

Oftentimes, what McClendon wants, McClendon gets from the Oklahoma Legislature. If anyone can revive the measure – which would send the proposed constitutional amendment to a statewide vote – it's McClendon.

The state's liquor retailers are no pushovers, of course. They've wielded enough power over the years to maintain a sweetheart deal: Unless you're willing to drive to another state to stock up, and carry it back yourself, you have no choice but to patronize a state-licensed package store.

In other states, if you're picking up dinner supplies at your local grocery, you also can purchase a bottle of your favorite wine. Not in Oklahoma, where arcane, restrictive liquor laws are relics of a long-passed Puritanical era.

McClendon is the most visible player in this game, but he's hardly alone.

More than a few deep-pocketed developers are working to attract upper-end, specialty grocers near new, upscale housing in downtown Oklahoma City and Tulsa and in affluent suburbs like Edmond, Broken Arrow and Jenks.

Whole Foods Market. World Market. Trader Joe's. All could soon call Oklahoma home. All offer wines for sale.

It may be less a question of if, than when – and what the liquor retailers get in return. Maybe it's as simple as being allowed to sell cold, high-point beer and liquor supplies, like Margarita and Cosmopolitan mixes.

There's something else that should not be overlooked in this discussion: Notice who's absent from the debate?

The state's preeminent teetotalers, Southern Baptists and other religious conservatives, who long have fought liberalizing of the state's liquor laws.

Neither Rice nor Rep. Al McAffrey, D-OKC, who offered a similar proposal in the House, has heard from any denomination opposed to the idea.

The Tweeting class – mostly tech-savvy, younger folks – sure seems to like it, though. A sign perhaps that Oklahoma is on the verge of joining the 21st Century, albeit a decade late? ...

With all the Tenthers, Birthers and other crackpot legislation sailing through this year's session, it's easy to forget other state lawmaking bodies also get diverted from government's more serious affairs.

Take California, for instance. When I was a statehouse reporter in Sacramento 25 years ago, then-Assemblyman John Vasconcellos worked to create a state Self-Esteem Commission. The snickers were immediate. Doonesbury even lampooned it. But it came to pass.

Now, California lawmakers want to establish "Cuss Free Week" each March in order to promote greater harmony and connectedness. It was inspired by a California teen who launched a No Cussing Club at his junior high school in 2007.

Of course, it was only last October that Gov. Arnold Swarzenegger used the first letter in each line of a veto message to spell out a four-letter vulgarity that is often followed by the letters "y-o-u."

Maybe it's not such a silly idea, after all ...

## Bill Would Prohibit Selling Female Eggs

By Karen Webb

First, State Rep. Rebecca Hamilton, D-OKC, only has sons. If anyone decided to start legislating their reproductive systems she would be pitching a fit. How about a vasectomy for any teenager who gets a girl pregnant?

That should slow down those hormones a bit, but that would be punishing boys and we can't do that because Rebecca and Rep. Sally Kern, R-OKC, only have boys.

College aged females are not "girls," they are young women. She claims there are so many women being harmed or killed by providing ova for infertile women that she thinks she needs to butt in. OK, so who are these harmed women? Prove your case.

### ARE WOMEN STUPID?

Don't let anyone kid you; she obviously thinks women are stupid. She is interested in forcing her religious beliefs on women who have their own religious beliefs or none at all.

If women and girls in Oklahoma had even half the rights of a fertilized egg or access to the medical care that a fertilized egg has, I might be interested in her help.

I do not need, nor do I care what her religious beliefs are and I definitely do not want her making medical decisions for me, my daughter or any other woman in Oklahoma who does not ask for it. She has no medical degree and her religious beliefs are not more valid than mine or anyone else's.

### HOW ABOUT REAL ISSUES?

She and the rest of the GOP think there are no problems in Oklahoma worth their time, except those that involve controlling our private lives.

More than 600,000 Oklahomans have no access to affordable health care and many have no jobs, but she does not care.

In fact Hamilton and the GOP think the only thing in Oklahoma worth their time is snooping around in your bedroom or your OB-GYN examination room.

I am aware this is really crazy coming from people who think the government is too big and should stay out of their lives. They think they have the right to tell you who you can and who you can't marry, when you can and can't have children and what you can and can't do with your own body.

### SHE WOULD DO THE SAME

If I were trying to get through college, with this job climate, I would likely do the same thing these women are doing and if I had children and no job in this job climate, I would definitely do the same thing.

Would I give, sell or do anything to provide for my child? In a heartbeat, with or without an Okie Dokie from the Oklahoma GOP and Hamilton.

Get the women jobs and give the college kids the money they need.

Rebecca and Sally both need to be unemployed so don't vote for the two biggest busy-bodies in Oklahoma. Please, help me out; get these two women out of my life. Sally has so much faith she needs to pack heat.

- The author lives in Moore. More of her essays are available on-line at [www.okobserver.net](http://www.okobserver.net)

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## PUBLIC FORUM

# 90-Day Call To Action For State's Children

By Mike Smith

Because Oklahoma's brand of social-political-religious conservatism is so void of compassion, the state's children suffer. Here's how:

- Children going hungry; we're 4th highest in nation
- Children without proper health care: highest in nation
- Children living in poverty: among highest in nation
- Children with parent in prison: highest in nation
- Children pregnant: highest in nation
- Children homeless, on street or under bridges
- Children without coats, gloves, shoes
- Children abused by parent's live-in boyfriend
- Children shuffled around by DHS
- Children's parks, pools, playgrounds closed – lack of funds
- Children's per pupil education dollars lowest in nation
- Children's schoolteachers' pay among lowest in nation

How long will Oklahoma's 3.5 million hard-working people allow this indifference to continue?

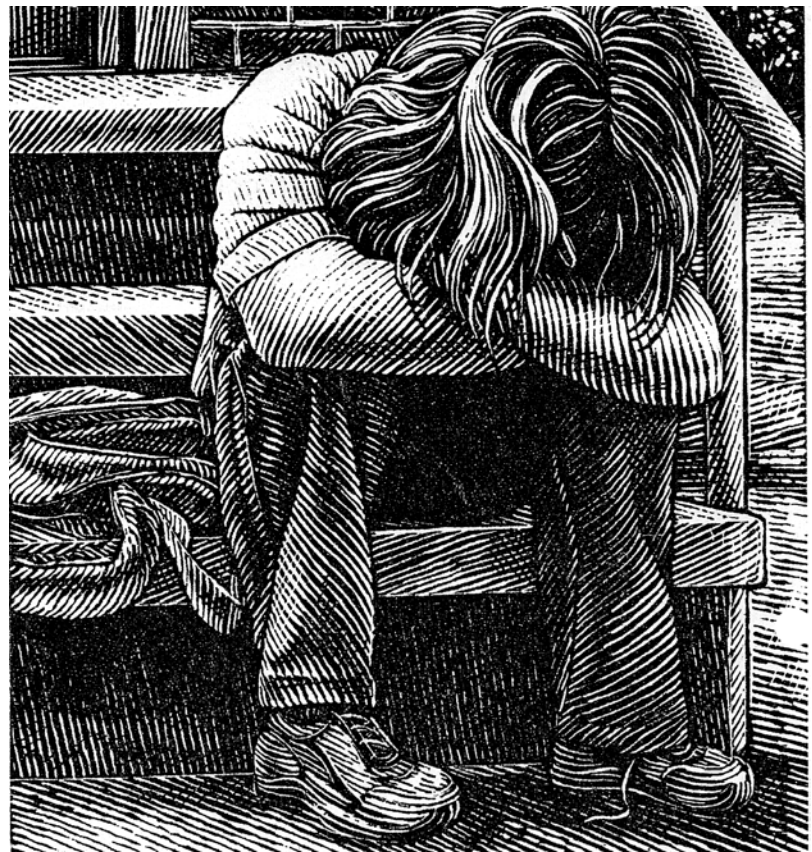
We can do better. We have proven that – with our courageous astronauts, champion ball teams, brainy and beautiful Miss Americas, country music superstars and military heroes.

We've turned a drought-stricken state into a land of lakes, green hills and prairies and growing cities. We've built a church on nearly every street corner and not all of them are conservative. Some are moderate and some even liberal. They don't agree that only conservatives are Christians.

But alas! We have cheated our children by ignoring their needs while building a prison system that locks up more of our women than any state in our country and the number continues to rise. We have the worst mental health care in the nation, the highest poverty rate, and our children's parks, playgrounds and pools are the first casualties in our continuing effort to replace the state income tax with the most unfair tax of all – sales tax.

Yet, every election day a huge majority of Oklahoma's voters marches lock-step to the polls to cast votes for the party that preaches one thing and practices another.

Does this mean Oklahoma will always be governed by a party that lacks compassion for those in need, which includes so many of the state's children? Probably. Certainly as long as most Democrats and all Republicans support a



conservative government that favors the well-to-do and hates taxes.

However, while we may not be able to change our state government, we can still demand that it recognize the plight of so many of its children.

Will you join me and thousands of other moderates, liberals and – yes – some conservatives, as well as many private organizations which have shown they care, in a massive effort to contact legislators, news media, churches, high schools, middle schools colleges, city councilors and mayors, neighbors and friends, business leaders, hairdressers, barbers, and everyone with whom you work and play during the next 90 days to draw attention to Oklahoma conservatives' long history of ignoring children in need, in both good and bad economic times.

Let's be sure that no one can say they didn't know. Use every manner of communication available to you. You have my permission to copy this letter and use as you choose. Just don't wait; start today.

I'm convinced that when folks all across the state begin to talk about this wrong, we will start seeing some pleasant results, which means life will be a little better for Oklahoma's needy children. And it will happen because of your compassion!

– The author lives in Tulsa

## Job Training, Education Slow Recidivism

By Nancy Jackson

It is time for people to stop complaining and start opening their eyes to the problem of crime in Oklahoma. We have the No. 1 incarceration rate for women and No. 4 for men in the United States. Times are tough and criminals don't deserve a free ride, right? We have stiffened the penalties and increased prison sentences – that should help prevent crime, right? We have “No Tolerance” policies – that should take care of the problem, right?

Wrong!

WRONG!!!

Inmates are not in prison to be punished. Being in prison is the punishment. The time of incarceration should be used for education, rehabilitation, and training. This is the ONLY preventative measure that will work. Recidivism is skyrocketing. Why?

The recent article “Prison Job Training Programs Closed Due to Cuts” [in the Oklahoman and Guymon Daily Herald] was self-explanatory. Most of the inmates that participated in the training programs have never had more than a minimum wage job, if any, and 60% don't have a high school education. Upon

release, the individual now begins to search for work, with the label “FELONY” attached to their application. With no training, no education, and no opportunity, for many, in order to provide for themselves and their families, the only options are criminal.

Statistics are that if an individual returns to prison for a second time, they will spend the rest of their lives in the prison system. It becomes a generational issue as mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, fall under this curse.

In order to break the cycle, it is vitally important that we continue to fund these training programs. With the economy as it is, of course budget cuts are necessary. My question is this: Why are we willing to spend thousands upon thousands of dollars to plant tulips on the lawn of the governor's mansion each year, and yet we are unable to find money to continue training and educational programs that enable inmates to become self-supporting, law-abiding citizens AND provide employment for the trainers of these programs?

As voters and taxpayers, I feel it is critical this question be asked.

– The author lives in Guymon

## Is ‘Tooth Floating’ The Real Issue?

By Billy Clay

As Rep. Don Armes, R-Faxon, attempts to make good on his promise that he will become “the veterinarian's worst nightmare” he has conducted an interim study, filed HB 3202, rallied Farm Bureau members and the Oklahoma Cattle-men's Association, staged events for the media and teamed up with influential board chairmen.

Why is all this effort being expended for five Oklahoma “tooth floater” residents [and some out-of-state visitors] who have been breaking the law for some time by practicing veterinary medicine without a license and using prescription labeled drugs illegally?

It all began two years ago when Director Darrell Weaver of the Oklahoma Board of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs enlisted Rep. Brian Renegar, D-McAlester, to carry a bill changing the penalty for practicing veterinary medicine, osteopathic medicine and dentistry without a license from a misdemeanor to a felony. The target was to help deter and punish drug diversion.

The bill passed with Rep. Armes voting in favor of passage. One year later the Oklahoma State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners [OSBVME] arrested Bobby Griswald, a “tooth floater,” while in the act of “floating” a horse's teeth. He had in his possession 13 vials of prescription sedatives and other drugs, some of which are known as “date rape” drugs on the street. Up to that time he had been given four previous “cease and desist” orders by the OSBVME all of which he had ignored.

Before charges were levied against Griswald, Rep. Armes intervened with threats of legislation to abolish the Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners and move all regulation over to the Department of Agriculture. He created two possible bills for introduction in the 2009 session that would legalize tooth floating and other animal procedures to include the use of prescription drugs.

