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## Lunacy Of Legislating By Ballot Proposition Politics

By Arnold Hamilton

One by one, Republican legislative leaders and highway promoters recently approached the microphones in the House lounge to denounce State Question 744, the education initiative that would mandate per pupil spending at the regional average.

"Irresponsible," opined Senate President Pro Tem Glenn Coffee. "The wrong thing at the wrong time," proclaimed Neal McCaleb, former state transportation secretary. A "stealth" attack that portends "financial ruin for our state," added banker Kell Kelly.

Irony is rarely in short supply at the state Capitol.

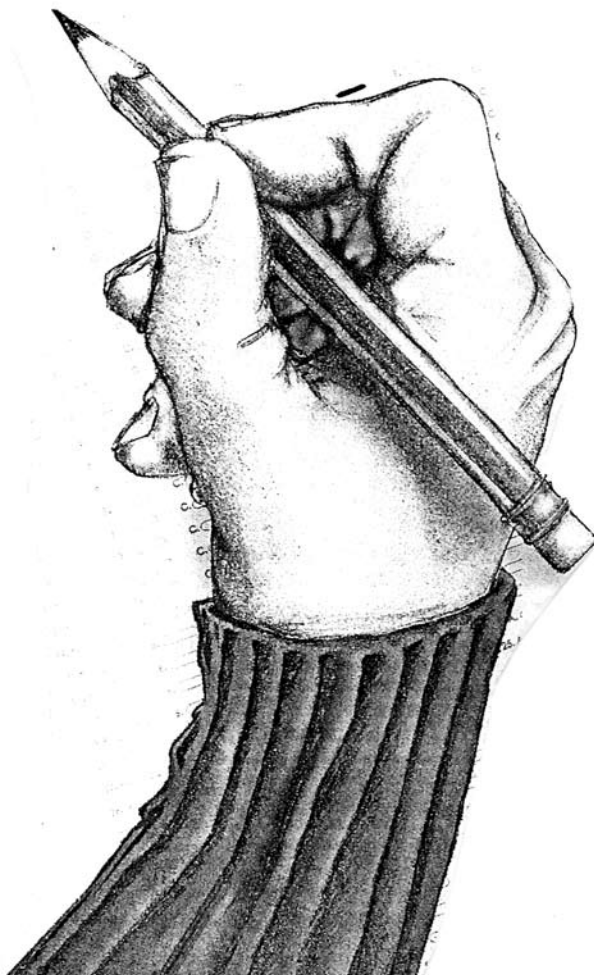
It wasn't that long ago state GOP leaders and many conservative business types were gung-ho for a different ballot measure – State Question 640 – that tied the hands of state lawmakers, making it all but impossible to raise taxes.

Of course, Republicans weren't in control of the Legislature in 1992 when voters approved that initiative – a vehicle designed to not only shrink government, Grover Norquist-style, but also to starve the Democratic majority's spending priorities.

Now that they are in a position to reward their benefactors, GOP leaders are apoplectic over the thought that state voters might force them to do what they promised, but never delivered: Truly make public education a priority.

What's good for the goose ...?

As intense as the battle over State Question 744 is likely to be, it won't necessarily encompass a broader



public policy debate that is critical to Oklahoma's future: Is legislating by initiative and referendum really the best way for the state to address its problems?

Oklahomans pay their 48 state senators and 101 representatives more

than \$50,000 a year in total compensation [salaries, benefits, etc.] for representative democracy. What we're getting instead is the Californization of Oklahoma politics.

This year, in order to be informed voters, Sooners won't have to just get up to speed on the candidates for statewide [governor, lieutenant governor, treasurer, attorney general, etc.], legislative, congressional, judicial or county offices.

They also will need to educate themselves on at least nine proposed constitutional amendments, all but one [SQ 744] drafted by Republican lawmakers who hope to achieve at the ballot box what they could not in regular session despite majorities of 23 seats in the House and four in the Senate.

It's a script straight out of California's wacky politics, where all-too-often direct democracy [aka ballot propositions] supplants representative democracy [aka the Legislature] because state lawmakers can't or won't tackle many of the toughest problems or are distracted by superfluous issues.

Oklahoma has representative democracy for a reason: Most citizens don't have the time, much less the financial wherewithal, to camp at the state Capitol, immersing themselves in the affairs of state. Lawmakers are proxies, hired to study up, keep citizens informed, listen to their concerns and make decisions. If we don't like what they do, we can vote to throw them out of office.

So what's wrong with asking "The People" to vote? Nothing, when it's used sparingly to determine broad public will on the most important, big-picture policy decisions facing our democracy. What happens, though, is that lawmakers and special interests frequently propose constitutional amendments in pursuit of raw political power, not some over-arching public good.

Think about it:

- Is there a compelling reason to extend terms limits [State Question 747] to all statewide offices, not just governor – except that Republicans haven't been particularly successful wresting offices away from Democrats, especially Attorney General Drew Edmondson [four terms] and State Superintendent Sandy Garrett [five terms]?

- Is it so important to establish English as the state's official language [SQ 751] – or is it merely a tool to increase Republican votes by turning out ultrarightwingers who often blame immigrants, legal and otherwise, for most of society's ills?

- Is it really necessary to expand the state's Judicial Nomination Commission, which helps fill court vacancies, to include appointees by the House speaker and Senate president

# Observations

## Positives

State Superintendent Sandy Garrett released some positives about public education in light of new data showing that we're still having problems in reading and math.

Oklahoma's national rankings:

- 1st in early childhood education
- 2nd in technology for virtual programs and computer-based assessments
- 6th in school management
- 9th in total National Board Certified teachers
- 10th in state curriculum
- 46th in per-pupil expenditures

When you consider our teachers are the 48th lowest paid in America, it is a wonder we do as well as we do.

## Tin Foil Alert!

Some experts contend that the polling methods were flawed, but the numbers are in line with the on-going determination by Republicans to keep President Obama from succeeding in any endeavor.

Polling figures, provided by Harris Interactive show that 45% of Republicans [25% overall] agree with the Birthers in their belief that Obama was "not born in the United States and so is not eligible to be president."

A sickening 38% of Republicans [20% overall] say that Obama is "doing many of the things that Hitler did."

Oklahoma, reddest of the red states, is rife with anti-Obama racism – egged on by the worst editorial page in America, The Oklahoman.

## Jim Again

Sen. Jim Inhofe virtually stood alone in the U.S. Senate by continuing to support pork barrel projects – better known as earmarks.

That calls in to question the National Journal's naming him the most conservative member of the Senate. He is easily the most rightwing, but he's anything but "conservative" in the traditional sense.

His direct quote: "Republicans in the House of Representatives acted recklessly in joining together for an earmark moratorium. In truth, eliminating earmarks does not save a single taxpayer dime. Instead, it shifts spending to the Executive Branch – in this case the Obama Administration – and away from the control of Congress."

He has to defend his rightwing position by slamming the President, which he does regularly along with his fellow Tea Partiers and Birthers.

What he doesn't tell you is that there are three branches of government [can he count to three?] and earmarks are a way around the executive branch. Congress proposes, the President disposes.

Standing opposite of Inhofe is his colleague, Sen. Tom Coburn, who has a genuine conservative track record of fighting for a balanced budget and eliminating earmarks. One of mysteries of the universe is how Oklahoma voters can elect both.

## Poisoned Well

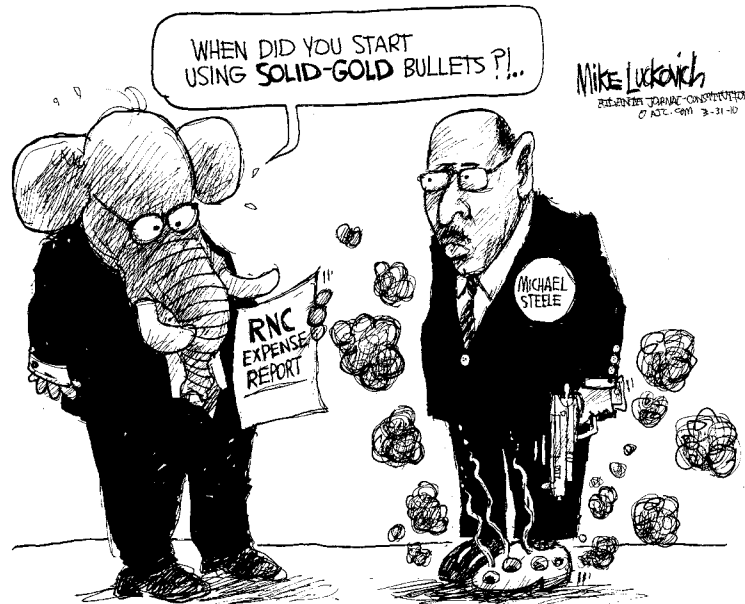
We don't often applaud Rep. Dan Sullivan, the Tulsa Republican who keeps trying to lock the courthouse door for ordinary Oklahomans.

But he is right on with his bill to place the Office of the State Auditor and Inspector in charge of reviewing school district audits.

He's backed by Speaker Chris Benge who put it bluntly: "More accountability and oversight is clearly needed to ensure taxpayer dollars are being spent in the classroom, not padding someone's pockets."

All Oklahoma school districts are required to have their financial records independently audited each year. Currently, those audits are forwarded to the Department of Education.

State Auditor Steve Burrage would be a terrific backstop and we hope his grossly underfunded agency will get a few new bucks to double-check school audits.



We are confident that virtually all school districts are operated by honest individuals. It only takes one Skiatook to poison the well.

A recent audit of Skiatook Public Schools, conducted by the Office of the State Auditor and Inspector, found the school wasted \$570,000 on overpriced supplies during a five-year period. The excess purchases included spending up to \$60 apiece for \$8 trash cans and \$1,500 for a \$500 vacuum, among other things.

Although the Skiatook district had been audited each year and that audit sent to the Department of Education, the wasteful spending was not identified until the Office of the State Auditor and Inspector became involved.

## Stop This Bill

Two Republican legislators want to shut down the ability of nurse-anesthetists to help Oklahomans manage chronic pain.

SB 1133 by Rep. John Trebilcock, R-Broken Arrow, and Sen. Clark Jolley, R-Edmond, attack certified registered nurse for what these graduate degree-trained providers have been doing for decades.

The state's 500-plus nurse anesthetists are as exceptionally well-trained in pain management as general-practice physicians and are equally able to offer Oklahomans with arthritis and debilitating injury a measure of relief.

The irony is that if this bill becomes law, any physician, regardless of training, will be able to provide pain management, while nurse anesthetists will not.

Once again Republicans make Oklahoma a laughingstock – it would be the first state to adopt such legislation.

Can Jolley or Trebilcock cite the complaints against those in the profession?

No, it's one more instance of a pair of loons practicing medicine without a license. Too bad legislators aren't required to be licensed – neither would qualify.

## Surprise!

According to a massive new survey underwritten by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Scholastic Inc., American teachers are more interested in school reform and student achievement than their paychecks.

The national poll, the largest of teachers ever completed, includes the opinions of teachers in every grade, in every state, and across every de-

mographic, and was conducted to keep teachers' voices in the debate over education reform, according to the Gates Foundation's director, Vicki Phillips.

Most teachers surveyed said they feel students in their states are doing OK in school, but believe fewer than 75% will graduate from high school ready to succeed in college and work.

More value non-monetary rewards like collaboration time with other teachers and a supportive school leadership over higher salaries.

Only 28% feel performance pay would have a strong impact, with 30% feeling it would have no impact at all.

A majority of teachers said they would like to see tougher academic standards common to every state, despite the extra work these could create for them.

Teachers are not opposed to standardized tests. But instead of yearly tests, teachers would prefer formative, ongoing assessments to help them understand how much their students are learning over time.

## Another Raid

Here's another rotten Republican idea that would ravage public education: Legislation providing so-called scholarships to private and parochial schools for special ed students.

This poison, HB 3393, springs from the pen of Rep. Jason Nelson, R-OKC.

Any Democrat or thinking Republican [there are a few] who votes for it undermines Oklahoma's superb program of special education.

Under the bill, students with disabilities [such as those with Down Syndrome or autism] who have an individualized education program [IEP] would qualify for a scholarship to attend any school which meets the accreditation requirements of the State Board of Education.

The scholarship program would not require new spending during the downturn, but would merely redirect existing state funds that are currently being spent on the student.

The bill was amended in committee to allow special-needs scholarships to be used at either a private or public school.

State law already allows school districts to transfer a student on an IEP, including tuition, to a different public school better suited to serve the special needs of the child.

School districts may also partner with another public or private school to meet the requirements of a student's IEP.

Kill this monstrosity or warn the governor to get his veto pen ready.

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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

**Dart:** to Stanley Hupfeld, ex-CEO of Integris Health, criticizing Obama's health care reform when in fact he is part of an industry whose mistakes killed nearly 100,000 people last year.

**Laurel:** To OETA Station Manager Bill Thrash, honored by the prestigious Heartland Gold Circle for his 50 years of superb service.

**Dart:** To the Daily Disappointment editorial page, afraid to name the author of a resolution to investigate arson convictions in Oklahoma. It was African-American Sen. Connie Johnson, D-OKC.

**Laurel:** To Sen. Mike Johnson, R-Kingfisher, for killing Democratic Rep. Rebecca Hamilton's bill to outlaw the selling of female eggs. Fertility Clinic doctors said almost all her rhetoric is false but the Sooner Catholic newspaper did no fact-checking on her article.

**Dart:** To those who park illegally in handicap spots. You need to know that Sen. Debbie Leftwich's bill making it a \$500 fine is moving through the Legislature.

**Laurel:** To a House majority for killing that part of Rep. Rex Duncan's bill to allow open-carry of guns in Oklahoma. The Sand Springs Republican should be used for target practice by voters in his district.

**Dart:** To Phil Busey Sr., for an op-ed article calling for less money and more accountability for public education. Not once does he mention poverty – fifth poorest state. Whip it and test scores will soar.

**Laurel:** To the Tulsa World's Oklahoma Poll for sending a message to the Legislature – 61% support State Question 744, raising per-pupil spending to the regional average. The question to kill it lost by 57%.

**Dart:** To those who park illegally in handicap spots. You need to know that Sen. Debbie Leftwich's bill making it a \$500 fine is moving through the Legislature.

**Rep. Randy Terrill, R-Moore,** leads a group of 11 lawmakers asking the Tenth Circuit to reverse its negative opinion on HB 1804, the immigration bill. If brains were oil, Terrill would be about a quart low.

**Laurel:** To Rep. Steve Martin, R-Bartlesville, for his bill to impound uninsured vehicles – that's one in four vehicles on Oklahoma roads today.

**Sen. Jay Paul Gumm, D-Durant,** finally won Senate approval of a bill to remove the sales tax from groceries. It would only take effect when the state's economy is recovered. The tax loss is \$420 million annually.

**Dart:** To Sen. Anthony Sykes, R-Moore, for his bill that would require competitive bids by state agencies seeking to hire an attorney. Who wants a lawyer who is a product of the lowest bid?

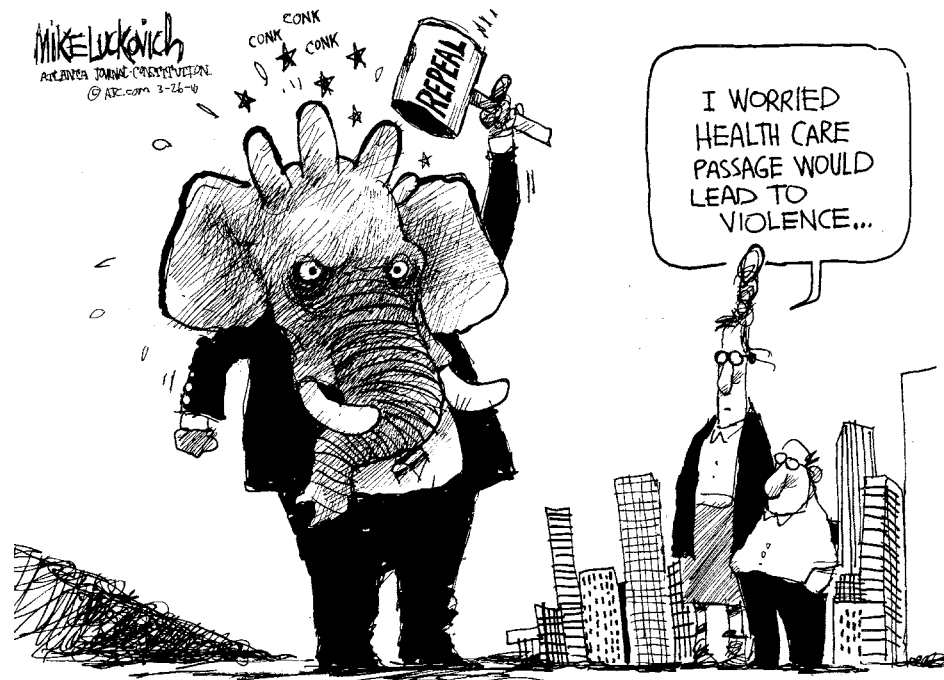
**If Rep. Mark McCullough, R-Sapulpa,** successfully outlaws common law marriage, it will be one more brutalization of Oklahoma women – stripped of any assets she brought to the marriage.

