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Teachers Battered, Bewildered Schools Under Fire

By Frosty Troy

"If I knew that a man was coming to my house with the conscious design of doing me good, I should run for my life." – Henry David Thoreau

The growing number of critics of public education include many who mean well, but taken together the criticism is reaching epic proportions.

Teachers for the most part are dumbfounded. No other profession labors in such desperate vineyards for less money and does – for the most part – a successful but thankless job.

From U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan [more rigor is demanded] to OU President David Boren [civic illiteracy is appalling], the critics spin the notion that nothing less than restructuring public education will work.

A Republican legislative leader confronted me in the rotunda of the Capitol.

"Where did you get the idea that Republicans hate teachers? We don't hate teachers, we hate their unions." Duh!

One of Oklahoma's foremost political loons, Tom Daxon, spewed an article for the rightwing Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, asserting that House Bill 1017 failed. If public education is a failure, Daxon is exhibit A.

Henry Bellmon must be rolling over in his grave as 1017 funding goes down the drain, a victim of corporate greed that has dominated the Statehouse since the GOP took over the Legislature.

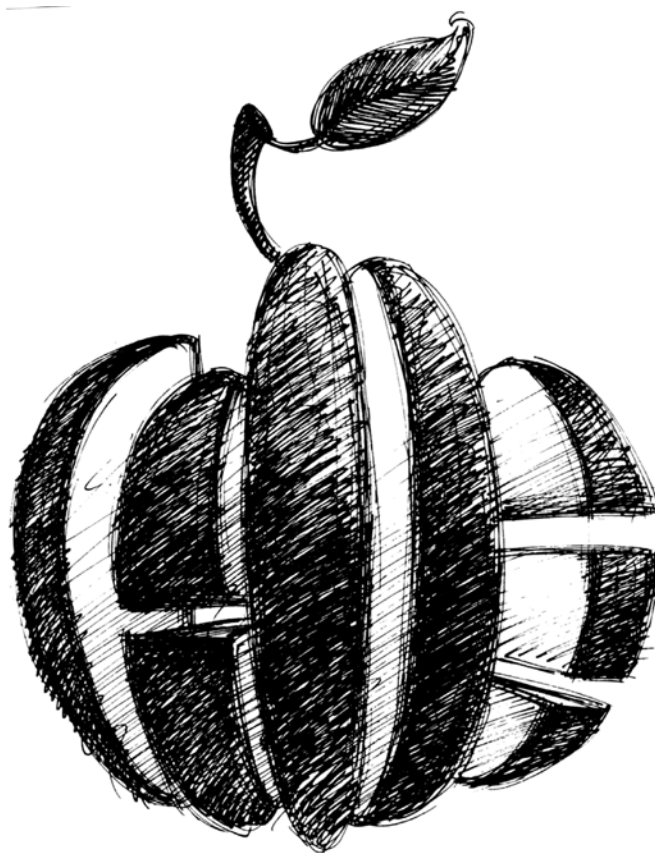
Bellmon spearheaded public school reform in 1985, producing the finest system in America. He had to work with Democrats because almost all legislative Republicans were op-

posed.

If political lies and exaggerations about public education were crimes, Oklahoma would have to build a new prison.

The majority of so-called reforms in Oklahoma saddle the public schools with 32 funded and unfunded mandates.

Schools already grapple with George Bush's No Child Left Behind Act, a mish-mash that amounts to test, test, test. Add that to the state mandates and it is little wonder that the average new teacher is quitting after five



years.

Oklahoma test scores soar when inner city schools' scores are subtracted. Oklahoma still ranks among the Top 10 best prepared teachers in the nation, yet teachers rank 48th in pay and the state ranks 47th in what it spends on a student's education.

That brings forth the oft repeated Republican refrain: "Quit throwing money at the schools and hold them accountable." Hey, throw money at public education just once and see if it makes a difference.

Public schools are "accountable" for the fourth hungriest students in America, the highest percentage of kids whose parents are in prison, and nearly a third from single parent families.

Even a handful of Democratic legislators side with the Republicans in favor of vouchers – a dead draw from public school funding. [If homeschoolers are covered it would be zero accountability.]

Easily the harshest critic of the public schools is Sen. Steve Rus-

sell, an Oklahoma City Republican who chronically belittles the schools. Guess what? He's a homeschooler!

The record proves that Oklahoma students are as bright as students anywhere, including the fabulous Math & Science High School which has led the nation in test scores. At \$22,000 per student, it should.

Why are schools always measured by test scores? Of course they are important, but how about valuing how teachers touch lives?

Teacher Merri Snow says Arne Duncan has it wrong for implying that teachers are to blame, that firing the teachers would fix the problems. Why must emphasis always be on punishing teachers who are only a part of the system?

There are 654,511 students in Oklahoma public schools, up 73,172 since 1990, including 74,000 Hispanic students. Only 56% are white.

Critics should note that Oklahoma City is 41% Hispanic and 22% in Tulsa. Their lack of English is a major challenge for teachers.

In Oklahoma City 80% of all students are on free and reduced lunches and 33% come from single parent homes.

Sen. Russell should spend a day in an inner Oklahoma City school with a teacher of our acquaintance.

As she passed out test papers a student showed up late and she told him to take a seat. As he slid into his seat he mumbled "f-- you!"

"Did you hear what he said?" a student asked.

"Shhhh! Just let me handle it," the teacher whispered. She knew he wanted to be sent to the principal's office so he could cut school because he would do poorly on the test. He did. She had better things to do than re-test him.

Such wiley teachers are part babysitter, part parent, part counselor and sometimes the only friend a student has – especially those who are obviously abused or neglected.

Teachers deal with teen pregnancy and students who are homeless, thousands of foster kids and poor kids coming to school on cold winter days

See SCHOOLS Page 19

Observations

Mute On Crime

The news out of Tulsa was stomach-turning. Vanentino Verner, 27, was shot repeatedly outside of the Chicken Hut, a walk-up restaurant. He subsequently died.

Just another murder? Hardly. A crowd estimated at 100 patrons were at the restaurant. Many witnessed the shooting.

An EMSA employee said people were walking over the man's body to get their food. EMSA emergency workers said they were actually impeding in their attempt to aid to the man.

Police and firefighters arrived on the scene and the crowd began jeering and yelling at them.

Police Captain Karen Taylor said police attempted to question bystanders but they were mute.

In case you tuned it late, this is not just an Oklahoma phenomenon. It is happening in black communities across the nation.

Irate at police profiling and a criminal justice system that incarcerates blacks at three times the rate of whites, the silence of witnesses to crimes has swept the country.

While we hold no brief for profiling or desperate sentencing, the answer is not silence. What if the victim is a member of your family? What if you're next?

This masking of crimes ranging from murder to armed robbery to criminal assault is unacceptable, especially within a minority where the majority of crimes are black on black.

Ministers in Tulsa and elsewhere have their work cut out for them. You cannot ignore the man in the ditch and still profess to be a believer.

Crisis

America is facing a critical shortage of family physicians, none hurting worse than Oklahoma.

The number of primary care physicians has dropped by half since 1997 and more than 50% that are still practicing no longer see new patients.

Why? The average family practi-

tioner earns about \$200,000 a year – lowest of any medical specialty. The average family doctor starts the practice owing an average of \$200,000.

Doctors are increasingly depending on physicians' assistants to do regular exams, referring to the doctor if something is medically wrong.

Family doctors are not alone. Oklahoma is short more than 3,000 registered nurses. Hospitals are increasingly relying on practical nurses for jobs the RNs once did.

Some programs are forgiving bills if doctors practice in rural Oklahoma, hardest hit by the shortage.

It is ironic that the very politicians who whine about Obama's healthcare plan are in a position to do something about it in impoverished Oklahoma – home of more than 650,000 citizens without health insurance.

Stepping Out

Too bad more pro-life legislators don't follow the lead of State Rep. Jason Murphey who continues his yearly donation of \$8,241 from his legislative salary to Crossroads, An Open Door For Life Choices Inc., located in Guthrie.

Crossroads provides faith-based, pro-life counseling and support services to expectant mothers.

Murphey said that Oklahoma legislators are some of the highest paid part-time legislators in the nation, making double the regional average.

He said his donation is to demonstrate that legislators in Oklahoma should not be paid so much more than other legislators in the region, and to illustrate the importance of pro-life services such as Crossroads.

The amount donated reflects the difference in legislative pay and the per capita pay in Oklahoma at the time Murphey was elected. During his 2006 campaign for office, he pledged to continue making the donation until legislative salaries are adjusted.

That's not why we applaud him. Adoption is a major way of curbing



abortions. There are thousands of couples who would gladly adopt if they had the opportunity.

Many couples are spending tens of thousands of dollars going abroad to adopt.

Obama Hype

To say we are disappointed in the Obama Administration's approach to public education would be an understatement.

We had hoped Obama would get out of the way and let teachers teach; that he would shelve the sorry Bush No Child Left Behind law.

Yet pressure from the Obama Administration and the incentive of federal dollars may cause more wholesale firings like those at Central Falls High School in Rhode Island.

Of course it was applauded by the likes of the Christian Science Monitor and others on the far right.

Such moves will proliferate as "an increasing crop of no-excuses superintendents and state commissioners" take the view that "it's essential to clean house," according to Frederick Hess, director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute.

The turnaround plan in Central Falls arose when negotiations between the district and local union over alternate approaches broke down.

Sure! Fire the teachers! Replace them with a new set of teachers that will also be fired as long as support for public education remains on the backburner.

All that hype about Arne Duncan and his so-called Chicago turnaround was seriously overblown as he took the reins as Secretary of Education.

Say What?

Is Mental Health Commissioner Terri White out of her mind? Requiring drug and alcohol counselors to have a master's degree in order to be certified is outrageous.

Literally thousands of alcohol and drug addicts would be without help.

Requiring a four-year degree in behavioral science and 4,000 hours of supervisions is more than enough to get the job done.

If those with a bachelor's degree are inclined to further their education, go for it – but don't make it mandatory.

This is a busy-body decision that will backfire on Oklahoma, which doesn't at present have adequate means to fully address addiction with-

out adding to the misery.

Just as we were thinking that White, a social worker, was turning out to be a better mental health commissioner than we expected, she goes and does something truly stupid.

Indoctrination

It was worth a laugh if it didn't involve something so serious. We refer to the Daily Disappointment's editorial bemoaning the lack of centrist politics.

Their definition of centrist politics is to bitterly criticize those legislative Democrats who fight the legislative Republican leadership's hard right momentum.

The Daily Disappointment is a primary reason why Oklahoma has shifted to Republican Tea Party and Birther politics.

Their chronic assault on public education and Oklahoma's modest tax base reaches Oklahomans who don't have a clue that they're being indoctrinated, not informed.

The sop they throw at a few Democratic Party officeholders is amusing – they would never support their political aspirations.

I keep reminding folks the Disappointment's founder, E.K. Gaylord, was a founding member of the John Birch Society. Little has changed on the worst editorial page in America.

Real Losers

That heat the press is feeling is the hot breath of a rightwing Legislature considering half a dozen bills to keep the media from doing a complete job of reporting.

Among them are bills to close autopsy reports, birth dates of public employees, municipal court data and records from a subsidized film office.

Sniffing around people's private lives is one thing but holding public officials accountable is the heart and soul of good reporting.

Senate Leader Glenn Coffee, R-OKC, told a news conference that he was having second thoughts about his vote in favor of keeping birth dates private.

State Rep. Randy Terrill, R-Moore, said birth dates in cases of crime, corruption or wrong-doing should be public.

The media isn't the loser if these bills become law.

The real losers would be the public – the only way they can cast informed ballots.

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OUR MOTTO: To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

OUR CREDO: So then to all their chance, to all their shining golden opportunity. To all the right to love, to live, to work, to be themselves, and to become whatever thing their vision and humanity can combine to make them. This seeker, is the promise of America.

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

Observerscope

The unauthorized move of President Barack Obama's portrait in the House chamber gives you an idea of how childish some Republicans are. It was Rep. Lewis Moore, R-Arcadia.

Dart: To U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-OK, for more than 20 trips on the taxpayers' dime to visit Uganda as a representative of The Family, a religious cult to which he and Sen. Tom Coburn, R-OK, belong.

An average teacher's week: 36.3 hours teaching, 6.2 hours related duties and 11.2 hours in preparation and grading. That equals 53.7 hours.

Laurel: To Rep. Mike Reynolds, R-OKC, for nailing HB 3288 by Rep. Skye McNiell, for what it is – a so-called study of tax credits but an exemption from the Opens Meetings Act.

Rep. Gus Blackwell, R-Goodwell, wants to change the name of the Ethics Commission. Someone tell him it's named in the State Constitution, not by statute.

Dart: To U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe, for his perfect score as the most rightwing member of the U.S. Senate. Sen. Tom Coburn ranked fourth. [The National Journal]

Following Gov. Brad Henry's State of the State proposal, the House is considering consolidating state agencies, saving \$775,000 a year.

Laurel: To The Oklahoman and the Tulsa World for an excellent team series on nursing homes in Oklahoma. That's what good journalism is all about.

It is with sadness that we report that State Rep. Ryan Kiesel, D-Seminole, will not run for re-election. He is a vigorous voice of sanity in a House run by the intellectually challenged.

Dart: To critics of the Obama stimulus. It has created or saved 23,000 jobs in Oklahoma, accounted for 546 small business loans, extended unemployment benefits for 130,000 Oklahomans and funded 4,900 education positions.

Mazzios and Oliveto restaurants are the latest to ban smoking in workplaces. Rep. Kris Steele, R-Shawnee, has House Bill 2744 for incentives to restaurants that eliminate smoking rooms.

Laurel: To the British medical journal The Lancet for retracting a controversial study that linked autism to measles, mumps and rubella vaccine. It was dead wrong and they apologized for printing it.

State Rep. Sally Kern, R-OKC, had a bill to require counseling for divorcing couples with children but it went down in flames.

Dart: To Rep. John Enns, R-Enid, for HB 2994, which is nothing more than huffing and puffing on guns, claiming the state trumps the feds. Where did he go to school?

The uninsured are twice as likely to die in the emergency room from a traumatic injury than the insured, according to a report by the Archives of Surgery that analyzed 697,091 patients' files.

Laurel: To Dr. Dennis Canfield, FAA forensic scientist, for recognition by the National Safety Council for his work in transportation safety.

U.S. Rep. Tom Cole, R-OK, is opposed to anything proposed by President Obama, including the vital stimulus, healthcare and the budget. Typically, he hasn't proposed any alternatives.

Dart: To the Obama critics. If you think George W. Bush didn't leave this country on the brink of ruin, consider that the Chinese hold \$2.5 trillion of our debt. [Time Magazine]

If President Obama's Education Department has its way, 40,000 poor Oklahoma children in 130 districts would lose free books under the Reading Is Fundamental Act.

Laurel: To the fierce opponents of layoffs at two state-run centers for profoundly mentally disabled residents. The Department of Human Services quickly backed off.



Maybe the politicians would quit citing failures in public education if they ever adequately funded public schools. Teachers rank 48th in pay and the state ranks 47th in what it spends on a student's education.

Dart: To the Daily Disappointment, hiring people for their circulation department with the understanding that they work less than 40 hours so OPUBCO doesn't have to provide healthcare benefits.

A bill by Rep. Lisa Billy, R-Purcell, is whizzing through the Legislature providing a free ultrasound for pregnant women. How many unwanted children has Billy adopted?

Laurel: To OKC Grant High School Principal Rodney Stearns for locking doors on tardy students – and to OKC Superintendent Karl Springer for backing him up. As many as 400 were showing up late for first hour. Not anymore.

The death of Paul Thompson robs the Oklahoma Democratic Party of a tireless activist. He always found time to volunteer, speaking up for minorities while others hugged the sidelines.

Dart: To you folks foolish enough to text while driving. It may cost you up to a \$1,000 fine if pending legislation becomes law – and it should.

A tip of the hat to Catholic Archbishop Beltran for chastising critics of churches banding together to address community social problems. They are NOT a cheering section for President Obama.

Laurel: To the State, Tulsa and OKC Chambers for their opposition to the sale of CompSource, the Oklahoma program providing workmen's compensation insurance. The legislation was dropped.

What would Oklahoma do without the Oklahoma Policy Institute, the only solid source for government data? Every Oklahoman ought to log in at www.okpolicy.org

Dart: To busy-body Rep. Rebecca Hamilton, D-OKC, who is at it again – interfering in the personal lives of women. Her HB 3077 bill prohibiting women from selling their eggs could jeopardize state fertility clinics.

Save the date! Author Greg Mortenson will speak at OU April 22 at 10 a.m. If you haven't read his book *Three Cups of Tea*, it's a must.

Laurel: To New Mexico, latest state to abolish the death penalty – not because it is soft on crime but due to the soaring cost. The average death sentence takes \$1.3 million. Soaring costs led to only 52 American death cases last year.

Gun Owners of America endorsed State Sen. Randy Brogdon for the GOP gubernatorial nomination, a blow for frontrunner U.S. Rep Mary Fallin who dodges debates with Brogdon because it is "too early."