After much discussion, he contacted OBNDD Director Weaver concerning the

See VET MEDICINE Page 9

# Grand Inquisition Against Oklahoma Women

By Martha L. Hayes

When Sen. Todd Lamb and Rep. Dan Sullivan passed HB 1595 last year, neither could have imagined that their action would cause an explosion of negative publicity and severely blight the image of Oklahoma nationwide.

Even the Center for Reproductive Rights, New York, took note of this extremist bill and succeeded in getting it struck down on Feb. 19 by Oklahoma County District Judge Daniel L. Owens.

The center's victorious attorney, Jennifer Mondino, said, "We are very pleased with today's ruling. The government has no business running a grand inquisition into the private lives of Oklahoma women and wasting a quarter of a million dollars of taxpayers money annually" in the process.

Actually, Mondino got the bill struck down on a technicality because it violated Article 5, Section 57 of the Oklahoma Constitution which mandates only one subject per bill. Mondino documented that the bill contained multiple subjects, two of which are discussed below.

## 40 'PERSONAL, PROBING' QUESTIONS

Specifically, HB 1595 requires doctors to investigate women seeking an abortion by asking them about 40 intensely personal, probing questions and submitting their answers to the State Health Department for posting on the Internet – all at an annual cost to taxpayers of a quarter million dollars.

Jo Davis, a plaintiff in the case, documented that basic information about abortions in Oklahoma is already available on the Health Department's web site called OK2SHARE – all without unnecessary invasion of women's privacy.

## WHAT GENDER SELECTION?

Another provision of the bill prohibits abortion based on gender selection, even though Sen. Lamb admitted that no proof exists that this practice occurs in Oklahoma.

Davis, by analyzing the data at OK2SHARE, found that "the gender of the fetus cannot be determined before 18-20 weeks, even with an ultrasound, and over 96% of abortions in Oklahoma occur before 18-20 weeks.

"Even after 18-20 weeks, gender determination requires an ultrasound, so most women seeking abortions wouldn't know the gender of the fetus beforehand in order to even consider abortion based on gender selection."

Later, Davis added: "I have received even more information on the gender selection part of the issue and learned that more than likely only about 1% of the abortions currently performed in Oklahoma are performed during the time period that the gender of the fetus could possibly be known."

# Bible Teaching In Public Schools OK?

There are no new bills aimed directly at the teaching of evolution in public schools or the improper introduction of creationism.

However, bills from last year are still listed [e.g., HB 1001, "Religious Viewpoints Antidiscrimination Act"] and could be considered. HB 1001 is similar to a bill with the same title that was previously vetoed by the governor.

Also there is always a chance that amendments to other bills, including some "shell" bills that have no detailed content could crop up with an anti-science intent. Thus, we must be watchful.

One bill that has generated much discussion is HB 2321 [and similar bill SB 1338]. This bill has passed so far with overwhelming support. It allows schools to offer an elective course in the Bible as literature.

## NO PROSELYTIZING

As written, it is not a bad bill and has requirements that would, if followed, avoid proselytizing by a teacher. BUT, as an editorial in the Tulsa World points out:

# Senate Leader Wants More Charter Schools

Just what Oklahoma doesn't need – more charter schools while public schools are financially starving.

Senate President Pro Tem Glenn Coffee is pushing SB 1862, giving large city mayors chartering authority, while removing the number of caps on allowed charter schools, an education "reform" aimed at increasing opportunities for students and parents in the state's two largest cities.

"Mayors across the nation are enthusiastic about this opportunity to reform their local schools and provide more quality educational access to their respective cities," Coffee said. "We want to make this available to our cities, and we believe this will expand a very successful reform that has increased student achievement and parental involvement in the educational process.

"Charter schools provide greater opportunity for minority and poor students, require greater accountability, and have been proven to produce a higher level of achievement for their students," Coffee continued.

A national study reported in Education Week, however, showed that on average, charter schools fare no better grade-wise than public schools.

The agenda of right-wing Republicans is to strike a body blow to teachers' unions since charter schools don't enter collective bargaining with the NEA or AFT affiliates.

Key points of SB 1862 include:

- Allow municipalities with a population of 300,000 or more to sponsor/authorize charter schools;
- Remove the number of caps on charter schools;

Davis concluded that the real motive for HB 1595 was to "whip up their [political] base," with erroneous information and false implications, and use our tax dollars to do so.

Apparently, Sen. Lamb is a slow learner about how to succeed in passing bills which "whip up" his right-wing Republican base because he keeps violating the one-subject mandate in the State Constitution. Lamb needs this extremist base in his quest to be Oklahoma's next lieutenant governor.

## ANOTHER JUDGE ACTS

Last August, Oklahoma County District Judge Vicki L. Robertson struck down SB 1878, which Lamb passed in 2008. Robertson said this measure contained five subjects in violation of the constitutional mandate of one subject per bill.

This measure mandates that women and girls seeking an abortion – even victims of rape or incest – must first have an ultrasound. Many ultrasounds consist of a probe inserted into the vagina for the clearest view of the fetus. And the doctor must describe the image in detail, even if the patient objects!

Some have called this procedure rape by instrumentation.

Gov. Brad Henry vetoed this measure but had his veto overridden.

## CENTER RIDES TO RESCUE

Again, the Center for Reproductive Rights came to the rescue by challenging this new law.

Stephanie Toti, the center's victorious attorney, said that the ultrasound requirement "takes away a patient's choice about whether or not to view this ultrasound, and it requires physicians to provide information to their patients that the physicians do not believe is medically necessary. It's an affront to women's autonomy and decision-making power, and it's an intrusion into the physician-patient relationship."

Attorney General Drew Edmondson, in keeping with his role as the state's lawyer, appealed Robertson's ruling. The appeal has yet to be heard.

In conclusion, because state legislators are trying to pass the most draconian abortion laws in the country, the Center for Reproductive Rights has taken a keen interest in our state and could possibly challenge more laws.

The cost of interrogating women, Internet postings, and hiring abortion law experts to defend these controversial new laws has cost about half-a million to date. How long will state taxpayers be willing to pay the enormous cost of defending the indefensible?

– The author lives in Oklahoma City and is a semi-retired educator

"But care must be taken in the study of the Bible. There are legitimate courses such as the Bible Project that offer a study guide and sets standards for such study. The Legislature must be able to separate the wheat from the chaff in choosing the right course of study. It also must ensure that the separation of church and state remains intact. Instructors must leave their religion at the door."

In addition, HB 2546 by Rep. John Wright, R-Broken Arrow, is particularly of concern for several reasons. The bill appears to be another attempt at attacking public education. It would allow school districts to set up their own textbook committees, adopt texts not on the list approved by the State Textbook Committee and have the state pay for them.

Districts now can adopt texts not on the state approved list, but each district would have to pay for the books. On first reading, the bill does not appear to be bad, but there are some very real underlying problems that may not be apparent to many citizens.

– From Oklahoma Evolution list-serve

- Allow existing charter schools to participate in school board bond elections;
- Mandate the State Department of Education and the Department of Central Services publish a list of all vacant buildings owned by the state or school districts that may be suitable for charter schools, as done in other states;
- Allow Native American tribes to authorize and sponsor charter schools;
- Remove all geographic restrictions on charter schools or allow charter schools in districts with an ADM of 5,000 or more students regardless of county.

## NOTEWORTHY

The Interfaith Alliance Foundation of Oklahoma is hosting "A Different Way of Talking About Same-Gender Marriage" March 23 at OKC's Will Rogers Center, 4322 N. Western.

The event, free and open to the public, is an effort to promote a "reasoned and respectful conversation among Oklahomans from the perspective of civil law and religious freedom."

Featured speaker is the Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy, national president of the Interfaith Alliance. He will be joined by a panel that includes Sen. Andrew Rice, D-OKC; and attorneys Sandy Ingraham and Don G. Holladay. Moderator is Phyllis E. Bernard, Oklahoma City University law professor and director of the school's Center on Alternative Dispute Resolution.

For more information call 405.521.0568 or visit [www.tia-okc.org](http://www.tia-okc.org)

# DHS Investigates All Reports Of Adult Abuse

By Sean Burrage

It is often said that a society should be judged by how it cares for its most vulnerable members. That's why our state requires the investigation of any reports of alleged abuse of elderly or disabled adults.

In Oklahoma the Adult Protective Services [APS] division of the Department of Human Services [DHS] is charged with the task of investigating allegations of abandonment, physical, sexual or verbal abuse, exploitation or neglect. They also investigate allegations of financial abuse or neglect.

It is important to point out that not all of those allegations are substantiated. In 2009, there were 28,655 allegations made as a result of 17,178 referrals.

Of these allegations, only 13,305 were substantiated. More than 15,000 were found to be unsubstantiated and another 334 were categorized as undetermined.

This means more than half of the cases were not substantiated. It may well be that part of the time, an individual reported the suspected abuse in good faith, but there was a lack of evidence to conclude abuse had actually occurred.

## THEY ALWAYS INVESTIGATE

There are also cases when a person may become angry with a neighbor or relative and make false accusations. Whatever the case, APS must err on the side of caution and investigate.

The problem is, under current law, if a person is investigated and APS determines they were wrongly accused, there is no authorization in statute that enables DHS to expunge those records.

They have several expungement requests a year from people who have been investigated and found innocent of the abuse allegations, but nevertheless, because state law doesn't address this issue, the investigation record must remain on file with the state.

This session, I authored SB 1601 to address this issue, and make sure Oklahoma law allows DHS to wipe the slate clean if an innocent person has been investigated and cleared. The bill has already won Senate approval [43-0], and will next be considered by the House.

I firmly believe we must be vigilant when there are allegations of abuse, and when they are substantiated, those responsible must be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.



If an individual has been falsely accused, there needs to be a way to make sure an investigative file isn't kept indefinitely on that person.

- The author, a Claremore Democrat, represents District 2 in the state Senate

## Conflict Of Interest Votes Are Targeted

Two measures aimed at discouraging members of the Legislature from voting on bills that could personally or financially benefit them cleared their first hurdle.

The Senate Rules Committee approved - and sent to the full Senate for consideration - Sen. Andrew Rice's measures, SJR 53 and SB 1671, that he described as an effort to keep members honest while at the same time helping increase public trust in the legislative process.

"Unfortunately, public trust in our government is very low," said the Oklahoma City Democrat, whose bills are co-sponsored in the Senate by Democrat John Sparks of Norman and in the House by Republican Rep. David Dank of OKC.

"With these bills, I'm trying to refine our laws to show the public that members will be held accountable for their actions should they choose to vote on measures that are clearly a conflict of interest for them.

"By creating a penalty for this type of violation, I believe we can avoid members acting in their own interest when voting on legislation and restore the public's faith that we are working only in their best interest."

SJR 53 would amend the State Constitution to create more specific guidelines

for legislators to determine whether or not a personal or private interest is in fact a legal conflict of interest.

A legislator would have to consider whether the interest impedes his or her independence of judgment; the effect of the member's participation on public confidence in the integrity of the Legislature; and the effect of the lack of representation on the member's constituents if he or she refrains from voting.

If the public approved the constitutional amendment found in SJR 53, SB 1671 would create a penalty for those legislators found not disclosing a conflict of interest on a measure and voting on the bill, which personally or privately benefited them.

Currently, there is no punishment for legislators who vote on legislation that benefits them. Under SB 1671, violators would be guilty of a felony punishable by imprisonment in the State Penitentiary up to 10 years, by a fine no greater than \$50,000 or three times the amount of the gain the legislator garnered from the approved legislation, by both fine and imprisonment.

SB 1671 also would allow the Legislature to determine rules of its proceedings to provide sanctions against members found in violation of this law.

## VET MEDICINE

From Page 7

felony penalty. Rep. Armes reported that Weaver had no concerns about moving the penalty for veterinary offenses from the felony status back to misdemeanor. He negotiated this change with the Oklahoma Veterinary Medical Association [OVMA] in lieu of not filing the bills. The OSBVME offered a mechanism whereby "tooth floaters" could practice their trade after a certification process and with supervision by a licensed veterinarian. These compromises were understood to be sufficient to address the issue of "tooth floaters."

This year HB 3202 shows disregard for the agreement reached by the OSBVME, the OVMA and Rep. Armes. It contains all the elements of the original threat [including the use of prescription drugs].

In addition, Sen. Mike Schulz, R-Altus, has offered two companion bills that mirror the language in HB 3202. The veterinary community has recognized that Rep. Armes is trying to make good on his threats and have reacted to what they believe is an unjust attack on the profession with tremendous amounts of misinformation.