**Laurel:** To a House majority for killing that part of Rep. Rex Duncan's bill to allow open-carry of guns in Oklahoma. The Sand Springs Republican should be used for target practice by voters in his district.

**African-American Sen. Judy McIntyre-Eason** brought an Obama poster back from the Democratic National Convention, proudly hanging it on her office door. Some creep took it.

**Dart:** To Phil Busey Sr., for an op-ed article calling for less money and more accountability for public education. Not once does he mention poverty – fifth poorest state. Whip it and test scores will soar.

**Oklahoma's retired U.S. Army Gen. Tommy Franks** has been awarded the Horatio Alger Award "for overcoming adversity to achieve success." He's the general who talked Bush into invading Iraq, then led the invasion.



**Laurel:** To U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn, R-OK, for leading the drive to eliminate pork barrel congressional politics called "earmarks." His colleague Sen. Jim Inhofe furiously disagreed.

**Our heartfelt sympathy** goes to our State Capitol press colleague, OETA's Lori Rasmussen, whose mother and stepfather were killed in an auto accident.

**Dart:** To hard-hearted GOP legislative leaders. More than two dozen nutrition centers remain closed. Of the 216 still operating, 78 have reduced the number of days and the number of meals. More than 1,000 homebound seniors will no longer be served. [Areawide Aging Agency]

**Bless those 60 leaders** of 59,000 American Catholic nuns who vigorously endorsed the federal healthcare bill. They decried the Catholic bishops' contention that it included abortion.

**Laurel:** To the Tulsa World's Oklahoma Poll for sending a message to the Legislature – 61% support State Question 744, raising per-pupil spending to the regional average. The question to kill it lost by 57%.

**Oklahoma ranks seventh nationally** in religious commitment – church attendance, prayer and belief in a Supreme Being. We're also second in divorce, first in domestic abuse and 48th in wellness. [Pew Poll]

**Dart:** To Brian Downs, mouthpiece for Oklahomans for Responsible Government, another rightwinger calling for more government transparency but not listing their financial sponsors.

**It's hard to believe** that some radio stations still carry convicted felon G. Gordon Liddy's talkfest. Most recently he has been screaming that Obama is a Muslim, not a Christian.

**Laurel:** To Oklahoma's Integris Health, named by Modern Healthcare magazine as one of the top 100 hospital systems in America.

**Tulsa's IQ** is gradually recovering after Sarah Palin and Glenn Beck ranted to more than 6,000 nitwits, constantly defaming President Obama. Mention of his name brought jeers and boos.

**An amazing statistic** in AARP Magazine – \$32.9 billion of property is abandoned in safe deposit boxes or otherwise unclaimed.

**What passes for a member of Congress,** Rep. John Sullivan, R-Tulsa, blasts the Obama budget deficit, but he voted to add \$593 billion to the national debt in the Bush years.

**Dart:** To posturing Republican legislators aghast at using children in TV ads for the lottery. Why? Proceeds go to their education.

**Twenty-seven percent** of Oklahoma's bridges are deficient, with chunks of I-44 falling into the street. Repairs are now underwritten by Obama stimulus money that Republican legislators rage against.

**Laurel:** To Putnam City North High School English teacher Randy Baker, winner of the Excellence in Secondary Teaching Award from the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence.

**With a budget cut** of \$48 million, the Corrections Department is trying to handle 740 new admissions in the past year. We warn you again – sooner or later there will be a prison riot to end all riots.

**Dart:** To miserable leaders of both parties at the Capitol for letting the Teachers Retirement System slip \$9.5 billion in the hole.

**State Sen. Clark Jolley, R-Edmond,** pulled out of the race for attorney general. Is he angling to lead the Senate GOP, post-Glenn Coffee?

**Laurel:** To the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy for a report showing how unfair the Oklahoma tax system is – the top 1% in income pays 4.8% of family income. The poorest 20% pays 10.9%.

**We have learned** that the State Senate Democratic Caucus held a serious closed session about getting a Democrat to run against Congressman Dan Boren, a half-assed Democrat.

**Dart:** To Immigration Reform for Oklahoma Now for a specious press release. Rep. Randy Terrill, R-Moore, would have schools report on the legality of their parents, in addition to the standard federal report.

## THE OKLAHOMA Observer


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# Letters

Editor, The Observer:

Oklahoma Republican Rep. Mary Fallin was one of the legislators who stood on the balcony of the Capitol building and egged on the so-called Tea Party demonstrators, many of whom shouted obscenities and racial epithets, spat on, and called names at the Democratic legislators who entered the building before the health care vote. She cheerfully stoked the flames of hate.

This woman is running for governor. Oklahomans certainly deserve better than her as a public official. She has brought disgrace on herself and on the state of Oklahoma with her childish antics. She needs to be thrown out of office.

Barbara Santee  
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

If the President and the Speaker always had the parliamentary weapons to force health care reform through, why didn't they do it a year ago? Why did we have to endure Angry August? Why did we have to wait for the wingnut bushes to blossom, and spread their toxic pollen all over the country?

Did the President actually think he could forge some sort of agreement, ANY agreement, with people who refused to even acknowledge his status as a native-born citizen? With people who carried signs depicting him as Hitler? With supposedly Christian people who carried signs saying, "Your Health, Your Problem?" If so, it was madness.

We can only hope that the President learned something – which is, he'll never get a single, solitary thing from the Republicans. He can't be a nice guy like Jimmy Carter, or he, too, will be a one-term president. He needs to be street fighter like Lyndon Johnson, with brass knuckles in his pocket and a straight razor in his boot.

Health care was an ugly win, but it was a win. Next in the brackets: education reform, Wall Street reform, and cap-and-trade emissions regulation. Please, Mr. President, don't put us through another wingnut season. Just get the job done.

Roger B. Rensvold  
Midwest City

Editor, The Observer:

What truly astounds me is that not a single Republican in a leadership position has criticized, yet alone denounced, the rabid hatred fomented by the anti-Health Care tribe. Is it fair to conclude that Republican leader-

ship everywhere support the venom being spewed? Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins, where do you stand? "Silence" under these circumstances means tacit "approval," fear of the hate mongers or both.

I'm old enough to remember Joe McCarthy's hysteria silencing even President Dwight Eisenhower so I'm truly afraid for our country.

Frank Silovsky  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

I was in the express lane at the store quietly fuming. Completely ignoring the "10 items or less" sign, the woman ahead of me had slipped into the checkout line pushing a cart piled high with groceries. Imagine my delight when the cashier beckoned the woman to come forward looked into the cart and asked sweetly, "So which 10 items would you like to buy?" Wouldn't it be great if that happened more often?

Mary Francis  
Norman

Editor, The Observer:

Regarding the letter from Dick Galusha [3.25.10] where he talks about buying on-line and not paying taxes on his purchases:

I would like to direct his attention to line 20 of the OK 511 tax form. It is the "Use Tax" line and is Oklahoma's way of claiming these taxes Mr. Galusha identifies as being needed in these harsh economic times. I suggest he, and probably numerous others, amend his return and pay this tax before his delinquent nature is noticed by the relevant authorities and he is assessed penalties and interest to further assist in the currently dire fiscal situation.

Clinton Wiles  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Re: Teaching the Bible in Oklahoma's public schools ...

If these damn morons keep this type of thing up [also, opting out of the federal government's newest healthcare law], there will come a day soon when every Oklahoma tax dollar collected will be spent in attorney fees to defend [and lose] every suit filed that reaches the Supreme Court!

Meanwhile, our damn bridges are falling down and the highways won't get mowed this summer because of lack of funds. Can't you just see the Johnson grass at the intersections? That is how my best childhood friend's husband was killed, trying to cross a



country road from his stop sign and the oncoming car could not see his stop sign [four-way stop intersection] due to the Johnson grass being higher than the car roof!

She won a stupendous settlement from the lawsuits but it didn't bring back the father of her four young children nor did it imprint any common sense on this senseless Republican-owned and managed Oklahoma Legislature.

It's too bad we can't send every stinking one of these legislators to Vermont, Connecticut, New Hampshire, etc., to see how educated elected representatives serve their citizens. It would be useless because it isn't lack of brains that causes this problem. It's too much greed and corrupted brains!

Darla Reynolds-Sparks  
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

Are corporations created by a corporate charter granted by state governments? Could charters specify this is an artificial person not permitted constitutional rights granted humans?

Would this make it possible to forbid corporate money and lobbying, end our present day "theme park democracy," and restore our democracy to the people?

Al Engel  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

The now deceased Ayn Rand, along with Alan Greenspan, Dick Arme, and all the other neo-cons who claim we need less regulation are not using common sense. They claim with impunity that an unregulated market will automatically take care of itself. This would only work if 100% of the people involved were like innocent choir boys wearing halos – attesting to their moral goodness.

In a world with deregulation, markets would be in perpetual disarray, and nobody would get rich except the crooks and the lawyers. Ask any card shark or race track tout, "Who will come out ahead – the expert who plays by the rules, or the cheater who figures out a way to cheat without getting caught?" Obviously the answer is – the cheater!

Look at the mess we're in today because of deregulation – derivatives, hedge funds, credit default swaps, etc., have ruined the financial markets. Credit card interest rates sometimes exceed 24%, payday loans are up in the 400% to 500% range. It seems to me that humanity survived pretty well for 2,000 years with the biblical stan-

dard of 6%.

Besides the "at-risk institutions," we have several examples of supposedly "upright" companies who "protect" the investor. Examples: Moody's and Standard and Poor's, both gave "toxic" assets a AAA rating. Also, accounting/auditing firms such as Arthur Anderson [acquired by Ernst & Young after the Enron scandal] and Ernst & Young gave excellent ratings to firms that were totally insolvent. If you really have faith in the integrity of Wall Street corporations, I know of a 127-year-old suspension bridge across the East River in New York City that is for sale. Interested?

Concerning the current batch of politicians in Washington, Sen. Dick Durbin said, "Frankly, they own the place." He was speaking of course, about the lobbyists, Wall Street, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, as well as a few absurdly wealthy people such as Richard Melon Scaife, and the famous Koch brothers from Wichita, KS. [I would not include Bill Gates or Warren Buffet on such a list.]

The question then is, where do we go from here? We must go back to the Roosevelt era type of regulation for "all business" and with that type of regulation include a heavy dose of inspection. Regulation without enforcement is totally useless. George W. Bush proved that. Many regulations were politically too "hot" to touch. So he merely reduced the number of inspectors and reduced the salaries of those who remained – leaving a small group of incompetents to protect the public.

With regulation and effective enforcement, admittedly, growth will probably appear to be slower, but it will be steady and it will be solid. Over the long haul the current wild swings with deregulation will leave us at a lower place on the chart of progress.

J.A. Gowman  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

We must fight to change marijuana laws so that sick people won't become criminals when they use marijuana to get relief from pain and suffering. \$7.7 billion – that's how much the U.S. government spends on marijuana prohibition every year.

If you'd rather have your tax money spent on something useful, like stopping violent crimes, please ask your congressperson to change marijuana laws so as to decriminalize marijuana.

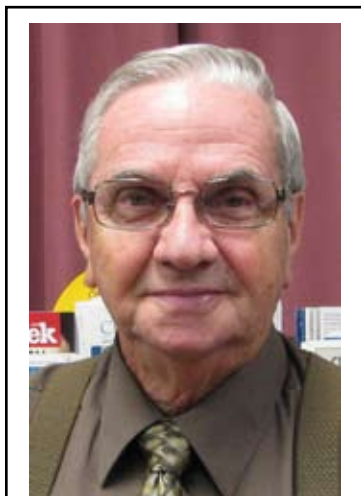
Frank P. Belcastro  
Dubuque, IA

## Frosty Troy's Who Killed Free Enterprise?

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

**Call Frosty at 405.760.1843 to book a speech.**

# Myths Vs. Facts



**FROSTY TROY**  
Founding Editor

**Myth:** Teachers teach only nine months – why do they bellyache about low salaries?

**Fact:** Repeated studies show this isn't true, that the average teacher, if you count hours, does in 9.5 months what it takes regular 40-hour workers to do in 11.5 months.

**Myth:** America spends more money on public education and gets less bang for the buck than any other country.

**Fact:** America is 14th among the 16 industrial nations in public school finance.

**Myth:** American kids score less well than kids in almost every other country.

**Fact:** This is the biggest canard of them all. America's smart kids are as smart or smarter than those in any other country. The math and science portion of the SAT is at a more than 30-year high; the ACT is at an 11-year across the board high.

**Myth:** Twenty-five percent of students drop

out, evidence of how ineffective public schools are.

**Fact:** More horse hockey. The dropout rate last year was 21%. Add to that a record-high graduation rate a whopping 450,000 GEDs issued last year and America is among the best educated nations in the world.

**Myth:** We have kids graduating from public schools who can't even read their diplomas.

**Fact:** You bet! They are among seven million special education kids – many will never read well but they're getting their chance based on whatever gifts they bring to school. It's the best unreported story in America.

**Myth:** Unions are running the public schools.

**Fact:** If that's true, why do American public school teacher salaries rank 22nd among the industrial nations of the world?

**Myth:** The PTA is a tool of teacher unions.

**Fact:** This had to be dreamed up by someone who has never been to a PTA meeting. I ought to know. I am not only a PTA veteran but I hold the National PTA's Distinguished Service to Children Award.

**Myth:** Teachers are recruited from the dregs of college graduates.

**Fact:** Nearly half the teachers in America have master's degrees. The political climate is so hateful toward public schools, a third quit within 10 years. Who can blame them? The committed stick and most are magnificent.

**Myth:** Public educators are afraid of competition, that's why they oppose charter schools and vouchers.

**Fact:** The NEA has endorsed charter schools but only a nitwit public educator would favor vouchers, which suck funds from one of the most poorly funded public school systems in the industrial world. Even the charter school movement is hardly the howling success predicted.

**Myth:** Kids can't read today because schools don't exclusively use phonics.

**Fact:** America's fourth grade readers just outperformed every country in the world except Finland. [National Assessment of Educational Progress] Phonics isn't the only way to learn to read. It often requires a blend which includes whole language instruction – as any good reading teacher will tell you.

**Myth:** Look how few American kids make it through college.

**Fact:** Only Britain, Finland and New Zealand have a higher college graduation rate.

**Myth:** Entering test scores prove public schools don't adequately prepare students for college.

**Fact:** Any student can take the SAT or the ACT. As many as 17% of those taking the SAT last year had never made above a C. The College Board which owns the SAT decries constant misuse of test data by critics with an anti-public education agenda. Three out of four test takers this year scored higher than the national average.

**Myth:** Would that today's kids have to take the rigorous courses provided in the "good old days."

**Fact:** I wish somebody who could talk slow enough would explain to the likes of Glenn Beck or G. Gordon Liddy that the percentage of high school graduates taking core courses has increased 47%. Critics who think books are soft ought to check today's math, science and social studies texts. They make yesterday's stuff look like kindergarten.

**Myth:** Public schools locked God out of the classroom.

**Fact:** The U.S. Supreme Court banned sectarian prayer. Schools that have ignored that opinion have lost every single court case. Student prayer is not illegal – it happens every time there's a final exam. The Supreme Court has held that a moment of silence is legal.

**Myth:** Teachers are secular humanists.

**Truth:** Oh really? Public educators lead all other professions and occupations in teaching Sunday school. [Parade Magazine poll]

**Myth:** Public schools don't teach values.

**Fact:** Define values. More than a third of students receive their only hot meal of the day in public schools. For thousands, the only hug they get is in public school. Teachers last year spent an average of \$486 of their own money for things like workbooks and pencils for poor children. Thousands of teachers sponsor everything from drama to chess clubs on their own time, usually with no reim-



bursement.

**Myth:** The National Education Association only seeks higher salaries for less work.

**Fact:** The NEA spends huge sums of money on grants, scholarships and programs to support reform efforts and quality schooling initiatives. I have searched in vain for a list of positive programs financed by the critics.

**Myth:** School boards have outlived their usefulness. Parents ought to run the schools.

**Fact:** More than 77,000 school board members are parents and community leaders. Few are reimbursed for their time and selfless efforts.

**Myth:** Why not voucher students who want it since their parents pay taxes and should have the right to direct some of that money to private or parochial education?

**Fact:** Private education would suck \$33 billion a year out of public education. Use your brain – do you get money back if you don't use the public library? Do you get your share of taxes back to secure private security if you don't like the cops?

**Myth:** We don't need school boards – they just get in the way.

**Fact:** Examples of waste, graft, corruption and illegalities are already emanating from hundreds of charter schools – which have no school boards and little accountability.

**Myth:** Catholic schools do a better job with less money.

**Fact:** It's unfair to compare the average Catholic per pupil cost with that of public schools. Public schools are required to provide regular education, vocational education, special education, counseling, dropout prevention, alternative education, attendance control, bilingual education, compensatory education, after-school athletics, regular student transportation, student activities, health and psychological programs, food services, security and violence prevention and much better employee benefits – such as a living wage and retirement programs

**Myth:** No Child Left Behind will upgrade standards.

**Fact:** NCLB was nothing more than testing mania designed for schools to fail so that George W. Bush could realize his dream – vouchers. NCLB is underfunded by billions of dollars.

## Religion & Politics

Oh, the things we think we know that are not so.