Dart: To Sen. Steve Russell, R-OKC, in the debate over a Bible course, said God has been pushed out of public schools, turning America into a "Godless society." We asked God and He said Russell doesn't speak for Him.

The Tenth Circuit ruled the Children's Rights lawsuit against the Department of Human Services regarding abuse and neglect of Oklahoma foster children can proceed as class-action. Legislative under-funding of DHS is about to come home to roost.

Laurel: To Rep. Mike Reynolds, R-OKC, for his successful amendment permitting the tracking of tax credits – who gets what, why and how many jobs are created. Bravo!

Republicans won't rest until the courthouse door is locked for average Oklahomans. The bill to "reform" workers comp is nothing more than an outright fraud on the people of Oklahoma.

Dart: To the Oklahoma Constitutional Alliance for proposing a constitutional amendment dropping the property tax rate increase from 5% to 3% without addressing how the lost revenue would be replaced.

It was Dostoevsky who said, "The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons." That would render Oklahoma uncivilized.

Laurel: To Dems for attaching two amendments to the bill to drug test welfare recipients. It would also include any folk or firms taking tax incentives and all elected officials.

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

The [3.10.10] article by Norm Rourke finally hits the nail on the head. Insurance companies run the health care business. The whole debate about health care treats insurance as the pink elephant in the middle of the room – everybody can see it but nobody wants to ask it to move.

It is a sad practice to go to the doctor of my choice [by the way] and his office has to call my insurance company to see if I'm covered for a procedure. I totally agree with Mr. Rourke's article: Doctors are not in charge anymore. My doctor is very good. And if he needs to treat me he should have the final say.

Why is it [and I can answer my own question] more discussion or attention has not been paid to the insurance driven health care system? Here's the answer: politicians line their pockets with insurance money. You know that money drives the machine. The machine has to be oiled to keep running.

Until there is a fundamental change of overall attitudes from both sides of the debate, nothing will change. By the way I have Health Choice insurance. The co-pay increased from \$25 to \$50 just to walk into my doctor's office.

Kenny Presson
Norman

Editor, The Observer:

The state of Oklahoma and the cities of Oklahoma have lost the sales taxes of countless numbers of purchases. Purchasing patterns have changed and the method of collecting taxes has not changed with the times. Consequently, our state and cities continue to lose even the ability to collect taxes due them.

I am talking about "on-line" purchasing. Personally, I purchase all computers and computer related items "on-line" and pay no taxes. I purchase all books, blue jeans, shoes, and tools "on-line" and pay no tax. The only "local" purchases that I make that allow me to pay taxes are groceries and gasoline. [Fortunately, there is no tax on the newspaper!] This not only harms the state and cities but it does great damage to our businesses that have to compete with those who do not collect taxes from customers.

Cities are laying off police and firefighters and cutting back on schools for lack of tax collections. The state is cutting out meals for seniors because of shortage of tax collections. It is my opinion that these taxes should be

paid and that the Oklahoma Legislature should create the structures for doing so. I regard taxes as a good thing and they should be collected. This is how we live together as a society.

Dick Galusha
Wagoner

Editor, The Observer:

Every time I hear someone on NPR refer to a "right wing think tank" or refer to something like the American Enterprise Institute as a "think tank" I cringe. This is the kind of misleading rhetoric Rush and Beck use.

So I was sorry to read in your story about the Koch brothers [2.25.10] that they fund various right wing think tanks.

Would not they be more accurately described as "right wing propaganda mills"?

Herb Beattie
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Congratulations on your "America Divided" [2.25.10, cover]. You so eloquently stated the issues as they really are. The whole issue was uplifting. Thank you.

Raymond D. Sewell
Muskogee

Editor, The Observer:

When talk show king Rush Limbaugh was shopping for painkillers, he was not treated like a criminal. But poor Sean Sutton is.

The news media have tried, convicted and executed the former Oklahoma State University basketball coach on drug charges.

Because he is addicted to pain medications, and without a criminal record, he is being treated like a piñata at a Mexican birthday party. He needs treatment, not punishment for his addiction.

But state drug agents want him treated like "Pretty Boy" Floyd for obtaining a controlled dangerous substance by fraud and use of a cell phone to commit a felony.

There are half a million people who are in jail for the consumption of drugs in the United States and it is not reducing consumption.

The failed drug war has succeeded only in inspiring a deadly rise in organized crime, drug-related violence and corruption.

We should decriminalize narcotics for personal use and allow addicts like Sutton to stop being buyers in an illegal market and to become patients of the health care system.



Liquor prohibition failed to stop the consumption of booze just as drug prohibition is a complete disaster in limiting drug use.

Sutton deserves a suspended sentence with 1,000 hours of community service that should involve speaking to youth about the dangers of drug addiction.

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner
Wagoner

Editor, The Observer:

Who believes that Oklahoma legislators, whose elections to office, on balance, are inevitably bought and paid for by Oklahoma big oil and natural gas – really, really, really want "alternative energy?"

As Jesus of Nazareth said many centuries ago, "You shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"

In short – only fools expect good fruit from bad trees or productive policy from corrupt governments.

Tom Elmore
Moore

Editor, The Observer:

First, I need to say as a long time subscriber to The Observer, I love it. Of course I'm a Yellow Dog Democrat that has never voted for a Republican or even considered voting for one other than Bob Anthony, who, I think, is the best Democrat the Republicans have ever had.

Usually I start these letters and never mail them because being from Old Town I never was too good at doing letters. I always know what I want to say about the Republicans, but can't express it without four-letter words – you know what I mean. I always thought the corporations ran the country before the Supreme Court decision. Now I think that we're up s-- creek without a paddle.

The main reason I'm writing today is to see if I can use your paper as a rallying cry. As a 77-year-old that loves to play the casinos [slots] but can't afford to as often as I like, I need to talk to some people like me. I don't do computers, so I can't do chat rooms or Facebook or whatever you call it, so I need your paper to ask the casino players: How many times have you seen a jackpot on a penny machine?

I've been playing a long time and have never seen one; of course, I know if they don't pay over \$1,199 they are not taxable, so you would not probably see it because they don't have to come to the machine to pay you,

which draws your attention.

But here's what I think we need to do: I know you can't go to the state and complain about the way Indian Casinos pay, but as a lifelong union man that understands that the only way you can get a corporation's attention is through strikes or boycotts, we need someone to organize the "Casino Players Union."

I'm as serious as cancer about this; if we had a force of a few thousand people, we could bargain with casinos and boycott those that don't want to help. We could make them put the date of the last jackpot of \$1,199 or more on every machine if it's like the Hot Shots that have two jackpots over that amount. They need to list both of them.

You watch TV shows about these casinos and they say these machines are designed to pay back 96% on what's put in them. Do you believe that? I know people will say "quit bitchin' and don't play," but that's beside the point – that's like saying "America, love it or leave it." I don't believe that; I say change it.

I will guarantee you, if you have enough people that will boycott casinos mentioned in your newsletter or on the computer, you would see some changes.

Everybody says it's just entertainment; well, I say when you don't have a chance of winning, it's not entertainment, it's thievery and that's what I think is going on. So come on and organize us.

Tom Magdalena
Tecumseh

Editor, The Observer:

I want Karl Rove to see if waterboarding is torture. I want to watch. I would pay to watch. And while they are at it, waterboard Liz Cheney and her old man.

Since everyone says the reason they did it was because of the memos and now that the memo writer has been given a pass, then I want to see him waterboarded as well.

Karen Webb
Moore

Editor, The Observer:

Re: Oklahoma now second in Indian gaming revenue behind California:

Why doesn't the state make the casinos pay a larger percentage of the revenue?

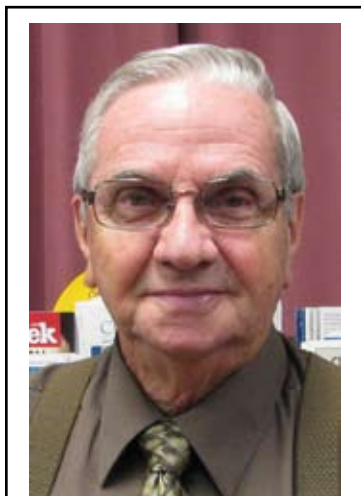
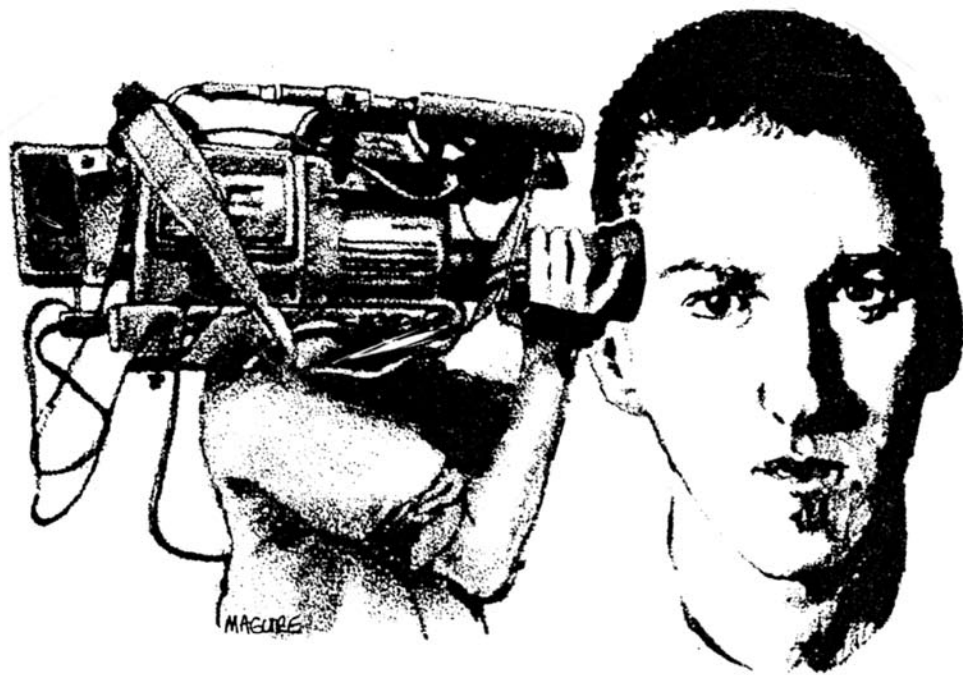
Kirk Milby
Norman

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.

The Dying Light



FROSTY TROY
Founding Editor

As a longtime supporter of the Southern Poverty Law Center, I was shocked by Mark Potok's latest issue of the center's Intelligence Newsletter.

He said based on their intensive surveys, the radical right caught fire in 2009. He said it will culminate on April 19, the date of the first shots fired at Lexington in the Revolutionary War and the anniversary of the fiery end of the federal siege in Waco and the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing.

It brings back memories I would like to forget. I was sitting at my desk in my Observer office on North Lincoln that spring day in 1995 when I was jarred out of my seat by a tremendous explosion.

I immediately assumed it was probably touched off by a gas leak. I went outside to see if it was nearby. Others joined me in the street.

A woman pointed to the southwest where a huge plume of smoke was going up. I hurried back into my office and turned on the TV.

I was glued to my seat as a TV helicopter dived toward downtown Oklahoma City. Finally it was reported that the source was the Murrah Federal Building.

Details were sketchy at first but it emerged as some kind of bomb. It was probably an hour before my phone rang. It was a person with Canadian TV.

Would I be willing to go to the scene and represent them until their chartered plane could arrive on site? They had cleared it with a local TV station who would feed my reports live via the Telstar uplink.

I asked, "Why me?" One of the producers listened to national NPR and my daily commentary.

I was a Korean veteran and had seen some pretty terrible things, but I was not prepared for what had happened to the Murrah Federal Building.

There was a cascade of activity. Police, firemen, ambulances and several hundred people were clawing at the smoking remains. Medical aid was being applied to a number of people.

I tried my best to describe the scene for Canadian TV. Body parts were being taken to a makeshift morgue in a nearby building. There were times I was lost for words. There were moments when I teared up.

Who could have done something so despicable? It was chaotic horror unlike anything that had happened in America during my lifetime.

At first I was on the air fulltime, painting a word picture of hundreds of volunteers clawing at the remains. Many were union members called off their jobs to assist in the recovery.

The call went out for more gloves and hundreds of pairs were brought from virtually every store in Oklahoma City. The Red Cross had hurriedly provided water.

Gov. Frank Keating would appear occasionally and dozens of cameras were on him. I finally realized that Canadian TV wasn't alone – news people were arriving from all over America.

There was hot speculation that it was the work of so-called militia – government haters who had a real presence in Oklahoma.

I had visited one of their training camps in southeastern Oklahoma.

I was dejected and weary when the Canadian team arrived. I gladly turned coverage over to them and headed home. I crashed, still haunted by the body parts of infants – there had been a nursery in the building.

Helen awakened me, telling me Canadian TV was on the phone. I took the call and I was asked if I would return to the Murrah building.

It seemed that viewers were yelping about the absence of "that guy who talks funny" but knew what he was talking about. I laughed and said it wasn't possible. I had to get to work on the Observer coverage.

I had no idea that I was being paid a large sum until weeks later when a check arrived in the mail. The bank had to verify it but Helen had already made a decision – it would go to the Red Cross. It did.

I was stunned when Timothy McVeigh turned out to be a decorated Army soldier and a Catholic altar boy who had fallen into the hands of the militia. He was furious about Waco and this was his revenge.

According to Potok, hate groups in 2009 stayed at record levels – almost 1,000 – despite the total collapse of the second largest neo-Nazi group in America.

Furious anti-immigrant vigilante groups soared by nearly 80%, adding some 136 new groups during 2009.

The so-called "Patriot" groups – militias and other organizations that see the
See LIGHT Page 19

Today's Workforce

The Center for American Progress released a report, titled "Our Working Nation," offering a "popular and doable agenda" of policy steps for governments and employers to take to "adapt to the needs of families and better harness the productivity of today's diverse workforce."

In 1975, half of all families fit the "traditional" mold of a "male breadwinner and female homemaker," writes CAP President and CEO John Podesta. Today, that number is one in five families.

The vast majority of workplaces, however, haven't caught up with these changes and "are still structured as though all workers have a stay-at-home spouse to deal with family needs."

Government laws need to be updated accordingly. While the Family and Medical Leave Act and the prohibition of sex discrimination clause under Title VII of

the Civil Rights Act do protect Americans' rights, they aren't able to "fully meet the needs of today's workers, especially lower-income workers."

"Our Working Nation" recommends "instituting predictable and flexible workplace schedules," "ending discrimination against ... pregnant women and caregivers," and "collecting national data and work-life policies" to measure their effectiveness.

These steps will lead to more efficient businesses and "real growth in family incomes" for the first time in a decade. Recent polling shows that Americans support such innovations.

Eighty-five percent agree that when businesses fail to meet the needs of modern families, they "risk losing good workers." This overwhelming support cuts across gender and ideological lines.

Our Sorry Voter Turnout

By now most Observer readers probably know my daughter Marti is in Iraq, an attorney working for the U.S. State Department.

She said the work leading up to the election was tireless to make sure the election went off smoothly.

By some count, more than two dozen people were killed in an attempt to disrupt the election. Hand grenades were hurled at some voting precincts.

Yet the Iraqi voters turned out an amazing 62% of the registered voters.

Iraqis defied mortar fire, rockets, and bombings throughout the country and went to the polls to elect a new national government for the second time since the U.S.-led invasion in March 2003.

Despite the violence, the Iraqi Election Commission reported that 62% of Iraqis voted – lower than the last national election's turnout in 2005 but higher than last year's showing in provincial elections, suggesting higher stakes.

Sad to say, that outstrips the turnout in America's last national election. We keep taking this country for granted at our peril.

Some of the Tea Party and Birther folks may be way out, but they touch a nerve in millions of Americans disgusted by the partisanship and inaction in Washington.

The attacks united Iraqis across party lines, with some voters even mocking the insurgents' intimidation tactics.

"It was really a good day for Iraqi democracy," said the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, Christopher Hill. "And I believe it will be a foundation point, a new beginning for the U.S. relationship with Iraq that we hope will stretch for decades to come."

President Obama praised the Iraqis' resolve as well. "I have great respect for the millions of Iraqis who refused to be deterred by acts of violence and who exercised their right to vote today," he said in a statement.

Too many Americans are either too lazy or too turned off to vote. When I was associate editor of the Tulsa Tribune I wrote an editorial praising Oklahomans for the big turnout. Those days are long gone.

As a result, we get a congressional delegation that is the butt of almost every joke coming out of Washington.

Closer to home we've elected a Republican Legislature that results in the closing of 26 nutrition centers for lack of a measly \$2.5 million.

The Oklahoma House has a slush fund of more than \$5 million and the Senate is sitting on \$4 million. This is only a small indication of their attack on programs serving the real needs of real Oklahomans.

Possible Sardis Deal Stirs Water Debate



ARNOLD HAMILTON
Editor

Water didn't figure to command much attention in this year's legislative session.

Wrestling with the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, lawmakers and other state officials seemed quite content to wait until next year's scheduled completion of a comprehensive statewide water plan before broaching the oft-contentious subject.