In a rare event, veterinarians of the state have agreed with the OSBVME that this is "dirty politics" with ulterior motives which must be addressed. Their efforts have forced Rep. Armes to seek other avenues of support. Once again, he has turned to OBND Weaver for help. He first sought a "provisional license/certificate" for "tooth floaters" to acquire and use certain prescription drugs. Overt public opposition to that plan resulted instead in a proposal by Armes to have Director Weaver come before both legislative party caucuses and explain

that the OBND "does not have any opposition to 'tooth floaters' using prescription labeled drugs." The OSBVME immediately asked the caucus chairmen for equal time for them and the Oklahoma Board of Pharmacy. That move resulted in the plan being scrapped!

An independent observer and practicing veterinarian wrote Director Weaver a letter scolding him for partisan and frivolous involvement in such an important topic of prescription drugs for which his board does not have the primary jurisdiction. Director Weaver reacted to that letter by having his legal counsel call Dr. Tina Neel and threaten her with a slander suit.

Now Rep. Armes has enlisted the State Department of Agriculture and Secretary Terry Peach to serve as a home for "tooth floaters." He has rewritten his HB 3202 to include the Department of Agriculture as overseers of their activities but to still allow them to administer prescription drugs as they charge for their services of floating teeth.

The Department of Agriculture has no history with, nor oversight, of prescription drugs.

Important questions emerge when one looks at this convoluted issue containing such disproportionate effort:

What does Rep. Armes hope to gain from all of this?

What does Director Weaver hope to gain from all of this?

What does Secretary Peach hope to gain from all of this?

- The author is a veterinarian living in Stillwater

## BOOKS

# Fueling The Politics Of Personal Destruction

By Michael S. Roth

### THE DEATH OF AMERICAN VIRTUE

*Starr vs. Clinton*  
By Ken Gormley  
Crown Publishers  
789 pages, \$35

When I began reading *The Death of American Virtue: Clinton vs. Starr*, I had the feeling of reliving a bad dream.

The sordid and the sanctimonious, the crazy and the corrupt, the hypocrisy of those last years of the Clinton Administration and, well, especially the hypocrisy were just awful to recall.

The weight of the book, too, gave me pause. How was I to get through 800 pages on that nightmare? But although Ken Gormley's book spares none of the gory details, it's a great read that reveals the core dynamics of historical events that influence [and plague] American political life to this day.

### SELECTION OF INDEPENDENT COUNSEL

Gormley is particularly good at teasing out turning points at which apparently minor decisions resulted in momentous consequences. The first was President Clinton's appointment of an independent counsel in 1994 to investigate what he thought of as "the Whitewater bugaboo." The crazy-quilt real estate scheme had long been a magnet for rumors about corruption, but at the time the president saw little risk in getting a report on transactions that had almost no economic value.

White House Counsel Bernie Nussbaum, in an interview with the author, reflected that appointing an independent counsel was an "ill-considered decision that changed the course of history." There were no clear boundaries for an independent counsel investigation, and the Whitewater inquisition would go in myriad directions until it had found something with which to "get" the president. At the time the independent counsel office began its work, Nussbaum noted, Monica Lewinsky was still a junior in college.

### ALL SIDES AGREED TO TALK

Gormley paints vivid pictures of those who played significant roles in these events. Rarely stopping to editorialize, he keeps the narrative moving along, deftly interweaving sources from the time and his own interviews with the key players.

Gormley, a law professor, must be an excellent interlocutor – protagonists from all aspects of the affair seem to have been comfortable and confident talking with him. Whether they were rabid anti-Clinton prosecutors who believed that any tactic was admissible if it helped them get their man, or defenders of the president who made light of his "private" transgressions, their voices come through loud and clear in *Death of American Virtue*.

This is invariably interesting, as the reader comes to understand how this scandal appeared to those on the inside, Democrats and Republicans, lawyers and interns.

Sometimes the interviews amount to giving subjects just enough rope to hang themselves.

### PAULA, LINDA AND MONICA

Paula Jones, for example, talks so disingenuously about "just wanting an apology" that it's anyone's guess as to whether she has ever understood how she was adopted by the right, or whether she thinks that just by making up so many stories she has somehow dissolved any expectation for truthfulness.

The odious Linda Tripp swears on the lives of her children that she never wanted to gain from her role as informant, and then Gormley notes laconically how the facts blatantly contradict this assertion. Those poor children.

Speaking of poor kids, the person who emerges most sympathetically, if sadly, from this book is Lewinsky. She's no dope, but as a young woman in Washington, she fell for its leading man, the man she now refers to as "the Big Creep."

The president of the United States asked her if he could kiss her, and the train was out of the station. She really thought that the president had strong feelings for her, too, and we can grimace at her naivete. But the grimace grows tighter when we read Clinton's explanation of why he wouldn't "go all the way": "When you get to be a certain age, you realize that every action you take ... has a consequence."

### THE STARR TEAM

The first Whitewater investigator, Robert Fiske, was restrained in his inquiry and judicious in his pursuit of the relevant facts. Not so his successor Kenneth Starr. Though Starr protests again and again that this was not a personal, political or religious vendetta, his staff's abusive treatment of the Lewinsky family, its blatant use of political tactics when they ran out of legitimate legal avenues for prosecution and its shameful exploitation of publicity for purposes of character assassination have set an example that will undermine for decades the integrity of intra-governmental investigation.

Furthermore, as the director of the Secret Service noted, the FBI was "attached at the hip" to Starr when they should have been investigating terrorism. The great resources of the federal government's law enforcement machine were focused on whether a sexual affair was being covered up. Meanwhile, terrorists in Afghanistan were making plans.

Starr admits in interviews that he should never have gotten into the Lewinsky matter, but he still feels he fought the good fight and did his duty. But Archibald

Cox has it right: "Starr's investigation was carried on as an attack on the White House from beginning to end."

### CLINTON COULDN'T RESIST

But the problem wasn't only Starr. The president, while being investigated for corruption and sexual harassment, was finding hiding places in the White House to have sex with a young woman his daughter's age. A man of enormous talent and ambition, a president with the potential to make a critical difference in American history, was willing to risk it all. Gormley at this point does share his own judgment: "The most powerful man in the world had been unable to resist that base, prurient attraction."

The investigation may have been crazed, but in Bill Clinton it found its perfect target. The results since then have been a revved-up politics of personal destruction and the diversion of resources from the legitimate defense of the country in favor of moralistic posturing.

The book's title, *The Death of American Virtue*, may be overblown, but it's hard to find any evidence of virtue in these pages, unless it's the author's diligence and hard work in getting the story straight and telling it well.

– The author is a historian and president of Wesleyan University in Middletown, CT. This review first appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle.

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# 545 People Think About Our Political Debacle

By Charlie Reese

Politicians are the only people in the world who create problems and then campaign against them.

Have you ever wondered, if both the Democrats and the Republicans are against deficits, WHY do we have deficits?

Have you ever wondered, if all the politicians are against inflation and high taxes, WHY do we have inflation and high taxes?

You and I don't propose a federal budget. The president does.

You and I don't have the Constitutional authority to vote on appropriations. The House of Representatives does.

You and I don't write the tax code, Congress does.

You and I don't set fiscal policy, Congress does.

You and I don't control monetary policy, the Federal Reserve Bank does.

## THEY ARE RESPONSIBLE

One hundred senators, 435 congressmen, one president, and nine Supreme Court justices equates to 545 human beings out of the 300 million are directly, legally, morally, and individually responsible for the domestic problems that plague this country.

I excluded the members of the Federal Reserve Board because that problem was created by the Congress. In 1913, Congress delegated its Constitutional duty to provide a sound currency to a federally chartered, but private, central bank.

I excluded all the special interests and lobbyists for a sound reason. They have no legal authority. They have no ability to coerce a senator, a congressman, or a president to do one cotton-picking thing.

## THE LEGISLATOR IS RESPONSIBLE

I don't care if they offer a politician \$1 million in cash. The politician has the power to accept or reject it. No matter what the lobbyist promises, it is the legislator's responsibility to determine how he votes.

Those 545 human beings spend much of their energy convincing you that what they did is not their fault. They cooperate in this common con regardless of party.

What separates a politician from a normal human being is an excessive amount of gall. No normal human being would have the gall of a Speaker, who stood up and criticized the President for creating deficits.

The president can only propose a budget. He cannot force the Congress to accept it.

## THE SUPREME LAW

The Constitution, which is the supreme law of the land, gives sole responsibility to the House of Representatives for originating and approving appropriations and taxes. Who is the speaker of the House? Nancy Pelosi.

She is the leader of the majority party. She and fellow House members, not the president, can approve any budget they want. If the president vetoes it, they can pass it over his veto if they agree to.



It seems inconceivable to me that a nation of 300 million can not replace 545 people who stand convicted – by present facts – of incompetence and irresponsibility.

I can't think of a single domestic problem that is not traceable directly to those 545 people. When you fully grasp the plain truth that 545 people exercise the power of the federal government, then it must follow that what exists is what they want to exist.

## THEY ARE RESPONSIBLE

If the tax code is unfair, it's because they want it unfair.

If the budget is in the red, it's because they want it in the red.

If the Army and Marines are in IRAQ, it's because they want them in IRAQ.

If they do not receive Social Security but are on an elite retirement plan not available to the people, it's because they want it that way.

There are no insoluble government problems.

Do not let these 545 people shift the blame to bureaucrats, whom they hire and whose jobs they can abolish; to lobbyists, whose gifts and advice they can reject; to regulators, to whom they give the power to regulate and from whom they can take this power.

## DON'T LET THEM CON YOU

Above all, do not let them con you into the belief that there exists disembodied mystical forces like "the economy," "inflation," or "politics" that prevent them from doing what they take an oath to do.

Those 545 people, and they alone, are responsible. They, and they alone, have the power. They, and they alone, should be held accountable by the people who are their bosses.

Provided the voters have the gumption to manage their own employees.

We should vote all of them out of office and clean up their mess. It is up to you.

– The author is a former columnist for the Orlando Sentinel

# Mythbuster: No Wave Of Immigrant Crime

By Alexander Cockburn

Nothing more easily elicits roars of assent across a good slice of the political spectrum than the hoarse alarms that wave after wave of brown-skinned illegals continually flood across the border, plunging neighborhoods and whole cities into an inferno of crime, overwhelming cops and prosecutors, clogging the justice system, cramming the prisons.

Lou Dobbs is pondering a political run powered by a thousand pop-eyed commentaries catering to this fear. "A third of the prison population in this country is estimated to be illegal aliens," he shouts. Glenn Beck screams about "an illegal alien crime wave."

The panic is by no means confined to the nutball right. Sen. Jim Webb of Virginia, launching his commendable plan for a National Criminal Justice Commission last year, invoked the specter of organized Mexican gangs that supposedly threaten "hundreds" of American cities. "There are an estimated 1 million gang members in the United States, many of them foreign-based," Webb wrote. "Every American neighborhood is vulnerable. Gangs commit 80% of the crime in some locations. Mexican cartels, which are military-capable, have operations in 230-plus U.S. cities."

## MYTH OF IMMIGRANT CRIME

It's all nonsense. There's no crime wave swollen by brown gangbangers to city-destroying proportions. If you want a lucid walk through the data, you can turn to ... The American Conservative, whose March issue features a cover story by the magazine's publisher, Ron Unz. There's a photo of a tattooed gangbanger, and the title, "HisPANIC," then the subtitle, "The Myth of Immigrant Crime."

Yes, this is the magazine co-founded by Pat Buchanan, whose physical form I last clapped eyes on at the Republican convention in the Houston Astrodome in 1992, roaring to a climactic fist-shake against the black and brown hordes who had recently rioted in Los Angeles: "We must take back our cities, and take back our culture, and take back our country!"

Unz comes to statistical analysis of populations and crime data with decent credentials – he majored in theoretical physics at Harvard, then went on to

physics graduate study at Cambridge and Stanford before swerving into very successful software work on Wall Street and now a busy life in Silicon Valley, fostering ideas on both sides of the political aisle. I should add that I count him as a discriminating friend, supportive of left ventures, such as CounterPunch, which I co-edit, as well as The American Conservative, of which he became publisher in 2007.

## SAME CRIME RATES AS WHITES

At the heart of Unz's essay is the matter of age weighting. Most serious crime is committed by young males, especially those between 18 and 29. Now, the age distribution of Hispanics and whites in the overall population is markedly different. The median age for Hispanics is around 27; for whites, it's above 40. But to get useful comparisons, you need to look at the relative criminality of Hispanics and whites of the same age; you need to sift out immigration-related offenses [more than half of all federal prosecutions] from state-prosecuted crimes such as robbery, rape, murder, burglary, assault and theft; you need to review comparative data state by state, since there are very significant regional differences in the way justice systems are administered, hence significant variations in incarceration rates.