America has become a godless, churchless, humanistic society, right? It must be true because that's the message radio and TV evangelists use to haul in the big bucks – telling us we're on the low road to hell.

The truth is considerably different. America is the most church-going nation in the western world. In fact, for religion, the bad old days were early day America. No, not the America of pious pilgrims and holy puritans. On the very day America won its independence, only 17% of colonials were church-going.

In Europe, you'd be lucky to find 20% of the population in a house of worship on Sunday. In England only one in five affiliates with the dominant Church of England.

In America, 65% of the population belongs to a religious denomination and 55% attend weekly worship services. That's more than twice the church attendance of Catholic Italy or France.

I make this point – based on solid research – because this nation is being sold a false bill of goods on a nearly hourly basis by a bevy of radio and TV theocrats. They should be careful what they pray for.

Those who want to Christianize America "from the courthouse to the White House" should know it is those countries where the government has melded with religion that churches have been abandoned.

The Gallup organization's polling shows that more than 90% of Americans believe in God – highest belief in the western world. Some are more pragmatic than others – only 75% believe in hell.

Even the last presidential race degenerated into a battle over values. I would remind the candidates that a bedrock value is truth. And the truth is that with all its societal problems, we're the most religious of any Western nation in the world. That fact should not be lost in the clamor of radio and TV preachers bawling for money or politicians fishing for votes.

# How Will Democrats Get Their Groove Back?



**ARNOLD HAMILTON**  
Editor

It's a question foremost on the minds of activist Oklahoma Democrats: How does a party that dominated state politics for nearly a century regain its groove?

As the 2010 elections near and redistricting approaches, party loyalists are fiercely debating two political strategies aimed at reversing the Republican tide.

Challenge every race? Or pick your spots?

The debate shouldn't be dismissed as inside baseball. The party faces serious challenges in Oklahoma. And no one has produced a GPS showing Democrats the way out of the political wilderness.

The challenges are obvious: Though there are still more registered Democrats than Republicans in the state, no Democratic presidential nominee has carried Oklahoma since 1964. President Obama lost all 77 counties in 2008, worst showing in the nation.

Only one of the state's five U.S. House seats is filled by a Democrat. Both U.S. senators are Republican. Eight years after taking control of the state House for the first time, Republicans have forged a 62-39 seat advantage. Two years ago, the GOP corralled its first state Senate majority, as well.

And this year, statewide offices dominated for much of the 21st Century by Democrats are at risk: Gov. Brad Henry is term-limited after eight years. Neither Lt. Gov. Jari Askins nor Attorney General Drew Edmondson is seeking re-election, opting instead to run for governor. State Superintendent Sandy Garrett is retiring.

The perfect storm has convinced some Democratic insiders that a new electoral strategy is required to not only stem the hemorrhaging but also to reverse the state's GOP trend.

The plan: Don't challenge every race. Marshal financial resources to protect vulnerable incumbents. Target a handful of legislative races in swing districts where Democrats could pull an upset.

The thinking goes like this: Why mount a quixotic challenge to a popular incumbent – say, U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn – when it will just encourage him to spend hundreds of thousands, if not more, turning out Republican voters?

Former state Democratic Chairman Pat Hall, now a political consultant and lobbyist, favors the targeted approach, contending it makes the most sense for a party striving to regain its political sea legs.

He cites two candidacies – one Republican, the other Democratic – in which he believes underfunded, little known challengers ended up costing their parties success in other races.

In 1984, Republican Bill Crozier decided to challenge incumbent U.S. Sen. David Boren, who ended up carrying all 77 counties and capturing 75% of the vote. "If people don't think that helped Democratic candidates across the state," Hall says, "I'd like to know what they're smoking."

In 2006, Democrat Hal Spake filed against U.S. Rep. Tom Cole in Oklahoma's 4th Congressional District. Cole spent about \$400,000 turning out GOP voters, Hall says, most likely costing Democrats three state House seats captured by Republicans T.W. Shannon of Lawton, Dennis Johnson of Duncan and Todd Thomsen of Ada.

Ivan Holmes, the immediate past state Democratic chairman, recalls that his goal as party leader was to "find somebody to run in every race."

"I've changed my philosophy on it in the last couple of years," he says, coming to believe it is better to target races and resources, rather than take a scattershot approach. "You've only got so much time and energy to do those things."

Other Democrats, though, point to former national party Chairman Howard Dean's successful 50-state strategy as a model, arguing it's just as important to force Republicans to spend time and money defending their seats rather than allowing them to target specific Democrats for defeat.

There's also a psychological aspect to this debate. It's dispiriting for some party loyalists, and an unacceptable sign of the party's decline, that every seat would not be contested – especially a high-profile U.S. Senate or congressional seat. Others cannot abide the notion of giving someone like Coburn, with whom they disagree so fervently, a free ride – even if it could help the overall Democratic ticket.

The debate isn't merely a philosophical one, left to musings on Internet message boards. It's playing out in central Oklahoma's 5th Congressional District, where Republican incumbent Mary Fallin has opted not to seek re-election, but instead is running for governor.

Until recently, it didn't appear any Democrat would enter the race for a seat that most political experts, both in Oklahoma and nationally, consider "safe Republican." Two current GOP state representatives, Mike Thompson of Oklahoma City and Shane Jett of Tecumseh, and a former, Kevin Calvey of Del City, are campaigning hard. Now, less than four months before the July 27 primary, at least two Democrats say they'll compete: Tom Guild, a college professor and Oklahoma County party secretary, and attorney Billy Coyle.

Though Holmes and Hall agree on the targeted strategy, they disagree over whether the 5th District is a seat Democrats should pursue.

Hall notes that no Democrat has held the seat for more than three decades and the district encompasses staunch Republican areas such as Edmond. Poking this GOP hornet's nest with a stick, he believes, won't help the statewide Democratic ticket in November.

But Holmes, who's helping Coyle, disagrees, arguing it may not be as rabidly Republican as some think: Democratic Jim Roth carried the district in his unsuccessful statewide bid in 2008 for Corporation Commission and Democratic state Sen. Andrew Rice ran strong [but did not carry] the district in his failed 2008 bid to unseat incumbent U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe.

There's another practical reason this debate is so important: The 2010 Census redistricting marks the first time the GOP has held a majority in both houses of the Oklahoma Legislature. Republicans will draw the boundaries for legislative and congressional districts for the next decade.

The state lost a congressional seat 10 years ago. Even though the state's population increased, it didn't climb nearly as much as other Sun Belt and western states. Oklahoma isn't expected to lose a seat this time, but the district lines will have to be revamped because of intrastate migration patterns.


The state's rural areas, once solidly blue and reliably Democratic, are rapidly becoming Republican strongholds, especially in western Oklahoma. The next round of redistricting will likely make rural Democratic legislators an even more endangered species. Map-drawers have to figure out ways to carve out more legislative seats in urban areas. The easiest way is to consolidate rural seats, effectively eliminating districts of term-limited Democrats.

Two seats already believed to be on the chopping block: Reps. Paul Roan of Tishomingo and Purcy Walker of Elk City, both of whom are term-limited in 2012.

At first glance, the rural Republican tide would seem to assure the GOP is positioned as the state's dominant party for decades to come.



But there is a silver lining for Democrats: The growth in Oklahoma City and Tulsa, much of it younger in age and more diverse ethnically and racially, is turning some once solidly red Republican areas purple, capable of electing either Republicans or Democrats. Keep an eye, for example, on what happens to Tulsa GOP Rep. Dan Sullivan's district along the Arkansas River.

Could either electoral strategy end up strengthening the Democratic position in redistricting? We'll know more Nov. 2.



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# What Boren's Vote Meant To State's Uninsured

By Tony Nuspl

Rep. Dan Boren's vote against the health care reform bill – which thankfully passed without his help – flies in the face of the needs of his constituents in Oklahoma's 2nd Congressional District.

The good news is that the Democratically-controlled Congress has used its majority in both upper and lower chambers to pass some sort of health care reform, improving the lot for many Americans. In so doing it upholds the Democratic principle of working to extend health care coverage.

Even President Obama – finally! – dropped the pretense of doing reform as a bipartisan effort, which was always really a means of thwarting reform altogether. Although the status quo entailed bankruptcy for many due to health care bills, the Republicans never seemed to mind.

There are problems with the bill just passed in the House, in particular, its omission of a public option, or government-run, not-for-profit solution to the health care morass.

## NO HELP FROM BOREN

Progressives across the country have been consistent in supporting the public option, so it is a sad day when a bill passes without it, despite the efforts of the millions of supporters of a public option. The Democratic leadership seems very much out of touch, in omitting the public option, supported by 65% of Americans and by 85% of Democrats nationwide.

But here in Oklahoma, health care reform of whatever stripe received no help whatsoever from the sole Democrat representing Oklahoma. Boren refused to listen to his constituents at health care Town Halls, and continued to vote with insurance companies against the present Democratically-brokered bill, thereby sacrificing the health of Oklahomans in his district.

Without mentioning the costs to Oklahomans outside his district, what are the costs of Boren's "no" vote just within the Oklahoma 2nd Congressional District? Here are statistics, detailing just exactly what Boren was voting against, broken down into meaningful figures, particularly to Boren's district:

- With his no vote, Boren voted to deny tax credits to Oklahoma families needing help in order to be able to buy health insurance coverage, thereby abandoning 210,000 families and 11,600 small businesses who cannot afford coverage in the 2nd District under the status quo.

## LEAVING BEHIND SENIORS

- With his no vote, Boren voted against improved drug coverage for the elderly, even though his "no" vote entailed leaving behind 137,000 seniors in the 2nd District, sending them down the river, because he just could not bring himself to strengthen Medicare.

- With his no vote, Boren turned the other direction when confronted with the 135,500 residents in his district who are plum left uninsured under the status quo.

- With his no vote, Boren condemned 21,700 2nd District residents with pre-existing conditions who cannot obtain coverage under the present broken system.

- With his no vote, Boren condemned 900 families to bankruptcy in Eastern Oklahoma, because they cannot affordable health care bills they've accumulated already.

- With his no vote, Boren voted to prevent 59,000 young adults in his district, from 18 to 26 years old, from obtaining coverage through their parents' insurance plans.



Boren is concerned, these families and other individuals should be made to pay and pay for health care coverage, with endless bills and financial ruin because of health care bills.

## BOREN DOESN'T CARE

Boren is OK with denying coverage to those with cancer, heart disease, and diabetes, putting the lie to the creed "Democrats Care." When it comes to Boren, his creed is: "Boren doesn't care one whit."

Why doesn't he run as a Republican, for all his heartlessness?

There is virtually nothing distinguishing his "no" vote on health care from the obstructionist tactics of Republicans who are also perfectly happy voting against the interests of the average Oklahoman, for the sake of corporate benefactors to electoral campaigns.

He's bought and paid for by the health/hospital lobby, like so many of his Republican friends in Congress. He seems to be an egregious example of a corporate-owned Democrat, without any courage to do the right thing.

Why do 2nd Congressional District voters continue to vote this man into office? *WassamatterwifOklahoma?*

"Standpatter Dan" deserves to be thrown out of office for his "no" vote on health care reform.

– The author is an activist with the Tulsa chapter of Democracy for America, founded by former Democratic Chairman Howard Dean

# DHS Is Moving On Audit Recommendations

Officials with the Department of Human Services presented evidence recently to a House committee of progress made by the agency since the passage of legislation implementing recommendations from a groundbreaking audit of the department.

HB 1734, authored by Rep. Ron Peters, was signed into law last year. The legislation implemented many of the recommendations of an audit of the Department of Human Services, including a requirement that law enforcement consult with DHS before removing a child.

## PROGRESS REPORT

The measure also mandated:

- The creation of a passport program to allow information about a child's physical and behavioral health and educational needs to be available electronically;
  - Implementation of a phase-out of public shelters;
  - Establishment of a centralized statewide hotline for all reports of abuse and neglect of children;
  - A reorganization of the department offices in Tulsa and Oklahoma Counties.
- Human Services officials testified to the Children's Services Oversight Committee that progress has been made in all of those areas of state-based care.

## WHERE PROGRESS IS MADE

Some of the significant progress seen at DHS includes:

- Record level of adoptions in the last two federal fiscal years and an all-time high finalized adoptions for a state fiscal year.
- Reduction of over 3,700 children in out-of-home care since July 2007.
- Worker retention continues to increase.
- Lowest number of children per responsible worker in years.
- Lowest average daily shelter population in years.
- Established 449 agreements with law enforcement agencies for joint response.
- Oklahoma County Human Service Center reorganized in October 2009.

- Tulsa County Human Service Center was reorganized in May 2009
- Round-the-clock centralized hotline rollout began in November 2009 and is expected to extend statewide by the end of 2010.
- Official development of a medical health passport [which is an accessible and comprehensive medical and educational record for all children placed in out-of-home care through DHS] began in February 2010.

"It is clear from today's presentation that much progress has been seen at the department, and I was assured that efforts will continue as we seek to further reduce the number of children coming into state care," said Peters, R-Tulsa, and chairman of the House Human Services Committee.

"There were many examples given about DHS working directly with law enforcement and community-based services to help keep children in their home or with relatives and out of state shelters. I commend DHS officials for their hard work, and their continued efforts."

## MORE TIME ON SEVERE CASES

Staff retention has increased as fewer children are taken into care, which means social workers are able to spend more time on the most severe cases of child abuse in the state.

Another area of success has been a reduction in the number of children in the state shelters in Oklahoma and Tulsa counties.

In June 2009, the Pauline Mayer shelter in Oklahoma City housed 46 children in state care and the Laura Dester shelter in Tulsa housed 52 children. As of last month, the Pauline Mayer shelter population was reduced to 13 children and there were 27 children living at the Laura Dester shelter.

"The audit served as a blueprint of changes needed in the department to ensure our children's ongoing safety, both inside and outside their home. We were told that the implementation of that blueprint has been successful," Peters said.

"But, there is still more work to do and this will continue to be an ongoing process as we adjust state law based on the results seen at the department."

## Walking In Their Footsteps

# Ponca Teacher Uses Struggle For Freedom

"Do as I say, not as a did," echoes throughout Maurisa Pruett's 8th grade classes at East Middle School in Ponca City, OK.

Fueled by her own middle school memory of allowing a racist act to go unchallenged, Maurisa uses the lives of patriots and activists to encourage students' bravery in the face of struggle.

Last summer, on a Fund for Teachers fellowship, she embarked on a driving tour of southern states and Washington DC, studying cultural and historical civil rights sites and gathering successful stories of social change previously relegated to her curriculum.

Pruett undertook this journey for two reasons: To make civil rights meaningful to middle school students; and to empower students to take a stand by bringing back insight and personal stories from places and people visited.

She gained inspiration by traveling across the South and viewing the spot where Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, thousands of shoes left by people murdered in the Holocaust, and George Washington's home.

She strengthened resolve when visiting the Old Slave Mart in Charleston and the National Civil Rights Institute in Birmingham.

### HISTORY HOT JUST A TEXTBOOK

"Witnessing the bravery of citizens who took a stand to make life better for all of us left me inspired," said Pruett. "History was no longer just in a book. It was all around me in the scents, the sights, and the textures of all that I touched. I returned with not only a wealth of knowledge, but also a renewed passion for my subject."

Back at East Middle School, Pruett says the fellowship added excitement to her previous commitment to teaching social justice. She is teaching a "Taking a Stand" enrichment class to rotating groups of 8th graders every three weeks, sharing her summer odyssey with colleagues in her district, and taking students to Washington, DC so they can share her experiences. As she teaches, she embodies a greater empathy for the parents and grandparents of her minority students.

"My trip really made an impression on me that the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s is a life experience for my students' families. As a white person, I finally realized that my freedom may have been hard-won by our forefathers, but



the freedom of African Americans was gained through even more adversity," she said.

"It saddens me that this struggle is not over. The MLK Museum in Memphis was full of people, but few of them were white. The same was true in Birmingham. My fellowship made my goal of teaching students to take a stand against injustice is stronger than ever."

Fund for Teachers is a national, donor-supported organization celebrating its 10th year of awarding fellowships for self-designed professional growth to teachers who recognize the value of inquiry, the power of knowledge and their ability to make a difference.

Fund for Teachers has partnered with the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence and The Tulsa Foundation to award 644 Oklahoma teachers with almost \$2 million in grants since 2002. For more information about Fund for Teachers, visit [www.fundforteachers.org](http://www.fundforteachers.org).

# Throw-Away Students Are Now Succeeding

A little-recognized but highly successful program is Oklahoma's pioneering work in addressing the needs of students who were suspended, expelled or dropped out.

The Oklahoma Statewide Alternative Education Academy grant program was designed to help school districts serve students who were most at risk of failing to complete high school.

The authorizing legislation provided a set of 17 criteria designed to ensure that research-based principles of effective practice were implemented while giving school districts flexibility in program design.

This year, 250 alternative education programs served 10,930 students.

Oklahoma has created a nationally-recognized statewide model for alternative education. Over the past 12 years, Statewide Alternative Education Academy programs have served more than 150,000 at-risk youth in grades six through 12.

### PERMANENT FUNDING

In 1996, the Statewide Alternative Education Academy Program was launched, providing permanent funding for alternative education across the state. The program was phased in over three years.