Plus, a federal court delivered a setback to North Texas cities attempting to force Oklahoma to sell its excess water, delaying a legal showdown over what is quickly emerging as the 21st Century's most valuable natural resource.

Ever so quietly, though, water is seeping back to the top of Oklahoma's political agenda: Two lawmakers say they have learned of a possible deal that would commit more than 90% of the available water from Sardis Lake to Oklahoma City and environs in exchange for getting the state out from under a \$25 million obligation to

repay the feds for the state's reservoir construction.

State Sen. Jerry Ellis, D-Valliant, a fierce opponent of selling water to Texas and a tireless protector of southeastern Oklahoma water interests, fired off a tart letter to Gov. Brad Henry, calling any such deal "premature ... prior to the

completion" of the statewide water plan in 2011.

"To transfer water before the study is completed would make the study a joke," Ellis wrote.

"Before any transfers, I expect valid independent studies revealing the social, economic and environmental impact. Studies should be completed by the EPA, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Red River Compact Commission, Corp of Engineers and the Oklahoma Health Commission, revealing the impact of any transfers.

"I expect the point of origin to be protected and compensated for any losses or damage. To do anything less when transferring a valuable natural resource from a poor area to a rich area is regional discrimination."

State Rep. Brian Renegar, D-McAlester, said he was appalled to learn of the possible deal, especially since he knows of many living within 10 miles of Sardis Lake who still must rely on pond water because there is no infrastructure to deliver the reservoir's water to them - and no money in the economically challenged region to build it.

Neither J.D. Strong, the secretary for the environment, nor Paul Sund, the governor's communications director, responded to messages seeking comment.

Meanwhile, Renegar says he attended a recent event in Oklahoma City for state legislators, hosted by a lobbyist for the Tarrant County Water District, one of the North Texas entities suing in federal court to force Oklahoma to sell its water.

At one point during the gathering, Renegar asked how much Tarrant was willing to pay for Oklahoma water. The answer: 1 cent per 1,000 gallons - or \$3.26 per acre foot.

See WATER Page 7

Exemptions Cut Our State Taxes To Zero!

By Wanda Jo Stapleton

Husband Bob and I get such lavish state tax breaks that for the 2008 tax year, we owed the Oklahoma Tax Commission zero, zilch, nada, nothing! And we're not even an oil or natural gas company!

For the 2008 tax year, the Oklahoma Tax Commission has identified "over 450 separate provisions in state law that provide some reduction in the amount of state taxes that would have been collected but for preferential tax treatment" like Bob's and mine. These uncollected taxes in FY 2008 totaled \$5.4 billion, according to David Blatt, an extraordinary researcher and analyst at the Oklahoma Policy Institute [www.okpolicy.org].

Five billion-plus in tax giveaways doesn't make sense in this state which doesn't even have the money for programs like hot meals which help keep the low-income elderly out of nursing homes and hospitals.

So I set out, down the winding trail, to see where this state got off track with the tax breaks I know about because they affect Bob and me.

Actually, this trail began in Michigan where a federal retiree named Paul Davis filed a lawsuit. He didn't like the idea of Michigan's requiring state income tax on all of his federal pension while state retirees had some deductions from their pensions which were state tax exempt.

The U.S. Supreme Court agreed with Davis and on March 28, 1989 declared that states must tax public pensions equally because both state and federal retirees are government employees.

This ruling affected Oklahoma because state retirees were getting a \$5,500 tax exemption on their pensions, but federal employees were not. The state's choice was to repeal that generous tax break or extend it to federal retirees. It was extended and stayed at \$5,500 for 15 years.

Then in 2004, House Speaker Larry Adair, D-Stillwell, filed HB 2660 which raised the \$5,500 to \$7,500 for the 2005 tax year and beyond.

Apparently \$7,500 was not enough! So Sen. Jay Paul Gumm, D-Durant, turned right around the same year [2005] and through SB 435 raised this deduction to \$10,000 for the 2006 tax year and beyond - where it stands today.

Finally, the mother of all giveaways was enacted in 2006 when Rep. Chris Bengé, R-Tulsa, filed HB 1174X. Bengé is now Speaker of the House. His bill affects Civil Service Retirement for those who don't draw Social Security, and it gives preferential tax treatment which is in addition to the \$10,000 deduction cited directly above!

Specifically, beginning in 2007, Civil Service retirees could exclude 20% of their retirement pay for state tax purposes. In 2008, the deduction increased to 40%, and by 2011, that tax exemption will be 100%!

Husband Bob, a Civil Service retiree, gets all of the tax breaks listed above. I, as a state retiree, get most of them plus a state tax deduction for 85% of my Social Security benefits.

I started out down this winding path to see where Oklahoma got off track and found that our state not only got off track but ended in a deep ditch as well - not only because of a bad economy but also because of the profligate, albeit well intended, giveaways like those detailed above.


The primary issue is one of fairness. Government retirees get preferential tax treatment while other hard-working Oklahomans pay their full share.

Bob and I are just two ordinary citizens whose tax breaks, however unjust, are almost nothing when compared to the \$5.4 billion total which was handed out in multi-millions to corporations like Chesapeake Energy.

In conclusion, why do I feel so strongly about Bob's and my situation which might be considered "good fortune" by some? Because it's a privilege in our



democracy to pool our resources and help pay for things to improve the quality of life for everyone. Alone, each of us could get little done for education, public health, infrastructure like roads, bridges, highways and more. It is my deep belief that each of us should strive to make the world better than we found it. Otherwise, why are we here in the first place?

- The author, a former Democratic state representative, lives in south OKC



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Ethics Commission Blew It

'No Gifts List' Isn't Dead Yet

By John R. Wood

In mid-March, the Oklahoma Ethics Commission, for the second year in a row, voted down my "No Gifts List" Amendment.

A "No Gifts List" is a good government measure to put Oklahoma state legislators on record, saying they do not accept gifts – or as Oklahoma law calls gifts "things of value."

Corporations and other organizations, otherwise known as Lobbyist Employers, gave state legislators \$86,137.41 in 2009 for sometimes lavish meals and tickets to entertainment activities through well paid lobbyists, who buy access to our democratically elected public officials.

In Oklahoma, we still do not have a "No Gifts List," but state legislators can receive up to \$100 from each of the state's 700 lobbyist employers, such as the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce. The Tulsa Chamber last year spread more than \$1,000 in total across 33 legislators for 42 meals.

SMALL INVESTMENT, BIG RETURNS

Likewise, last year AT&T spent more than \$2,600 for 40 legislators over the course of 135 meals during the legislative session. Since citizens cannot track exactly why AT&T specifically hosted so many legislators, we can surmise that it might relate to AT&T rolling out a fleet of at least 30 Compressed Natural Gas [CNG] vehicles in 2009 with the help of legislatively approved tax incentives developed by House Speaker Chris Benge.

Beyond campaign dollars it only cost AT&T \$2,600 to gain not only a significant tax credit to offset the cost of converting a vehicle to run on compressed natural gas or other alternative fuels, but a \$2,500 tax credit for installing home-fueling CNG stations.

What a lucrative taxpayer investment for AT&T with just a small business investment from themselves. AT&T access to Benge seems to have been helped by a \$200 brunch with his spouse on Jan. 8, 2009.

MILLER, COFFEE AMONG BIG RECIPIENTS

Some legislators, like Sen. Anthony Sykes, R-Moore, and Rep. Jason Murphey, R-Guthrie, received no gifts at all during the fall of 2009. At the other extreme were big-time gift getters like Rep. Ken Miller, R-Edmond, and Senate President Pro Tem Glenn Coffee, R-OKC, accepting \$1,470 and \$1,767, respectively, in 2009.

One-fifth of the state's legislators accepted nearly half of the gifts given by lobbyists in 2009.

The letter I brought to the Ethics Commission written by Rep. Murphey was also signed by six other state representatives and senators – Reps. Mike Ritze, Mike Reynolds and Charles Key and Sens. Randy Brogdon, Bill Brown and Sykes – who are all among the bottom fifth of those who receive gifts.

These legislators have little to lose and a lot to gain by making campaign promises that they want a cleaner government by acting ethically themselves this campaign season. And, they are making this pledge, because according to Murphey, you have to be active in avoiding lobbyist gift giving to keep your positing of being ethical.

LETTER FROM LEGISLATORS

"As legislators, we do not enjoy being listed for receiving gifts that we do not desire or request. In the past, these gifts have been mailed to legislator's homes, left at our offices, placed on the desk of legislative assistants even when no one is in the office. These actions force us to spend resources and time tracking down the lobbyists and returning the gifts. In addition, lobbyists sometimes enter reports of across the board gift giving which include our names even though we are not present for the gift."

The idea of a "No Gifts List" is nothing new. John T. Noonan's book *Bribes*, says that even the Greeks lacked the word for "bribe" because all gifts could be considered a bribe. "All gifts," he wrote, "are given by way of reciprocation for favors past or to come."

Additionally, since 2005, the North Carolina State House successfully maintains its own "No Gifts List," which currently lists 57 of their 120 House members. Like the one I proposed, the list is purely voluntary. Strangely enough, the sky still has not fallen in North Carolina, despite some lobbyist claims.

KIM HOLLAND'S STRICT POLICY

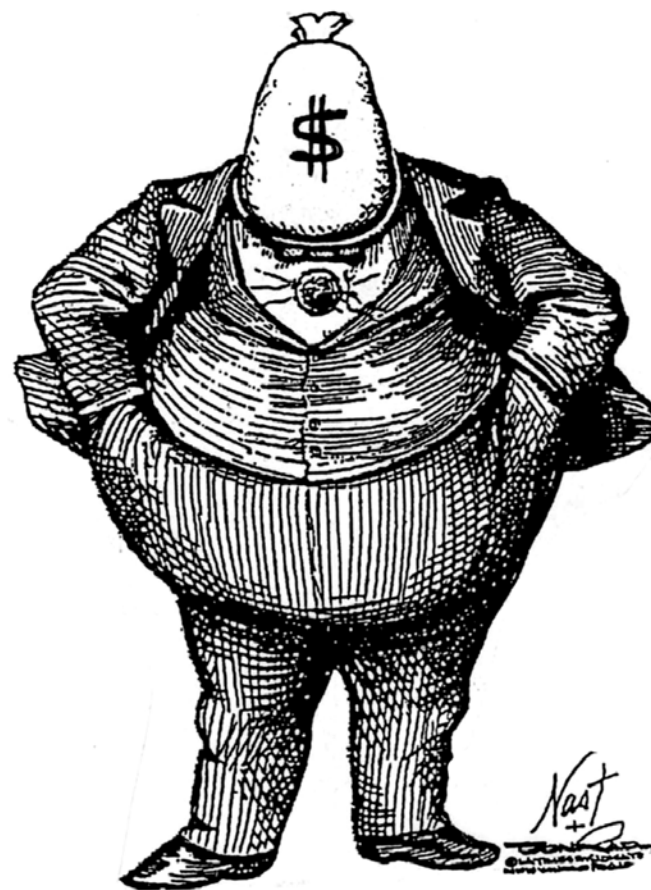
Even in Oklahoma there is a beacon of good government. Michael Ridgeway, general counsel for Oklahoma's Insurance Department, told the Ethics Commission that Insurance Commissioner Kim Holland implemented a department-wide "Things of Value" policy upon assuming office in 2006, prohibiting the receipt of gifts or meals from anyone regulated by the Insurance Department.

Ridgeway said he was not advocating "for" or "against" a gift list when he appeared before the ethics panel, but that banning gifts in the state's Insurance Department has been a huge success.

He said: "You probably remember the scandal we had a few years ago, but our current policy has helped clean that up." Ridgeway was referring to Holland's immediate predecessor, Carroll Fisher, who was impeached and is now in jail partly for accepting gifts, such as furniture and artwork worth more than \$30,000 from those regulated by the insurance department.

The Insurance Department has been plagued with corruption. Eight of the last 13 commissioners were appointed, most because the previous commissioner was either forced out of office or resigned under a cloud of allegation.

Holland's decision to impose strict ethics rules seems to have something to do



with a much-needed cleanup at the state's Insurance Department.

SHADY, UNDERHANDED TACTICS

North Carolina's House of Representatives, Commissioner Kim Holland, and Rep. Jason Murphey all have one thing in common: They see how gifts, or "things of value" can hurt the flow of government processes, whether it is real or perceived by the public.

Even lobbyists know "there are as many shady deals and underhanded tactics in Oklahoma as there ever were," according to an unnamed lobbyist in a 2006 Oklahoma survey by Oklahoma State University professor Jim Davis in which 44% of lobbyists surveyed agreed with the statement: "If lobbyists think the legislative process is shady, would it be hard to believe constituents think it is too?"

This perception of government shadiness undermines government legitimacy and creates an undercurrent of distrust, especially when the sentiments of lobbyists and legislators against a "No Gifts List" seems to carry the day over immense public cynicism about the system itself.

The Next Step? Do it ourselves!

RESURRECTING THE IDEA

The Oklahoma Ethics Commission has dropped the ball on a "No Gifts List," and, at the same time, advised me to start an independent website, not associated with the Oklahoma Ethics Commission. Therefore, I thought that maybe since I am a board member of Oklahoma's Common Cause and often represent them at the Ethics Commission meetings, that Oklahoma's Common Cause's website would be a perfect fit.

However, I have to obtain approval from the board first, which I think is likely. Common Cause itself is a good government group that turns 40 this year. The group was founded by Republican John W. Gardner, a former cabinet secretary under President Lyndon Johnson.

Common Cause's mission is focused on making U.S. political institutions more open and accountable with a focus on process. This "No Gifts List" does exactly that. It places sunshine on gifts and makes legislators more accountable when promises are made.

While the Ethics Commission lacks the backbone to provide an "No Gifts List" – other than the exceptional Commissioner John Raley, who sponsored and advocated for my amendment – it will be good for Oklahoma's Common Cause.

I guess Margaret Mead's often quoted "A small group of thoughtful people could change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has" is what is called for here.

We didn't win this time before the Ethics Commission, but it is not really a loss – it just forces good government advocates around the state to seek a new direction.

When no one has the courage to listen, do it ourselves.

– The author is a political science professor at Rose State College

WATER

From Page 6

By contrast, Renegar says, some cities in the western United States are paying between \$5,000 and \$20,000 per acre foot for water.

Meanwhile, those concerned that central Oklahoma could seize control of nearly all the available water from Sardis Lake are demanding to know why the Oklahoma City area isn't looking to northern Oklahoma's Kaw Law first [see Bob Jackman's essay, "Oklahoma's Watergate: Kaw vs. Sardis," on page 9]

"Kaw Reservoir is reported to have a large amount of water available," Ellis wrote the governor, "which is cheaper and closer to central Oklahoma."

Weeks later, Ellis still hadn't received a response from the governor. In politics, silence can speak volumes, often meaning that something sensitive indeed is in the works.

Stay tuned.

Homophobia, Bigotry Reign In State Senate

By Karen Webb

What happens if he gets more judgmental or self-righteous? Will we be forced to keep the Sabbath holy? And who defines holy?

"The federal government should not be creating a special class of people, and that is just what they did when they passed and signed this bill," state Sen. Steve Russell, R-OKC, said.

"All crimes against another person have some level of hate in them, and people can be assured that our laws that protect people against crimes such as murder are sufficient to protect everyone."

In the state of Oklahoma I can legally take a gun and shoot someone and get by with it by claiming I felt threatened.

"Russell said because the government has decided to intervene on issues of morality, he is worried that religious leaders who speak out against any lifestyle could be imprisoned for their speech."

HE INTERVENES REGULARLY

He intervenes regularly in morality. He wants to control what goes on between my doctor and me. He wants to tax gay people to the hilt and then deny them equal protection and equal rights because he believes their sin, in his opinion, is worse than his sin of self-righteousness.

He wants to tell people which consenting adults they can and can't marry and if that isn't the government intervening on morality issues I don't know what it is.

A bill just got passed with his approval mandating "approved" counseling [8-20hours] before a couple can get married or divorced without saying who gets to pay for the counseling and who gets to decide whether they can be married or must continue or begin living in sin, according to Russell.

Who pays for all the time off from work for the counseling?

WHAT IS VERY VAGUE?

"The law is very vague to begin with," Russell said. "Sexual orientation is a very vague word that could be extended to extremes like necrophilia."

Absolutely insane! Anyone with the IQ of a fruit fly knows that necrophilia is not a sexual orientation. Russell is saying that being gay is the same as having sex with corpses. I just really hope he doesn't have a child who turns out to be gay because they will likely commit suicide before admitting it.

"Russell said he is also concerned if someone is attacked and killed for his or her sexual orientation, the suspect could pass the blame onto a religious leader who preached out against the lifestyle of the victim who was attacked."

I believe he is saying that people are attacked and killed just because they are gay. I am waiting for him to codify every other Biblical admonition, killing girls who are not virgins on their wedding nights, stoning rebellious children and thousands of others.

NEW LAW UPSETS HIM

"Russell said, as a retired U.S. Army



lieutenant colonel, he is upset that the new hate crimes bill was attached to a defense spending bill."