Unz's bottom line: "Hispanics have approximately the same crime rates as whites of the same age." Since poverty and crime have an intimate connection, and since America's Hispanics are advancing economically, the Hispanic crime rate will most likely drop more. An important further point: Unz uses Census figures for all the states, with a total estimate in 2008 of around 45 million Hispanics. But there's a widespread view that illegal immigrants are significantly undercounted. So if there are, as some "brown tide" scaremongers allege, 25 million unreported Hispanic illegals above Census numbers, then the true Hispanic crime rate is 35% lower than Unz estimates. Almost beyond the shadow of a doubt, white crime rates nationwide are significantly higher than Hispanic ones. Sen. Webb needs to refocus his Threat Assessment.

See MYTHBUSTER Page 13

# Poll Results Proof Repubs Don't Think

*A village cannot revise village life to suit the village idiot. – Frank Schaeffer*

The Daily Kos published a new research study showing the current state of beliefs in the GOP. The results aren't anything new – indeed, the study just puts hard numbers to everything we already thought we knew about the right wing.

The data show, in sharp detail, just how far to the right the GOP has been dragged by its right wing ... and how far out of step they are with the rest of America as a result.

The data also show that Frank Schaeffer was more than fair in characterizing these people as America's "village idiots." For one thing, they really are a bitterly small minority.

The conservative movement as it's currently constituted only represents the views of about 25% to 30% of Americans. [Historically, that's about as big as conservative movements ever get in the U.S. – though it's plenty big enough to do some real damage.]

All figures are percentages:

Should Barack Obama be impeached, or not? Yes 39 No 32 Not Sure 29

Do you think Barack Obama is a socialist? Yes 63 No 21 Not Sure 16

Do you believe Sarah Palin is more qualified to be President than Barack Obama? Yes 53 No 14 Not Sure 33

Should Congress make it easier for workers to form and join labor unions? Yes 7 No 68 Not Sure 25

Would you favor or oppose giving illegal immigrants now living in the United States the right to live here legally if they pay a fine and learn English? Favor 26 Oppose 59 Not Sure 15

Do you support the death penalty? Yes 91 No 4 Not Sure 5

[The whole country is still conflicted about this issue, and the consensus is far from clear. The Death Penalty Information Center summarizes how Americans' views have changed in the last two decades:

The latest Gallup Poll on the death penalty shows 65% of Americans support the death penalty, significantly lower than the 80% support recorded in 1994 and near the lowest support of 64% in the past 25 years recorded last year.]

Should openly gay men and women be allowed to serve in the military? Yes 26 No 55 Not Sure 19

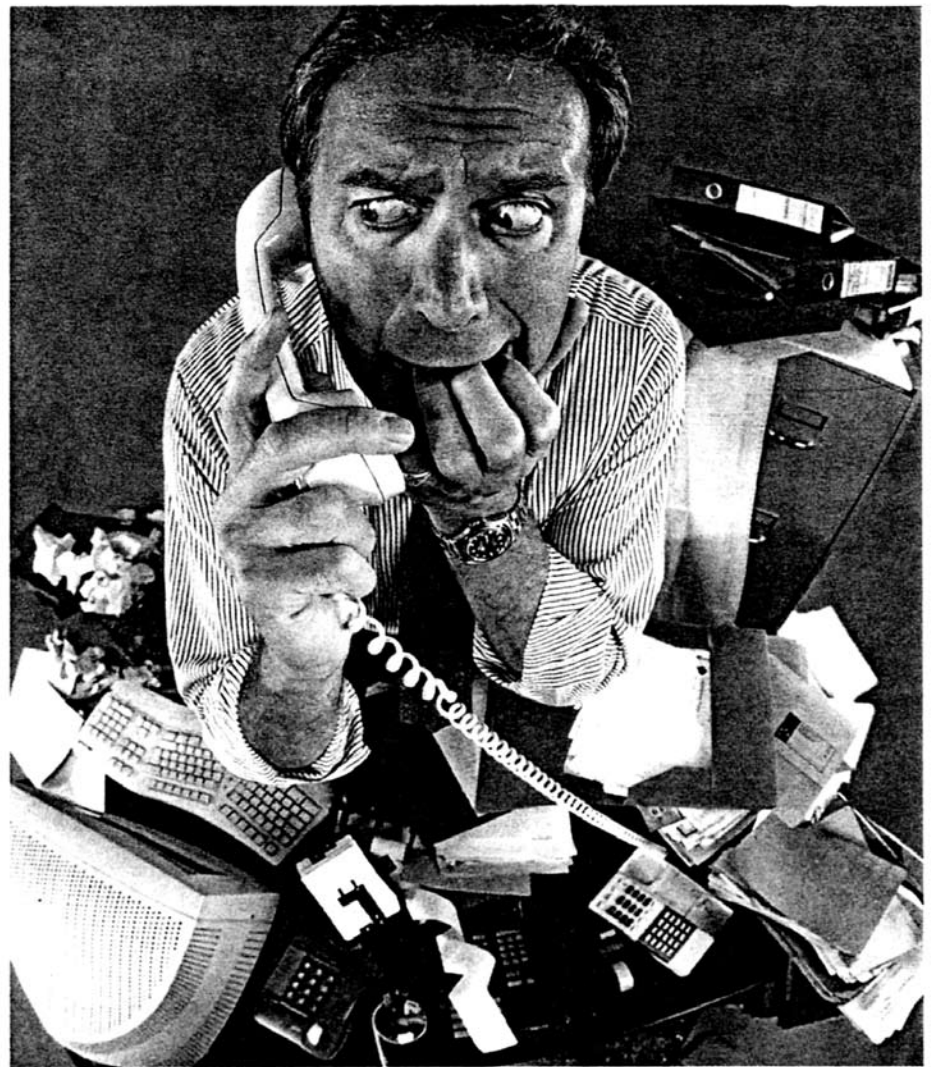
Should same-sex couples be allowed to marry? Yes 7 No 77 Not Sure 16

Should sex education be taught in the public schools? Yes 42 No 51 Not Sure 7

Should public school students be taught that the book of Genesis in the Bible explains how God created the world? Yes 77 No 15 Not Sure 8

Should contraceptive use be outlawed? Yes 34 No 48 Not Sure 18

Do you consider abortion to be murder? Yes 76 No 8 Not Sure 16



Do you believe that the only way for an individual to go to heaven is through Jesus Christ, or can one make it to heaven through another faith? Christ 67 Other 15 Not Sure 18

America is, at heart, still a progressive country in most of the ways that matter. The Kos poll shows us, once again, just how far from that mainstream the conservatives have drifted.

At this point, it should be clear to everybody that doing things their way would amount to nothing more than rearranging American life to suit the whims of our handful of remaining village idiots – at a very high cost to the rest of us.

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## Subverting The People's Sovereignty

By Jim Hightower

As you've probably heard, corporations are now "people" – humanoids that are equivalent to you and me. This miraculous metamorphosis happened on Jan. 21. Accompanied by a blinding bolt of lightning, and a terrifying jolt of thunder, five Dr. Frankensteins on the Supreme Court threw a judicial switch that endowed these pulseless paper entities with the human right to speak politically.

Never mind that inanimate corporate constructs have no tongue, brain, heart or soul – the five judicial fabricators breathed unprecedented legal life into corporations, decreeing that the vast wealth held in their corporate treasuries is their voice.

With a cry of "Shazam!" the court ruled that, henceforth, every corporation – from Wal-Mart to Wall Street – is entitled to "speak" by spending unlimited sums from their treasuries to elect or defeat candidates for any and all public offices in our land, from city council to the presidency.

By a bare five-to-four majority, the justices created an artificial, uber-wealthy, political monster that will overpower everyone else's voices. For example, just the 100 largest corporations have assets totaling more than \$13 trillion. No combination of human people's political organizations can amass even a tiny fraction of that spending power.

### JUSTICES PELTED WITH RIDICULE

With their ruling, five unelected guys in black robes have subverted our people's sovereignty with a semantical perversion that twists special-interest things into "people" and money into "speech."

In so doing, the Supreme Five have substituted their personal political views for the clearly-expressed wisdom of America's founders, every Congress since Teddy Roosevelt's time, 22 states, dozens of cities, the court's own precedents and the People themselves.

Bizarrely, the five court corporatists seemed to think that their sneak attack on America's democratic ideals was so cleverly done that it would be meekly accepted by the public and even widely applauded. Hardly.

The ink of their signatures on this absurd opinion wasn't dry before the justices were pelted with ridicule. "Hey," demanded one blogger, "it's time to reinstate the draft."

### WALL STREET: NOW A SLAVE MARKET?

Others raised an intriguing constitutional conundrum that the Court obvi-

ously failed to contemplate. Since the 13th Amendment bans slavery, which is the ownership of a person, the newly born corporate "persons" cannot legally be bought and sold.

Thus Wall Street – now a slave market – must be shut down! Let us all join hands and march for this new civil rights cause, chanting, "Free the Corporate Slaves!"

Meanwhile, Americans of all political stripes have risen in overwhelming opposition to the court's contortion of both the Constitution and common sense. In a recent Washington Post-ABC poll, 85% of Democrats, 81% of independents and – get this – 76% of Republicans reject this act of gross judicial overreach.

So, with eight of 10 Americans decrying the decree and nearly as many demanding that it be reversed, we can expect swift and decisive action from Congress. Right?

### 'TAIL-WAGGING KOWTOWERS TO CORPORATE POWER'

Uh ... no.

First, Republican leaders [who've consistently proven to be tail-wagging kowtowers to corporate power] flatly say they will oppose any legislation to restrict the ruling.

Second, Democrats have designated Sen. Chuck Schumer to lead their effort to undo the decision. Schumer is a notorious CEO-hugging Democrat who serves as the party's chief shaker of the corporate money tree, so sending him into this battle is like going lion hunting with a flyswatter.

Sure enough, Schumer has started by declaring that he wants a reform that can get "bipartisan support" in the Senate, and he is not even considering anything as bold or effective as a constitutional amendment to force these corporate behemoths out of our elections. Instead, he's lamely offering a patchwork of regulatory fixes designed to cover up this theft of political power from actual people – fixes that corporate lawyers and lobbyists will riddle with loopholes.

To get remedies that work, We the People will have to take direct grassroots action. Already, three major national coalitions have formed to retrieve our democratic authority from the court and its corporate clients: MoveToAmend.org, FreeSpeechForPeople.org and FixCongressFirst.org.

Let's get connected and get moving.

Creators Syndicate

## A Tulsan's Crusade

# It Takes A Village To Raise A Racist

Researches have found that kids don't necessarily get their prejudice from their parents – it is the community that fosters tolerance or prejudice.

Shortly after white supremacist James von Brunn's fatal shooting attack last spring at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, his 32-year-old son issued a statement to ABC News in which he denounced his father's ideology and described the devastating impact it had had on his family.

"My father's beliefs have been a constant source of verbal and mental abuse my family has had to suffer with for many years," he said. "His views consumed him, and in doing so, not only destroyed his life, but destroyed our family and ruined our lives as well."

### REPUDIATES HIS FATHER

Erik von Brunn's repudiation of his father's bigotry runs counter to the conventional wisdom that virulent racists will produce children like themselves.

Indeed, the movement has its share of parent-child notables, including neo-Nazi leaders Tom and John Metzger, white supremacists Don and Derek Black, and Klan/skinhead organizers Ron and Steven Edwards. But the younger von Brunn is hardly alone in rejecting a parent's beliefs – and experts say that's no surprise.

"Overall, there's not a lot of evidence that, at least in the long term, kids get their prejudice from their parents," said Charles Stangor, who runs the Laboratory for the Study of Social Stereotyping and Prejudice at the University of Maryland.

"I would call it more of a community effect than a parental effect. The community fosters tolerance or prejudice."

### INCLUDING MORE THAN A FEW

That community includes peers and other adults, such as teachers, coaches and clergy, said Frances Aboud, a psychology professor at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, who studies the development of racial prejudice in children. "There are so many other influences in a child's life [besides parents], particularly once they start kindergarten."

Children of racial extremists may have to contend with other effects of their parents' bigotry, Aboud said. "I think [they] probably become sensitive to that type of adult; other kids might not be aware that there's that kind of extreme emotional hate toward people," she said.

"[Children of racial extremists] might have lived with more fear. They might have felt vulnerable themselves to that kind of hate: What if I cross my parents in some way – am I going to get that hate directed at me?"

To take a closer look at the experience of growing up in a climate of hate, the Southern Poverty Law Center's Intelligence Report spoke with three people whose fathers were deeply involved in racial extremism: the co-founder of a civil rights group who drove her father to Klan meetings when she was a teenager in Arkansas in the 1960s; a former nurse whose father was among the most powerful Klan leaders during the civil rights movement; and a teenager who had to cast aside his entire way of thinking about the world after renouncing his white nationalist father.

### BIGOTRY'S ILL EFFECTS

Their stories reveal how they developed their own views about race and sense of identity. They also show how bigotry's ill effects often extend beyond its intended targets.

