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THE OKLAHOMA Observer



VOL. 42, NO. 11

An Independent Journal of Commentary

JUNE 10, 2010

2010 Legislative Performances Ten Best & Ten Worst

By Arnold Hamilton and Frosty Troy

A breathtaking, billion-dollar budget hole. Restive wingnuts obsessed with boogeymen. And corporatists devoted to the unimpeded transfer of public wealth to private pockets.

The 2010 legislative session was one for the ages, all right – the Middle Ages.

With as many as 5,000 teachers bracing for pink slips, thousands of state workers facing furloughs, prisons overcrowded and crumbling, highways and bridges rated among the nation's worst and the mentally ill kicked to the streets or dumped in county jails, lawmakers all but ignored the state's most pressing issues and instead schemed to turn back the clock on progressive advances of the last century.

They were transfixed with other people's bedrooms, wasting hours on ways to restrict abortion rights and shame those who dared exercise their right to the medical procedure.

They worked overtime to assert the old South states' rights rallying cry, proclaiming Oklahoma's authority to reject almost anything President Obama wants or the Congress mandates.

They once again refused to end a corrupt, good-old-boy system that allows lawmakers to morph into highly paid, special interest lobbyists the moment they leave office.

And despite the fiscal crisis, they failed to undertake a complete, systematic review of the state's \$5.6 billion in tax breaks, some of which amount to legalized looting of the state treasury by corporate interests.

As miserable a session as it was, some lawmakers seized the day,

standing tall amidst the pontificating and posturing, political gamesmanship and special interest shilling. Others, alas, helped reinforce the stereotype of the redneck, self-righteous Oklahoma politician, unaware the calendar is already a decade into the 21st Century.



– Steve Hill

Herewith, the Best 10 and Worst 10 performances of 2010:

Senate Best

Sen. Mike Johnson, R-Kingfisher: Hottest Senate seat in the Legislature this year was occupied by Johnson, who chaired the Appropriations and Budget Committee. He led the successful drive to set aside so-called business tax incentives. Ask any Senate Democrat – he heard all bills, all amendments as compared to his House counterpart.

Sen. Jim Wilson, D-Tahlequah: Wilson fearlessly challenged the Republican agenda, his sharp debate and questioning widely known as “The Wilson Factor.” A walking, talking expert on health care, he combined wit and harsh facts to expose the in-

credibly bad agenda of Senate Leader Glenn Coffee. He pushed the bill to force insurance companies to cover victims of domestic violence.

Sen. Connie Johnson, D-OKC: Johnson campaigned endlessly for penal reform and battled the seven so-called anti-abortion bills, showing on the Senate floor that they were bogus. She described in vivid detail what a rape or incest victim would endure undergoing an ultrasound before aborting. She fought for an interim study on the death penalty.

Sen. Jay Paul Gumm, D-Durant: Gumm finally won a partial victory in his years-long fight to have insurance companies cover autism. The state's sorry insurance industry fought him at every turn despite a study showing that it would add about \$2 a month to a healthcare policy. Thanks to him insurance companies will now cover an autistic person's other health care needs.

Sen. Jerry Ellis, D-Valliant: Ellis is a quiet legislator, seldom engaging in debate, but ignore him at your peril. He led the fight against the theft of Sardis Lake by the heavyweights in Oklahoma City. The Republican legislative leadership signed on to the theft but Ellis led Little Dixie Democrats' opposition, coming up with three tribes opposing it and willing to put up funding the GOP Legislature wouldn't provide.

Senate Worst

Sen. Glenn Coffee, R-OKC: The Senate's single worst member, President Pro Tem Coffee is meaner than a snake. He made no attempt to be even-handed, recently hiring a private GOP operative at \$60,000 a year and previously putting ex-Rep. Fred Morgan on the Senate payroll at \$140,000 a year. He gifted AT&T \$12 million. You get an idea of his “leadership” when he is unable to look at Democrats debating against one of his pro-State Chamber bills.

Sen. Randy Brogdon, R-Owasso: Call him Senator No. A John Bircher who is running for governor, Brogdon votes against practically every serious
See PERFORMANCES Page 19

Observations

Wars' Cost

America fell off an ugly cliff May 30 – we hit the \$1 trillion mark for our wars. We've lost 5,000 troops and countless thousands wounded – many crippled both mentally and physically for life.

Just how much is \$1 trillion? Put it into real-world terms. For that amount of money, you could do fantastic, life-changing things like:

- Provide jobs for 1 million music/arts teachers for a year.
- Provide health care for 1 million children for one year.

And then, just for fun, you could also:

- Buy Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

If you did all three of these things, you'd still have \$925 billion to spare.