Strange tactic - he is sticking an amendment on a bill it doesn't belong on to prove that sticking an amendment on a bill it doesn't belong on is wrong. I suspect Russell would commit adultery or child abuse just to prove that committing adultery or child abuse is wrong.

I guess in Russell's mind, two wrongs do make a right. Keep in mind, I have no real problem with sticking amendments that protect lives on anything, if that is what it takes.

"This bill couldn't stand on its own merits through multiple sessions of Congress, so a few activist representatives stuck it into a defense spending bill," Russell said. "A bill supporting the troops was turned into an activist bill where, if you voted against the hate crimes act, it made you look like you were voting against the troops."

JUST LET THE PERP GO

Multiple sessions of GOP control. I just hope he never has a gay friend or relative attacked or killed just because they are gay and then have some morally deficient jury let the perp go because he says the gay person was flirting with him or her.

Do the names Emmitt Till, Andrew Goodman, James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, Viola Liuzzo and Rev. James Reeb sound familiar to Russell?

Not one of their killers was convicted of anything in a state court. NOT ONE.

Medgar Evers killer was not convicted of murder for over 30 years and the governor of Mississippi actually came into court and shook the hand of his killer.

Medgar Evers and James Chaney were killed because they were black. Emmitt Till was killed because he said the wrong thing to a white woman. He did not touch her.

Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner were white and killed for registering blacks to vote. Viola Liuzzo was killed for giving a black guy

a ride home. Rev. Reeb was killed for eating in a black café.

IT TOOK A FEDERAL LAW

It took a Federal Civil Rights law to get the killers convicted of anything.

What possessed the former co-chair of the Oklahoma Democratic Party, Debbe Leftwich [woman], along with Connie Johnson [African American woman], Susan Paddock [woman], Roger Ballenger [straight guy], Mary Easley [woman], Judy Eason-McIntyre [African American woman], Randy Bass [straight guy], Jerry Ellis [straight guy], Charles Laster [straight guy], Earl Garrison [straight guy], Joe Sweeden [straight guy], Jay Paul Gumm [straight guy], Charles Wyrick [straight guy], Sean Burrage [straight guy] and Tom Ivester [straight guy] to vote for this amendment?

Will they be putting in an amendment removing women and African Americans from hate crimes legislation since their hero and spokesperson Russell says that all crimes involve hate, so what is the big deal?

My brother, a couple of cousins, two almost sons and numerous friends were born gay - do you have any proof your gay friends were not born gay?

I have already told Russell's office and now I am telling the rest of you: If the attacker or killer of a homosexual is ever let off by 12 rightwing Okie loonies because some big old straight dude felt threatened in some way then I am going to personally call and remind you that you backed this idiotic piece of discrimination.

Please, please don't let their excuse be that the final bill wouldn't pass anyway and they did it to make their voting record look good to their rightwing constituents. Don't tell me they voted against their own conscience. I know, without a doubt, that at least one of these would have attacked anyone who did this 10 years ago and they know who they are. Please don't let it have been for votes or to protect their seat.

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

Why Is Russell Afraid Of Gay Equality?

By James Nimmo

Hunting season is on for gays and lesbians as long as the Oklahoma Legislature is in session. If the rednecks don't get us, the suit-and-tie boys will.

Not content with passing SQ 711 in 2004 making marriage only between one man and one woman as many times as they like, the Senate has just passed 38-9 a bill [SB 1965] opting out of the recently passed federal Shepard/Byrd Hate Crimes Law. The bill now goes to the House.

SB 1965 seems optimistically numbered in that I'm sure Sen. Steve Russell, the sponsor, and 38 of his colleagues on both sides of the aisle would like to return to the year of 1965, if not earlier, when gays and lesbians knew that our place was not alongside other Americans but rather in the closet of narrow, scared shadows with the door hinges well rusted.

Odd, isn't it, that many of these legislators weren't even born then or were very young. Where did they learn such animosity towards strangers that never did them any harm? Surely not in their church pews, or at their dinner tables, do you think?

After all, African-Americans had just achieved a legal victory in 1965 with the passage of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights acts for which white bigots thought the sky would fall in.

The sky did not fall in and it won't fall in when gays and lesbians achieve our social and legal victory over the bigots of Oklahoma. The only thing lost will be the legal right bigots so jealously retain to impose their ignorance over the rest of us.

According to Russell's legislative webpage, he has a serious military record and several medals. If medals are a mark of bravery why is Russell so afraid of gays and lesbians that he sponsors bills that remove them from the protection of the law and maintain their second-class status as taxpayers - second-class in that gay/lesbian money is accepted for payment of taxes yet we are excepted when it comes to protection from hatred and discrimination?

Why is Russell afraid of gay/lesbian equality under the law?

Russell just can't stop fighting wars and looking for enemies. He should re-enlist and put his life back on the line, for his country, of course.

- The author lives in Oklahoma City

State Closer To Regulating ‘Puppy Mills’

By Ruth Steinberger

SB 1712, also known as “The Black Market Breeders’ Bill,” again places the “puppy mill issue” before Oklahomans.

Billboards and vastly increased grass roots activism have sprung up across Oklahoma, and animal advocates, private citizens and concerned officials hope that this legislative session will conclude with protections for dogs that languish in the remote locations commonly called “puppy mills.”

Introduced by Sen. Patrick Anderson, R-Enid, in response to the lack of regulations that are allowing a large-scale industry to escape taxes, cruelty laws and more, SB 1712 is designed to address the complex issues associated with puppy mills. Under this bill, kennel licensing fees will be used to support the regulatory agency that governs breeders.

HOW PUPPY MILLS BEGAN

The Midwest puppy producing industry started shortly after World War II as a means by which farm families earned supplemental income at home. As the industry grew, the relatively small family style operations turned to a factory farming-style industry. By the time the federal government stepped in to create regulations in 1966, the industry had started to rightfully earn the name “puppy mill.”

Under the United States Department of Agriculture, the federal government regulates the standards of care and record keeping of wholesale breeders, which are those that sell puppies at auction or through dog brokers. Those that sell directly to the public, including those that sell on the Internet or newspapers, are exempted from federal regulations; it is up to each state to create regulations for those not required to have a USDA license.

Oklahoma has the second highest number of USDA breeders in the nation and possibly the highest number of unlicensed ones.

BLACK MARKET EXPLODES

With the development of the Internet, cheap land and lax land use regulations, an unregulated black market industry grew dramatically throughout the Midwest. Licensed dog dealers nearly doubled in Oklahoma between 1999 and 2009 and unregulated facilities grew even more.

In response to a nightmare of complaints regarding cruelty and consumer fraud within a clandestine, cash industry, other states created regulations that matched or exceeded the USDA standards to regulate breeders not mandated to have a federal license. Oklahoma slowly became the last unregulated high volume breeder state.

An influx of substandard puppy producers set up shop in every corner of Oklahoma; some have fled cruelty charges elsewhere, some have faced cruelty charges once here and like their Oklahoma cohorts most operate on a cash basis, hiding what is estimated to be at least a \$40 million per year cash crop in our state that is also a burden to our already overworked and underfunded law enforcement agencies.

Consumer complaints revealed that Oklahoma had become a haven for producers that misrepresented the breeds of dogs; fraudulent health certificates

surfaced on an increasing basis throughout the last 10 years, with certificates supposedly signed by veterinarians who had in fact never seen the dogs.

UNSPEAKABLE CONDITIONS

As puppies arrived in a new home only to get sick, as a cash industry it was generally impossible for heartbroken consumers to even locate or communicate with the “kennel” they had bought a dog from. And in addition to tax evasion and consumer fraud, most high volume breeders operate in secrecy; cruelty remains largely hidden and dogs languish in unspeakable conditions.

In 2009, the first bill to regulate these facilities was introduced in the Oklahoma legislature. The response from high volume puppy mills included a deliberate misinformation campaign which seemingly tied unregulated dog dealing to the right to show dogs, the right to keep a breeding dog in your home and even the right to drive with a dog in your car. Anti-government organizations tied puppy mill regulations to a breach of constitutional freedoms including the right to bear arms, and the American Kennel Club [AKC] opposed Oklahoma’s bill along with virtually all other animal welfare legislation designed to help high volume breeder dogs nationwide.

“This issue creates a never ending burden on law enforcement and animal welfare organizations,” said Anita Stepp, president of the Oklahoma Humane Federation [OHF], an umbrella group that promotes citizen advocacy efforts through 68 membership organizations across the state.

“This is not about constitutional rights or other issues that the puppy mills try to hide behind. This is about dogs kept in tiny cages for years on end, bred each time they are able to produce and discarded at auction for under \$5 when they no longer produce.

“This is about dogs covered in filth so badly that their eyes are scalded, literally to the point of blindness, by the ammonia in the buildings where they have remained covered in their own urine and feces for years.

“This is about the worst kind of selfish cruelty and fraud imaginable and it is well-hidden from the public.”

SENATE APPROVES MEASURE

SB 1712 passed out of the Senate overwhelmingly and is headed to the House. Supporters are visiting with legislators and educating communities about this issue.

Rich Galyen, president of Clayton Animal Welfare Organization in Pushmataha County, organized a “1712 party” to inform the community about the Senate bill. Galyen said, “It hurts every part of Oklahoma to be the default zone for people who want to operate clandestine businesses while they commit cruelty and fraud.”

Clayton Animal Welfare assisted in a large scale law enforcement action that closed down a fraudulent breeder in December 2009. Galyen said, “SB 1712 will help us address a problem that is much bigger than people realize. The way it is now, all of Oklahoma is losing out.”

– The author lives in Bristow and works for Oklahoma Alliance for Animals

Oklahoma’s Watergate: Kaw vs Sardis

By Bob Jackman

If you live in central Oklahoma, wouldn’t you rather have a second source of municipal water than all your water eggs in the Kiamichi River Basin basket?

Why not use northern Oklahoma’s Kaw Lake as an additional source from the great Arkansas River Basin which includes snow-melt water starting from Canon City, CO in Rocky Mountains’ eastern slope?

Entirely in Oklahoma, Kaw Lake is on the Arkansas River east of Ponca City and south of the Kansas border. If long-term droughts hit southeastern Oklahoma – your current major water supply – then snow-melt water from the Rocky Mountains should still be flowing to you.

Many never heard of or considered Kaw Lake as a municipal water supply for Oklahoma City and neighboring cities. The Corps of Engineers-managed lake is larger than Lakes Arcadia, Hefner, Overholser, Stanley Draper and Thunderbird combined – plus Kaw has 16% more water available [yield] than Sardis Lake.

Wichita, KS is now eyeing Kaw Lake water – we better use it or lose it.

Consider these facts: Since the 1980s, the city of Stillwater has used Kaw Lake water with a conventional treatment plant. Kaw’s Arkansas River water has low sodium and chlorides and no bromides. It is piped to Stillwater by a 43-mile water line along a 50-foot right of way.

Kaw Lake to Oklahoma City is 92 miles – Stillwater’s right of way and line are nearly halfway there. Also important: Kaw Lake’s normal water line elevation is only 100 feet lower than many of Oklahoma City’s lakes. Sources inside the city of Stillwater say their Kaw Lake pipe needs replacing and enlarging and Stillwater could be open to partnering with central cities like Norman, Edmond, Midwest City and Moore.

The Oklahoma Water Resources Board’s [OWRB] water allocations at Kaw Lake, supposedly based on meeting so-called legal public beneficiary uses, are a joke. Special interests have hogged up questionable amounts without independent expert review.

Who is getting paid to not face reality?

By contrast, Sardis Lake water is 600 feet lower – down hill – and 130 miles away from where it will be pumped to and stored in the Oklahoma City area. Anyone familiar with high lifting pumping and water line costs will question whether

Oklahoma City and neighboring cities’ taxpayers should pay for OKC’s proposed \$1 billion project to take water from Sardis Lake.

A \$1 billion pipe job without studying and considering a sensible, cheaper, additional supply at Kaw Lake, which is closer in miles and has much lower [100 feet] lifting costs as an alternative.

Note: Long-term high lifting pumping costs can exceed original costs of long distant water lines.

Why was Kaw Lake off the Oklahoma Water Resources Board’s municipal water source list? And was Oklahoma City’s top management involved?

Kaw Lake, a viable municipal source for central Oklahoma cities, was never on the agenda of any of the Statewide Comprehensive Water Plan’s many meetings and conferences. Why?

And over \$2.5 million of the taxpayers’ money was spent on comprehensive water plan studies, all focusing on southeastern and southern Oklahoma water sources. Why?

The influence of those who want to sell water to Texas?

Answers to consider: If Kaw Lake became an additional source for central Oklahoma water, that could dilute or bust up the Oklahoma City Water Utility Trust’s [OCWUT] monopoly over its neighboring cities.

As a top official at one of the area’s cities said privately: “Oklahoma City is driving the water issues bus; we have to go where they want to go.”

OCWUT now has them all by its major water supply line – the Sardis-to-be-built to McGee Creek Reservoir to Lake Atoka to Oklahoma City pipeline. OCWUT must enlarge and rebuild one in use since 1958. Those on board the OKC water bus willingly or unwillingly may help pay for the water line’s expensive overdue rebuilding.

However, Kaw Lake is apparently an unwanted game changer, a monopoly buster. In addition, it is politically unattractive because it’s too far away to hook up and sell Kaw Lake’s water to Texas, whereas Sardis Lake’s water is not.

All foggy deals with billions involved. Your bottom line? Higher water bills.

Call it “The Ongoing Oklahoma Watergate.”

– The author is a geologist who lives in Tulsa

BOOKS

Chernobyl's Tendrils Still Spreading Poison

By Ace Hoffman

CHERNOBYL

Consequences of the Catastrophe for People and the Environment
By Alexey V. Yablokov [Center for Russian Environmental Policy, Moscow, Russia], Vassily B. Nesterenko, and Alexey V. Nesterenko [Institute of Radiation Safety, Minsk, Belarus]. Consulting Editor Janette D. Sherman-Nevinger [Environmental Institute, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI].
The Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences Volume 1181
335 Pages, \$150

Nearly 24 years later, Chernobyl is still a dirty place, a dirty word.

Chernobyl has almost surely killed hundreds of thousands of people, perhaps already it is more than a million. And over time, it will kill many more. In fact, many estimates are that the vast majority who will be killed or harmed by Chernobyl were not even born at the time of the accident.

This is the legacy denied by the Nuclear Energy Institute [NEI, the public relations arm of the American nuclear industry] and other nuclear supporters – including the International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA] and the World Health Organization [WHO, which submits all its regulations to the IAEA for approval].

IAEA and WHO admit to a few thousand dead. The NEI claims that only 38 or “under 50” people were killed due to Chernobyl [their exact guess changes now and then, but never by enough]. But the truth, like the poisons, seeps out anyway.

SCARY, BUT IMPORTANT

A new book about Chernobyl was recently published in the Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences. The book's esteemed authors collected several thousand scientific studies about the after-effects of the Chernobyl meltdown.

Until now these studies have never seen the light of day in America, mainly because both America and the countries of the former Soviet Union, as well as all the other nuclear nations of the world, do not want this information “scaring” the public.

It IS scary, but it's worth knowing!

The book, painstakingly edited in English by Dr. Janette D. Sherman-Nevinger, is both shocking and depressing [this author had the honor of co-writing an article with Dr. Sherman in 2009, published in Friends Journal]. The book is 335 pages long, and nearly every page has about two dozen studies described briefly [more than 33,000 studies of Chernobyl's effects have been done; they could not all be reviewed or included in the book].

HEALTH ISSUES

It's stupefying. One goes numb. One can't believe the figures [and occasionally, in part due to translation errors from the European mathematical conventions to American notation, the figures undoubtedly ARE wrong]. But taken as a group, the evidence is overwhelming.

So many numbers to absorb!

But fear not: The authors have thankfully provided dozens and dozens of graphical charts.

After a while, when you turn to a new page and see a new chart, you can put your finger on “1986” virtually every time [some effects are delayed].

Things start to go wrong in dozens of countries: Birth rates go down, perhaps due to people being cautious about having children right after Chernobyl, or perhaps due to unrecorded miscarriages, or both. Age at time of death is down, childhood leukemia is up. The list goes on and on and on.

FAR DEADLIER THAN BHOPAL

Chernobyl has killed as many as a hundred times more people than the next-biggest industrial disaster in human history, generally considered to be the mass chemical poisoning in Bhopal, India in 1984. Chernobyl has probably killed more people than the atomic bomb blasts at Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined, including their horrible [and continuing] aftermath.

To this day, the nuclear industry pretends that Chernobyl killed only as many people as might die in a train wreck, or maybe in a bus going over a mountain-side. Sad, but nothing substantial.

Chernobyl kills every which way imaginable. But the NEI and other pro-nuclear advocates only count obvious, unmistakable, indisputably-attributable deaths. For every death they acknowledge, their methodologies inevitably miss tens of thousands of deaths that were, in reality, caused by Chernobyl.

One could dismiss their estimates out-of-hand as being the work of fools, but the problem with doing that is that a lot of fools believe those estimates.