As the daughter of the Arkansas Klansman said: "We are all victims of this type

## MYTHBUSTER

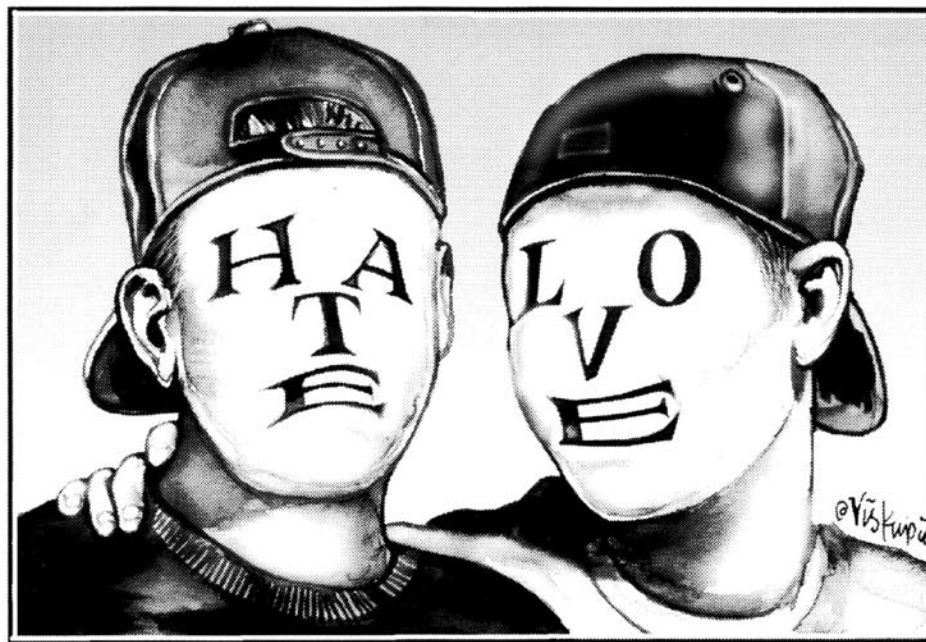
From Page 11

But what about Los Angeles, allegedly the dystopian HQ of immigrant crime, half Hispanic in population, many of them poor and illegal? All crime rates in L.A., Unz explains, have been dropping for two decades. Homicides plunged 18% last year. Violent crime is roughly the same in L.A. as in Portland, OR, the whitest major city in America, the same as it was in the lily-white L.A. of the early 1960s. But the gangs? Ah, yes. You see, the feds dole out hundreds of millions each year for gang prevention. Pay a city to find a gang problem and the city will oblige.

Unz had a question for me: "Pro-immigrant advocacy organizations spend hundreds of millions of dollars each year in this exact subject area. So if my theories were correct or even just remotely plausible, wouldn't such a vast army of paid researchers have long since discovered the same evidence and blasted it out to the four corners of the earth via a very supportive mainstream media?"

My answer: Remember that mainstream NGO liberalism – starting with Rockefeller and particularly saturating every environmental foundation – is built on the bedrock of demographic panic about the pullulating poor, particularly the brown, black and yellow hordes. Every billionaire setting up his foundation almost invariably has population control in his mandate. Shoulder to shoulder with hysteria about immigrant crime waves rides fear of the fecund darker races. So I think we can surmise an instinctive racist bias among foundation liberals, their likely belief that Hispanics do commit more crimes and hence their desire to steer clear of all data that they fear might ratify this instinct.

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of hate."

Taking on the Klan one summer night in 1965, 12-year-old Carolyn Wagner watched as Klansmen bound a young black man to a tree in her father's field, accused him of violating the "sundown" rules in nearby Booneville, AR, that forbade blacks from staying in town after dark, and lashed him a few times with a bullwhip as he cried out in pain and fear.

It was no different from beatings at other Klan gatherings her father had attended, but what happened next remains vivid in her memory: the Klansmen decided to tie the man to the railroad tracks below the pasture. When they were done, they ambled back to the field to discuss crops and politics.

### SHE LIVES IN TULSA

Wagner, a reluctant witness to her father's Klan meetings, couldn't stand it anymore. She stole down to the tracks, used a knife she kept in her boot to slash the rope that bound the man, and told him he could follow the tracks to Fort Smith, the nearest large town.

"That was a turning point," recalled Wagner, now 56 and living in Tulsa. "I felt like I had made a difference when I was able to cut that man free. I realized I can make a choice to be a passive observer or I can become involved to diminish the harm that they're doing. And that's what I did from that night on, and that's what I'm still doing."

After years working for civil rights and children's organizations, Wagner co-founded Families United Against Hate, a nonprofit group that helps people affected by bias incidents. Her experience growing up with a father in the Klan made her determined and fearless in her fight against hate.

### IT IS ALWAYS WITH ME

"That image of my dad and those men, and even the smells, are still with me, and they'll always be with me. And it was very important that my children never know the world I knew when I was growing up."

It was a world where Wagner's father, Edward Greenwood, and his acquaintances gathered at least once a month at each other's farms for Klan meetings, often bringing their children and grandkids.

Because her father, then in his late 50s, couldn't see well enough to drive at night, Wagner ferried him to meetings in a 1951 Chevy pickup. [Back then in rural Arkansas, it wasn't unusual for children as young as 12 to drive on country roads.] The men – including lawyers, judges, cops and pastors – would begin their gatherings with a prayer and eschew alcohol.

"They felt like they were doing God's work," Wagner said.

## It's In There Somewhere

During a sermon, the preacher said to his congregation, "The Bible covers everything. I challenge anyone here to name a subject I can't find in the Good Book."

A woman in the back pew raised her hand and asked, "What about PMS?"

Caught by surprise, the preacher nervously thumbs through the Bible before exclaiming, "Oh, here it is. 'And Mary rode Joseph's ass all the way to Bethlehem!'"

## A Cajun Family Tree?

Two Cajuns were sitting around talking one afternoon over cold beers.

After a while, Boudreaux says to Thibadeaux, "If I was to sneak over to your house Saturday and make love to your wife while you was off huntin' and she got pregnant and had a baby, would that make us kin??"

Thibadeaux crooked his head sideways for a minute, scratched his head and squinted his eyes, thinking real hard about the question.

Finally, he says, "Well, I don't know about kin, but it sure would make us even."

## Name That Tune

I was in a restaurant when I suddenly realized I desperately needed to pass gas. The music was really, really loud, so I timed my gas with the beat of the music.

After a couple of songs, I started to feel better. I finished my coffee, and noticed that everybody was staring at me.

Then I suddenly remembered that I was listening to my iPod.

# Epidemic: Sex Abuse Of Juvenile Prisoners

More than 1 out of every 10 child prisoners in state custody is molested or raped, according to a new report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

An unprecedented report has revealed some disturbing statistics about sexual abuse in U.S. juvenile detention facilities in all 50 states, including Oklahoma.

Twelve percent of youth held in such facilities say that they have been sexually abused over the course of one year. Or, to put it another way, more than 1 in 10 of young people under state supervision are molested and/or raped. Nearly all of these incidents involve a staff member [about 85%], while the rest involve another incarcerated youth.

According to the study, male prisoners were more likely than females to report sexual activity with facility staff, but less likely than females to report forced sexual activity with other youth.

## FEMALES ARE WORST ABUSERS

Surprisingly, a whopping 95% of all youth reporting staff sexual misconduct said they had been victimized by female staff members. In the most troubling facilities, between 20% and 30% of incarcerated youth reported abuse.

These stunning figures have come to light thanks to a provision within the National Prison Rape Elimination Act [PREA] of 2003, which included a mandate to produce such a study. Officially dubbed the National Survey of Youth in Custody [NSYC], the report limited its data to incidents occurring in the previous 12 months, or since the youth's admission to the facility if he or she had been in custody for fewer than 12 months.

While nearly 93,000 people are held in a juvenile detention center on any given day in the U.S., the survey does not represent those held for a short time, those held in small facilities, or young people who are held in adult facilities.

## HORRIFIC PROBLEM

This survey includes responses from nearly 200 juvenile facilities, with an estimated total of 10,000 interviews with youth. Jamie Fellner, senior counsel with Human Rights Watch, said that having a comprehensive report like this one is crucial to grasping a horrific problem.

"[The high rate of abuse] is symptomatic of a detention system that does not serve the rehabilitative purpose for which it is designed," said Fellner. "States put the youth there, and [the youth] don't come with any political or social clout. So who pays attention to them? No one but their families, if that."

Fellner added that the reported rates of sexual abuse are much higher in juvenile facilities than adult prisons, which she attributed to the fact that kids are less likely to be able defend themselves.

A notoriously difficult problem to gauge, the NSYC struggles against the tendency of some youth to not report abuse they've experienced, even when they are promised anonymity. At the same time, some youth make false or inflated claims, or may not have a clear understanding of what is being asked of them.

## THERE IS AN UNDERCOUNT

Fellner said it's her hunch that even the high reported numbers undercount the actual rate of abuse.

"If one in three kids are being abused at one facility, why in the world would they go to officials of the facility that's abusing them, that hasn't helped them, to report it?" Fellner asked.

But David, who teaches at a Michigan detention facility – and who asked that his real name not be used in this article – said that he was surprised at the high rate of abuse revealed by the NSYC.



"I know there's a lot of individual sexual activity between youth, but most of it is what you'd probably call consensual, unless you want to get into age stuff," David said.

He added that he is, however, familiar with one youth "grooming" another – that is, latching onto them and setting them up for a sexual encounter.

## 'REALLY PATHETIC'

David has also noticed that "some female staff that really like to flirt with the boys," a phenomenon that he described as "really pathetic."

By sexual contact, we mean sexual intercourse, oral sex, anal sex or any other touching or rubbing of someone else's private parts in a sexual way. By private parts, we mean any part of the body that would be covered by a bathing suit.

Sexual contacts can happen to boys as well as girls. People who try to have sexual contact with young people are not always strangers but can be someone they know well like a youth, a staff member, teacher, counselor, or minister.

People who try to have sexual contact with young people aren't always men or boys – they can also be women or girls.

And sometimes people try to make young people have sexual contact even if the young person doesn't want to do it.

It is a crime for staff to have sex with inmates in all 50 states, but such cases are rarely pursued in criminal court, according to The New York Times.

# Americans Can Speak For Selves On Reform

By Froma Harrop

Have you voted on any of the Democratic health care reform plans? Me neither.

No such vote was ever taken. But with coordination that the Rockettes would envy, Republicans insist that "the American people have spoken" on the matter, and they want the proposals killed.

House Republican Leader John Boehner: "The American people have spoken, loudly and clearly: They do not want Washington Democrats' government takeover of health care."

Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell: "The American people do not want this bill to pass."

Republican National Committee Chairman Michael Steele: "The American people have spoken. The White House hasn't heard their message."

Quite a coincidence, these guys saying the same thing on the same day. No matter. What they're saying is nonsense.

All politicians try, but Republicans excel, at creating a fantasy public always marching behind their baton. What the GOP leaders lack in veracity, they make up for in confidence.

They base their public mind-reading on polls showing displeasure with the Democrats' reform legislation [or what the public thinks is in it]. They ignore polls that don't.

Some Americans are unhappy with the lack of a public option in the Senate bill, others with its inclusion in the House version. Many already have their government-guaranteed health coverage and don't want to share. Almost everyone detests the "Cornhusker kickback," a special deal arranged by Nebraska's

Democratic senator, Ben Nelson. And how does one count strong opinions by those who don't have the foggiest idea what's really in the bills – but who are taking their talking orders from partisan yakkers?

It's worth noting that President Obama's proposal, based on the Senate bill, does not include a public option. It eliminates the Cornhusker kickback. It eases up on the controversial tax on so-called Cadillac health plans. And in an appeal to older voters, it does away with the Medicare drug benefit's "doughnut hole."

The public option has been the most demagogued item in the entire health care debate – not because it's a bad, or even radical, idea but because the deep-pocketed insurance industry opposes it. Republicans have been portraying it, as a government-run insurance plan to compete with private options, as a socialist Satan intent on destroying the American Way. The public option has been burning at their stake for so long, it's a wonder there's even an ash left of support for it.

But a recent Newsweek poll has 50% of Americans still favoring a public option and 48% opposed. That the administration refused to strenuously defend a cost-saving device that always enjoyed widespread backing is something I'll never understand [and may never forgive]. Nonetheless, health care reform must pass, with or without the public option.

The last time "the American people" came close to officially speaking on this subject was in November 2008, when they elected a Democratic president and expanded the Democratic majorities in both the House and the Senate.

See HEALTH Page 16

## PUBLIC FORUM

# Candidate, Pundit Revolving Door Reeks

By Edwin E. Vineyard

Questions have been raised for some time about the ethics of persons who move from a role as political candidates to doing network programs and political commentator roles, or the other way around. Questions are also raised about those news networks who are keeping future candidates "on staff." One has heard this issue raised regularly in private conversations, although rarely on air among media people. There is something about these moves that doesn't seem right to a lot of people.