So does Congress give a damn? On June 1, several programs, including extended unemployment benefits, expired thanks to, among others, U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn, R-OK. By the end of the first week, 19,400 people prematurely stopped receiving checks, according to data from the Department of Labor.

By the end of the following week, the number of premature unemployment exhaustions climbed to 323,400. The week after that, 903,000. By the end of the month, 1.2 million. The clowns in Congress now have a Gallup approvability of less than 20% -- and they don't deserve that.

Yet Again

If there's one thing you can count on, the Legislature will eternally meddle in public education. This year was no exception.

- Optional teacher incentive pay for districts.
- Implementation of an Oklahoma teacher evaluation system.
- Establishment of an Oklahoma "Race to the Top" Commission consisting of education stakeholders from throughout the educational system.

- Addressing schools consistently listed as low-achieving for improvement methods.

- Allowing for dismissal for principals and teachers deemed ineffective via due process.

We have lost count of the mandates – funded and unfunded. At last count it was 32.

One day a miracle will happen – politicians will get out of the way and let teachers teach.

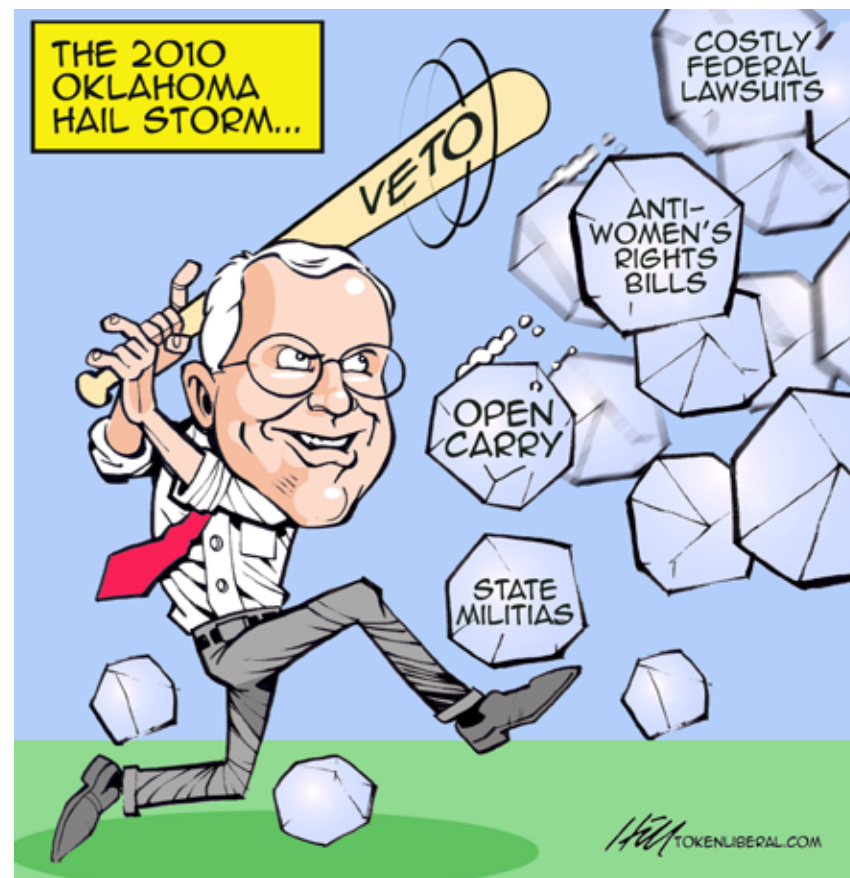
Robbing Kids

Legislation directing more money into school classrooms during this budget shortfall is law. It provides the following:

1. Suspends library media expenditures.
2. Eliminates financial penalties for any district given a deficiency in accreditation status.
3. Exempts districts from having to convene or participate in any advisory councils [excluding councils or committees required by federal law or regulation].
4. Allows districts to elect to not adopt, participate or offer professional development programs.
5. Freezes only new applications for the National Board certification process and the certification bonuses for new applicants.
6. Delays the textbook adoption cycle by two years and allows districts to spend that money for purposes related to the support and maintenance of schools.
7. Allows for districts to spend any carryover money from the current fiscal year for purposes related to the support and maintenance of schools.

In other words, a district can spend millions buying school activity buses instead of library books.

This fiscal crisis was created by Gov. Brad Henry and the Republican legislative leadership that not only cut taxes by more than \$771 million, but also cut rates.



– Steve Hill

Tragically, relaxing mandates for fiscal years 2011 and 2012 will save school districts millions of dollars that will be used for general operations instead of educating students.

Lost Revenue

Our state and nation desperately need revenue to invest in education, health, nutrition, and other priorities to promote a competitive workforce and ensure opportunity for every American.