AMERICA IS LUCKY

It's the biggest lie of the 21st Century, since trillions of dollars are being spent based on the idea that nuclear power is “safe” and “clean.” In reality, all designs of reactors – new and old [and old with new names and minor refinements] – are capable of releasing huge quantities of radioactive isotopes into the environment. Certainly, most designs are different from Chernobyl. But none are perfect by any stretch of the imagination.

Perhaps an accident in America is less likely, but there is NO significant evidence of that. There is only evidence that America has been very, very LUCKY not to have experienced a full-blown meltdown yet. [Google Davis-Besse 2002 for one example of a “close call.”]

The more reactors we build [if we build ANY more] and the longer we let our old reactors continue to operate, the greater the likelihood that a Chernobyl-size disaster will happen here. Many U.S. reactors are now well beyond their designed-

for years of operation, but the old clunkers are kept going by a corrupt regulatory system that refuses to do its job.

INCREASING THE RISK

And then there is the spent fuel. A catastrophe just as big or BIGGER than Chernobyl could happen in any spent fuel pool, or any dry fuel storage cask, at any time. These imperfect and inadequate storage methods are subject to earthquake or construction failures, as well as terrorists, tornados, tsunamis, even asteroids! No one can rightly claim that our nuclear facilities are secured – not even against rogue employees.

We have built the seeds of our own destruction into our environment. We should be reducing the risk, not increasing it.

But what if we are led to believe that the “disaster” would be minor? What if we are told that wildlife is flourishing in the “exclusion zone” around Chernobyl, now that there are no humans? Would it make us happy?

Or would we look for the underlying facts: Birds and other animals can't read signs saying “KEEP OUT!” [in any language]. So, yes, there is wildlife in the “exclusion zone,” but there is strong evidence that many of the creatures are dying when they get there. They don't reproduce properly, and more birds and animals from the nearby, less-contaminated areas come in to replace them, and this just

See **CHERNOBYL** Page 17

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Meet Charles And David Koch

Billionaire Brothers Quest To Remake America

By Jim Hightower

First of Two Parts

Despite a constant racket from the forces of the far-out right [Fox television's yackety-yackers, just-say-no GOP know-nothings, tea-bag howlers, Sarah Palinistas, et al], the great majority of Americans support a bold progressive agenda for our country, ranging from Medicare for all to the decentralization and re-regulation of Wall Street. Indeed, in the elections of 2006 and 2008, people voted for a fundamental break from Washington's 30-year push to enthrone a corporate kleptocracy.

Yet the economic and political thievery continues, as the White House, Congress, both parties, the courts, the media, much of academia, and other national institutions that shape our public policies reflexively shy away from any structural change. Instead, the first instinct of these entities is to soothe the fevered brow of corporate power by insisting that corporate primacy be the starting point of any "reform."

Thus, when Washington began its widely ballyhooed effort last year to reform our health-care system, step number one was to announce publicly that the monopolistic, bureaucratic insurance behemoths that cost us so much and deliver so little would retain their controlling position in the structure. Likewise, Wall Street barons who crashed America's financial system were allowed to oversee the system's remake – and [Big Surprise!] the same top-heavy structure and shaky practices that caused the crash are being kept in place.

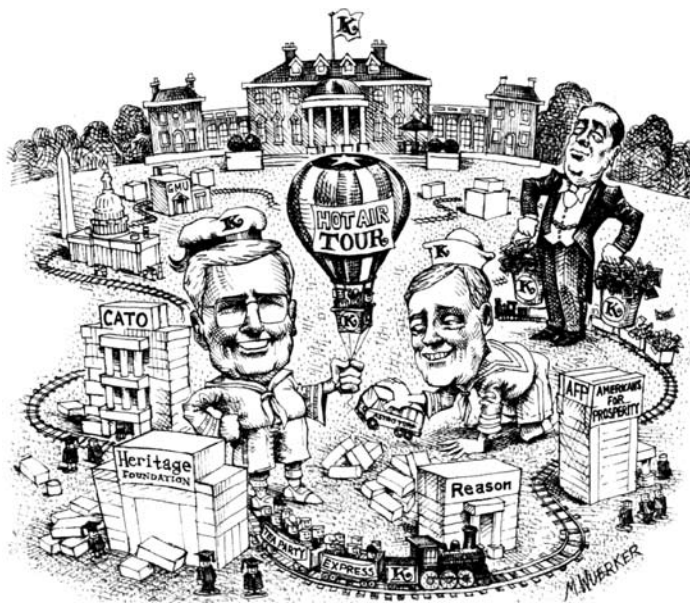
NOTHING REALLY CHANGES

In other words, the foxes who ate the chickens keep being put in charge of designing the new hen house – so nothing really changes.

This is more than frustrating, it's infuriating – and it's debilitating for our democracy. As a fellow said to me about the lack of real changes in national policy during the Clinton presidency, "I don't mind losing when we lose, but I hate losing when we win."

Why does this keep happening to us, and who's doing it? It's not merely a matter of too many fickle and pusillanimous politicians – they're the on-stage actors in this drama, but not the producers, not the ones behind the scenes plotting to thwart the people's democratic will. Who, specifically, are these plotters, and how do they impose their narrow agenda of self-interest over the public interest? These crucial questions for our democratic republic are the focus of this Lowdown, and they'll be a recurring topic in future issues. After all, to achieve genuine grassroots power, we have to know the full dimensions of the plutocratic powers we're up against.

Most Americans are totally unaware of these interests, which have attained a dangerous reach by quietly embedding themselves [and their self-centered worldview] much more deeply in our society's governing



THE THINKERS

To put an intellectual gloss on their hard-core antigovernment beliefs, the Kochs founded and funded their own think tank: the Cato Institute. Headquartered in Washington, it is home to a flock of leading right-wing thinkers who regularly churn out reports, op-eds, and blogs, as well as appearing frequently on media broadcasts and testifying before lawmakers.

The institute also serves as a loyal champion of corporate "rights." Among its pet causes are the total privatization of Social Security, elimination of tobacco regulation and taxation, and shifting control of America's water supplies into corporate hands [thus making our water just another market commodity to be bought and sold for profit]. Besides the generous support of the Koch family, Cato also gets funding from Altria [Philip Morris], FedEx, R.J. Reynolds, Volkswagon, and Wal-Mart.

In addition to its national advocacy and media work, this think tank also funds numerous "Little Catos" across the country to spread its thinking into state and local policies. Among its financial recipients are state-level think tanks in Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Nevada, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

institutions than they want us to realize. So let's take a peek at them, beginning with a look at the intricate power woven by a huge corporation you've probably never heard of, even though your consumer dollars are financing its right-wing political agenda.

ANONYMOUS INC.

It's none of my business, but maybe you have Northern tissue on your toilet roll. You might also buy Brawny paper towels, Dixie paper cups, and Vanity Fair napkins. Maybe you have clothing that owes its clingy and comfy stretchiness to Lycra, and perhaps you have a Stainmaster carpet or a Solarmax couch in your home.

All of these well-known brands are owned and produced by a global conglomerate that deliberately tries to stay little known: Koch Industries [pronounced "coke"]. Based in Wichita, KS, Koch is also a major producer of oil, gas timber, coal and cattle. It's a petroleum refiner, too, as well as a manufacturer of asphalt, chemicals, polyethylene plastic, nitrogen fertilizers, cement, and lumber products. It owns or controls some 4,000 miles of pipelines, including a piece of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline. And, in a poetic bow to its desire for anonymity, Koch also owns Teflon.

With 70,000 employees in 60 countries, this publicity-shy giant is America's second-largest privately owned corporation. Being private means it makes very few disclosures about its finances and operating

practices, but we do know that it has sales topping \$100 billion a year, which means it is bigger than such corporate giants as Verizon and Morgan Stanley.

BILLIONAIRE BROTHERS

Charles and David Koch, who control this family-owned empire, are tied for a spot as the 19th-richest billionaire in the world, according to a 2009 ranking by Forbes. Each brother has a net worth of \$14 billion, just below the wealth held by four heirs to the Wal-Mart fortune.

Charles, 73, and David, 68, boast of being "self-made" billionaires. Actually, that's a fib, for they had a little help from Daddy. Fred Koch, who died in 1967, started his name-sake business after inventing a method of turning heavy oil into gasoline, and his sons got a leg up on their climb to billionairehood by inheriting Fred's company.

They also inherited something else: a burning ideological commitment to right-wing politics. How right wing? In 1958, Daddy Fred helped found the John Birch Society.

Following in those footsteps, Charles and David have used the wealth they draw from Koch Industries to fuel a network of three Koch Family Foundations. During the past three decades, these "charitable" foundations have set up and financed a secretive army of political operatives dedicated to achieving the brothers' antigovernment, corporate-controlled vision for America. This stealth force includes national and state-level think tanks, Astroturf

front groups, academic shells, university centers, political-training programs, fundraising clearinghouses, publications, lobbyists, and various other units useful to Charles and David's ideological cause.

This army's effort is effective because it is comprehensive, well funded, coordinated, and focused on a long-term political strategy. Contrast that to the progressive movement, which largely consists of under-funded, unconnected groups and hops from battle to battle with little or no strategic planning.

KOCH'S WICKED WEB

For some three decades, there's been a steadily increasing flow of think-tank studies, legislative proposals, articles, books, corporate lawsuits, citizen petitions, and other efforts to push for the deregulation of most industries and the privatization or elimination of government functions. These extremist ideas have never had strong public support, yet they've moved from the back burner of American policy in the 1970s to the red-hot front burner in the Bush years – and today we're paying the price for the adoption of these concepts at all levels of government, from privatization of local water supplies to the deregulation of Wall Street.

The different pushes to implement this antigovernment ideology have come from a wide assortment of seemingly independent groups and individuals, creating a sense of broad public demand for a libertarian corporate kingdom in America. However, when you examine those pushing this dog-eat-dog ethic, chances are you'll find that they have one thing in common: funding from the Koch fortune.

The three Koch family foundations discreetly refrain from publishing the recipients of their beneficence, but some progressive watchdogs [including www.sunlightfoundation.com, www.mediamattersaction.org/transparency and www.sourcewatch.org] have dug into the dense IRS reports that foundations must file, giving us a glimpse of the extensive right-wing web spun by this one oil family. The Kochs are not the only funders, of course – such other far-right family foundations as Bradley, Coors, Olin, and Scaife are also major players. But the size, scope, strategic purpose, and secrecy of the Koch investments make the brothers worthy of special attention.

Next: *Jim Hightower details a list that "by no means covers the entirety of [the Koch brothers'] network – they've put money into hundreds of groups – but it'll give you a sense of their reach into every nook and cranny of public policy."*

– The author is co-editor of *The Hightower Lowdown*, where this report first appeared. To subscribe to his monthly newsletter, visit www.hightowerlowdown.org or send \$15 [for a year] to *The Hightower Lowdown*, P.O. Box 20596, New York, NY 10011 or call 866.271.4900.

Education 'Reforms' Prevent Real Reform

By Diane Ravitch

As an education historian, I have often warned against the seductive lure of grand ideas to reform education. Our national infatuation with education fads and reforms distracts us from the steady work that must be done.

Our era is no different. We now face a wave of education reforms based on the belief that school choice, test-driven accountability and the resulting competition will dramatically improve student achievement.

Once again, I find myself sounding the alarm that the latest vision of education reform is deeply flawed. But this time my warning carries a personal rebuke. For much of the last two decades, I was among those who jumped aboard the choice and accountability bandwagon.

Choice and accountability, I believed, would offer a chance for poor children to escape failing schools.

Testing and accountability, I thought, would cast sunshine on low-performing schools and lead to improvement. It all seemed to make sense, even if there was little empirical evidence, just promise and hope.

FADS ARE NOT WORKING

Today there is empirical evidence, and it shows clearly that choice, competition and accountability as education reform levers are not working. But with confidence bordering on recklessness, the Obama Administration is plunging ahead, pushing an aggressive program of school reform – codified in its signature Race to the Top program – that relies on the power of incentives and competition. This approach may well make schools worse, not better.

Those who do not follow education closely may be tempted to think that, at long last, we're finally turning the corner. What could be wrong with promoting charter schools to compete with public schools?

Why shouldn't we demand accountability from educators and use test scores to reward our best teachers and identify those who should find another job?

Like the grand plans of previous eras, they sound sensible but will leave education no better off. Charter schools are no panacea. The nation now has about 5,000 of them, and they vary in quality. Some are excellent, some terrible; most are in between. Most studies have found that charters, on average, are no better than public schools.

CHARTERS NEVER OUTPERFORM

On the federal tests, known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress, from 2003 to 2009, charters have never outperformed public schools. Nor have black and Latino students in charter schools performed better than their counterparts in public schools.

This is surprising, because charter schools have many advantages over public schools. Most charters choose their students by lottery. Those who sign up to win seats tend to be the most motivated students and families in the poorest communities. Charters are also free to "counsel out" students who are unable or unwilling to meet expectations.

A study of KIPP charters in the San Francisco area found that 60% of those students who started the fifth grade were gone before the end of eighth grade. Most of those who left were low performers.

Studies of charters in Boston, New York City and Washington have found that charters, as compared to public schools, have smaller percentages of the stu-



dents who are generally hardest to educate – those with disabilities and English-language learners. Because the public schools must educate everyone, they end up with disproportionate numbers of the students the charters don't want.

PRIVATE MANAGEMENT WON'T WORK

So we're left with the knowledge that a dramatic expansion in the number of privately managed schools is not likely to raise student achievement. Meanwhile, public schools will become schools of last resort for the unmotivated, the hardest to teach and those who didn't win a seat in a charter school. If our goal is to destroy public education in America, this is precisely the right path.

Nor is there evidence that student achievement will improve if teachers are evaluated by their students' test scores. Some economists say that when students have four or five "great" teachers in a row, the achievement gap between racial groups disappears. The difficulty with this theory is that we do not have adequate measures of teacher excellence.

Of course, it would be wonderful if all teachers were excellent, but many factors affect student scores other than their teacher, including students' motivation, the schools' curriculum, family support, poverty and distractions on testing day, such as the weather or even a dog barking in the school's parking lot.

The Obama education reform plan is an aggressive version of the Bush Administration's No Child Left Behind, under which many schools have narrowed their curriculum to the tested subjects of reading and math.

POOR SUBSTITUTE

This poor substitute for a well-rounded education, which includes subjects such as the arts, history, geography, civics, science and foreign language, hits low-income children the hardest, since they are the most likely to attend the kind of "failing school" that drills kids relentlessly on the basics. Emphasis on test scores already compels teachers to focus on test preparation.

Holding teachers personally and exclusively accountable for test scores – a

See REFORM Page 17

Justice's Wife Opens 'Tea Party' Nonprofit

By Kathleen Hennessey

As Virginia Thomas tells it in her soft-spoken, Midwestern cadence, the story of her involvement in the "tea party" movement is the tale of an average citizen in action.

"I am an ordinary citizen from Omaha, NE, who just may have the chance to preserve liberty along with you and other people like you," she said at a recent panel discussion with tea party leaders in Washington.

Thomas went on to count herself among those energized into action by President Obama's "hard-left agenda."

But Thomas is no ordinary activist.

She is the wife of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, and she has launched a tea-party-linked group that could test the traditional notions of political impartiality for the court.

LOBBYING GROUP

In January, Virginia Thomas created Liberty Central Inc., a nonprofit lobbying group whose website will organize activism around a set of conservative "core principles," she said.

The group plans to issue scorecards for Congress members and be involved in the November election, although Thomas would not specify how.

She said it would accept donations from various sources – including corporations – as allowed under campaign finance rules recently loosened by the Supreme Court.

"I adore all the new citizen patriots who are rising up across this country," Thomas, who goes by Ginni, said on the panel at the Conservative Political Action Conference.

"I have felt called to the front lines with you, with my fellow citizens, to pre-

serve what made America great."

THOMAS SENSITIVE?

Justice Thomas recently expressed sensitivity to such concerns, telling law students in Florida that he doesn't attend the State of the Union because it is "so partisan."

Thomas was nominated by President George H.W. Bush in 1991.

Experts say Virginia Thomas' work doesn't violate ethical rules for judges. But Liberty Central could give rise to conflicts of interest for her husband, they said, as it tests the norms for judicial spouses. The couple have been married since 1987.

"I think the American public expects the justices to be out of politics," said University of Texas law school professor Lucas A. "Scot" Powe, a court historian.

Under judicial rules, judges must curb political activity, but a spouse is free to engage.

Although Liberty Central is a nonpartisan group, its website shows an affinity for conservative principles. Her biography notes that Thomas is a fan of Rush Limbaugh and Mark Levin, author of *Men in Black: How the Supreme Court Is Destroying America*.

"She is intrigued by Glenn Beck and listening carefully," the bio says.

Because of a recent Supreme Court decision, *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, the group may also spend corporate money freely to advocate for or against candidates for office.

Justice Thomas was part of the 5-4 majority in that case.

© Los Angeles Times

Facts You Should Know About Catholics

Editor's Note: Excerpts of an article written by Sam Miller, a prominent Jewish businessman from Cleveland. He is not Catholic.