Now it appears that leadership of some other TV networks have joined with some professional journalists in questioning or outright condemning this practice.

Look at these names: Sarah Palin, Mike Huckabee, and Newt Gingrich. These are three prominent names of past office holders and candidates for national office. Also Palin, Huckabee, and Gingrich are all commonly mentioned as likely candidates for the Republican nomination in the 2012 presidential race. And all three are under contract for commentary and programming with Fox News.

Another Fox political analyst, Angela McGlowan, recently left her pundit job at Fox to declare her candidacy for congress in Mississippi the next day. Along with those above, this appears unseemly.

### **'STRONG POTENTIAL FOR CONFLICT'**

"As long as they are still newsmakers, there is strong potential for conflict," says Andy Schotz, who is chairman of the Ethics Committee of the Society of Professional Journalists. He remarks that at the very least, this amounts to "an advantage for analysts and creates a perception of favoritism."

He does not say what else it does for the "news" network which so commonly follows such a practice, yet promotes itself as "fair and balanced."

"It is a little awkward," says David Bohrman, Washington Bureau Chief for CNN, adding that the networks employing such past and future candidates should realize that they are being taken advantage of by people who are posturing for election advantage.

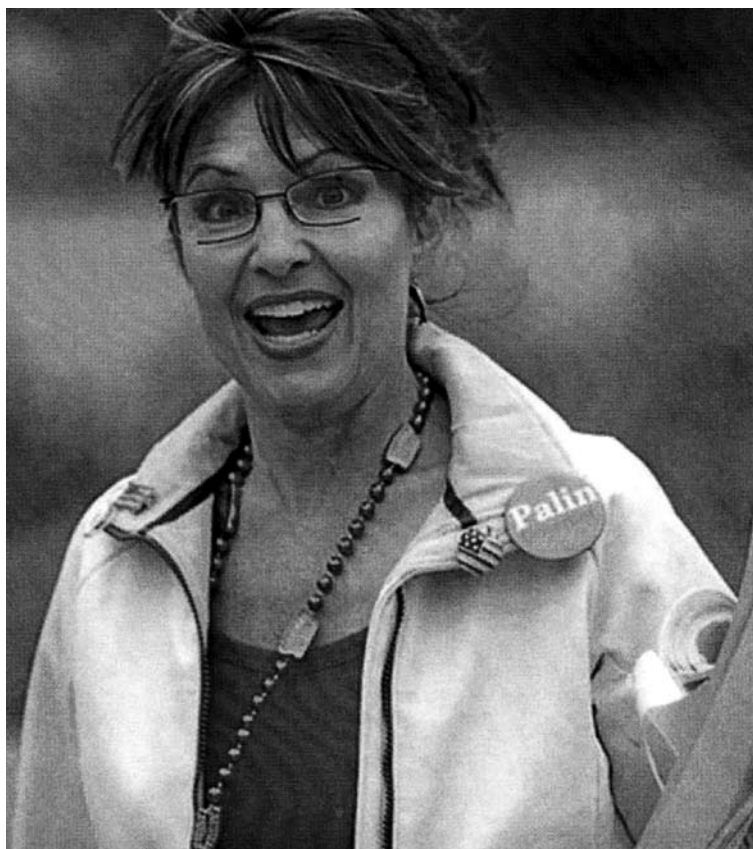
So, do we buy it here that Fox News is being used and manipulated by these candidates it purposely offers these lucrative, publicly visible positions, in front of the very distinct audience from whom they will be seeking basic support?

Negative. From here it appears that they are in bed in a mutually beneficial back-scratching relationship.

### **FOX'S 'EXCLUSIVE' WITH PALIN**

None of CNN's stable of political analysts and commentators are likely political candidates in 2010 or 2012. Pat Buchanan, a sometimes political candidate, has at times had limited roles on CNN, MSNBC, Fox, and PBS, but he is an unlikely future candidate. Lou Dobbs, who left CNN and appears on Fox, has been rumored as a possible congressional candidate. When given an either/or choice, Chris Matthews chose to remain at MSNBC rather than become a candidate for the senate from Pennsylvania.

Fox News became a recent Washington joke when it promoted a Chris Wallace "exclusive interview" with Sarah Palin on Fox News Sunday. It should be rather



easy to obtain "exclusives" with a person on your own payroll.

All this serves to highlight what an unholy alliance it is when journalism and politics become bedfellows.

### **CORROSIVE FORCE: MEDIA MONOPOLIES**

Democracies in the history of western civilization have always depended upon "the fourth estate" to keep government honest or inform the people when government becomes corrupt, dishonest, or abusive of the citizens or the democratic process. Over the decades we have tolerated much from our press, and we have granted the press many privileges, because we have fiercely valued its independence from government.

While it is unseemly for even a single newspaper to engage in the unethical practices of news slanting, selective reporting, and outright political support of parties or candidates outside of its editorial and opinion pages, we have been more tolerant than we should be of those instances when this has happened. After all, this was only a single newspaper in a single city.

But we have learned how corrupting a monopolistic news source can be in states where one or two metropolitan papers control the information received by the people. When television came in around 1950, we had rules which prevented a major metro newspaper from owning a television station in the same news area. We also had rules against foreigners or foreign corporations owning television stations or networks.

But these rules have changed, and so has the level of involvement of news media in politics. The fairness doctrine was discarded, as were the limits on minutes per hour of commercials – much to our chagrin. Most such events, and the coming of Rupert Murdoch, occurred during the Reagan-Bush presidencies and the Gingrich dominated Congress. But that is a topic for another day.

– The author, aka *The Militant Moderate*, lives in Enid. More of his essays are available on-line at [www.okobserver.net](http://www.okobserver.net)

## A Plague On Both Their Houses

By Morton S. Skorodin

The commentary on page five of the Observer's 2.25.10 issue, Climate Change Deniers, makes some valid points, but basically has the climate problem wrong. We shall discuss Frosty Troy's points in the order in which they appear.

"Global warming" is not a misnomer as Frosty stated. Global warming is real and is harmful. The phrase "climate change" was coined by propaganda professional and right-wing Republican operative, Frank Luntz. This apparently was to sugarcoat the bad news for his fellow retrogressives.

There is no need to back down from the factual reality of global warming. Even our current and prolonged cold snap throughout the Northern hemisphere is likely to be a manifestation of global warming in our complex and chaotic world. We may go on to discussing the causes of global warming.

### **CONFLICTING EVIDENCE**

Frosty does this, discussing carbon dioxide [CO<sub>2</sub>] and the greenhouse gas theory of global warming. He got his information from Realclimate.org. This is an "establishment" website related to IPCC, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [and former Vice President Gore].

While there is evidence supporting the CO<sub>2</sub> hypothesis, there is also evidence against it or that its role is much exaggerated.

It is difficult for a journalist/editorialist to write about such a complicated subject. Many thousands of scientific studies have been published. Establishment-based consensus is not universal consensus.

Although many of the critics of CO<sub>2</sub>/global warming are suspect because of their own conflicts of interest – such as Oklahoma Sen. Jim Inhofe's with the oil companies – some are respected academics in climate research, such as Professor Richard Lindzen of MIT.

### **PROGRESSIVES HAVE CONFLICTS OF INTEREST, TOO**

The IPCC, Al Gore and their progressive hangers on, who promote the green-

house gas CO<sub>2</sub> hypothesis, may also have conflicts of interest, though perhaps these are more difficult to perceive.

This has all come to the fore recently with the exposure of lies by the establishment climate scientists, the failure and fractiousness of the Copenhagen meeting, further reports questioning the degree of importance of CO<sub>2</sub> to global warming: Nature 463, 527-530 [28 January 2010] | doi:10.1038/nature08769, and President Obama's full court press for a nuclear-saturated America.

So the problem remains – how can an intelligent and generally well-educated person such as our stalwart founding editor digest all this and make a cogent summary for his readers?

I don't have a good answer for this. In my case, I had the time and opportunity to research global warming, nuclear power and related issues intensively over a prolonged period.

### **NUCLEAR POWER PROBLEMS**

It was worth the effort as I made some startling discoveries.

For example, global warming is largely due to the addition of heat from human industry, whether from nuclear power, coal, oil or natural gas; with only small effect from CO<sub>2</sub>. Solar and solar-derived sources do not add heat to the environment.

Solving the global warming problem will require the elimination of nuclear, coal, oil and natural gas sources and substitution with solar, wind, wave, etc. A full explanation can be found at <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=15957>.

Nuclear power advocates have every reason to hide the fact that nuclear power is an important cause of global warming, and they misuse the CO<sub>2</sub> global warming hypothesis to do so.

– The author lives in Stillwater

## PUBLIC FORUM

# Health Insurance Insanity Hits Home

By Norm Rourke

It's time for me to get into the health care "debate." It has nothing to do with politics or the recent flap in Congress about the health care program proposed by the president. Nope, this is personal.

We have had the same doctor for more than 20 years. He has kept us healthy for all those years. Fortunately we both have great health and have no health issues that require other than normal care and treatment for people our age. He has prescribed a few basic medications for continued good health, but nothing serious. We don't have cholesterol, heart or blood pressure problems. We're blessed with good genes.

Recently my wife needed a refill on Boniva, a common medication used to prevent or treat osteoporosis. The refill order was placed through our health insurance prescription program. She has been using this medication for several years. A generic medication had been tried, but she had adverse reactions. So the doctor went back to the brand name medication.

### PRE-APPROVAL? AGAIN?

This time, the prescription filling agency said they needed the doctor's pre-approval to fill the order with the non generic medication. Huh? I thought we had settled this a long time ago when the generic didn't work.

This was explained to the prescription filling folks. So why is the doctor's pre-approval required this time after he's been prescribing this medication for years? That's the way it has to be done, say the prescription folks.

This pre-approval is going to cost us because of the paperwork required for the doctor and/or his office to comply with this idiotic [my comment] request.

So the question I have is: Who runs medical care? It's clear from this personal experience that our doctor isn't the person in charge. Remember he's treated us for more than 20 years and knows more about our health care needs than the prescription folks.

### DOCTORS AREN'T IN CHARGE

That dear reader is the problem with health care: Insurance companies run it, not your physician. This isn't a revelation. Almost everyone has had a similar experience.

Think about it: If you needed medication or anything related to your health would you rather trust your doctor or do you want to place your health care decisions with your insurance company?

There's nothing wrong with suggesting a generic medication if it will do the



job. Generics save money [I use some] and that translates into less health care costs which translates into saving [hopefully] you and me money. But if a generic medication has been tried and the patient experiences adverse reaction to it or it doesn't do the job, then it makes sense the doctor will go back to the non-generic medication. This isn't rocket science. It's called good medicine.

But no, the all knowing insurance company gets in the act and calls the shots overruling your doctor's professional medical treatment. This is wrong. Regardless of the sincerity and professionalism of the insurance company, it isn't a trained, professional, practicing physician treating you. And it isn't knowledgeable about your health care treatment needs.

We all scream about the rising cost of medical care. Let's place some of the blame for this where it rightfully belongs: On the insurance companies who increasingly determine what kind of care you will receive.

### WHY NOT PASS ALONG SAVINGS?

If the insurance companies are so concerned about saving money, why don't they pass these savings on to you and me in reducing our premiums and our co-pays? If you use a generic medication your co-pay may [but not always] be a little less. But don't count on it.

Don't waste your time griping about the politicians in Washington fumbling around about health care. It's clear those in Washington aren't responsive to their voters. Besides, many of them are in the pocket of the insurance company lobbyists as they are with all lobbyists.

The real target of your frustration and anger should be the insurance company. Like Wall Street bankers, they aren't going broke.

- The author lives in Beggs

# Teabaggers' Delusions Threaten Us All

By Larry Steele

OK, let me get this straight. A group calling themselves "teabaggers" holds a "National Convention" [joke] in a mid-sized southern city. They have all of 600 [not 6,000 or 60,000] "delegates" and a featured speaker who needs to write "tax cuts" on her hand to remember to say it. They rail about losing the America of the 1950s and long for the "good ol' days."

And these people get national and local news coverage?

There are UFO conventions in New Mexico with more people [and probably more lucid discussions!] These 21st Century "Know Nothings" are being covered way beyond their scope of importance.

Why are they just appearing now when we have a black president? Is there something we don't know about their stealthy and covert agenda?

They say they protest our national debt but where were they when it was mounting daily over the last eight years of Bush? After Bush paid off the banks in 2008 with billions in taxpayer money, Obama took office with a national debt of \$1.3 trillion, all inherited from the Republicans!

The ship of state was dangling on the edge of the waterfall and we were looking at a second Great Depression. There was going to be 25% unemployment [not the 10% we peaked at], soup lines, financial collapse, and a real threat that our Republic could fail.