By 1998, the current level of 250 academy programs was reached. The state dropout rate decreased sharply once the Statewide Alternative Academy program became well-established, and the rates have continued to decline despite increasing risk levels among Oklahoma students.

Grade level – Students in grades 6-12 were served. High school students accounted for 89.3% of all academy students. One-third of all students were seniors.

Ethnicity – Ethnic identification of alternative education students was very similar to that of the state as a whole; urban students [and thus African American students] were slightly over-represented.

### PROGRAMS REPORTED

Special populations – 183 programs reported that they served students who were on Individualized Education Plans; 11.5% of the alternative education population.

The percentage of students who self-reported then-involvement with juvenile justice authorities [15.5%] was lower than last year's average of 17.5%.

Students who qualified for Gifted and Talented services were served by 38 alternative education programs.

Years in attendance – Most students attended the alternative education program for one year or less although 27.4% attended for two or more years.

Reason for referral – One-third of the students [33.8%] were referred due to academic deficiencies. Students with excessive absences accounted for 14% of the population followed by students referred for behavioral difficulties [12.58%].

Exit status – More than three-fourths of students [78%] had a positive exit status at the end of the year. Students with negative outcomes accounted for 14.1%

of alternative students; most of these were dropouts.

### DROPOUTS ARE REDUCED

Neutral status at exit [e.g., moved] was reported for 8.1% of the students.

Dropouts – The percentage of students who dropped out of alternative education programs [11.8%] was lower than last year's 13.3%.

Dropouts were significantly older than the non-dropouts. Recovered dropouts were the most likely to drop out of the alternative program; their dropout rate was 21.5%.

Pregnant/Parenting teens had one of the higher dropout rates [10.6%] but also one of the highest graduation rates [42.9%].

The dropout rate for African American students [15.2%] was higher than the mean for all students [11.8%].

Statewide Alternative Programs collected data on five variables highly related to dropping out of school. The data collected for each student included grades, courses passed, absences, disciplinary referrals, and achievement test scores.

Two types of analyses were conducted: pre-post analyses, involving only students enrolled in alternative education programs, and treatment-comparison group analyses.

### PROOF THE SYSTEM WORKS

The findings have been consistent for more than 10 years. Once students were enrolled in an alternative education program, they were absent less often, made higher grades, failed fewer classes, earned a greater number of credits, were referred less often for disciplinary problems, and improved their scores on tests of basic skills.

A total of 182 Statewide Academies reported End of Instruction [EOI] exam data this year. Alternative education students performed best on the English III and English II exams [53% and 49% pass rates, respectively] and worst on the Algebra II exam [16%]. Although the percentage of students passing the EOIs has increased markedly over the last three years, the alternative education pass rates were significantly lower than the pass rates for all students.

Structure – Most Oklahoma programs chose to operate a full day educational program [46.8%]. Half-day programs that met either in the morning or afternoon were the second most commonly implemented structure [28%]. The 250 programs required the services of 879 teachers to provide instruction.

### EARNING CREDITS

Students earned course credit through demonstrated competency, seat time, or a combination of the two.

Computer-assisted instruction was included as one method of instructional delivery in 94% of the programs.

Most programs employed a mix of teacher-directed and computer-assisted instruction.

See STUDENTS Page 9

# 'You mean, I Have A Right to Know?'

By Terry M. Clark

"You mean we can find out how much you're paid?" asked one university student, a journalism major. "Yep," said I.

"And how much money Edmond makes from all the traffic tickets the cops write?" asked another student, majoring in PR. "How about in Midwest City?" someone jumped in. "And how my son's school board evaluates the superintendent?" said another. I nodded.

"How about how UCO spends all those fees they charge us every semester, including what goes to athletics?" another student asked.

"Yes you can," I said.

When I teach editing at UCO, I include about two days covering Oklahoma's Sunshine laws, the Open Meeting and Open Records Acts.

Those are the kinds of responses I get. These are not dumb kids, and they're not "kids," either. Average age is usually 22-26 and they're juniors and seniors literally working their way through college, most being employed from 30 to 40 hours a week plus taking a full load of courses, commuting; many are married and have children. So they're a cross section of young Oklahoma adults.

And they usually don't know about those laws. Yes, we have a required media law class that touches on them, but many still seem to miss out.

Even though many won't work for the traditional "news media," I figure they need to know about the laws anyway, just in case. And as citizens, they certainly need the information.

So we spend a day talking about agendas, executive sessions, public meetings, public records and so forth – the basics.

Then I take out the now more-than-10-year-old publication that the Oklahoma Press Association, FOI Oklahoma Inc., the Oklahoman and the Tulsa World teamed up on when we audited the open records compliance across the state. Yes, I have plenty of copies stored away, and we go through that, page by page, looking at the stories, the charts, the information.

They hear the horror stories, like the southeastern Oklahoma law enforcement people intimidating young reporters and refusing to obey the laws, and the fusses caused by asking for football coaches' salaries.

I also tell them the good news, like the compliance of all 77 county clerks, and the little ladies in towns like Apache who was more than happy to make copies of the financial sheets because nobody had ever asked for them before.

Or the people who wrote back on our survey, in shaky handwriting, saying they didn't have a copier or agenda, but here's what they did at the meeting last month, and inviting us to come visit.

I had one superintendent reply, saying, "I know I can't ask this, but when this is over, will you write back and tell me why you want that agenda?" Common curiosity.

## Fallin Leads In Early Polling; Askins Climbing

Republican Congresswoman Mary Fallin runs strongest for now among the four major announced candidates for governor of Oklahoma.

The first Rasmussen Reports Election 2010 telephone survey of the race finds Fallin earning the support of 51% of likely voters against both announced Democrats in the race, Lt. Gov. Jari Askins and state Attorney General Drew Edmondson.

In a match-up with Fallin, Askins picks up 37% support. Six percent prefer some other candidate, and 6% more are undecided.

Edmondson gets 36% of the vote against Fallin. Eight percent favor another candidate. Eleven percent are undecided.

State Sen. Randy Brogdon, R-Owasso, the other major announced GOP hopeful, doesn't fare as well. He's in virtual ties with both Democrats.

### ASKINS VS. BROGDON

Askins leads Brogdon 42% to 39%, with 11% undecided. Eight percent like some other candidate in the race.

Brogdon earns 42% to Edmondson's 41% in that match-up. Five percent opt for another candidate, and 12% are undecided.

Both parties pick their nominees in July 27 primaries.

Voters not affiliated with either major party prefer either of the Republicans to the Democratic candidates.

Fallin, one of the state's five House members, was the first woman to serve as lieutenant governor. She was elected to the U.S. House in 2006. Twenty-six percent of Oklahoma voters have a very favorable opinion of Fallin, while 13% view her very unfavorably.

For Brogdon, very favorables total 9% and very unfavorables 12%.

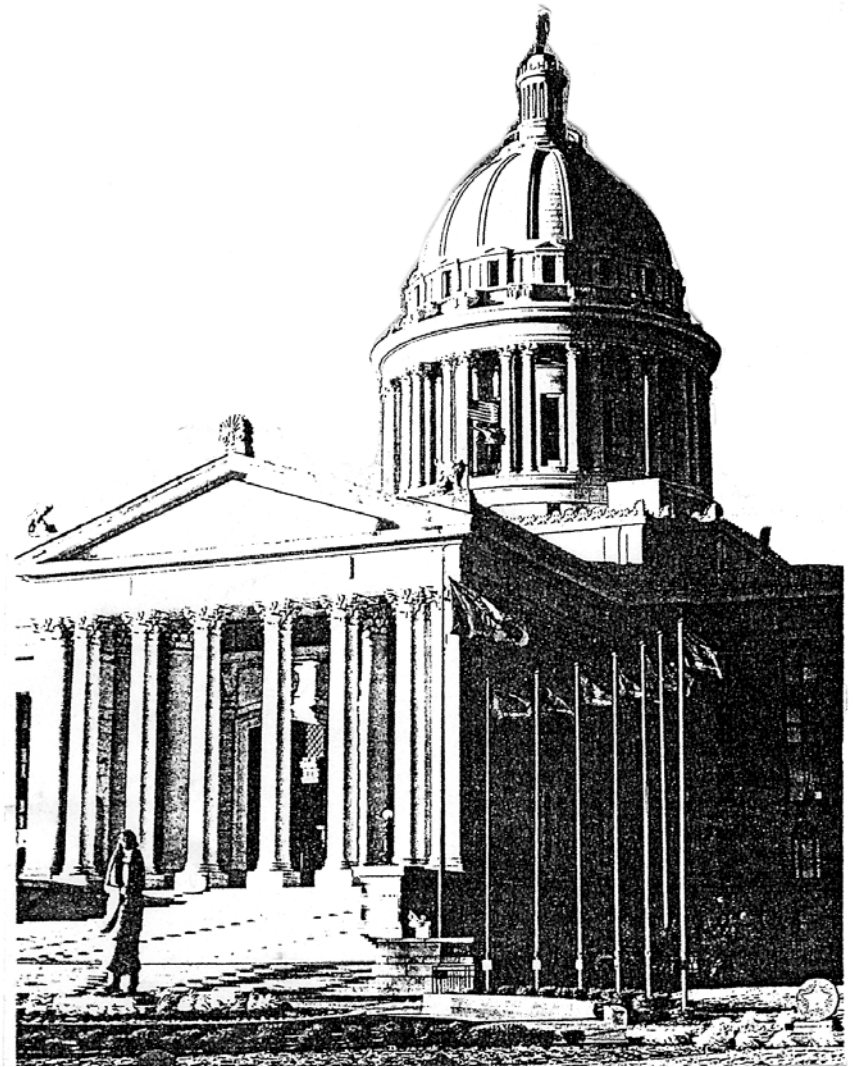
Askins, a former legislator and judge, was elected lieutenant governor in 2006. She's viewed very favorably by 14% and very unfavorably by 8%.

### EDMONDSON'S RATINGS

Twenty percent have a very favorable opinion of Edmondson, who has been state attorney general since 1994. Fourteen percent view him very unfavorably.

At this early stage of the campaign, Rasmussen Reports considers the very favorable and very unfavorable figures more significant than the overall favorability totals.

Sixty-four percent of Oklahoma voters currently approve of Gov. Brad Henry's



In the survey of all 1,500 state, municipal and county public offices, asking for agendas, we sent \$1 to cover copy costs. Many sent change back. Yale schools refused to comply, wanting \$7.50 for an agenda, in spite of three mailings. OU was the last university to comply, but its regents agenda was so thick, the postage was more than \$1, and they could have charged us 25 cents a page, and didn't.

Conclusion: Most Okies are honest. Most small town governments are just citizens trying to do their jobs. The main enforcement problems always come from the people who are supposed to enforce the law, and from people who think the government office belongs to them, not the people.

But many, many people don't know the laws ... and many of my students, who come from all over the state and metro area living in a multitude of governmental jurisdictions, don't either.

– The author is director of the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame. This essay first appeared in the FOI Oklahoma Inc. newsletter.

performance as governor, with 25% who strongly approve. Thirty-four percent disapprove of the job he is doing, with only 9% who strongly disapprove.

## STUDENTS

From Page 8

Quality – OTAC Field Coordinators used the information they collected throughout the year to rate each program's level of implementation of the 17 criteria for alternative education programs.

Seventy-five percent of programs were rated as Satisfactory or better on all 17 criteria. The criterion on which programs were most likely to be noncompliant was counseling.

Programs lacked either the funds to hire a suitable counselor or they simply could not locate a suitable counselor within reasonable driving distance.

### COSTS AND BENEFITS

Program cost – The median cost per program was \$35,718. The median funding by program type: cooperatives, \$43,741; single district multiple sites, \$239,534; single district programs, \$25,713.

Cost per student – The median cost per students was \$1,381 but the range was large – \$96 to \$7,955.

Savings to government – Multiplying the estimated savings [\$200,000] to taxpayers for a recovered dropout by the number of recovered dropouts who had positive exits this year [814] resulted in \$162.8 million in savings to government.

When applied to all students who graduated from alternative education programs this year [3,052 students – approximately one-third of the total number served], the analysis resulted in an even larger estimate of benefit to government: \$610.4 million.

– For more information or a copy of the complete evaluation report, contact Kathleen McKean, PhD, Director, or Kelly Langley, PhD, Coordinator of Program Evaluation, Oklahoma Technical Assistance Center, 123 E. Broadway, Cushing, OK 74023 Phone 918.225.1882 or visit [www.otac.info](http://www.otac.info)

## BOOKS

# An Unexamined Life: Rove's Curious Memoir

By Tim Rutten

### COURAGE AND CONSEQUENCE

*My Life As A Conservative In The Fight*  
By Karl Rove  
Threshold Editions  
596 pages, \$30

Karl Rove is a true believer, as the subtitle to his memoir suggests, in a fighting faith. Much that vexes our current politics flows from the fact that he is an exemplar rather than a singular case.

Courage and Consequence: My Life as a Conservative in the Fight pretty much completes the recollections of those who surrounded George W. Bush during his eight-year presidency. Only former Vice President Dick Cheney's book still is to come from those within the innermost White House circle. Rove, of course, was the political architect of all Bush's successful campaigns, as well as those of dozens of other Republican candidates.

In the extensive news coverage leading up to its publication, much was made of his admissions of tactical error – failing to push back against charges that the administration misled the country into the Iraqi war; botching the post-Katrina response; predictable score-settling with prominent Democrats.

### ORIGINS OF ROVE'S CONSERVATISM

More interesting are the vague and largely unexamined origins of Rove's conservatism. As he tells it, he holds the views he does largely because he grew up in the mountain West, where self-reliance is prized, and because when, as a 10-year-old Denver boy, he put a Richard Nixon sticker on his bike, a little girl down the street whose family supported John F. Kennedy beat the heck out of him.

His own family was utterly dysfunctional – his father, the book suggests, was apparently a closeted homosexual who ultimately divorced his mother, a habitual spendthrift who stole her children's legal support payments. Only as an adult did Rove discover he was adopted. He was a champion debater in high school and became so deeply involved in electoral politics that he never took a degree, though he was just a couple of classes short. Later, when enrolled briefly at the University of Texas, he would acquire a life-long admiration for William McKinley because his mastery of new electoral technology would usher in decades of GOP dominance.

### FAMILY VALUES AND FAITH

For a man who repeatedly used "family values" and "faith-based" considerations as wedge issues in his campaigns, there is in this book nothing of how his own two marriages failed nor why he, like Bush, remains unchurched.

Still, it's clear that his great disappointment was the failure of "compassionate conservatism" – defined mainly as privatizing Social Security and Medicare supporting faith-based social services – to accomplish a fundamental electoral realignment. For that, Rove blames the cowardice of the Republicans' congressional delegations.

His is a Manichean view of American society – divided irremediably between dark and light, allies and enemies.

Rove the debater is at his dodgiest when he defends the Bush Administration's break with generations of American moral tradition and jurisprudence by adopting torture as state policy. First, he attacks House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the congressional Democrats for denying their knowledge of the step: "Can we really expect CIA agents to carry out war policies if they fear that leaders of one of the two major political parties will punish them for good-faith efforts to protect America?" [There's a classic straw man, since no such retribution has occurred, despite considerable pressure from the Democratic left.]

### DEFENDING TORTURE

Then, Rove goes on to argue that the Geneva Conventions on the treatment of prisoners are not applicable to "Al Qaeda, since they protect only the combatants of signatory nations." In other words, it's OK to torture some people, but not others.

Rove also dismisses the objections of conservative legal scholar Jack Goldsmith, who headed the Office of Legal Counsel under Bush, by arguing that while his legal arguments have to be taken seriously, "[T]hose of us serving in government at the time – in the aftermath of 9/11 and when intelligence was collecting 'chatter' from terrorist operatives that indicated another attack was imminent – this debate was not academic ..."

Waterboarding, for example, is not torture – according to Rove – because "the president never authorized torture," though he did approve waterboarding. Besides, again according to Rove, waterboarding – for which convicted Japanese war criminals were hanged after World War II – worked and extracted vital information from Abu Zubaydah, Ramzi bin al Shibh and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. The latter point is disputed by many inside and outside of the intelligence community, and we'll probably never know for certain, because the tapes of their interrogations have been destroyed. [Now, why do you suppose that happened?]

### MISLEADING AMERICA INTO WAR

Even Rove's most highly publicized admission of error – though not quite an acceptance of responsibility – comes with an explanation. He considers his singular shortcoming the failure to mount a push-back against those who charged the administration had misled the country into going to war in Iraq by falsely asserting Saddam Hussein's possession of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and by alleging his complicity in 9/11.

One reason for the lack of rebuttal, the author writes, "was that we felt it was beneath the dignity of the president to refute such outlandish charges." Moreover, "many people in the Bush White House were simply worn down by the Iraq debate. ... Our critics pounded us relentlessly. And the public saw silence as a plea of nolo contendere. With a complicit media that refused to subject the Democratic attacks to even the most mild fact-checking, many Americans eventually came to side with the administration's adversaries on this important question. ..."

"The charge did what its critics had hoped. It weakened the Bush presidency. And those who led the charge [Rove singles out former Vice President Al Gore and Sens. Ted Kennedy, Harry Reid and John Kerry] did grave damage to their country's ability to win a war it was hotly engaged in. They must have known at the start this would happen, but it was a price they were willing, even eager, to have their nation pay."