Why would newspapers carry on a vendetta on one of the most important institutions that we have today in the United States, namely the Catholic Church?

Do you know – the Catholic Church educates 2.6 million students everyday at the cost to that Church of \$10 billion, and a savings on the other hand to the American taxpayer of \$18 billion.

The graduates go on to graduate studies at the rate of 92%. The Church has 230 colleges and universities in the U.S. with an enrollment of 700,000 students.

The Catholic Church has a non-profit hospital system of 637 hospitals, which account for hospital treatment of one out of every five people – not just Catholics – in the United States today.

PRESS IS VINDICTIVE

But the press is vindictive and trying to totally denigrate in every way the Catholic Church in this country. They have blamed the disease of pedophilia on the Catholic Church, which is as irresponsible as blaming adultery on the institution of marriage.

Let me give you some figures that Catholics should know and remember. For example, 12% of the 300 Protestant clergy surveyed admitted to sexual intercourse with a parishioner; 38% acknowledged other inappropriate sexual contact in a study by the United Methodist Church, 41.8% of clergy women reported unwanted sexual behavior; 17% of laywomen have been sexually harassed.

Meanwhile, 1.7% of the Catholic clergy has been found guilty of pedophilia. Ten percent of the Protestant ministers have been found guilty of pedophilia. This is not a Catholic problem.

MOST PRIESTS HAPPY

A study of American priests showed that most are happy in the priesthood and find it even better than they had expected, and that most, if given the choice, would choose to be priests again in face of all this obnoxious PR the church has been receiving.

The Catholic Church is bleeding from self-inflicted wounds. The agony that Catholics have felt and suffered is not necessarily the fault of the Church.

You have been hurt by a small number of wayward priests that have probably been totally weeded out by now. Walk with your shoulders high and your head



higher. Be a proud member of the most important non-governmental agency in the United States.

Then remember what Jeremiah said, "Stand by the roads, and look and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is and walk in it, and find rest for your souls." Be proud to speak up for your faith with pride and reverence and learn what your Church does for all other religions.

Be proud that you're a Catholic.

If You Thought It Couldn't Get Worse ...

By Harry T. Cook

It appears we will be spared no racist atrocity, especially of the kind that impersonates a work of mercy.

The anti-choice zealots of the misogynist world have begun [again] to prey on the insecurities of African Americans by suggesting that Planned Parenthood and other respecters of reproductive rights are really out to commit genocide, i.e. to kill off as many African American fetuses as possible.

A Feb. 26 article in The New York Times tells how Georgia Right to Life is advertising the reprehensible fiction that the constitutionally protected exercise of reproductive rights is making "black children an endangered species."

Full disclosure: On the wall about three feet from where I am sitting at my computer keyboard hangs an award I received from Planned Parenthood of Michigan 15 years ago naming me a "Tireless Advocate of Reproductive Freedom."

On the same wall hangs a similar award from the Oakland County [Michigan] American Civil Liberties Union naming me the 1998 "Civil Libertarian of the Year." Nearby is a Distinguished Alumni award from my alma mater.

Yet it is the Planned Parenthood citation that means the most to me. In my acceptance of the award I said, speaking of my wife, my daughter and two daughters-in-law, that their uteri were their own, sacrosanct to their reproductive freedom and off-limits to any government interference.

Had I then the three granddaughters I have now, I would have included them, too.

I realize all these years along that my sentiment on that occasion sounded a lot like what the Tea Party partiers are saying today about holding government at bay. Yet many of them would claim that the women in my life have no such thing as reproductive rights.

Here's how I know that there is no such thing as a genocidal plot against African-American babies.

I am a volunteer counselor at a non-government, not-for-profit social service agency in the depth of one of America's large and troubled cities, the population of which is nearly 90% African American.

Drawing on a graduate education and on-the-ground experiences of more than 40 years as a parish priest, I sit for one day a week with all sorts and conditions of human beings who come to our agency for help with the most basic of needs.

Not infrequently will sit in my cubicle one African-American woman or another in her mid-20s with as many as four children all under 6. She will be in one fix or another, food stamps cancelled due to a bureaucratic error, or utilities shut off, or a Medicaid card that her neighborhood pharmacist says is invalid.

Often she will have one or more or all of her children with her, trying with seeming infinite patience to gather them in as a mother hen gathers her chicks.

You would see what I see: a woman with no male companion in her life, the fa-

ther or fathers of her children long gone, in prison or merely footloose and fancy free. You would see a severely sleep-deprived person who sometimes stares into the middle distance, overwhelmed with unresolved and evidently unresolvable concerns, yet still alert to her children's safety and welfare.

She has come begging anything our agency can do to help. Somewhere in the conversation you ask gently if she plans ever to have more children. With a look somewhere on the spectrum between rage and resignation she says, "Never planned to have the ones I got." But you know that now she has them, she will care for them at whatever cost to herself. She has come to us because she knows we will help her do so to the best of our ability.

The white Georgia racists disguised as pious uplift right-to-lifers are telling African Americans that Planned Parenthood is trying to get their women to submit to "womb lynchings" as a way to reduce the black population.

Such lies amount to slander and must be robustly challenged. The young mother in my cubicle, if she could live the last eight or nine years over again, would surely seek medical advice about contraception and would not depend on her suitors to carry and use prophylactics. Such a practice is considered in some communities to be unmanly.

She would not wish her children away, but she would certainly wish that she might have built the kind of life that would not now have her lining up outside our building in the chill of winter's waning days just to keep them from starvation.

The malevolent Georgian liars are abusing African-American women for pointless political – or worse, religious – ends having nothing whatsoever to do with the health and welfare of those affected. It is a wretched, terrible thing and must be dealt with by any available and licit means.

– The author is an Episcopal priest, journalist and author living in Michigan

Wabbits

A precious little girl walks into a pet shop and asks, in the sweetest little lisp, between two missing teeth, "Excute me, Mither, do you keep widdle wabbits?"

As the shopkeeper's heart melts, he gets down on his knees so that he's on her level and asks, "Do you want a widdle white wabbit, or a thoft and fuwwy bwack wabbit, or maybe one like that cute widdle brown wabbit over there?"

She, in turn, blushes, rocks on her heels, puts her hands on her knees, leans forward and says, in a tiny voice, "I don't think my python weally gives a thit."

Bipartisanship Is Just Surrendering To GOP

By John Cory

I'm tired of pundits and know-nothing media gasbags. I'm tired of snarky "inside politics" programming.

I am sick of the bigotry and hatred of "birthers" and faux patriotic cranks and their GOP puppet masters. And I'm really pissed at the Democratic Party that confuses having a plate of limp noodles with having a spine.

I'm going to vomit if I hear the word "bipartisanship" one more time. It was "bipartisanship" that gave us this activist conservative Supreme Court.

It is a Supreme Court that says money is free speech and corporations are persons except when real people try to hold them accountable for their greed and poisonous ways.

WHAT BIPARTISANSHIP GAVE US

"Bipartisanship" gave us the Patriot Act and FISA and illegal wiretaps and two wars and "free speech zones" and "no fly" lists. God bless bipartisan America.

I get nauseated every time the Senate explains how it takes a super majority to do anything for the American people. Tell you what, Senate Bozos, if it takes 60 votes to pass legislation then it should take 60% of the popular vote to get you elected.

When some Tea Party crank says, "I want my country back," I respond, "No, madam, you want your country backward."

WHAT ABOUT THE SURPLUS?

When a deficit-mongering politician says, "How do we pay for this?" Why not ask, "What did you Republicans do with the surplus we Democrats left you?"

When a compassionate conservative says, "Healthcare reform is socialism," why not answer, "No, sir, it is the moral and American way to care for people."

Yes, I can hear it now: "You are naive and simplistic. These are complicated matters and require sophisticated solutions. Democrats are a big tent and strive for balance. But Republicans block our path at every turn. We are thinking and considering new ways to work in harmony with everyone."

Bite me.

The only thing you get with "harmony" is a Barbershop Quartet.

Democrats, stop being Republican Lite. Stop whining about that mean GOP and their nasty messaging. Grow a pair, get a message, get a bumper sticker and hang it out there. Get some strong vivid talking points.

WHAT GREED HAS WROUGHT

G-O-P = Greed Over People. Greed Kills – jobs, people and the economy. Terrorism is Viagra for Republicans: The more fear, the more excited they get.

When a soldier dies for America, who dares ask if they were gay or straight? Don't act so shocked, Democratic Party. Have you looked around lately?

You're losing the youth vote that showed up to elect Obama. You're losing those old enough to remember real Democrats. Why? Because you don't talk to them any more than you talk to me. You talk at me. You talk around me.

You talk down to me. You talk about me. You don't talk with me. And you don't inspire and you don't champion and without that you are nothing more than an arbitrator of compromise and abdication. You are facing a bully. Deal with it!

WHAT REPUBLICANS WANT

Republicans want the country backwards. They champion superstition over



science because it entrenches ignorance and bigotry and captures the easily frightened.

Republicans treat the Constitution the way they treat the Bible, with selective interpretation and selective application to others while exempting themselves from judgment and accountability.

Republicans preach the Gospel of Fear because fear is darkness and darkness covers their theft of civil liberties and constitutional principles.

For 30 years the Republican Party has claimed the mantle of law and order but now quake in dread of the American judicial system when putting terrorists on trial. How criminal is that?

Torture is illegal. Period. John Wayne and Jack Bauer were not our Founding Fathers – only in the make-believe world of Republican drugstore-patriots. It is unconscionable, immoral, and disgusting.

AMERICA'S REAL VALUES

Empathy, compassion and equality are not pejoratives. They are American values proven again and again throughout our history.

Republicans believe that bake-sales and cookies for chemotherapy best determine the value of life and healthcare because life is a pre-existing condition and the "free market" should not have to take on such a high risk – after all, no one gets out alive, so why should the corporation be left holding the bag? Unless of course the price is right.

Republicans believe that government should keep its hands off healthcare but should put its hands inside a woman's body.

Republicans believe in small government – small enough to hold the "right" people and small enough to be owned and operated by the "right" people. Who are the "right" people? Them. Not you.

Democratic Party, DNC, DLCC, DSCC or whatever your acronym – I have only one question for you: Really?

You can't win against these guys? You can't get your message out against these guys? You can't give America leadership against these guys? Really?

Stiffening The Backbones Of Democrats

By Jim Hightower

You know what we need to juice up the performance of our weak economy? Viagra.

Yes, America needs a new Viagra, specifically targeted to stiffen backbones – in particular, the limp backbones of Barack Obama's team, as well as the flaccid spines of Democratic congressional leaders. Where's the drug industry when we really need it?

The Obama-ites seem incapable of firm stands. They excite us by boldly addressing our economic woes, then they seduce us by proposing stout actions. But when it comes time to follow through – it's droopsville.

Take America's job crisis. Obama and the Democrats eloquently empathize with the plight of struggling families who are falling out of the middle class. They point out that after Wall Street banksters crashed our economy and created the Great Recession, which began in December 2007, the number of jobs available to Americans has plummeted by more than 8.4 million. Since then, another 2.7 million jobseekers have come into the workforce. That leaves us in a hole that is 11.1 million jobs deep.

JOBS, JOBS, JOBS

The White House and Congress correctly note that our economy must not merely stop losing jobs, it must create more than 400,000 new positions a month for the next three years just to get us out of this hole. Nothing is more important, they tell us, blowing kisses of compassion and promising satisfaction.

"Our three most important priorities in this Congress," says Rep. Bob Etheridge, a North Carolina Democrat, are "jobs, jobs, jobs." Obama himself has titillated the hopes of working families by proposing a \$266 billion national emergency program to put America to work.

Strong stuff – let's get it on!

Sure enough, after a lengthy romancing of their Republican colleagues [who are devout believers in an abstinence-only job-creation policy], the Democrats finally made their move. With the support of five GOP senators, the "jobs, jobs, jobs" bill passed in both houses of Congress.

WHAT A LETDOWN

But ... what a letdown. To win those five Republican senators, Democratic leaders shriveled their job investment program from a robust \$266 billion to a frustratingly puny \$15 billion. Even such phony Casanovas as Sen. Chuck Schumer had to confess that the "package is not a panacea; it's not going to solve everything."

Everything? Chuck, admit your impotence. At most, this bill might stimulate the creation of 250,000 new jobs – a bit short of the 11 million that America needs just to get back to where we were in 2007, much less the need to create an economic path to lead us into a bold future of new, sustainable, middle-class job creation.

In fact, the Democrats' response is even weaker than it appears. Rather than directly creating jobs that pay workers, the \$15 billion is going into tax breaks for businesses. The convoluted hope is that the money will "encourage" the recipients to hire a few people who're suffering from long-term joblessness. This trickle-down approach is even more pathetic than trying to fight a house fire with a squirt gun, for it doesn't even put the squirt gun in the hands of the people caught in the fire.

What the Democrats have done is to pass a do-nothing Republican bill, a reality that was blurred out by Sen. Orrin Hatch, one of the five GOPsters to vote for it: "This is a conservative approach to help put our economy back on track

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Career Colleges Are Swindling Students

By Danny Weil

Co-founder of Alta Colleges Inc., Kirk Riedinger, chuckled to a reporter in June 2002 as he looked back at the company he helped found.

In an interview in the Denver Business Journal, Riedinger was quoted, sniggering: "We didn't have two nickels to our name."

Along with fellow Harvard Business School graduate Jamie Turner, Riedinger acquired the Denver Institute of Technology in 1987 with the help of "hard money" from an organization called the "Funded Search."

The two entrepreneurs were looking to cash in on the burgeoning "for-profit career colleges" that have recently sprung up like Pay Day Loans, only they're subsidized by taxpayer funds in the form of federal grants.

The Denver Institute of Technology was eventually morphed into Alta Colleges Inc., headquartered in Denver with over 12,000 students at 19 campuses in California, Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Texas and Virginia.

20,000 GRADUATES

It boasts 20,000 graduates. That's a lot of federal money flowing to the private coffers of Alta Colleges Inc., over \$300 million by some estimates.

What better way to do business and garner easy cash for investors than to offer a "career education" to typically low income, working class students – generally students of color – who then qualify for taxpayer-funded financial aid which is immediately transferred to the college.

At this point it seems that Alta Colleges Inc. and their budding entrepreneurs will need more than a few nickels to rub together.

On April 20, 2009 after an intense investigation of their practices, Alta Colleges Inc. and its wholly-owned collegiate schools in Texas agreed to pay the United States government \$7 million to resolve allegations under the U.S. False Claims Act.

The False Claims Act permits private citizens to bring lawsuits on behalf of the United States and to share in any recovery.

SETTLEMENT TERMS

Under the settlement, the whistleblowers who initiated the federal lawsuit against Alta Colleges Inc. will receive \$1.19 million for their efforts.

The for-profit career college industry was not always a multi-billion dollar business.

The whole notion of a career college dates back to the mid-19th Century when urban stenography schools saw a rise in enrollment as working people looked for entry into the new industrialized economy.

Once advertised as vocational, trucking and beautician schools, today, thanks to dramatic changes in the rules and regulations under the Bush Administration, for-profit career colleges have not only gained favor as for-profit competitors with traditional public schools, but the for-profit industry also received substantial

When Politics And Religion Trump Science

By Charles C. Haynes

At a time when American students rank an abysmal 21st in science literacy when compared with students around the world, state legislatures should be passing laws to strengthen science education – or at least refrain from enacting bills that make matters worse.

Instead, politicians in a growing number of states are muddying the science-education waters by pushing legislation that requires schools to "teach the controversy" about evolution, global warming and other scientific theories.

This situation isn't entirely new. For some years now, anti-evolutionists have worked to bring critiques of evolution into the curriculum by calling for "academic freedom" to teach alternatives to the prevailing scientific theory.

REFRAMING THE DEBATE

What is new, as reported March 3 in The New York Times, is the attempt to reframe the debate by making it less about evolution and more about the need to teach students dissenting views on a range of scientific theories, with global warming at the top of the list.

Consider Kentucky, where the Legislature is considering a bill that would encourage "open and objective discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of scientific theories being studied." That means, according to the bill, critiquing the science supporting "evolution, the origins of life, global warming and human cloning."