Obama formulated a stimulus package to head off these very real threats and it began working. The cost of the stimulus, voted against by the party of "NO," was minimal compared to the debt inherited. Instead of going over the waterfall, he pulled us back from plunging into the falls and he now is being blamed for our huge national debt!

All we need for these "teabaggers" is a white rabbit, talking caterpillar, and a mad hatter and they will be able to attend a tea party similar to Alice's in Wonderland.

The failures of Republican policies are finally hitting home in Oklahoma. Word is that next year in Norman and all across the state, schools will eliminate one to two classes in every grade level in each elementary school. This is because the stimulus money is running out.

Our Republican "teabaggers" in the Oklahoma Legislature refuse to roll back the \$700 million-plus in tax cuts for their wealthy buddies they passed previously when they became the majority.

I thought cutting taxes was supposed to stimulate the economy? Any more "tax cut" and "right to work" stimulation from these posers and we will all be

selling pencils on the corner as our kids will be attending school 50 in a classroom with no music, no art, no sports to be offered.

Perhaps Obama made it too easy for us to survive this crisis. Perhaps if he had not shouldered the burden to save the financial system from collapse and save and create jobs, people would have seen exactly what the Republican policies, beginning with Reagan and ending with Bush, have brought to this country.

The incredible thing is that people are now actually talking about putting Republicans back into the Senate and House, both locally and nationally!

If we continue to believe these naysayers and their negative and blatantly false propaganda, we, too, will be condemned to attend the tea party. The real ones to suffer will be the children because we will have handed over our positive, forward looking outlook as Americans to the grumpy, backward looking Republican teabaggers.

A famous American once said that lies can travel halfway around the world before the truth can get its boots on. I encourage all Americans to look at the facts and move forward, not backward.

If we don't, I fear for our Republic.

- The author lives in Norman

## HEALTH

From Page 14

It's mind-boggling that any sophisticated analyst would attribute Republican Scott Brown's surprise victory in the Massachusetts special senatorial election to public rejection of government-guaranteed health care. As a Massachusetts state senator, Brown voted for a universal coverage plan that's a lot less conservative than what's on deck in Washington.

The Newsweek poll also asked for feelings about the job that Obama and Republicans and Democrats in Congress were doing on health care reform. Some 52% disapproved of Obama's performance, 61% disapproved of the congressional Democrats', and 63% disapproved of the congressional Republicans'.

No one is walking away from this with an Academy Award, but what's coming out of Republican leaders' mouths clearly isn't what's coming out of the American people's. The people will speak definitively on Nov. 2.

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# Lessons Learned From America's Lost Decade

By Robert Parry

As the United States takes the measure of Barack Obama's first year in the White House and looks beyond to what could be a difficult new decade, it might be useful to first stop and extract some lessons from the 2000s, which proved to be a lost economic decade for many Americans.

For the first time since the Great Depression, the United States experienced zero job growth in a decade. Zero. And zero is actually worse than it sounds since none of the preceding six decades registered job growth of less than 20%.

By comparison, the 1970s, which are often bemoaned as a time of economic stagflation and political malaise, registered a 27% increase in jobs. Yet, in part because of that relatively slow rise in jobs – down from 31% in the 1960s – American voters turned to Ronald Reagan and his radical economic theories of tax cuts, global “free markets” and deregulation.

Reagan sold Americans on his core vision: “Government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem.” Through his personal magnetism, Reagan turned taxes into a third rail of American politics.

## HE CONVINCED THEM

He convinced many voters that the government's only important role was funding the military.

Yet, instead of guiding the country to a bright new day of economic vitality, Reagan's approach accelerated a de-industrialization of the United States and a slump in the growth of American jobs, down to 20% during the 1980s.

The percentage job increase for the 1990s stayed at 20%, although job growth did pick up later in the decade under Democrat Bill Clinton, who raised taxes and moderated some of Reagan's approaches while still pushing “free trade” agreements and deregulation.

Hard-line Reaganomics returned with a vengeance under George W. Bush – more tax cuts, more faith in “free trade,” more deregulation – and the Great American Job Engine finally started grinding to a halt. Zero percent increase.

## STILL A POWERFUL FORCE

Despite the painful statistics of the past three decades, Reaganomics remains a powerful force in American political life. Anyone tuning in CNBC or picking up the Wall Street Journal would think that these economic policies had enjoyed unqualified success.

Though the downward economic spiral can be traced over the past three decades, the facts are especially stark for the 2000s, the so-called “Aughts” or perhaps more accurately the “Naughts.”

“For most of the past 70 years, the U.S. economy has grown at a steady clip, generating perpetually higher incomes and wealth for American households,” wrote Neil Irwin in a 2010 review of comparative economic data for the Washington Post. “But since 2000, the story is starkly different.”

As the Post article and its accompanying graphics show, the last decade's sad story wasn't just limited to the abysmal job numbers.

## WORST PACE SINCE 1930s

U.S. economic output slowed to its worst pace since the 1930s, rising only 17.8% in the 2000s, less than half the 38.1% increase in the despised 1970s. Household net worth declined 4% in the last decade, compared to a 28% rise in the 1970s. [All figures were adjusted for inflation.]

As grim as those numbers were, the overall economic legacies of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush may be even worse.

Not only did the Great American Job Engine grind to a halt in the past decade, but the dire economic numbers were accompanied by massive increases in federal debt, part of a risky right-wing strategy to hamstring the government's ability to ever address domestic problems in the future.

When Reagan took office, the total federal debt was still under \$1 trillion [\$909 billion]. By the end of the 12-year Republican reign of Reagan and George H.W. Bush, the total debt had quadrupled.

## CLINTON STOPPED IT

The rise in the red ink leveled off under Democrat Bill Clinton. Amazingly, he left office with the federal budget in the black by \$236 billion and with a projected 10-year budget surplus of \$5.6 trillion.

The budgetary trend lines were such that Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan began to fret about the challenges the Fed might face in influencing interest rates if the entire U.S. government debt were paid off, thus leaving no debt obligations to sell.

But Greenspan's nervousness was soon quieted. In 2001, George W. Bush seized the White House after blocking a full counting of legally cast votes in Florida, with the help of five Republican partisans on the U.S. Supreme Court.

Then, though lacking a popular mandate – Bush also had lost the national popular vote to Al Gore – Bush governed as if he had won by a landslide. He pushed through a new round of tax cuts weighted in favor of the wealthy and, after the 9/11 attacks, launched two open-ended wars on borrowed money.

By the time Bush left office in 2009, the annual deficit had gone to \$1.3 trillion [from a \$236 billion surplus]. Total federal debt had risen almost \$5 trillion to \$10.7 trillion. And the projected 10-year budget outlook called for \$8 trillion more in red ink.

## WHO'S TO BLAME?

Some of the fault for these Democratic political troubles can fairly be laid at Obama's door, though surely not all.



Fearing a new Great Depression, Obama did continue Bush's policies for bailing out large banks whose greed and recklessness contributed to the 2008 financial meltdown.

Obama also alienated his “base” by rejecting calls for investigating Bush-era national security crimes, expanding the Afghan War, and accepting compromises on health-care reform.

Tactically, Obama was played for a sucker when he let health-care negotiations with “moderate” Republicans like Olympia Snowe of Maine drag on past his initial deadline of August.

By slow-rolling the process, the Republicans bought time to organize right-wing populist opposition to the reform package and then marched the GOP [Sen. Olympia Snowe included] in lockstep behind a Senate filibuster of the legislation.

Republicans and the Right are determined to protect the Reagan-Bush legacies by blocking Democratic domestic legislation that might take the country in a different direction. To stop that possibility, they continue to whip up anti-tax, anti-government furies.

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## As Only Molly Ivins Could Tell The Tale

At a long-ago political do at Scholz Garten in Austin, everybody who was anybody was there meetin' and greetin' at a furious pace.

A group of us got the tired feet and went to lean our butts against a table at the back wall of the bar. Perched like birds in a row were Bob Bullock, then state comptroller; moi; Charles Miles, the head of Bullock's personnel department; and Ms. Ann Richards.

Bullock, 20 years in God's Place politics, knew every sorry, no good sumbitch in the entire state. Some old racist judge from East God's Place came up to him: “Bob, my boy, how are you?”

Bullock said, “Judge, I'd like you to meet my friends: This is Molly Ivins with the God's Place Observer.”

The judge peered up at me and said, “How yew, little lady?” Bullock, “And this is Charles Miles, the head of my personnel department.” Miles, who is black, stuck out his hand, and the judge got an expression on his face as though he had just stepped into a fresh cowpie.

He reached out and touched Charlie's palm with one finger, while turning eagerly to the pretty, blond, blue-eyed Ann Richards.

“And who is this lovely lady?” Ann beamed and replied, “I am Mrs. Miles.”

## The Broken System

# ***GOP Destroying American Democracy***

While running for president in 1976, Jimmy Carter said that America must have "a government as good as its people." Today, our political system isn't living up to that challenge.

Sixty-two percent of the public thinks the country is headed on the wrong track, and 75% disapprove of the job Congress is doing.

With political stalemate the norm in Washington – on health care legislation, terrorism issues, economic reform, and presidential nominees – Americans are looking for progress and hoping that politicians will break the gridlock.

The Center for American Progress President and CEO John Podesta gave one of the most blunt assessments of the current political climate recently, telling the *Financial Times* that the "health of American politics ... sucks."

### **FRUSTRATED**

"It feels like a very frustrated country," he added. The shocking retirement announcement from Sen. Evan Bayh, D-IN, further brought the dysfunction into focus.

Instead of offering the usual reasons for stepping down, Bayh cited "too much partisanship and not enough progress – too much narrow ideology and not enough practical problem-solving."

Bayh's analysis is on the mark, even though he was often part of the problem. His decision to walk away from public service is, as Center for American Progress Action Fund Fellow Matt Yglesias has noted, "not a recipe for good conduct."

James Fallows of *The Atlantic* recently wrote that the "American tragedy of the early 21st Century" is that it has "a vital and self-renewing culture that attracts the world's talent, and a governing system that increasingly looks like a joke."

### **WE NEED TO FIX IT**

If the country doesn't fix what's broken, "we face a replay of what made the months after the 9/11 attacks so painful: realizing that it was possible to change course and address problems long neglected, and then watching that chance slip away."

Former President Teddy Roosevelt famously praised "the man who is actually in the arena," who "if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."

Bayh fell short of this standard. Instead of staying in the arena to help repair the political system and push for progress, he decided to step aside.

Bayh is the son of the legendary former Sen. Birch Bayh, a man remembered "as a key architect of Title IX, a proponent of the Equal Rights Amendment, and a crusader for sensible political reform like electoral college abolition."

The *Guardian's* Michael Tomasky noted that Bayh was "a darling of centrist Democrats," but "never a profile in courage."

### **FIXING THE FILIBUSTER**

A major part of the problem in the Senate is that it now takes a supermajority – 60 votes – to pass just about anything.

Marc Ambinder of *The Atlantic* notes that "Republicans threatened to filibuster at least 100 pieces of legislation this session, far more than any other since the procedural tactic was invented."

The filibuster gives an undue amount of power to individual senators and allows them to exploit the process for their narrow interests.

For instance, Connecticut Independent Sen. Joe Lieberman's threat to filibuster health care reform forced the removal of the public option and the Medicare buy-in, despite their tremendous popularity.

Moreover, the filibuster removes electoral accountability by giving the losing party the ability to obstruct the winning party's agenda.

## ***Obama Urged To Fix 'Faith-Based' Initiative***

*By Joe Conn*

Americans United for Separation of Church and State joined 25 national religious and public policy organizations in a letter to President Barack Obama asking him to make major changes to the "faith-based" initiative.

The joint letter to the president lays out a specific set of proposals to protect civil rights and religious liberty in federally funded social services and urges Obama to adopt them.