### BELOW THE BELT PUNCHES

There is the voice of the "all in" political operative, incapable of keeping his punches above the belt, even when the issue is life and death. There, too, the voice of the unself-conscious ideologue who unwittingly reveals himself in his

See MEMOIR Page 19

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# Kansas Brothers Spend Megabucks Spreading The Wingnut Gospel

By Jim Hightower

Second of Two Parts

Charles and David Koch are not idle check-writers – they're actively involved in the creation and running of this interconnected web of political influence and hold top positions in many groups. For example, David is board chairman of Americans for Prosperity and is on the boards of the Cato Institute and Reason Foundation, while Charles [who founded Cato in 1977] is chairman of the Institute for Humane Studies and a director of the Mercatus Center.

The focus of most political groups is to influence candidates, lawmakers, agency heads, and reporters at the top of the system. But these two brothers have been executing a concerted plan for more than 30 years not only to influence those at the top, but also to go much deeper. They spend freely on dozens of ideologically grounded, right-wing groups to influence schoolteachers and high-school curricula, state and federal judges, lawyers and legal scholars, conservative policy thinkers and media producers, city-council candidates and local party activists – and their aim is to shove the country's national debate to the hard right, discombobulate the public's progressive wishes, and alter government policies to advance corporate interests generally and the Kochs' own interests specifically.

Here is a profile of just one of the Koch tentacles: Americans For Prosperity. AFP, the third-largest recipient of Koch foundation largesse, is the brothers' overtly political unit. Essentially, it is a front group for mass-producing front groups. Much like McDonald's churns out Big Mac franchises, AFP can pop out a grassroots-looking, cookie-cutter political operation on demand.

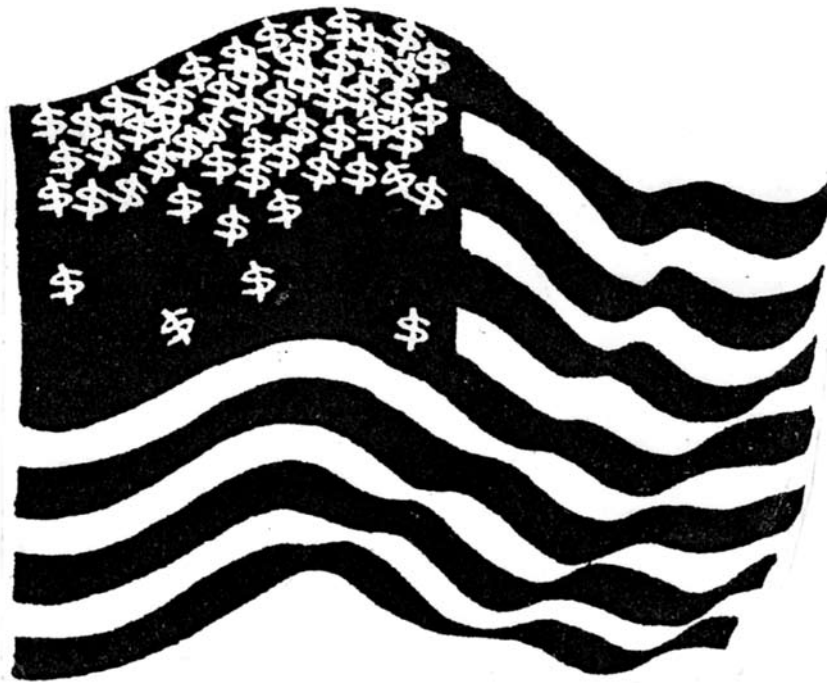
## KARL ROVE MOLD

It has a \$7 million annual budget that supports dozens of GOP operatives and former corporate PR veterans, all standing ready to assemble, fund, staff, and package a hot-to-go front group for any issue that comes up. Its menu includes such garnishes as hoked-up studies, alarmist talking points, deceptive attack ads, divisive hate messages, celebrity and religious endorsers, and a menagerie of media stunts.

AFP was launched by David Koch in 1984 as Citizens for a Sound Economy [CSE], a moniker it used until switching to its present name in 2003. It refuses to disclose its list of donors, but when it was known as CSE, about 70% of the \$18 million it spent came from the Koch foundations. There's no reason to think that AFP is any less of a Koch-funded operation today, and David, as one of its top officers, continues to be actively engaged in directing the organization's work.

And what a piece of work it is.

Start with Tim Phillips, brought in to be AFP's president and Koch's



point man in 2006. As a longtime Republican campaign director and Washington lobbyist for corporate interests, Phillips earned a reputation as one of the GOP's "Mr. Nasties," in the Karl Rove mold.

## SMEARING MCCAIN

His credits include helping George W. Bush win the pivotal 2000 GOP primary in South Carolina by spearheading a smear campaign that used images of John McCain's adopted daughter from Bangladesh to claim that he had fathered a black child; helping Saxby Chambliss defeat incumbent Democratic Sen. Max Cleland [a highly decorated Vietnam vet who lost both legs and an arm in that war] in the 2002 Georgia election by creating a TV ad linking the Democrat to Osama bin Laden and claiming that he lacked the courage to fight terrorists; and working with super-sleaze corporate lobbyist Jack Abramoff in 1998 to stir up evangelical churches in opposition to a labor-law reform that would've ended the brutal exploitation of Chinese girls and young women enslaved in sweatshops on the Northern Mariana Islands, a U.S. commonwealth. [Phillips rallied evangelicals by asserting that many of the Chinese workers "are exposed to the teachings of Jesus Christ" while on the islands "and return to China with Bibles in hand," so Congress should not interfere.]

At AFP Phillips has the Kochs' deep pockets and political network at his disposal to take on a broad range of right-wing corporate causes. While the organization has 23 state "chapters" and immodestly bills itself as the nation's "premier grassroots organization," it has only 8,000 actual members, is totally controlled by corporate money, is headquartered in Washington, DC, and is run by the exact same kind of professional political insiders it pretends to detest.

## 'MAD-AS-HELLERS'

Consider the boisterous "tea bag" rebellion. No one professes more hatred for the two-party, business-as-usual political system in Washington

than those angry Americans who're caught up in the tea-bag rallies. Yet unbeknownst to most of the mad-as-hellers who have showed up, it was AFP's Republican-tied lobbyists and political functionaries who cynically financed, organized, and orchestrated the very first tea-bag protest.

AFP has steadily co-opted the tea-bag faction to make it a front for the corporate agenda, and many of the tea-bag groups have devolved into subsidiaries of the Republican Party.

Indeed, AFP has become the Astroturf-To-Go Store, fabricating and spreading fake grassroots organizations all across the country. It was especially busy during the 2008 presidential campaign and in the first year of Obama's presidency. Here are a few recent AFP-manufactured campaigns on major public-policy issues:

## PATIENTS UNITED NOW

The website for PUN [odd choice for an acronym, huh?] proclaims, "We are people just like you." However, that statement is true only if you're one of the people working as paid political hacks for AFP. PUN is nothing but a shell created by AFP's laissez-faire corporate extremists. The goal of this front group is to kill legislation that would restructure the rip-off health-insurance industry so real patients can get fairly priced, quality care. In addition to running farcical, anti-reform TV ads under PUN'S name, the AFP-directed effort has included a "Hands Off My Health Care" bus tour. Its message wasn't subtle – a giant bloody hand was painted on the side of the bus, and a speaker traveling with the group repeatedly compared the Democrats' health reform plans to the Holocaust.

## HOT-AIR TOUR

During the past two years, people in 40 cities have been greeted by the sight of a 70-foot-tall hot-air balloon drifting over them. It heralded the arrival of a barnstorming tour to expose "the ballooning costs of global warming hysteria." This stunt had a just-folks veneer on it, but it was

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## Right-wing groups receiving major grants from the Koch Family Foundations

[Charles Koch, David Koch and Claude Lambe Foundations]

Amounts granted from 1976 through 2007, the latest year for which data is available.

ORGANIZATION	AMOUNT
George Mason University Foundation Inc.	\$25,808,987
Cato Institute	\$13,349,240
Citizens for a Sound Economy/Freedomworks	\$12,906,712
Mercatus Center	\$ 8,024,000
Institute for Humane Studies	\$ 4,668,957
The Heritage Foundation	\$ 3,272,000
Americans for Prosperity Foundation	\$ 3,176,500
Institute for Justice	\$ 2,615,000
Reason Foundation	\$ 2,354,212
Federalist Society for Law and Public Policy Studies	\$ 2,002,700
Bill of Rights Institute	\$ 1,667,000
Foundation for Research on Economics and the Environment [FREE]	\$ 1,305,000
Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy	\$ 1,160,800
Manhattan Institute for Policy Research Inc.	\$ 1,125,000
Washington Legal Foundation	\$ 1,105,000
Foundation for Individual Rights in Education Inc.	\$ 850,000
Intercollegiate Studies Institute	\$ 706,250
Competitive Enterprise Institute	\$ 666,420
Capital Research Center	\$ 605,000
National Center for Policy Analysis	\$ 600,000
American Enterprise Institute	\$ 500,000
Tax Foundation	\$ 475,000
American Legislative Exchange Council	\$ 465,000
Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research	\$ 300,000
Center for Equal Opportunity	\$ 240,000
Action Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty	\$ 297,500
Texas Policy Foundation	\$ 296,516
Philanthropy Roundtable	\$ 263,700
Institute for Energy Research	\$ 237,000
Property and Environment Research Center	\$ 219,500

# Richest One Percent Own 70% Of Wealth

By David DeGraw

The United States already had the highest inequality of wealth in the industrialized world prior to the financial crisis – and it's gotten even worse since.

As a record amount of U.S. citizens are struggling to get by, many of the largest corporations are experiencing record-breaking profits, and CEO's are receiving record-breaking bonuses. How could this be happening, how did we get to this point?

The Economic Elite have escalated their attack on U.S. workers over the past few years. The attack began to build intensity in the 1970s. In 1970, CEOs made \$25 for every \$1 the average worker made.

Due to technological advancements, production and profit levels exploded from 1970-2000. With the lion's share of increased profits going to the CEO's, this pay ratio dramatically rose to \$90 for CEOs to \$1 for the average worker.

## IT'S \$500 TO \$1

As ridiculous as that seems, an in-depth study in 2004 on the explosion of CEO pay revealed that, including stock options and other benefits, CEO pay is more accurately \$500 to \$1.

Paul Buchheit, from DePaul University, revealed, "From 1980 to 2006 the richest 1% of America tripled their after-tax percentage of our nation's total income, while the bottom 90% have seen their share drop over 20%."

Robert Freeman added, "Between 2002 and 2006, it was even worse: an astounding three-quarters of all the economy's growth was captured by the top 1%."

Due to this, the United States already had the highest inequality of wealth in the industrialized world prior to the financial crisis.

Since the crisis, which has hit the average worker much harder than CEO's, the gap between the top 1% and the remaining 99% of the U.S. population has grown to a record high.

The economic top 1% of the population now owns over 70% of all financial assets, an all time record. As mentioned before, just look at the first full year of the crisis when workers lost an average of 25% off their 401k.

During the same time period, the wealth of the 400 richest Americans increased by \$30 billion, bringing their total combined wealth to \$1.57 trillion, which is more than the combined net worth of 50% of the U.S. population.

Just to make this point clear, 400 people have more wealth than 155 million people combined.

Meanwhile, 2009 was a record-breaking year for Wall Street bonuses, as firms issued \$150 billion to their executives. One hundred percent of these bonuses is a direct result of our tax dollars, so if we used this money to create jobs, instead of giving them to a handful of top executives, we could have paid an annual salary of \$30,000 to 5 million people.

## WHERE WEALTH GOES

So while U.S. workers are now working more hours and have become dramatically more productive and profitable, our pay is actually declining and all the dramatic increases in wealth are going straight into the pockets of the Economic Elite.

If our income had kept pace with compensation distribution rates established in the early 1970s, we would all be making at least three times as much as we are currently making. How different would your life be if you were making \$120,000

another AFP production – after all, as owners of the largest privately held oil corporation, the Koch brothers have a special interest in spreading denial about the existence of climate change.

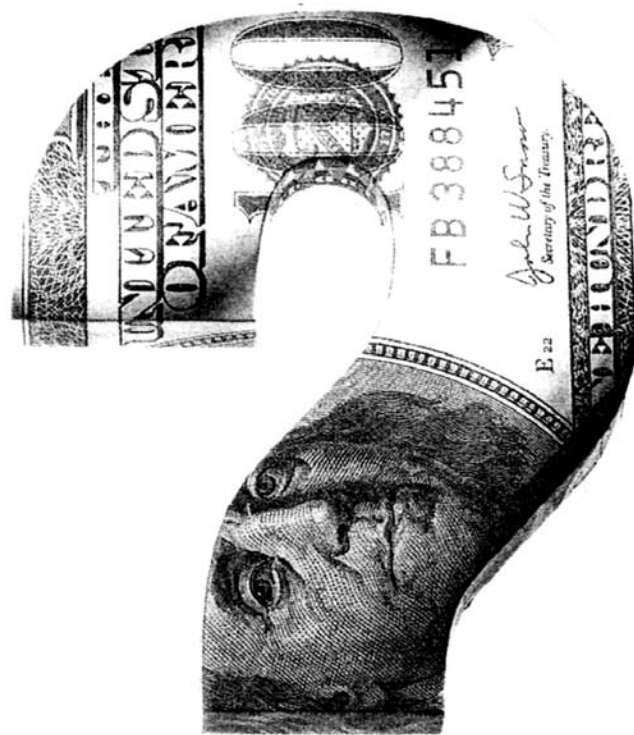
AFP ran ads mocking proponents of fossil-fuel regulations as elitist brats more concerned about their "three homes and five cars" than about the jobs of working-class families [an incredible rhetorical gusher from a privileged billionaire like David, who lives the high life in Manhattan, where he hobnobs with the richest elites at society galas, while also owning a mansion in Aspen where he can curl up in luxury and sip fine wine from his collection of 5,000 vintage bottles]. Perhaps he was tipsy on some of those grapes last fall when he attended an AFP summit of tea-party leaders and personally embraced the histrionics of a climate-denial film that accuses such

leaders as Al Gore of wanting to bring back "the Dark Ages and the Black Plague."

Among AFP's other fronts are: FREE OUR ENERGY, which clamored during the 2008 election season to open up our seashores and national parks to oil drillers; NO STIMULUS, which tried to rev up the tea-party network last year to kill Obama's economic-recovery plan; and SAVE MY BALLOT, yet another "grassroots tour," this one to rail against a proposal to stop corporate intimidation of workers trying to unionize [AFP paid Joe the Plumber to front this smear campaign].

## OUT OF THE SHADOWS

It's not paranoia if they really are out to get you – and they are! "They" are the corporate powers that collect our consumer dollars and then, as hush-hush as possible, use that money to finance their interlocked array of right-wing foundations, think tanks,



a year, instead of \$40,000?

So it should come as no surprise to see that we now have the highest inequality of wealth in the industrialized world and the highest inequality of wealth in our nation's history. The backbone of America, a hard working middle class that has made our country a world leader, has been devastated.

Now that we have a better understanding of how our income has been suppressed over the past 40 years, let's take a look at how the economy has been designed to take the limited money we receive and put it into the hands of the Economic Elite as well Costs of Living.

## SYSTEM IS RIGGED

Other than in the workplace, in almost all our costs of living the system is now blatantly rigged against us. Let's take a look at it, starting out with our tax system.

In total, the average U.S. citizen is forced to give up approximately 30% of our income in taxes. This tax system is now strategically designed to flow straight into the hands of the Economic Elite.

A huge percentage of our tax dollars ultimately end up in their pockets. The past decade proves that – whether it's the Republicans or the Democrats running the government – our tax money is not going into our community, it is going into the pockets of the billionaires who have bought off both parties – it is obscene.

For an example of how this system flows to the Economic Elite, just look at the Wall Street "bailout." The real size of the bailout is estimated to be \$14 trillion

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# MEGABUCKS

From Page 11

"scholars," media sparklies, political personalities, and other fronts. What the Kochs and their ilk are out to get is nothing less than America's commitment to the Common Good, colluding to kill such egalitarian proposals as Medicare for all, green-energy jobs, workplace democracy, decentralization of capital, and clean elections.

They pose publicly as enlightened industrialists. David Koch, for example, is an MIT-educated chemist and an enthusiastic evolutionist who has given \$20 million to the American Museum of Natural History [which then – I kid you not – named its dinosaur wing after him]. Yet David the Enlightened cynically pays groups to nurture ignorance and exploit it for his political gain, including paying to bus angry and confused people to "citizen" rallies and Town Hall meetings where they literally end up shouting themselves red-faced in support of his corporate interests over their own.

While such elites as the Kochs are a tiny minority of Americans, they've surreptitiously skewed our public debate, agenda, and policies to their self-serving agenda by instilling a totally false supposition within the mass media and both major parties that a volatile majority of people has a broad distrust of anything public and views government as the enemy. Thus even Democrats shrink from attempting anything more audacious than incremental reforms, meekly courting vituperous Republicans and corporatists who obviously are out to gut any forward-thinking changes.