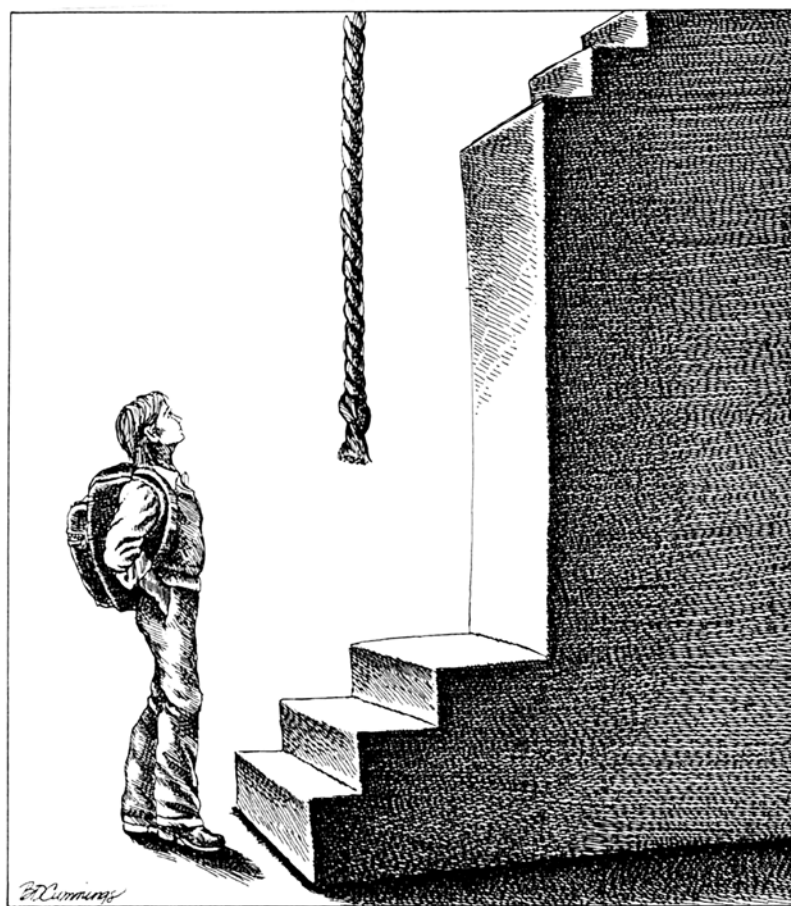
The Kentucky proposal mirrors laws passed in Louisiana [2008] and Texas [2009], as well as legislation debated, but not yet adopted, in many other states in recent years.

The language of the Kentucky bill may be confusing [what can it possibly mean for any scientific theory to have "disadvantages"?], but the intent is clear: Teach students to be skeptical of what the vast majority of scientists tell us about evolution, climate change and other science topics studied in school.

INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

At first blush, who can possibly object? After all, intellectual freedom should be the cornerstone of a good education in a democratic society.

Of course students should be taught to be critical thinkers. Of course they should be exposed to legitimate scientific questions and debates in science classes.



governmental assistance under the Bush regime which simply dismantled consumer-protection rules.

MAJOR APPOINTMENT

In 2002, for example, around the time Alta Colleges Inc. saw tremendous growth and soaring profits, Sally Stroup, the top lobbyist for the University of Phoenix, was appointed the Department of Education's assistant secretary for post-secondary education.

During her tenure, which ended in 2006, the Department of Education softened rules that prevented the career colleges from obtaining more than 90% of their income from federal aid.

Under Stroup, the feds also reduced the level of scrutiny for the accreditation agencies. Ironically, Dr. Laura Palmer Noone, former president of the University of Phoenix, is now on the Alta College's Westwood College board. She resigned from the University of Phoenix in 2006, coincidentally around the same time Stroup's tenure ended.

HOMELAND SECURITY DEGREE

Now instead of becoming a dental assistant or truck driver, you can take out federal grants and loans to obtain a \$33,000 online bachelor's degree in "Homeland Security" from the American Public University System, a for-profit college

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But are these bills really about academic freedom – or are they driven by politics and religion? The question answers itself when you consider that the science targeted in Kentucky and elsewhere for skeptical treatment just happens to coincide with the science that many religious conservatives question or outright reject.

Surely Kentucky politicians know that passing a bill that would permit teachers to critique scientific theories using "other instructional materials" beyond the approved textbooks and materials opens the door to all kinds of religious claims masquerading as science. With all due respect, most legislators and school board members are not qualified to tell the difference.

Genuine academic freedom means exposing students to how scientists determine what is and isn't controversial in science – and then helping students understand how the scientific method is used to resolve unanswered questions about any and all scientific theories. Scientists and science educators should decide what our kids need to learn about science, not legislators or religious advocacy groups.

SCIENTIFIC ALTERNATIVES?

Proponents of legislation to "teach all sides" claim that there are indeed scientific alternatives to the prevailing scientific theories on such topics as evolution and global warming. If that claim is true, then those alternatives must be peer-reviewed in science journals before being presented as science in public schools.

Yes, students should learn about a variety of religious and philosophical worldviews, including those that reject evolution and question global warming. But when public schools teach science, they must ensure that students get an accurate and full account of what science tells us, including those questions that scientists themselves agree remain to be answered.

If we want to advance scientific literacy in America, we should refrain from imposing political and religious agendas on the public school curriculum and focus instead on how to provide the best education possible.

Under the First Amendment, Americans are free to wage ideological warfare against evolution or any other scientific theory. But to make public schools the battlefield is both wrong and dangerous.

– The author is senior scholar at the First Amendment Center in Washington

Texas Textbook Massacre

Jefferson Is History In Lone Star State

By Adele M. Stan

As long as history is written by human beings, it will always be a subjective enterprise. But what's going on in Texas is the manufacture of a creation myth of the United States, crafted through the prism of right-wing Christianity – not just a simple coloring of history as seen through one facet of the prism that illuminates the historical record.

At issue are the textbooks to be used in the state's public schools, shaped by the curriculum guidelines passed by the State Board of Education. The New York Times talked to several school board members, including:

Cynthia Dunbar – a lawyer from Richmond who is a strict constitutionalist and thinks the nation was founded on Christian beliefs – managed to cut Thomas Jefferson from a list of figures whose writings inspired revolutions in the late 18th Century and 19th Century, replacing him with St. Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin and William Blackstone.

WHY THEY DISLIKE JEFFERSON

Jefferson is not well liked among conservatives on the board because he coined the term "separation between church and state."

Right. Jefferson, the Founding Father most responsible for the First Amendment, had nothing to do with inspiring the French revolution – or the American Revolution, for that matter.

Here's what happened when one of the 15-member panel's five Democrats attempted to introduce a little balance, according to the Times:

Mavis B. Knight, a Democrat from Dallas, introduced an amendment requiring that students study the reasons "the founding fathers protected religious freedom in America by barring the government from promoting or disfavoring any particular religion above all others."

DOWNPLAYING RACISM

The new curriculum will also downplay the history of racism in the U.S. and, according to board member Mary Helen Berlinga, a board member who stormed



out of the school board meeting, virtually write Latinos out of history.

As I first wrote here, there's a truly dangerous trend afoot in the lack of a common notion of reality. Then I wrote of the siloing of media via cable and Internet, which leads to completely ideologized versions of the news.

In Texas we see what happens when a body acting on behalf of the public is dominated by people of a very particular mindset – a mindset based on a paranoid, chauvinistic mindset that has been advanced as gospel truth through five decades of right-wing propaganda.

For more than 50 years, the right wing has built institutions to advance this worldview, and its philanthropists have given generously to its "visionaries," funding them not project-by-project, but bestowing operating budgets on right-wing institutions, and often providing hundreds of thousands of dollars in research support to right-wing authors.

The result is an alternate universe built on a handful of Big Lies. The only possible antidote is a similar level of support to truth-tellers.

Well, a girl can dream, can't she?

– The author is *Alternet's* Washington bureau chief

Poor Too Often Left To Beg For Health Care

By Judy Eichstedt

Imagine your child is crying because he or she does not feel well. Your child has a fever and is throwing up. You walk the floor; child in arms doing your best to comfort the child but nothing seems to work. A cold towel is placed on the child's head to help the fever go down. The child will not eat and it's clear she is very ill.

As any parent, your heart is broken because the child that you love is suffering. Picture in your mind a mother as she holds her sick child, calling doctor after doctor, trying to find help for her child only to be told rudely over and over we can't help you because you have no insurance, but we will take cash.

The mother pleads with the doctor and makes promises of paying later knowing very well she could never dig up the money to pay the bill. Frustrated and angry she slams the phone down.

The needs of the poor shall not all ways be forgotten.

Take it a step further and pretend you have worked hard all your life at back breaking labor at a low paying job that takes for granted that you need the job to survive and you won't dare make waves of any kind. The boss is able to scream at you and treat you as less than human and all you can do is stand there and take it.

You're reduced to a slave and trained to obey the masters. You work long hours and six days a week and never see your family that you're working so hard to support.

For the most part you do the work nobody else wants to do – the dirty jobs, the hard ones that leave you dead tired at the end of the workday.

Oh, yes, and you have no medical insurance whatsoever. In fact, there are no raises and not a single perk of any kind. You struggle daily to avoid having your utilities shut off and worry what will happen if you or your children get sick.

Blessed is the poor for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

For just a moment or two, as scary as it will be, place yourself into the body of someone working for minimum wage. Let us say a single mother working at a fast food restaurant with customers complaining about their food order and you're trying to be as nice as you can in spite of how you're being treated. As you rush to get out orders working as fast as you can, your legs start to pain because you have been on your feet for four hours now without a rest.

All the time your mind is trying to come up with a way to take your children to the doctor because they have the flu. You are worried to a state of depression because two of your children need to see a dentist but you have no insurance or money to pay for it. Two of your own teeth were so bad, causing you great pain, so you pulled them out yourself. It took over a week of twisting your teeth to make them loose so you could pull them out.

Blessed is he who considers the poor.

Pretend for a moment that you're ill and you don't have a clue what is wrong. You know you need to see a doctor but you're too poor to afford such a luxury. Perhaps you should not pay the rent and risk being evicted but at least you could see a doctor. Maybe you cannot pay your water bill and use that money. After all

it won't be so bad going a month or so without running water.

These are the decisions millions of human beings must make everyday of their lives. They are hard working people who are denied health care because they are poor. Is it possible that the homeless and poor, the low-income workers, are viewed as unworthy or of no value so they suffer in silence?

In America there is no excuse whatsoever not to have every American covered by health insurance. Well, except for greed and selfishness.

Millions are not able to pay for health care and so they just do without. Many companies now try and save money by doing away with health care for the workers. The bottom line is that no one should ever be denied health care.

The American workers, as well as the poor, are suffering greatly and their cries fall on deaf ears.

The suffering going on behind closed doors is clearly a disgrace to us all as children of god. He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor shall also cry and not be heard.

– Judy Eichstedt lives in Tulsa and is co-author of 2012: The Last Entries

Now Voters Are Mad?

We had eight years of Bush and Cheney ... Now you get mad!
You didn't get mad when the Supreme Court stopped a legal recount and appointed a President.
You didn't get mad when Cheney allowed Energy company officials to dictate energy policy.
You didn't get mad when a covert CIA operative got outed.
You didn't get mad when we illegally invaded a country that posed no threat to us.
You didn't get mad when we spent over \$600 billion [and counting] on said illegal war.
You didn't get mad when over \$10 billion just disappeared in Iraq.
You didn't get mad when you found out we were torturing people.
You didn't get mad when the government was illegally wiretapping Americans.
You didn't get mad when we didn't catch Bin Laden.
You didn't get mad when you saw the horrible conditions at Walter Reed.
You didn't get mad when we let a major U.S. city drown.
You didn't get mad when we gave a \$900 billion tax break to the rich.
You didn't get mad when the Reagan deficit hit the trillion dollar mark.
You finally got mad when the government decided that people in America deserved the right to see a doctor if they are sick.

Yes, illegal wars, lies, corruption, torture, stealing your tax dollars to make the rich richer, are all OK with you, but helping other Americans ... OH, HELL NO!

– Anonymous

Deeper Than Ever In Student Loan Debt

One of the great hardships facing American college students today is student debt. According to a recent report from The Project on Student Debt, the average student in the class of 2008 graduated with \$23,000 of debt.

That's a figure 25% higher than what their older brothers and sisters owed when they graduated from college in 2004.

Two out of every three college students now graduate with debt, and the Great Recession is requiring students to take out more loans than ever before. In the 2008-09 academic year, federal student loan borrowing grew about 25% over the previous year, to \$75.1 billion.

Students are deeper in debt today than ever before. Two out of three college students graduate with debt and the average borrower who graduates from a public college owes \$17,250 from student loans.

Ten years ago, the average student borrower attending a public college or university graduated owing \$8,000 from student loans [adjusted for inflation].

The trend of heavy debt burdens threatens to limit access to higher education,

particularly for low-income and first-generation students, who tend to carry the heaviest debt burden.

Federal student aid policy has steadily put resources into student loan programs rather than need-based grants, a trend that straps future generations with high debt burdens.

Even students who receive federal grant aid are finding it more difficult to pay for college. In 2004, 88.5% of all Pell Grant recipients took out student loans averaging \$20,735. Borrowers who were not Pell recipients took out smaller loans, averaging \$18,420.

To rectify this problem, liberals in Congress introduced the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act [SAFRA], which expands and improves successful student aid programs like the Pell Grant and the Perkins Loan program, and eliminates billions of dollars in subsidies to wasteful private lenders. Last September, by a 253-171 vote, the House of Representatives passed this landmark student lending legislation. Now, SAFRA is a Senate vote away from the President's desk.

CHERNOBYL

From Page 10

keeps on happening.

Migratory species pass through, eat Chernobyl's plants and animals, which are often highly irradiated, and then leave their droppings [or die] elsewhere, in a continuous, deadly, but gradual cycle.

CHERNOBYL'S DESIGN FLAWS

Chernobyl had a poor design. The operators were running unauthorized experiments without proper safety equipment ready. There was no containment dome. Well, that had plusses, actually. In fact, it saved the day in some sense, since they were able to pour sand, lead, and other materials directly onto the hot reactor from helicopters flying overhead, through the invisible radioactive plume.

Otherwise, the reactor might have burnt completely. As it was, "only" about 3% to 5% of the reactor core was dispersed into the environment. The rest sits there to this day, still hot thermally and radioactively, still seeping nuclear poisons into the ecosystem, untouched for the most part.

Covered once with a poorly-built concrete sarcophagus, it is soon to be covered again. Right now, water gets in, and then radioactive crud oozes out. Radioactive gasses seep constantly from the numerous cracks in the "vault."

What once were some of the richest agricultural areas in the world are now foraged by scavengers: Poor, uneducated people who drift into the "exclusion zone" that surrounds the plant, where only authorized people taking proper protective measures are supposed to go.

Chernobyl's pollution is still spreading. The soil holds the cesium and the strontium and other radioactive elements, until years of rain bring them down to the roots of deep-root trees, which take them up to the surface again. Then a wildfire burns those trees, and a cloud of radioactive crud is wafted onto some other community downwind from Chernobyl. Of course the dose will be lower, but the damage will be more widespread.

CHILDREN OF CHERNOBYL

Currently, most of the radiation doses that the residents of the contaminated regions are receiving are from the food they eat and the water they drink [mostly the food], not the air they breath [although that, too, is poisoned].

Chernobyl changed the definitions of words and gave us many new phrases which the book discusses.

Perhaps the most well-known new term is "Children of Chernobyl."

Each year, a few hundred young children, usually with thyroid problems but always with health problems, are brought to "healthy" environments such as Southern California, USA [where this author lives and got bladder cancer a few years ago]. There is always a lot of media publicity about the children, which is good for the organizers, fun for the children, and useful for the public, who are thus reminded each year of the horrible events that occurred in Chernobyl 24 years ago.

The downside is that the public is led to believe that helping these few means the problem is being properly handled. There is, for the most part, no assistance for most of the millions who have been harmed.

'DYING IN DROVES'

Normally, and thankfully, only a small fraction of children are born with health problems. In areas that were heavily contaminated by Chernobyl's invisible poisons [invisible, but relatively easy to measure IF you have the money, the time, and the equipment], 80% of the children are born with health problems. In very heavily contaminated areas, 98% are not healthy.

One of the "solutions" recommended in the book – presumably out of desperation – is better testing of fetuses, and abortions if the findings are severe enough.

Another new term that came out of Chernobyl is "Liquidators." Liquidators are the people who went into the reactor to put out the fire, or flew over it – people who put their lives on the line to save their families, their country, and our environment. There were over 800,000 liquidators. Now they are dying in droves, dying early, of cancer, heart disease, leukemia, and a general degradation of their body organs. [That's what radiation does at the very least: It ages you.]

Another new term that came out of Chernobyl is "Chernobyl AIDS." One of the main ways that radiation damages the body is that it weakens the immune system, leading to death from infectious diseases that the person might have otherwise survived.

"Chernobyl babies" are children who have serious malformations such as organs outside their bodies, shortened limbs, or no brain [only a brain stem, so

they breath, but can never think]. Some have essentially no bones – they are called "jellyfish children" and the only other place they have been seen was on the Marshall Islands after nuclear weapons testing in the 1950s. The children of liquidators are especially likely to be "Chernobyl babies."

DAMAGES OF RADIATION

Monitoring what is being fed to people who already live in contaminated zones is one of the most important tools for protecting them from the damages of radiation. Needless to say, it's expensive and is rarely done.

Another problem is that companies which know they are "over the limit" with some of their supplies mix the contaminated food with less radioactive food so the average dose is legally permissible. But the same amount of radionuclides are being dispersed into the population. It's an inexcusable crime that happens all the time.

More new phrases and meanings: The "Red Forest" is the area immediately surrounding Chernobyl – hundreds of square miles – where the trees have turned color for some unknown reason.