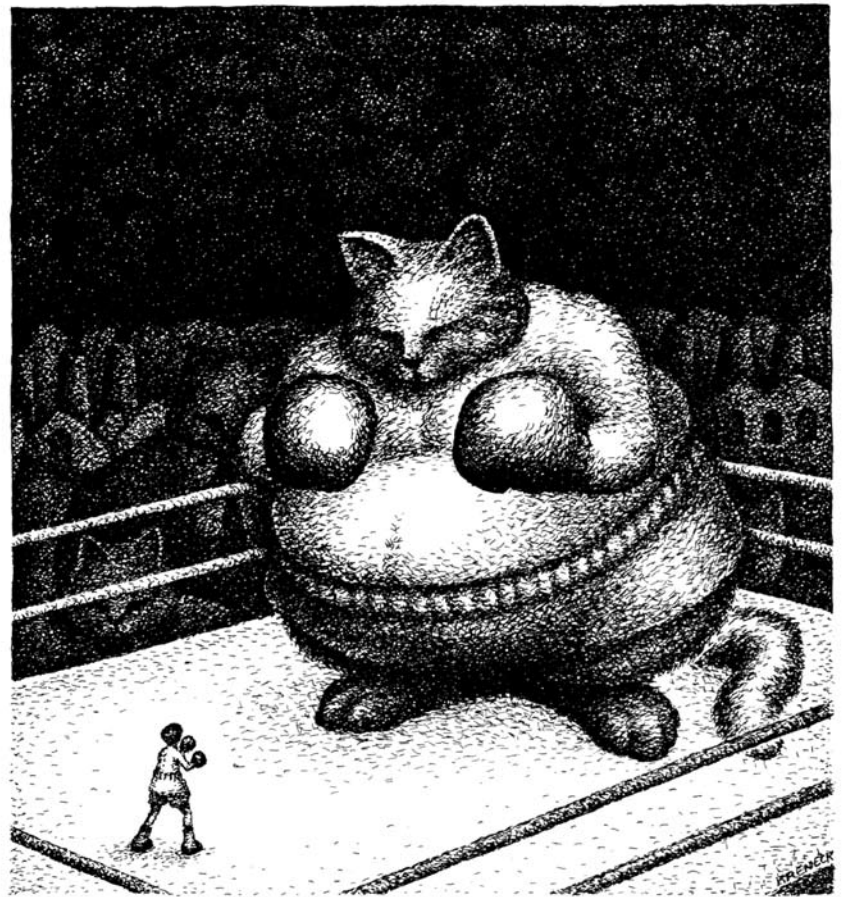
They include banning employment discrimination based on religion in tax-funded projects and issuing uniform guidelines to ensure that no person seeking help in a publicly funded program is subjected to unwanted proselytizing.

In a speech at the National Prayer Breakfast, Obama insisted that his administration has "turned the faith-based initiative around." In fact, leaders of civil rights, civil liberties and religious groups say the president has failed to correct Bush-era policies.

### **SURPRISED AND DISAPPOINTED**

"I was surprised and disappointed to hear President Obama suggest that the faith-based initiative has somehow been turned around," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "In fact, in all significant ways, the Obama faith-based initiative right now is the same as the Bush faith-based initiative.

"The Bush rules and regulations are all still in place," Lynn continued. "Ad-



While the House passed a health care reform bill with a robust public option, a clean energy and greenhouse gas pollution reduction bill to fight climate change, and a comprehensive financial regulatory reform bill, each bill languished in the Senate because of the filibuster threat.

Sen. Tom Harkin, D-IA, has proposed legislation that would gradually lower the number of votes the Senate majority would need to block filibusters.

### **FIXING CLOTURE**

Rep. Alan Grayson, D-FL, has a petition to reduce the Senate's cloture threshold to 55 senators. Changing the filibuster would not be without precedent, as was done in 1975. A recent poll also shows that more Americans are in favor of changing these Senate rules.

By listening to Republican lawmakers and many political pundits, the American public would get the impression that President Obama and the Democratic-controlled 113th Congress has been a complete failure.

The facts are quite different though. American Enterprise Institute scholar Norman J. Ornstein points to the \$787 billion stimulus legislation, one of the largest tax cuts in history, funding to improve health-information technology, dramatic K-12 education reform, and a massive investment in energy and environmental programs.

"Any Congress that passed all these items separately would be considered enormously productive," he writes. "Instead, this Congress did it in one bill."

Yet at the same time, Republicans continue to focus on the short-term rewards of obstruction. They reflexively oppose anything that Democrats support – even if they supported it at one time – and use the fact that Democrats have only a narrow majority in the Senate to block progress.

The system has become so dysfunctional that one man – Sen. Richard Shelby, R-AL – can set back the functioning of the federal government by placing a hold on every single one of Obama's pending nominees, all in the interest of securing home state pork projects.

"Washington, right now, is broken," Vice President Biden, formerly a veteran senator, said in an interview with CBS News. "I've never seen it this dysfunctional."

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ministration officials have failed to safeguard the vital constitutional boundary between church and state, and they have not restored the damage to civil rights law."

The joint letter notes that Obama, as a candidate, promised to reform the faith-based initiative – a concept pioneered under the administration of George W. Bush. Yet since taking office, Obama has kept in place various rules and executive orders promulgated during the Bush Administration.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Among specific recommendations, the letter asks the president to:

- Revoke a June 2007 legal memo issued by the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel that asserts that a 1993 religious freedom law gives religious groups the right to take tax funds and still discriminate on religious grounds in hiring. This interpretation, the joint letter asserts, is "erroneous and threatens core civil rights and religious freedom protections."

- Issue policies making it clear that social-services providers must give proper notice to beneficiaries of their religious liberty rights and access to alternative secular providers.

- Require that houses of worship and other religious institutions that infuse religion into every program create separate corporations for the purpose of providing secular government-funded social services.

## Catholic Bishops Sign On

# 'Christian' Manifesto Says Liberals Are Nazis

By Peter Montgomery

Religious right leaders are making a concerted push to gain thousands of new signatures for their "Manhattan Declaration," a manifesto released by about 150 conservative Christian leaders.

The document was signed by such religious-right heavy-hitters as Focus on the Family eminence James Dobson and Prison Fellowship Ministries leader Chuck Colson.

It compares pro-choice advocates to eugenicists [and implicitly to Nazis] and equates same-sex marriage with polygamy and a gateway to legalized incest.

Its authors promise to defy any law that does not comport with their religious beliefs. Joining the religious right's Protestant leaders as signatories to the declaration are four Roman Catholic bishops, including those presiding over the powerful archdioceses of New York and Washington, DC.

Although they fell well short of the one million signature goal, they claimed at press time to have gathered more than 419,000 signatures and have redoubled their efforts to add more names.

The manifesto warns of a grave threat from "the anti-family/anti-religious radicals who control the White House and Congress."

Several U.S. Catholic bishops – Cardinal Justin Rigali of Philadelphia, Archbishop Donald Wueri of Washington, DC, Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York, and Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville – are urging their fellow bishops to preach about the declaration, get signatures from the faithful and use the document as an organizing vehicle.

## WELFARE

From Page One

There's an initial burst of outrage, then ... nothing.

And when lawmakers like Sen. Mike Mazzei, R-Tulsa, attempt to persuade their colleagues to thoroughly review the tax breaks, one-by-one, they're quickly rebuffed.

It may well be that some of these tax breaks work splendidly, providing a substantial return on a modest public investment, but no one really knows.

House Speaker Chris Benge says he likes the idea of reviewing the tax breaks to ensure they're working as anticipated. But he needs to do more than merely express support for the notion – he needs to put the muscle of his office behind it.

It's a good bet a substantial legislative majority would back an exhaustive review of the tax breaks.

So why doesn't it happen?

The Legislature's powers-that-be typically give lip service to the idea, but never permit it to be considered because it would rankle too many of their leading financial backers.

For the record, it's not just in Oklahoma that legislators are too wimpy to take a hard look at corporate welfare.

Several years ago, two North Carolina state representatives, Republican Phillip Frye and Democrat Pryor Gibson, worked to create an interstate compact that would stop the use of economic development incentives like tax credits and cash grants that create bidding wars between states.

Their efforts won some positive media attention, but went nowhere. Oklahoma, for one, continues to dole out mega-tax breaks to a vast array of businesses that range from natural gas producers to tire manufacturers to the Oklahoma City Thunder NBA team.

Since 2004, state lawmakers awarded nearly \$400 million in tax breaks to oil and gas companies alone – a fact that even legendary Tulsa oilman, banker and philanthropist George Kaiser views as something of an em-

barrassment of riches when compared to the plight of average Oklahomans.

Remember Kaiser's 2009 testimony before the House Appropriations and Budget Committee?

He suggested the state money dedicated to oil and gas tax credits would be better spent matching federal Medicaid funds, providing health care for children or funding teacher pay raises.

"The tax rebates we are considering cause almost no wells to be drilled in Oklahoma that would not otherwise be drilled," he said. "This is particularly disturbing because Oklahoma has allowed many serious statewide problems to fester for lack of funding."

The situation is even worse now. The governor, the House speaker and the Senate president pro tem have deployed spending cuts, federal stimulus dollars and Rainy Day funds to patch a gaping hole in the state's current budget – result of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, collapsing oil and gas tax revenues and nearly three-quarters of a billion dollars in foolhardy tax cuts.

Oklahoma legislators – especially corporatist Republicans – are remarkably adept at waving the flag and proclaiming their devotion to free-market capitalism. So are many of the state's leading corporate citizens.

Yet, who's first in line at the public trough, investing modest amounts [campaign contributions] to reap taxpayer-funded windfalls? And who's more than happy to dole out the incentives, despite their free-market fealty?

It's nothing short of a conspiracy to loot the state treasury, ensuring the rich-get-richer while rank-and-file Oklahomans get to ... well ... eat cake.

Given the state's fiscal crisis – including a projected \$1.2 billion hole in next year's budget – isn't it time to take a serious look at tax policies that cost the state treasury \$5.6 billion a year?

The declaration links reproductive rights and death-with-dignity advocates with the early-20th Century eugenicists whose notions fueled the murderous Nazi ideology of genetic purity.

According to the declaration, marriage is, in the final analysis, about creating a "reproductive unit." Yes, marriage may be about an emotional and spiritual commitment, but only one that is "completed and actualized" by sexual intercourse that fulfills "the behavioral conditions of procreation."

The Manhattan Declaration, while presented as a religious tract, is more a political offensive, and its primary target appears to be President Barack Obama.

Princeton University Law Professor Robert George, who co-authored the document with Chuck Colson, explained on Dobson's radio show that one impetus for the declaration was the election of Barack Obama and Democratic majorities in Congress.

Although the document's rhetoric sounds some old and familiar right-wing themes, it's dressed up for the Obama era to include the now-standard right-wing warnings that the administration and its congressional allies are leading the United States into an era of Nazism.

David Dockery, president of the Southern Baptist-affiliated Union University, compared the Manhattan Declaration to the 1934 Barmen Declaration of the resisting churches in Nazi Germany.

The document repeats bogus claims about the new federal hate crimes law, neglecting to note the law's explicit affirmation of First Amendment protections for free speech and religious liberty.

Promoters of the Manhattan Declaration have made a big deal out of the supposedly historical significance of getting Roman Catholics, evangelicals and Orthodox Christians together on the same document and the same press conference podium.

Anti-choice Catholics and evangelicals have long worked side by side in opposition to legal abortion, as they are currently doing to try to use health-care reform efforts to further restrict women's access to reproductive health services.

In recent months, Catholic bishops have devoted massive financial resources and political muscle to resisting domestic partnerships and marriage equality, and shown themselves ever more willing to stand with extreme anti-gay voices of the evangelical right.

In December, Catholic leaders shocked even many Washington-area Catholics by threatening to abandon Catholic Charities' extensive social service partnerships with the DC government if the marriage equality bill moving forward in the DC Council becomes law.

Mike Huckabee gushed on his television show that Colson, one of the authors of the declaration, would be "one of the great influences on history."

Appearing on Fox's "The O'Reilly Factor," Ann Coulter told Bill O'Reilly it is a "fantastic statement" that might "wake up" the church.

Asking rhetorically if the attention-seeking Declaration was a sign of desperation or a show of power by the religious right, journalist and author Sarah Posner calls it "proof that the culture wars are not only not over; there hasn't even been a truce."

Ex-felon Colson rejected the notion that the declaration is a political manifesto of the religious right, saying "nothing could be further from the truth."

If, as these and other conservative Christians have declared, their positions on abortion and end-of-life issues and marriage are "inviolable and non-negotiable," where does that lead?

Clearly, it may lead to the Archdiocese of Washington decreeing that its supposed need not to provide health care benefits to the partner of a gay employee is more important than its multi-million-dollar partnerships with the District of Columbia government to provide services to the homeless and hungry.

The editors of the Los Angeles Times called the Manhattan Declaration's "apocalyptic argument for lawbreaking" both disingenuous and dangerous, and asked, "Did the Roman Catholic bishops who signed the manifesto consider how their endorsement of lawbreaking in a higher cause might embolden the antiabortion terrorists they claim to condemn?"

The signers, concludes the editorial, "need to be reminded that this is a nation of laws, not of men – even holy men."

– The author is a senior fellow at People For the American Way Foundation  
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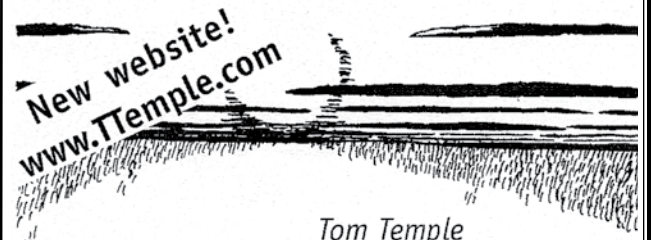
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