– Jim Hightower, based in Austin, TX, is co-editor of *The Hightower Lowdown*, where this report first appeared. To subscribe to his monthly newsletter, visit [www.hightowerlowdown.org](http://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.

# Criminal Probe Of Climate Scientists?

The U.S. Congress' most ardent global warming skeptic is being accused of turning the row over climate science into a McCarthyite witch-hunt by calling for a criminal investigation of scientists.

Climate scientists say Oklahoma Sen. James Inhofe's call for a criminal investigation into American as well as British scientists who worked on the UN climate body's report or had communications with the University of East Anglia's Climate Research Unit [CRU] represents an attempt to silence debate on the eve of new proposals for a climate change law.

Inhofe's document ends by naming 17 "key players" in the controversy about CRU's stolen e-mails, including the Britons Phil Jones and Keith Briffa.

### GUILT BY ASSOCIATION

"I think this is like a dragnet, just to try and catch everyone whose name happens to be on this list. It's guilt by association and I thought those days were over 50 years ago," said Michael Oppenheimer, of Princeton University, who is on the list of 17 scientists.

"It looks like a McCarthyite tactic: pull in anyone who had anything to do with anyone because they happened to converse with some by e-mail, and threaten them with criminal activity."

Inhofe is also accused of further fuelling a spike in hate mail and politically motivated freedom of information requests in the three months since the e-mails of climate scientists were stolen from the CRU.

Rick Piltz, a former official in the U.S. government climate science program who now runs the Climate Science Watch website, said Inhofe and others were getting in the way of scientific work.

"Scientists who are working in federal labs are being subjected to inquisitions coming from Congress," he said. "There is no question that this is an orchestrated campaign to intimidate scientists."

Michael Mann, a scientist at Penn State University who is on Inhofe's list of 17, said that he had seen a sharp rise in hostile e-mail since November.

"Some of the e-mails make thinly veiled threats of violence against me and even my family, and law enforcement authorities have been made aware of the matter," he told the [London] Guardian.

He said the attacks appeared to be a coordinated effort. "Some of them look cut-and-paste."

### SCIENTIST CLEARED

A university investigation largely cleared Mann of misconduct for his connection to the East Anglia controversy. However, a right-wing group in Pennsylvania demands further action.

Gavin Schmidt, a climate scientist at NASA's Goddard Institute who is also on the list of 17, said he had seen an increase in freedom of information act requests.

"In my previous six years I dealt with one FOIA request. In the last three months, we have had to deal with I think eight," he said. "These FOIAs are fishing expedi-



tions for potentially embarrassing content but they are not FOIA requests for scientific information."

He said Inhofe's call for a criminal investigation created an atmosphere of intimidation.

"The idea very clearly is to let it be known that should you be a scientist who speaks out in public then you will be intimidated, you will be harassed, and you will be threatened," he said.

"The idea very clearly is to put a chilling effect on scientists speaking out in public and to tell others to keep their heads down. That kind of intimidation is very reminiscent of other periods in U.S. history where people abused their position."

Other scientists on Inhofe's list of 17 admitted they were disturbed by the threat of criminal prosecution.

"I am worried about it, I have to say," said Raymond Bradley, director of the Climate Science Research Center at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, who is also on the list of 17.

"You can understand that this powerful person is using the power of his office to intimidate people and to harass people and you wonder whether you should have legal counsel. It is a very intimidating thing and that is the point."

### RECYCLING SKEPTICS ARGUMENTS

Inhofe, an Oklahoma Republican on the Senate's Environment and Public Works Committee, released a document suggesting scientists be investigated for breaking three laws

and four government regulations.

The document, produced by members of Inhofe's staff, recycles now familiar skeptic arguments about the stolen e-mails from East Anglia and the mistakes in the IPCC report.

But climate scientists say the report takes the campaign to a new level by threatening criminal prosecution. The report calls for the inspector generals of all U.S. government agencies touching on the environment to investigate the scientists as a first step to possible prosecution.

"The minority staff of the Senate committee on environment and public works believe the scientists involved violated fundamental ethical principles governing taxpayer-funded research and, in some cases, may have violated federal laws," the report says.

A spokesman for Inhofe rejected the charges of a witch-hunt. But he said a criminal investigation was warranted and that it should not necessarily be limited to the 17 "key players."

"We are not saying that there are 17 scientists we should be calling criminals," said Matt Dempsey, a spokesman for Inhofe. "I'm not putting a number on 17."

He added: "The bottom line though is that there was manipulation of data and it appears that they violated a law.

"In terms of what these e-mails demonstrate, there are possible criminal violations here with FOIA and other laws."

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## WEALTH

From Page 12

- and could end up costing trillions more than that.

By now you are probably also sick of hearing about the bailout, but stop and think about this for a moment: Do you comprehend how much \$14 trillion is? What could be accomplished with this money is almost beyond common comprehension.

### NATIONAL DEBT GROWS

This is just the tip of the iceberg that has hit us. On top of the trillions given to the Wall Street elite, we already have a record \$12.3 trillion in national debt - and we now have to pay \$500 billion in interest to the Economic Elite on this debt every year, yet another way they are milking us dry.

When you add in unfunded liabilities owed, like Social Security payments, we actually owe a stunning \$74 trillion. That adds up to a debt of \$242,000 for every man, woman and child in America.

Trillions more, 25% of taxpayer dollars allocated to military spending goes unaccounted for every year, not to mention the billions spent on overcharging and outright fraud.

During the War on Terror, the Economic Elite have used our tax money to build a private army that has more soldiers deployed than the U.S. military - a congressional study revealed that 69% of the "U.S." fighting forces deployed throughout the world in our name are in fact private mercenaries, 80% of them are foreign nationals.

Private contractors regularly get paid three to five times more than our soldiers, and have been repeatedly caught overcharging and committing fraud on a massive scale.

### MILITARY WASTE

A congressional investigation revealed this and strongly recommended that we cease wasting tax dollars on these private military contractors. However, under Obama, there has actually been a drastic increase in total tax dollars spent on

them.

In 2009, just over \$1 trillion tax dollars were spent on the military; it's safe to say that at least \$350 billion of that was needlessly wasted. When you research our tax system you see an unprecedented level of waste and fraud rampant throughout most expenditures.

Our tax system is a national disaster of epic proportions. It is literally an organized criminal operation that continues to rob us in broad daylight, with zero accountability.

Just 10 years ago, in 2000, American families paid 7% of our income on food and fuel. We now pay 20%. This drastic increase is primarily driven by fraudulent market manipulation that drives up stock prices.

We have the most expensive health care system in the world and we are forced to pay twice as much as other countries, and the overall care we get in return ranks 37th in the world.

On average, U.S. citizens are now paying a record high 8% of their income on medical care.

### COST OF NECESSITIES

Part of the reason why foreclosure rates are so high is because the percentage of income Americans pay on their housing has risen to 34%. So for these basic necessities - taxes, food, fuel, shelter and medical bills - we have already lost 92% of our limited income.

The most recent college graduates are now known as a "lost generation." The American dream has turned into a nightmare. The economic system is a sophisticated prison cell; the indentured servant is now an indebted wage slave; whips and chains have evolved into debts.

"There are two ways to conquer and enslave a nation. One is by sword. The other is by debt." - John Adams

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## PUBLIC FORUM

# The Party Of No Ideas Or Solutions

By Deborah Lewis

I watched the health care debate. Again and again the Party of No used inflammatory, inaccurate talking points in their effort to keep the American people from getting basic health care.

Occasionally, they would go outside to whip up the teabagger crowd with the vitriol they spew constantly. They even managed to provoke some into using the "N" word and spitting on black members of Congress.

They must be so proud. I guess when you live in the past like the GOP [Grumpy Old People] it is considered an accomplishment when you can get your followers to revert to hateful, racist behavior not seen since the 1960s.

The behavior of the Republicans is despicable. And they know it. The only thing they are concerned about is that the Democrats, and particularly President Obama, will get credit for doing something great for the American people.

They even threaten an end to any bipartisan cooperation. Really? How will we know? Since the day President Obama was sworn in, their response to everything is no. No ideas. No solutions. Nothing to contribute.

The lies and distortions we hear today are the same ones the Party of No used years ago to fight the passage of Medicare and Civil Rights. The basic theme is always the same: They do not want to help anyone except their rich buddies. They even use the excuse that the Bush tax cuts for the super rich were acceptable because we had a budget surplus at the time. That is true. Thanks to Bill



Clinton we did have a budget surplus, but it sure didn't last long after G-Dub got his hands on it.

The bottom line is, if you have Social Security, thank a Democrat. If you have Medicare, thank a Democrat. If you have Civil Rights, thank a Democrat. If you have Medicaid, thank a Democrat. If you have voting rights, thank a Democrat.

And we do have a few things to thank the Republicans for – Joe McCarthy, Richard Nixon, George W. Bush and the not-so-great Ronald Reagan. On second thought, no thanks.

– The author lives in Garland, TX

# Armageddon Is Hardly Just Another Word

By Karen Webb

When asked whether he thought his use of the word "Armageddon" could cause people to do crazy things like spit on members of the Congressional Black Caucus, House Minority Leader John Boehner said, "Armageddon is just a word."

Yes it is, and so are bonsai, kamikaze, revolution, n---r, f---t, Taliban, secession, states rights, rap songs, sermons, sin, apocalypse, Jesus, cumquat, God, and jihad.

They are all words and they all mean something to whoever is speaking and maybe something totally different to whoever is hearing.

There are collections of JUST words like the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, The Bill of Rights, the Torah, the Koran, the Communist Manifesto, the Dictionary and the Bible. They are all just WORDS.

You cannot say that the teenage Christmas Eve bomber was influenced by a radical Islamic cleric and therefore all Islamic clerics should be suspect and then say that the words of Christian clerics, politicians, parents, teachers or rap singers mean nothing and do not ever provoke anyone to wrath.

Islamic terrorists and clerics, Christian ministers, Congress and the Ku Klux Klan do not use Vulcan mind transfers – they use WORDS, just like the ones Rep. Michelle Bachmann used when she said she wanted her constituents to be "armed and dangerous."

She could have said, "I want my constituents to be informed and vocal," but since she is the one doing the informing they are out of luck.

I have heard the best of the hell, fire and brimstone ministers who were less terrifying at describing hell than most of the GOP leadership are at describing the health care reform package.

When anyone uses the term "secession," it always brings to mind what James L. Petegru said in 1861: "South Carolina is too small to be a republic and too large to be an insane asylum." A lot of historians believe that "states rights" was one of the main things that killed the Confederacy. Gov. Brown of Georgia thought Jeff Davis was getting too pushy when he called for a day of fasting for the Confederacy. Brown called his own day.

Every leader from Hitler to Billy Graham has used words to influence people so, Mr. Boehner, the word Armageddon does mean something. It may mean nothing to you, but to most Christians it brings on visions of something: the END.

Why they are not looking forward to the end and the rapture and must fight it off with every part of their beings, they will have to explain.

Another pre-Civil War quote that comes to mind is the last paragraph of Lincoln's first inaugural address: "We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break the bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

How happy would he be that we are still fighting over states rights, but this time it is because they believe the first African American president is a socialist who wants to force affordable health care on everyone and they are not willing to let him try?

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

# Where's The Compassion In Pot Restriction?

By Danny Buntin

If there is such a thing as compassionate conservatism in Oklahoma, then the least they can do about the medical marijuana issue is to simply pass a law banning state courts from denying medical marijuana patients from using medical necessity as a defense against criminal drug charges.

I don't know how the legal system gets by with doing such a thing. But the motivation behind it possibly arose in 1976 when the feds lost big time in a celebrated case. That was when the feds charged Robert Randall for cultivating marijuana.

In his defense, Randall used the Common Law doctrine of necessity. His necessity was a medical one to use marijuana to treat his glaucoma.

To strengthen his defense, he had already undergone exhaustive tests at UCLA and John Hopkins that indicated that no other glaucoma drug could halt deterioration of his eyesight.

The judge, in believing evidence for banning marijuana for medical use was unfounded, dismissed charges against Randall.

Randall then petitioned the government to enable him access to medical marijuana. He was not denied. But Randall did not celebrate his victory as America's first legal medical marijuana patient in silence. He advocated other ill people needing help with medical marijuana should do what he did.

In response, the feds tried to put a stop to Randall's access to medical marijuana. He came back with a lawsuit against several government agencies. The

feds quickly settled out of court.

The settlement provided a legal basis for the Food and Drug Administration to set up the Compassionate Investigational New Drug Program. Initially, only available to patients afflicted by marijuana-responsive disorders and orphan drugs, the concept was expanded to include HIV-positive patients in the mid-1980's.

Due to the growing number of AIDS patients throughout the late 1980's and the resulting numbers of patients who joined the Compassionate IND Program, the George H.W. Bush Administration closed the program in 1992. Some people suspected the program was undermining the FDA's status of marijuana as a schedule one drug, meaning a drug having much potential for misuse with no accepted medical value, and so not allowed to be doctor prescribed. Thirteen medical marijuana patients were grandfathered in to prevent lawsuits from them.

Today, it's believed only four of them remain. Each get around 300 free joints at taxpayer expense in a tin can from the feds every month. While not conducted by the government, they were given extensive medical examinations in 2002. Nearly all abnormalities found were believed related to diseases the marijuana was treating, rather than due to smoking marijuana itself.

It's the 21st Century now, and it's highly unjust that only a handful of patients in this country can fully look forward to living their lives free of any criminal charges related to personal use of medical marijuana. Who knows if the next

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## Health Care Lawsuits

# Better Chance Of Being Hit By Meteor

By Danny M. Adkison

Unless you live in a cave, you already know that some people [led by lawsuits initiated by several states] think the new national health-care legislation is unconstitutional.

Who is responsible for this constitutional violation? Whodunit?

Was it liberal Democrats? The socialistic executive branch? Special interest groups? [This is an obligatory response when asking for an explanation for why something in government went wrong.]

Would you believe the butler did it? Well, it is true.

### LAWSUITS FOLLOW SIGNING

Before describing the butler, let's look at a little background. Health care has been the focus of Congressional debate for over a year now. In fact, it got to the point where progress on health care reform was stalled because polls showed Americans thought the government in general and the administration if particular was obsessing on the issue.

In response, the Obama Administration decided to not play nice anymore and use whatever tactics were necessary to get the policy passed. The president signed the bill into law at a White House ceremony that resembled a pep rally.

The ink was no sooner dry before lawsuits were initiated claiming the legislation was unconstitutional.

Those questioning its constitutionality make several arguments, but generally they object to the "individual mandate" requiring people to get some form of health insurance.

### A REPUBLICAN IDEA

This provision was, ironically, the brainchild of conservative Republicans who felt that if the health industry was going to be forced to treat literally all people [even those with preexisting conditions], then there should be some way of helping pay the costs [hence, the idea of an individual mandate].

Now that it has passed, many Republicans [and some Democrats] are arguing it is unconstitutional. Is it?

From a constitutional law point of view there are two major problems here.

First, there is the problem of getting to the Supreme Court. The Constitution stipulates that the Supreme Court will only decide "cases and controversies." This seemingly innocuous language has taken on huge legal ramifications. Since 1923 it has consistently meant that the court will not entertain what are called "taxpayer suits."

### PROSPECTS BLEAK

Neither a person nor a state's Attorney General can sue on the grounds that he objects to the use of tax money. Since the individual mandate provision of the health care legislation is described as a tax, anyone suing would be instituting a "taxpayer suit" and for nearly 90 years the court has refused to decide such cases.

Let's assume that somehow the opponents of the legislation get around this, and manage to frame the issue in such a way that the case gets accepted by the court. Could the law be challenged as an abuse of congressional power? What does precedent indicate concerning that argument?

As formidable as the "getting into court argument" is [less likely than the probability of getting hit by a meteor while walking to your car] success with the argument that Congress has exceeded its powers is even more unlikely.

# Mexico's Drug Cartels Enriched By U.S. Dopers

By Norm Rourke

According to some experts, last year the Mexican drug cartels made over \$350 billion. This figure is most likely low, but since the cartels don't file income taxes there is no way to know for sure. Nevertheless it goes without saying the Mexican drug trade has a big market in the U.S.

The drug business in Mexico is so competitive that the various cartels and their paramilitary groups are engaged in a war for turf and control. One of the ongoing major turf wars takes place in Reynosa, Mexico where the Gulf cartel and the paramilitary Zetas have running gun battles in the streets. Other nearby cities such as Matamoros just a short walk across the river from Brownsville, TX, have had similar experiences.

The cartels are better armed than the Mexican army that struggles to keep things under control. Benefitting from illegal weaponry from the U. S., the cartels have the latest automatic weapons, hand grenades and bombs that are frequently used. They are also becoming more sophisticated in their drug delivery methods using small submarines just below the water line. Several of these vessels have been captured and spotted in the waters around South Texas. The subs are manned by one or at most two people. The rest of the sub is packed with drugs that are off loaded in some remote area.

### CONSUMERS ARE CRIMINALS, TOO

Other creative ways of smuggling drugs across the border keep U. S. border agents on their toes. Using drug sniffing dogs, x-ray machines, mirrors to look under the vehicles, the agents carefully investigate suspected transporters. If a suspected vehicle is pulled aside, the agents take it apart piece by piece.