The "Chernobyl effect" is an increased thyroid cancer rate. There is also an increased mortality rate if you do get the disease than in the less contaminated regions of the world [perhaps because your entire body is already degraded by the radioactive poisons].

We all are degraded by Chernobyl. Chernobyl's radioactive isotopes continue to invade us all. The general term for what Chernobyl has done is "geobotanical catastrophe."

TRUTH IS HIDDEN

Chernobyl illnesses are no fun. "Typical complaints from liquidators" include "severe headaches, not relieved by medication, impaired memory of current events, general weakness, fatigue, diminished capacity for work, generalized sweating, palpitations, bone and joint pains and aches that interfere with their sleep, sporadic loss of consciousness, sensation of fever or heat, difficulty in thinking, heart seizures, flashes, loss of vision, and numbness in hands and feet."

Chernobyl's tendrils of poison have only begun to spread. Inadequate containment measures ensure that more of the original reactor core will leak out of the site, into the environment, and into our bodies.

Chernobyl's radiation has damaged hundreds of millions of people, if not billions, and continues to do so.

The truth about the Chernobyl catastrophe is being systematically hidden from the people, especially in every country with nuclear power, by their governments and by their nuclear industries. It is good to read the truth, but it hardly feels like a breath of fresh air.

– The author lives in Carlsbad, CA

REFORM

From Page 12

key feature of Race to the Top – will make this situation even worse. Test scores will determine salary, tenure, bonuses and sanctions, as teachers and schools compete with each other, survival-of-the-fittest style.

Frustrated by a chronic lack of progress, business leaders and politicians expect that a stern dose of this sort of competition and incentives will improve education, but they are wrong. No other nation is taking such harsh lessons from the corporate sector and applying them to their schools.

No nation with successful schools ignores everything but basic skills and testing. Schools work best when teachers collaborate to help their students and strive together for common goals, not when they compete for higher scores and bonuses.

Having embraced the Republican agenda of choice, competition and accountability, the Obama Administration is promoting the privatization of large segments of American education and undermining the profession of teaching. This toxic combination is the latest Big Idea in education reform. Like so many of its predecessors, it is not likely to improve education.

– Diane Ravitch, a historian of education, is the author of *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education*

Big Oil Promises But Doesn't Deliver

By Tolu Olorunda

Rule No. 1 in hip-hop: don't knock the hustle. And KRS-One stated clearly in the first principle of The Hip-Hop Declaration of Peace, that among the nine elements fundamental to the kulture is street entrepreneurialism. It is hard, I understand, to speak ill of a rapper or MC making business moves to better their living and, in some cases, enrich the communities from which they emerged.

But if you adhere blindly to a "can't knock the hustle" philosophy, there's a good chance you feel the same of the "snitching code," meaning, in deference to a morally decrepit conception of solidarity, you're willing to put at risk the lives of innocent victims.

For the record, I hope hip-hop artists, engineers, graffiti painters, b-boys and b-girls, DJs, educators, thinkers, critics, fans and nonreptilian executives make as much money as possible without leaving the crime scene in blood-stained hands. As a cultural force generating multi-billion dollar revenue for giant conglomerates, it's critical we harness avenues available for financial empowerment.

Thus, when Cash Money CEOs Bryan "Baby" and Ronald "Slim" Williams announced their new oil venture, Bronald Oil, mid-January, many took it as a sign that hip-hop entrepreneurs were stepping on to higher grounds – making "power moves." Unfortunately, more is at stake than a mere business deal, which could rake in some serious money.

The oil industry is a dirty one, confined to a different league – run by different breeds of men. It is marked by corruption, graft, backdoor deals, and every other unethical invention imaginable. It makes the music industry – for all its shadiness – look like a Girl Scout lemonade sale.

Safe for a limited few who try to do the right thing, most tycoons are, in fact, over-zealous corporatists whose love of money is only outlasted by their disregard for the communities and lives ruined from pollution of the environment.

It would be wrong to paint the entire oil field business bad based on the crimes of a few major corporations, but, by and large, most aren't committed to doing

right by communities – even if their mission statements swear otherwise.

As evidenced, even the super-rich conglomerates consider – or, more accurately, state – environmental preservation and worker safety as of optimum priority. Too bad their records indicate anything but active adherence to these tenets.

In June 2009, Shell settled a lawsuit brought by family and friends of Ken Saro Wiwa, a Nigerian activist hanged alongside eight others in 1995, following protests of the exploitation and pollution of native land by Shell – \$15.5 million was granted the plaintiffs to avoid a trial, which could have implicated Shell as aiding and abetting the execution of innocent environmental activists.

In October 2009, a federal jury awarded New York City \$104.7 million in compensatory damages over the contamination of groundwater by ExxonMobil.

In 2007, Ecuador Amazonians filed a \$12 billion lawsuit against Chevron for contaminating its waterways. Thirty-thousand natives of the indigenous tribe claim Chevron workers illegally dumped toxic waste into its rivers which are used for washing, cooking and drinking.

The same year, China's top environmental watchdog group fined PetroChina the maximum penalty of one million yuan [\$125,000 U.S.] for "seriously" polluting a river servicing four million people. An explosion, it was reported, caused the dumping of 100 tons of waste, leading to lack of water supply in the region for several days.

Last November, 95 Colombian farmers sued British Petroleum over breach of contract and negligence. They claim adverse effects of a pipeline construction project have led to destroyed farms and malnourished crops. Colombian lawyers who tried to assist the farmers reported intimidation by paramilitary gangs.

So, you notice a trend – a lapse, perhaps – between mission statement propaganda and business as carried out. It never is enough for a company to claim to respect life and the environment. Deed always outlives word.

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SWINDLING

From Page 15

that consists largely of a web site. And at Alta Colleges Inc., one can even get a degree in criminal justice.

Even though a settlement was reached with the United States government, Alta Colleges Inc. is hardly out of hot water. The law firm of James, Hoyer, Newcomer, Smiljanich, and Yanchunis out of Florida is now representing four former students of Westside College, one of Alta's campuses in Denver, in a demand for a class-action arbitration suit against Alta Colleges Inc., as well as their multifaceted subsidiaries, of which there are many.

You can go to the brief filed by the law firm representing the students and see the attached exhibit of the corporate organizational chart that is Alta Colleges Inc.

The diagram included with the brief looks like an organizational chart straight out of the criminal division of the Department of Justice, or an episode of the HBO special, the Wire.

On Sept. 21, 2009 the law-firm reported on their website that an arbitrator had been finally appointed to hear the suit.

ALLEGATIONS

There's two main parts to this suit. The first is for "deceptive and unfair trade practices" which is the legal way of saying "they lied to and misled students." The main issues addressed are failure to properly disclose costs, misrepresentation of accreditation status, misrepresentation of transferability of credits, misrepresentation of job placement opportunities, and misrepresentation of sales people as admissions representatives.

The second part is about a specific program at Westwood College called "the Apex loan program." This is a loan that is created by the school if there is a balance between the traditional federal and private student loans and the cost of the college.

Any amount remaining unpaid at the end of school is loaned to the student so the student account is zeroed out. The balance is moved to an Apex loan that carries an 18% interest rate for the life of the loan.

The accusations set forth in the class action suit allege that Westwood College aggressively pursued the enrollment of all potential students without any consideration for the means used to recruit them.

ACADEMICALLY UNQUALIFIED

The suit alleges that the college marketed programs to academically unqualified students, urged them to take the maximum in loans and grants, gave them an inadequate education that was not regionally transferable and then sent them packing on to low paying jobs, or no jobs at all, where they would be shackled with thousands of dollars in student loans and private and federal debt.

This is not unusual, according to a report released in August 2009 by the inspector general for the U.S. Department of Education. It is estimated that as many as 40% of graduates from for-profit career schools default on student loans, compared with 12% for college students overall.

The suit continues on, alleging that "Admissions Representatives" employed by Alta College's Westside Campus regularly and deliberately failed to disclose relevant material, information necessary for the students' to make informed decisions.

ENROLLMENT GOALS

Like loan officers in the sub-prime mortgage industry, the Admissions Representatives are required to meet minimum enrollment quotas to maintain employment and gain promotions. Similar to aggressive military recruiters, they are

encouraged to sign-up as many students as possible by participating in competitive "games" based on applications, actual enrollments and boiler room sales tactics.

The cost of the programs can be over exorbitantly high, climbing in some cases to \$80,000.

We've all seen advertisements for vocational schools in which smiling young working class men and women boast about getting their lives back on track by going back to college to get the coveted degree.

Capitalizing on economic frustration the "career schools" hold out economic success as candy to consumers.

The \$787 billion stimulus package passed by the Obama Administration included \$17 billion to increase by \$500 the amount of money each student may receive to pay for college classes under the Pell Grant program, which provides money to low-income undergraduates.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act was designed to help people recover financially. As President Obama said during a March 2009 speech: "We're already taking steps to make college or technical training affordable. All in all, we are making college affordable for seven million more students, with a sweeping investment in our children's futures and America's success."

SETTING UP FOR FAILURE?

It seems that instead of actually helping prepare people for future success, the stimulus program is setting many students up for a lifetime of debt peonage in the midst of a sweltering economic depression.

How could this happen? The answer is complicated and involves neo-liberal policies of deregulation and privatization along with the fact that large corporations, like Alta Colleges Inc., have figured out how to work the federal student aid system while at the same time selling counterfeit dreams to low-income students.

Sound like the sub-prime mortgage crisis or the "ownership society?" One thing is for sure: at Alta Colleges Inc. one can truly get a neo-liberal arts education.

– The author is soon to publish Charter Schools, dissecting neo-liberalism's plan for reforming education in America.

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BACKBONES

From Page 14

through tax relief, not government spending."

What a fraud. And an insult. Remember when Wall Street bankers shouted "Fire!" two years ago? Both parties rushed to the rescue, not with "conservative" tax relief, but with trillions of public dollars that they put directly in the hands of the same Wall Street arsonists who started the fire.

We expect pious Republicans to consider millions of struggling American workers to be less worthy than a few greedheaded bankers, but not the Party of Roosevelt. Yet one Democratic leader said of this feeble bill, "Better something than nothing."

Maybe they're fooling themselves – but not us, and certainly not the jobless. This bill is nothing. And if Democrats don't stiffen their spines, they'll be nothing, too.

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Federal Funds Dry Up For Abstinence

By Lucas L. Johnson II

Jeiel Ballard and his girlfriend, both 16, are dressed up in their best attire, ready for a night of dancing and fun.

But there will be no close embraces or risqué moves to test chaperones on the dance floor. The “purity ball” sponsored by their Seventh-day Adventist Church will feature a vow to abstain from sex until marriage and offer tips on “appropriate” touching between the sexes.

“It’s tough, but when you have sex at an early age it can become addictive,” Ballard said. “And when you get addicted ... it can lead you down the wrong path.”

Expect to see more events like this now that abstinence-only sex education programs have lost their federal government support, and churches and other religious groups step in to keep the message alive.

SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITY

“With funding being cut from the government, you’re going to see more responsibility placed on churches in the community to carry this banner,” said Michael Polite, assistant pastor at Riverside Chapel Seventh-day Adventist Church in Nashville, which collaborated with several other local Adventist churches for the ball on a recent weekend.

“And I think when we do our job, it will show the government this type of education is still necessary,” he said.

There’s a measure in the U.S. Senate to restore about \$50 million to abstinence education, but its passage is uncertain and it would restore funding to less than half of what it had been under the Bush Administration.

One advantage of not using federal funds is more freedom and creativity. At the purity ball, Polite uses ballroom dancing as the platform to teach teenagers how to interact without being tempted.

HOW TO TOUCH

A dance instructor at the purity ball showed “how a woman should be touched, how a man should be touched” without being sexual, Polite said.

Gianna Snell organized a purity ball for teenagers at her church in Lexington, KY. Snell said she and her husband are proof individuals can wait until marriage because they abstained from sex during their two-year courtship.

“At times, it was tough,” Snell said with a chuckle. “I had someone who had

SCHOOLS

From Page One

without coats or good shoes.

The Mid-Del District in Oklahoma County keeps a fulltime clothing room – no questions asked.

Disabuse yourself of the notion that the problem is only gangs or the children from the 48th poorest families in America. Teachers also have their hands full with disrespectful kids from affluent families.

Name one other profession that spends an average of nearly \$600 a year on other people’s kids. They quietly help the less fortunate students without any fanfare, but let a teacher mess up and it leads the evening TV news and makes page one in the newspaper.

Unlike private and parochial schools, public education must take them all, including children whose parents are not legal immigrants, and tens of thousands of special education students.

If you’re looking for a genuine American hero, don’t go to a distant battlefield. Walk into any special education class and shake hands with the teacher.

Where is the time in today’s overloaded school day for a Bible course required under a pending bill? When would schools teach four years of math?

This session includes a bill that would require teachers to report on the legal status of parents – a clear violation of federal law.

The latest “reforms” include Republican initiatives for merit pay and statewide charter schools.

Tulsa Classroom Teachers Associa-

tion [OEA and NEA affiliate] called the superintendent’s bluff and agreed to merit pay if they had a seat at the table setting the standards.

Another loopy Republican bill would let a district jettison all mandates and refrain from collective bargaining. It drew a veto last year.

A heartbreaking bill would allow districts to use textbook money for general operations – just about the last mandate of Henry Bellmon’s 1017.

Several thousand teachers only have their jobs due to President Barack Obama’s stimulus money. It’s gone and next year promises to be an educational disaster.

I was reading *Hop On Pop* to first graders on Dr. Suess’ birthday at an elementary school. I have done it for many years and it’s great fun and restores my faith.

As I was leaving the principal whispered to me, “I am going to have to fire three teachers and they’re great teachers. Keep giving them hell at the Capitol.”

The Observer raged against more than \$771 million in Republican tax cuts – especially for cutting tax rates, which means they are etched in stone.

One of the Observer’s observations: “A teacher voting Republican is an oxymoron.” It was never truer than today in Oklahoma. These are not Henry Bellmon or Dewey Bartlett Republicans. They mean public education real harm.

When will Oklahoma and America get out of the way and let teachers teach?



the same goal, and we both made that commitment to each other once we started dating.”

DIFFERENT APPROACHES

Jason Burt directs a nondenominational group called “Silver Ring Thing” based just outside Pittsburgh, PA, that uses comedy, drama, music videos and testimonies to promote abstinence in live events each year around the country.

“We try to relate to students on the level and the forms of communication they deal with every day, and just talk to them about the realities of sexual activity,” said Burt, who estimates the group reached about 60,000 students and parents in 2009.

Regardless of where the message comes from, critics of abstinence-only programs say there’s no solid evidence they work.

President Barack Obama’s budget approves \$114 million for a new “teenage pregnancy prevention” initiative that will only fund programs with evidence of success. Supporters cite data to back their argument abstinence-only programs can be beneficial.

TEEN PREGNANCY CUT

According to the Health Department in Hamilton County, TN, teen pregnancy in Chattanooga has decreased by 72%, and On Point executive director Lesley Searce said her program – founded in 1991 – has played a major role in that.

“Part of the danger in the cuts is that we’re seeing incredible outcomes,” said Searce.

Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, agrees the funding cuts will drastically reduce the reach of the abstinence message.

“Churches will try to fill as much of the gap as they can, but they’re not going to have the opportunity to have exposure to children that the abstinence programs have now,” Land said.

If that’s the case, then 17-year-old Mary Scott George is up for the challenge.

She attended a Silver Ring Thing rally and was so impressed that she contacted the group’s director and asked him to visit her hometown of Raleigh, NC. Burt agreed, and the group performed this month.

“Even though it’s hard these days, we think it’s important because it is the last thing you can give your husband,” she said. “I think it will be so worth it.”

LIGHT

From Page 5

federal government as part of a plot to impose “one-world government” on liberty-loving Americans – came roaring back after years out of the limelight.

The anger seething across the American political landscape – Hispanics, soaring public debt and the terrible economy, the bailouts of bankers and other elites, and an array of initiatives by the relatively liberal Obama Administration that are seen as “socialist” or even “fascist” – goes beyond the radical right.

How counter-productive that they are raging against federal government programs and policies, including health care, reform of immigration and labor laws, abortion, and gay marriage.

With all its flaws, this is the greatest form of government on earth. People need to cast informed ballots – that’s the real battleground, that’s where real change occurs.

As for me, I rail against the do-nothing politicians all too concerned about their re-election, not the next generation. But I wouldn’t trade them for the angry mob that attacks the very roots of democracy.

We think we can’t lose this remarkable country but we can – one absent voter at a time. The poet had it right: “Do not go gentle into that dark night, rage against the dying of the light.”

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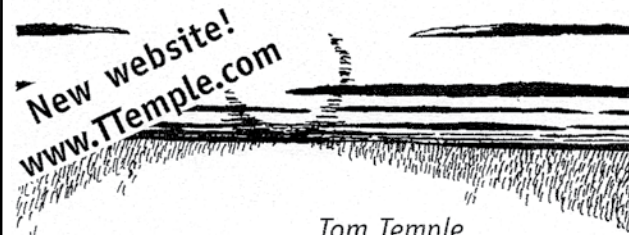
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