Article I Section 8, Clause 1 of the U.S. Constitution specifies Congress' powers to tax and spend, provide for the general welfare, and provide for the national defense.

### COURT DECISIONS

Hamilton argued that the General Welfare Clause was, itself, an independent grant of authority while his opponents argued it modified the tax and spending provisions. Under Hamilton's interpretation, Congress would, in essence, have the power traditionally reserved to states [police power].

When given the chance in the Butler case [1936] to decide the issue, the court ruled that Hamilton was wrong. The court ruled that the power to provide for the general welfare was inextricably connected to Congress' power to tax and spend. But, there was another issue raised in the case.

The other question in the case was whether in taxing and spending for the general welfare Congress would be restricted to those powers specified in the section [what are called "delegate" or "enumerated" powers] or if there were no limits [other than specific constitutional prohibitions] on the power.

### DON'T BUY HARDHAT

Hamilton had addressed this question too during his tenure as President Washington's Secretary of the Treasury. He argued that Congress' power to provide for the general welfare was NOT restricted to those powers specified in the Constitution. On this question, again in the Butler case, the court agreed with Hamilton's view. It has never ruled otherwise.

A good example of how this has been applied in contemporary times is the 1987 South Dakota v. Dole decision. In that case the court upheld [relying, by the way, on the logic of Butler] the federal government withholding highway funds if state law allowed anyone below the age of 21 to purchase beer. Even more surprising, one of the great states' rightist justices [Rehnquist] wrote the majority opinion in that case.

The Constitution says nothing about any of this. Just like it doesn't say anything about health care and an individual mandate. The Supreme Court, however, has.

If I were one of the Attorney Generals suing to halt the law, I wouldn't bother buying a hard hat to avoid getting hit by a meteor.

- The author teaches constitutional law at Oklahoma State University

Still the drugs flow across the Rio Grande into the anxious U.S. dopers' possession. While the drug producers, cartels and smugglers are tagged as criminals, the U.S. drug consumers are as much criminals who continue to make the drug business so profitable. Efforts to stem the flow of drugs have been abysmal failures.

Instead of learning firsthand what the pitifully understaffed border agents face every day, the wizards in Washington rely on "experts" from think tanks using computer models meeting with pontificating politicians in hearings. Walking the border in the agents' shoes for a few days would give them more information than some overpaid isolated know nothing.

### HARSH ACTION

And when the border agents do their job it backfires on them when a pipsqueak Texas prosecutor uses the testimony of a known drug smuggler to send two Border Patrol agents to prison based on flimsy hair splitting over procedures. Meanwhile, the drug smuggler gets off only to be back in business again. What a great system we have.

There are ways that might at least give the drug smugglers and the U.S. dopers' pause. But they would be condemned by the bleeding hearts, ACLU and the brain dead wizards in Washington. Yet as the saying goes: Harsh times require harsh action.

Using deadly force to stop smugglers would get their attention fast. To be fair, signs could be posted on the infamous finished and mostly unfinished fence

See CARTELS Page 17

# Stopping Radical Right's Race To Destruction

By Sheila Samples

*Change is the process by which the future invades our lives – Alvin Toffler, Future Shock*

Each time it appears that Republicans can't get any nastier, any more bereft of morality, they wrap themselves in the flag, grab their guns and Bibles, and manage once again to hit the bottom of the ethical barrel.

A good example is Ben Smith's recent startling revelation in Politico.com, which exposed the dirty tricks Republican National Committee [RNC] operatives were planning to play, not only on Democrats in the upcoming elections – but on their own donors.

Smith writes: "Manipulating donors with crude caricatures and playing on their fears is hardly unique to Republicans or to the RNC – Democrats raised millions off George W. Bush in similar terms – but rarely is it practiced in such cartoonish terms.

"One page, headed 'The Evil Empire,' pictures Obama as the Joker from Batman, while House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leaders Harry Reid are depicted as Cruella DeVille and Scooby Doo, respectively."

## HOW FAR WILL THEY GO?

Ruh-Roh. I can't help it – that's good for a grin, albeit a ghoulish one.

And the "tchochkes," or swag, such as T-shirts, tote bags, baseball caps, and other useless crap they planned to give to their donors in exchange for big bucks made some of us laugh out loud.

But that's just the funny part. The far more frightening aspect is the lengths the rabid radical right – not just the Republican Party – is willing to go in order to destroy President Obama and the "socialist commies" who elected him. They are very open about it; proud to be the "Party of No," and brag about burying Obama under a burning health-care pyre.

Nearly a year ago, South Carolina Senator Jim DeMint gloated: "This health care issue is D-Day for freedom in America ... If we're able to stop Obama on this, it will be his Waterloo. It will break him."

Former Bush speech writer David Frum admitted to MSNBC's Ed Shultz on his March 18 show that negotiation has never been on the Republican's health-care table. Frum said:

"It's critical for everybody, and not just the president. It's critical for us on the Republican side, too. If this thing passes, there is going to be an accountability moment on the Republican side. We had a choice, do we negotiate and try to get some of our values in the bill? Or do we go for total defeat of the president and bet everything on that?"

"I was one of those who said negotiate. That advice was rejected. We went for total defeat of the president. If he prevails, it is going to be a shutout of Republican views in one of the most important pieces of legislation ever passed in the United States."

## NO LONGER ABOUT POLITICS

Some are disillusioned with Obama because they feel he has not been forthcoming with his promise of change. They do not seem to realize that, for more than a decade, change in this nation has been overwhelming.

Since the Kafkaesque mutation of the Republican establishment – whose metamorphosis into a destructive force was sudden as a result of five right-wing justices on the U.S. Supreme Court stopping the Florida recount in December 2000 and handing the presidency to one of their own even though his opponent won the national popular vote by more than a half million ballots – the change within the Republican Party has been nothing less than frenetic.

This is no longer about politics, where opposing sides butt heads, twist arms and kick ass until they manage to agree on legislation that will benefit American citizens on both sides of the aisle. It is not, as Frum said, about merely defeating this president. It is about destroying him; about weaving a noose for him out of lies and dirty tricks; about sending a message to future generations of African Americans that the "White" House means just that.

## IT'S ABOUT RACE

If you doubt that the right-wing crusade is about race, you are either so oblivious of the past that you see nothing unusual about the present – or you haven't been to a Tea Party lately. At Tea Parties across the nation, Obama is not only portrayed in hideous caricatures as the Joker, but as others such as Adolph Hitler, Karl Marx and Osama bin Laden.

Initially, the Tea Party movement was started by Congressman Ron Paul to appeal to Americans who were frustrated and fed-up with such things as taxes and wars, but it was immediately co-opted by right-wing think tanks and by Fox News



whose target-eyed pundits brayed 24/7 about a massive "white culture" crusade taking over the nation.

Racist hatemongers joined the party, especially Rush Limbaugh and Glenn Beck and, in no time at all, had David Duke, a "white nationalist" and former Grand Wizard of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, looking like a rank amateur.

## GHOSTS OF K-K-KARL AND DICK

These guys aren't crazy – OK, maybe they are – but they know exactly what they're doing. They learned from eight years of K-K-Karl Rove and Dick Cheney that fear and hate are the two easiest emotions to work with. Stir in a generous helping of rage, and entire cultures can be manipulated into a frenzy. And when those emotions feed on racism, a gathering can be turned into a mob, which can then be whipped into a destructive, extremist riot.

In the Spring 2010 Intelligence Report published by the Southern Poverty Law Center [SPLC], Mark Potok examines the "Rage on the Right." He writes:

*Since the installation of Barack Obama, right-wing extremists have murdered six law enforcement officers. Racist skinheads and others have been arrested in alleged plots to assassinate the nation's first black president. One man from Brockton, MA – who told police he had learned on white supremacist websites that a genocide was under way against whites – is charged with murdering two black people and planning to kill as many Jews as possible on the day after Obama's inauguration. Most recently, a rash of individuals with anti-government,*

*survivalist or racist views have been arrested in a series of bomb cases.*

*As the movement has exploded, so has the reach of its ideas, aided and abetted by commentators and politicians in the ostensible mainstream. While in the 1990s, the movement got good reviews from a few lawmakers and talk-radio hosts, some of its central ideas today are being plugged by people with far larger audiences like FOX News' Glenn Beck and U.S. Rep. Michele Bachmann, R-MN. Beck, for instance, re-popularized a key Patriot conspiracy theory – the charge that FEMA is secretly running concentration camps – before finally "de-bunking" it.*

## LOST SENSE OF DECENCY

*Last year also experienced levels of cross-pollination between different sectors of the radical right not seen in years. Nativist activists increasingly adopted the ideas of the Patriots; racist rants against Obama and others coursed through the Patriot movement; and conspiracy theories involving the government appeared in all kinds of right-wing venues."*

The SPLC also reports that just in the first year of the Obama presidency, "an astonishing 363 new Patriot groups appeared in 2009, with the totals going from 149 groups [including 42 militias] to 512 [127 of them militias] – a 244% jump."

We are falling apart. We have lost our sense of decency, our sense of direction.

The past is overtaking us, and will soon be our future. We are surrounded by increasingly violent gun-toting "Patriots" who are eager to water the Tree of Liberty with the blood of loony liberals, Commies, and Socialists – starting with their black president who, according to the mad dogs on the right, is determined to destroy the freedoms of loyal Americans.

Are we going to stand here, suffering from change shock – too much change in too short a period of time – and do nothing? It's tempting, but as Chris Hedges warns:

*To give up acts of resistance is spiritual and intellectual death. It is to surrender to the dehumanizing ideology of totalitarian capitalism. Acts of resistance keep alive another narrative, sustain our integrity and empower others, who we may never meet, to stand up and carry the flame we pass to them. No act of resistance is useless. ... But we will have to resist and then find the faith that resistance is worthwhile, for we will not immediately alter the awful configuration of power. And in this long, long war a community to sustain us, emotionally and materially, will be the key to a life of defiance. As long as we are willing to defy these forces we have a chance, if not for ourselves, then at least for those who follow.*

I agree. We must resist – in order to stop the rightwing's race to destruction before it's too late – and to change the shock of our children's future.

– The author is an Oklahoma writer, a former civilian U.S. Army Public Information Officer and a regular contributor for a variety of Internet sites. <http://sheilastuff.blogspot.com/>

# Gulag Ag Vs. White House Egg Roll

By Alexander Cockburn

There's America the Mythical, with the White House Easter Egg Roll and activities designed – in the words of the White House press release – to “encourage children to lead healthy and active lives and follow the First Lady's ‘Let's Move!’ initiative, a national campaign to combat childhood obesity. The White House will open its South Lawn for children aged 12 years and younger and their families.”

Then there's America the Real, where on March 23, a big fire in Ohio in a warehouse at a Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation, owned by Ohio Fresh Eggs, prompted the euthanizing of 250,000 laying hens after – in the words of a local news report – “electricity in some of the buildings had to be shut off, and some of the birds suffered from issues with ventilation and smoke inhalation.”

Rotten luck on the birds, of course. But, fire or no fire, their future was not bright.

The same news story quoted Kevin Elder, executive director of the Ohio Department of Agriculture's Livestock Environmental Permitting program, as saying Ohio Fresh Eggs was permitted to keep 2.4 million birds and had about 2.2 million on hand. He said the birds were euthanized according to industry standards and none were known to have died in the fire. He said those euthanized were nearing the end of their laying cycle and would have been euthanized soon, regardless of the fire.

## SQUEALS AND SCREAMS

As Martha Rosenberg, a freelance journalist who covers America's ghastly agro-industrial landscape, wrote, “At Ohio Fresh Eggs, only eight employees were tending 16 barns when the fire was reported ... What kind of ‘care’ can workers give animals in fume-filled barns the size of football fields? Removing the dead and putting the half dead into kill carts, say those who've worked there.”

Mythical America is interminably featured in pastoral commercials and cute cartoons, where contentment reigns at Animal Farm. The raucous cackle of chickens mingles polyphon-

ically with the grunts of what Bertie Wooster, commenting to Jeeves on his breakfast bacon, invoked as from “contented pigs.”

There aren't many contented pigs on this continent, certainly not those imprisoned in the Netley Hutterite Colony hog farm in Manitoba, where 8,700 pigs perished in a 2008 fire. Witnesses reported hearing the animals' “ear shattering” squeals and “screams.” Only six full-time employees tended the animals, and bulldozers could not breach the factory farm manure pits. Fires at two other Hutterite Colonies, Vermillion Farms and Rainbow, both near Winnipeg, incinerated 8,500 pigs previously.

## SERVING AMERICA ‘PINK SLIME’

Every Thanksgiving, the U.S. president pardons a turkey, a cute ceremony – in fairness, Obama did not look enthusiastic – as repulsive as would have been the spectacle of Adolf Hitler excusing from the gas chamber on each anniversary of Kristallnacht a Jew imported for the ceremony from Auschwitz.

Michelle Obama has planted an organic garden on the White House grounds. The symbolism would be more admirable if one did not know that Obama installed as his Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, a former governor of Iowa and a notorious supporter of everything that is awful in the mass production of food in America – from bioengineered crops from Monsanto to the treatment of compromised meat with ammonia to produce what one USDA microbiologist, Gerald Zirnstein, called “pink slime,” saying to colleagues in an e-mail, “I do not consider the stuff to be ground beef, and I consider allowing it in ground beef to be a form of fraudulent labeling.” It's in fast-food chain hamburgers and school meals.

These days, animals in the days before slaughter are dosed with a dangerous chemical additive. To quote Rosenberg again, “Ractopamine, aka Paylean and Optaflexx, is banned in 160 countries, including Europe, Taiwan and China ... Yet, in the United States 45% of pigs, 30% of ration-fed

cattle, and an unknown percentage of turkeys are pumped full of this drug in the days leading up to slaughter. This drug increases protein synthesis. In other words, it makes animals more muscular ... and this increases the food growers' bottom line.”

## ANIMAL GULAGS

Across rural America, in the past 15 years, CAFOs have sprung up. As Steve Higgs writes in our current CounterPunch newsletter, “In most instances, the C in CAFO means ‘concentrated,’ but it can also stand for ‘confined,’ as in Confined Feeding Operations [CFOs]. Regardless what the letters stand for, the meaning is the same: the concentration and confinement of huge numbers of hogs, cows, chickens and turkeys in places where sustainable agriculture had served both farmers and society for centuries.” These animal gulags emit appalling stinks, clouds of methane so toxic that they kill and sewage filling vast poisonous lagoons.

America the Mythical loves backyard barbecue. America the Real services the myth with hogs from Gulag Ag. The coastal plains and piedmont of, initially, North Carolina and now many other states are pocked by vast pig factories and pig slaughterhouses. People living there sicken from the stink of 25-foot deep lagoons of pig excrement, which have poisoned the water table and decanted nitrogen and phosphorous-laced sludge into such rivers as the Neuse, the Tar-Pamlico and the Albemarle. Ammonia gas burdens the air. In North Carolina, it is as though the sewage of 15 million people were being flushed into open pits and sprayed onto fields, with almost no restrictions. That's where the millions of pigs' worth of manure go.

The reeking lagoons surround darkened warehouses of animals trapped in metal crates barely larger than their bodies, tails chopped off, pumped with corn, soy beans and chemicals until, in six months, they weigh about 240 pounds, at which point they are shipped off to abattoirs to be killed, sometimes by prisoners on work release from the county jail. The sows are killed after about two years or whenever their reproductive performance declines. It takes maybe eight to 10 people to run a sow factory, overseeing 2,000 sows, boars and piglets.

America's food corporations, only a handful of them, wield huge political power. Their lobbyists shuttle in and out of government. Their bought politicians safeguard the CAFOs from local regulation and OK “organic” standards designed to destroy the small farmers and processors.

## CAMPAIGN AGAINST OBESITY

Michelle Obama campaigns against obesity. She doesn't campaign against Chicken McNuggets, as sold by the McDonald's Corporation and devoured by kids across America. Here's a slice of America the Real, from Michael Pollan's best-seller, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*:

He describes what makes up a McNugget: “Of the thirty-eight ingredients it takes to make a McNugget, I counted thirteen that can be derived from corn”, starting with the corn-fed chicken itself ... According to the handout, McNuggets also contain several completely synthetic ingredients, quasiedible substances that ultimately come not from a corn or soybean field but from a petroleum refinery or chemical plant ... But perhaps the most alarming ingredient in a Chicken McNugget is tertiary butylhydroquinone, or TBHQ, an antioxidant derived from petroleum that is either sprayed directly on the nugget or the inside of the box it comes in to ‘help preserve freshness.’ According to A Consumer's Dictionary of Food Additives, TBHQ is a form of butane [i.e., lighter fluid] the FDA allows processors to use sparingly in our food: it can comprise no more than 0.02 percent of the oil in a nugget. Which is probably just as well, considering that ingesting a single gram of TBHQ can cause ‘nausea, vomiting, ringing in the ears, delirium, a sense of suffocation, and collapse.’ Ingesting five grams of TBHQ can kill.”

Many Americans have to eat at fast-food outlets because it's all they can afford or have time for. I count myself lucky. I live in the country, and I take care to know which pasture and farm yard the pig, the steer and the lamb in my freezer came from. There's no reason why there couldn't be mass online ordering from small farms and real-time footage to show how the creatures are treated. No, it's not veganism, but it would be progress nonetheless.

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## CARTELS

From Page 15

warning smugglers of the consequences of their acts. These people are as much terrorists as those who murder innocent people. Why shouldn't they be treated as such?

Knocking off a few drug smugglers would send a strong message to the rest that their dirty business is no longer tolerated.

## STIFF SENTENCES

As for the dopers themselves, a stiff prison term of at least 10 years with no chance of parole would go a long way to get the message through their drug clouded brains. Let them go cold turkey in a cell and maybe they'll catch on.

The drug users aren't all dirty street people panhandling for money to buy a hit from some thug in a nasty neighborhood. The rich and famous, the high and mighty who spends thousands to sniff a line of coke are perhaps even more prolific. They include celebrities, sports idols, business people and of course the Hollywood crowd that often glorifies drug use in their trashy films.

Will actions such as these happen? Not a chance. The politically correct crowd joined by the aforementioned bleeding hearts and the self righteous idiots who rail against anything that smacks of being tough will oppose these moves.

And that's what the drug lords know and count on as they look forward to another banner sales year fueled by the U.S. dopers.

– The author, who lives in Beggs, just returned after spending the winter at South Padre Island, TX

## What A Treat!

A cute little kitty cat died and went to heaven. God said, “What can I do for you?”

“I would like a nice soft pillow to sleep on. All my life I had to sleep on hard floors, in cold barns, etc.,” replied Kitty.

So God gave the cat a beautiful down-filled pillow.

Meanwhile, six mice died and went to heaven. God said, “What can I do for you?”

“We would like to have roller skates,” they said. “All our lives we had to run and jump and scurry.”

So God gave them all the cutest little roller skates to suit their needs.

A day or so passed and God was out for a walk. He saw the cat and asked if the down-filled pillow was to his liking.

“It's wonderful,” said Kitty. “And incidentally, thanks for the meals on wheels.”

– Thanks to Don Chabot for this gem

## Profiting From Recession

# Payday Lenders Are Fighting Regulation

By Keith Epstein

The influential \$42 billion-a-year payday lending industry, thriving from a surge in emergency loans to people struggling through the recession, is pouring record sums into lobbying, campaign contributions, and public relations – and getting results.

Payday loans got their name because many of the small, unsecured loans are made as advances on a borrower's next paycheck. Operating from some 22,000 storefronts, the lenders specialize in instantly available short-term loans that typically require repayment within two weeks.

While interest rates vary, typical fees are \$15 to \$25 for every \$100 borrowed. In Virginia, someone who borrows \$200 from one big lender, Advance America, must come up with \$247.80 within 14 days; the fee is equivalent to a 623% annual rate.

As the U.S. Senate prepares to take up financial reform, lobbyists are working to exempt companies that make short-term cash loans from proposed new federal regulations and policing.

### ATTEMPTS AT REFORM

In state capitols around the country, payday companies have been fighting some 100 pieces of legislation aimed at safeguarding borrowers from high interest rates and from falling into excessive debt.

Last year, as the U.S. House drew up a financial reform bill, some lawmakers who were courted by the companies and received campaign contributions from them helped crush amendments seeking to restrict payday practices, a review by the Huffington Post Investigative Fund has found.

The failed amendments would have capped payday interest rates – which reach triple digits on an annualized basis – and would have limited the number of loans a lender could make to a customer.

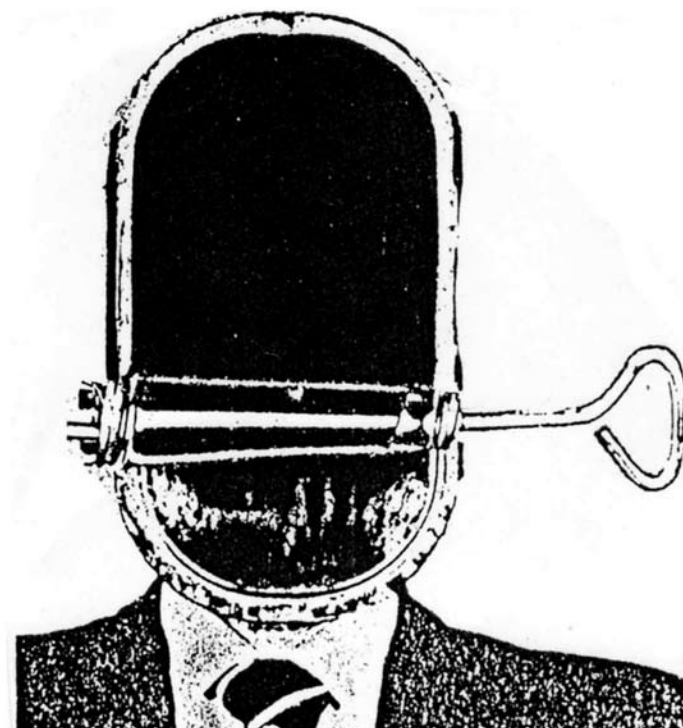
Over the last decade, lenders specializing in short-term loans, along with company executives and others associated with them, have spent millions of dollars to win influence in Congress, according to an analysis of campaign finance data and lobbying records.

### REFORM IS MISPLACED?

Spokesmen for payday lenders say that attempts to rein in their business are misplaced. Short-term cash loans were not a cause of the financial crisis, they say, and as lenders of last resort they claim to provide a critically needed service in an economic downturn.

Lenders range from small bodegas in Albuquerque or Miami to the chain stores of publicly traded corporations such as Cash America International Inc. and Advance America Cash Advance Centers Inc. The financial crisis has been good for their bottom lines. Advance America, for example, reported \$54 million in net income in 2009, a 41% increase over the previous year.

Customers taking out multiple loans can face a cascading series of fees. "Some



people borrow \$500 and end up owing \$3,000," said Jan Zavislan, a deputy attorney general in Colorado, which placed some limits on payday lenders in 2000. "Without our state regulation of this industry, payday lending would be usurious."

### SPENDING MILLIONS

The 2008 activity in Congress led the industry to spend \$6.1 million lobbying Washington last year, more than twice what it spent a year earlier, according to an Investigative Fund analysis of lobbying reports.

The total is about equal to what JPMorgan Chase & Co. spent on lobbying in 2009. The Community Financial Services Association alone increased its spending by 74% to \$2.56 million.

Industry representatives say they are tracking 178 different pieces of legislation around the country – 101 of which they oppose. In response, in 34 states and the nation's capital, the industry and its companies have 40 of their own in-house lobbyists, while paying another 75 outside lobbyists.

Wright Andrews, whose lobbying shop Butera & Andrews earned \$4 million in fees for coordinating the subprime industry's lobbying between 2002 and 2006, now represents the payday industry.

Records show his firm earned \$240,000 from the Community Financial Services Association in 2009.

Last October, Colorado was the site of an industry conference aimed at mobilizing hundreds of companies specializing in providing rapid access to money through payday loans and other services.

The meeting at the luxurious Gaylord-owned Broadmoor Hotel, sitting on 3,000 acres of golf courses and rolling forest at the foot of the Rockies, was sponsored by the trade group FISCA.

*Editor's Note: Payday lending is thriving in Oklahoma, especially in Midwest City where Tinker Air Force Base personnel are easy pickings.*

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# The Inhuman Essence Of A Corporate 'Person'

By Jim Hightower

I'm curious about those five Supreme Court justices who recently decreed that a corporation is a "person" with human rights: Do you think they ever met Mr. Walmart?

If they had, they'd be forced to concede that corporate personhood is a sheer fantasy, for there is nothing even remotely human about the bloodless and brainless thing that is Walmart. For conclusive evidence of this entity's total lack of humanity, the learned judges should climb down from their high bench and visit with Joseph Casias, a 29-year-old former employee of a Walmart store in Battle Creek, MI.

In fact, Casias was an excellent employee throughout his five-year tenure with the corporate person, even earning "Associate of the Year" honors in 2008.

"I always tried my best," he says. "I gave them everything. One hundred ten percent every day. Anything they asked me to do, I did. More than they asked me to do. Twelve to 14 hours a day. I thought I was part of the Walmart family."

Five months ago, however, he was coldly cast out of the family. What happened? It started with cancer – a rare form invaded his sinuses and brain. He's getting treatment to control it, but he still suffers a severe level of chronic pain. Yet, Casias was able to keep doing his usual good job every day by using a controlled dose of marijuana that his doctor prescribed to alleviate pain – a prescription that is perfectly legal under Michigan's medical marijuana law.

By carefully scheduling his daily dosage, Casias never came to work under the influence, and he never took the medicine on the job, so Walmart saw nothing but an employee performing well.

Until last November. In a routine drug screening by the company, Casias tested positive for pot. He showed his state medical marijuana permit to the corporate cogs, but instead of using common sense or showing a smidgeon of human compassion, the managers mindlessly clicked into Program 420g, Section 21-mj [or some such] of corporate-code – and summarily cashiered Casias.

Oh, come on, he's no druggie – he has a painful cancer and is using legal medicine! If he were taking Oxycontin or other harsh drugs, you wouldn't think of

terminating your associate of the year.

But there is no "you" there. Walmart is a machine, a fabrication, not a sentient, reasoning person. So the machine responded to public outrage over Casias' firing by issuing an insensate legal statement: "In states, such as Michigan, where prescriptions for marijuana can be obtained, an employer can still enforce a policy that requires termination of employment following a positive drug screen. We believe our policy complies with the law, and we support decisions based on the policy."

Cancer is enough of a burden on a person without corporate callousness adding to the pain, but Walmart just kept piling on this employee. He's got no job, is facing \$10,000 in unpaid medical bills and can no longer afford his cancer treatment, so what does the corporation do? It challenged Casias' eligibility for unemployment compensation.

Not that Mr. Walmart hates the guy. It's just the corporate way. For Casias, however, it's a disaster. "It's not fair," he says.

Fair? To a corporation, "fair" is a place to take your pig to try to win a blue ribbon. Corporations are literally inhuman, possessing no sense of moral responsibility or human decency.

The good news is that real people are rallying against the faux person's outrageous officiousness, and they've formed a Facebook page: "Let Joseph Casias Talk."

With the corporate image taking a beating and some customers organizing a boycott, the machinery for damage control kicked in at headquarters, prompting the company to drop its ugly effort to deny unemployment payments to Casias. It adamantly refuses, however, to take the one step he most needs: rehiring. And how about apologizing?

To convey your own thoughts directly to Citizen Walmart, call 800.963.8442. And to help reform the law to stop such corporate attacks on medical marijuana patients, contact the Marijuana Policy Project: [www.mpp.org](http://www.mpp.org).

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# BALLOT

From Page One

pro tempore – or is it just another legislative power grab?

The fact is, Republican majorities in both houses weren't able to steer these measures past a Democratic governor, and a Democratic legislative minority that upheld his vetoes. So, instead, they hope to trick the voters into thinking these matters are so vital to Oklahoma's future that the state Constitution must be amended.

Lawmakers can blaviate until the cows come home about "trusting the people to decide" and "giving the people the right to choose" ... blah, blah, blah. The reality is, it's all about raw political power.

Worse, as the state routinely relies on ballot measures to resolve issues that should be the Legislature's domain, it cedes even more power to

deep-pocketed special interests.

They already wield considerable influence at the Capitol – check campaign contribution and lobbying reports against voting records. Ballot measures afford the opportunity for them to create even more mischief: they can establish fake grass roots support groups with "good government"-sounding names in order to finance expensive petition drives or slick ad campaigns.

"Oklahomans generally are not sure who's behind it," says Dr. Bob Darcy, an Oklahoma State University political science professor who's studied the state's history of initiative and referendum. Often, he says, "it's out-of-state organizations with a financial interest" in a particular issue.

California is the classic example

of a state whipsawed by the back-and-forth of ballot-box public policy. Rather than sober, thoughtful debate in a deliberative, representative body, California voters are frequently confronted with a kaleidoscope of initiatives, packaged and sold incessantly in mainstream media, direct mail and on the Internet.

"It's a tool for special interests," says Phil Trounstone, a longtime California political analyst who operates calbuzz.com and blogs for Huffington Post. "Anybody with money can get something on the ballot or kill something.

"It was conceived as an expression of the popular will of the citizens who might be unable to accomplish what they want through the Legislature. It was designed to be an extraordinary event." What's evolved in California, he said, "is a perversion of its initial concept."

Two of this year's Oklahoma ballot measures, when considered together, underscore the problem.

SQ 744, circulated by the Oklahoma Education Association and other pro-education groups, would mandate that state lawmakers fund public schools at the per-pupil regional average. Republican legislative leaders are opposed to the idea, as much as anything because they despise the state's largest teachers union [OEA]. So concerned, however, that they cannot defeat it, they cleverly crafted a referendum, SQ 754, that would block such constitutional spending mandates.

What happens if both measures gain voter approval? A long, drawn-out court fight to determine which proposal prevails.

Meanwhile, state lawmakers have done nothing substantive to address the embarrassing fact that Oklahoma spends less per pupil on education than any state in the region – including Arkansas and New Mexico.

From listening to politicians, reading the state's newspapers and surfing the Internet, you'd think the SQ 744 is doomed, Oklahomans rising in opposition with a fervor normally re-

served every October for a certain orange-clad football team from south of the Red River.

Republican legislative leaders and the Democratic governor? Opposed. GOP and Democratic gubernatorial candidates? Opposed. The State Chamber, the Farm Bureau, the highway contractors, some newspapers and even some teachers groups? All opposed.

You'd think SQ 744 has no chance of passing ... but you'd be wrong.

Oklahomans love their public schools: In a recent Tulsa World/Oklahoma Poll, 61% of the 621 likely voters surveyed statewide support the proposal, only 23% oppose it and 16% are undecided or declined to answer.

Even more interesting: They expressed opposition [57% to 22%] to SQ 754, the GOP scheme to nullify SQ 744.

Much of the debate in Democratic circles is over philosophy – a belief that legislating-by-ballot-proposition is bad public policy.

Interestingly, highway contractors worked overtime several years ago to persuade lawmakers to guarantee transportation gets a significant first cut of excess cash in the state budget.

Now they complain SQ 744 would siphon away \$850 million in state revenues, cutting into sorely needed monies for the state's decrepit bridges [rated America's worst] and substandard highways.

This year's ballot could grow even longer to include the federal health care opt-out and other initiatives – most championed by the GOP's wingnut, Birther, Tenth and Bircher wing.

The long list of proposed constitutional amendments isn't a recent phenomenon. As early as 1916, voters were presented with nine proposals in the same year.

But isn't it way past time that Oklahoma honestly debates this question: Is this really the way we want to make our most important public policy decisions?

## MEMOIR

From Page 10

recitation of a now relatively minor incident, the gaffe that cost Sen. Trent Lott, R-MS, his leadership post.

Lott, you may recall, extravagantly praised South Carolina's Strom Thurmond at a birthday celebration and remarked that the country would today be better off if the old white supremacist had been elected president. Lott attempted to hold on to his job, but finally stepped aside, when the Bush White House withdrew its support.

According to Rove, that occurred because Lott went on Black Entertainment Television and recanted his long-time opposition to affirmative action, thereby betraying a lack of "principle."

Clearly, "compassionate conservatism" has its limits.

### A LARGELY UNEXAMINED LIFE

Rove has produced – that seems the right word – a curious memoir, clear in its antipathies and in its constrained but obvious affection for the Bush dynasty, particularly George W. The why of those antagonisms and affections is more obscure. Can it really come down to the geographic accident of birth and a feisty little girl down the street? Perhaps – or, maybe both are fruits of a largely unexamined life lived entirely within the hothouse of contemporary electoral politics.

The great architects of recent electoral change – unmentioned here – such as industrialist Mark Hanna, who elected Rove's admired McKinley and ushered in 35 years of Republican preeminence, or Jim Farley, the construction magnate who put together Franklin Roosevelt's enduring New Deal coalition, were men of vast experience, as well as political acumen.

It's worth wondering just how much of our current political discontent grows out of the dominance on both sides of the aisle of men and women, like Rove, whose only serious experience of American life is politics itself.

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## COMPASSION

From Page 14

U.S. president will also not want to prosecute medical marijuana patients at the federal level?

Recently, in California, a number of clinical, scientific medical studies of the type rarely done before have come out with findings that justify using marijuana as medicine for a number of serious ailments that cause chronic pain or muscle spasms.

In Oklahoma, it's time to put patients before politics. After all, the infamous "suicide doctor," Jack Kevorkian, had some clients who didn't want to live any longer with multiple sclerosis or Lou Gehrig's disease, the kind of serious ailments believed good for marijuana treatment.

Did they ever resort to marijuana? I don't know, but perhaps if they did, some would be alive today.

– The author is a board member of the Drug Policy Forum of Oklahoma



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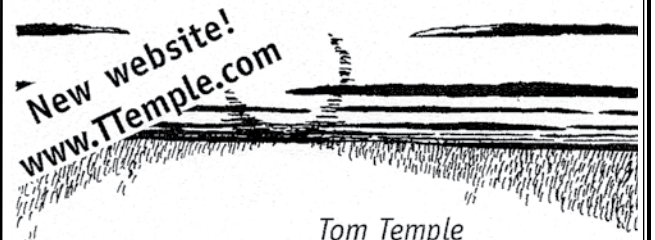


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