Only one-third of working adults have a college degree. One out of three Americans lacked health insurance at least once over the last couple years. Poverty, joblessness, and home foreclosures are harsh realities for millions of Americans.

We are told over and over again that increased investments in the American people are not affordable because state and federal budget deficits are too great. And yet, Congress has gradually eliminated an important revenue source that can help fund these priorities and reduce the budget deficit.

Ex-Republican Gov. Frank Keating is speaking across the state in favor of eliminating the income tax but in typical Keating style, he doesn't address how the lost revenue would be made up.

Through a period of war, natural disaster, and now the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, the Bush Administration and Congress set in place the gradual elimination of the federal estate tax. Since 2001, the tax was cut to exempt more and more estates so that in 2009, only one-quarter of 1% of all estates in the U.S. were expected to pay the tax.

In 2009, only individuals with estates worth more than \$3.5 million [\$7 million for married couples] were subject to the tax. In January 2010, the estate tax was completely eliminated for one year.

The estate tax raises revenue that we need to invest in the American people. When Congress enacted the gradual repeal of the estate tax in 2001, it did not want to own up to the enormous cost of full repeal, which would exceed \$800 billion over 10

years.

Adding to Oklahoma's misery is the fact that next year yet another \$175 million in tax cuts kick in unless they are stopped.

This is the legacy of the Brad Henry Administration and the sorriest legislative leadership in state history.

Just The Facts

Here are some facts about the effects of the recently passed Health Care Reform law on Tulsa County alone, provided by the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce:

- Improve coverage for 346,400 residents with health insurance.
- Give tax credits and other assistance to up to 154,000 families and 15,120 small businesses to help them afford coverage.
- Improve Medicare for 88,000 beneficiaries, including closing the donut hole.
- Extend coverage to 56,800 uninsured residents.
- Guarantee that 12,560 residents with pre-existing conditions can obtain coverage.
- Protect 880 families from bankruptcy due to unaffordable health care costs.
- Allow 48,000 young adults to obtain coverage on their parents' insurance plans.
- Provide millions of dollars in new funding for four community health centers.
- Reduce the cost of uncompensated care for hospitals and other health care providers by \$68.8 million dollars annually.

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THE OKLAHOMA
Observer

www.okobserver.net

FOUNDING PUBLISHER • Helen B. Troy [1970-2006]

[ISSN 0030-1795]

The Oklahoma Observer [USPS 865-720] is published the 10th and 25th of each month, except July 25th and Dec. 25th, by AHB Enterprises LLC, 13912 Plymouth Xing, P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275. Periodicals postage paid at Oklahoma City, OK 73125.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Oklahoma Observer, P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: 1-Year [22 issues] \$40. Send check to The Oklahoma Observer, P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275. Online: Visit www.okobserver.net to use a credit card.

UPDATE ADDRESSES: Please notify us at least two weeks before your move to ensure uninterrupted service. E-Mail to subscriptions@okobserver.net or mail to P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275.

LETTERS TO EDITOR: E-mail to letters@okobserver.net or mail to P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275.

SPEAKERS BUREAU: To book Founding Editor Frosty Troy for your Chamber banquet, convention or other gathering, and for rates and availability, call 405.525.5582. You also may submit your request via e-mail to ftroy@fullnet.net or by U.S. mail to P.O. Box 53371, Oklahoma City, OK 73152-3371.

To invite Editor Arnold Hamilton to address your civic club, students or political gathering, contact him directly at 405.478.8700 or at ahamilton@okobserver.net.

PUBLISHER

Beverly Hamilton
bhamilton@okobserver.net
405.478.8700

EDITOR

Arnold Hamilton
ahamilton@okobserver.net
405.478.8700

FOUNDING EDITOR

Frosty Troy
ftroy@fullnet.net
405.525.5582

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

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

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

Observerscope

The biggest news of 2010 will be the multi-county grand jury convening next month ...

Laurel: To State Sen. Todd Lamb, R-Edmond, the best majority floor leader since Sen. Ted Fisher. He kept the State Senate on schedule and was even-handed, hearing all bills, all amendments, all debate.

Taking dead aim at ex-Gov. Frank Keating's anti-tax crusade, we report that Oklahoma has fallen to 49th in what we spend on a student's public education - \$7,683. Texas is 43rd at \$8,350.

Dart: To State Sen. Jim Reynolds, R-OKC, for a rant asserting that public education isn't the foundation of America. Guess he skipped that part of Thomas Jefferson's prediction.

It has been a bad few weeks for sex offenders. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that dangerous ones may be held beyond their sentence. In Oklahoma, they are no longer able to use a post office box for an address.

Laurel: Thanks to USA Today for a critical analysis showing the percentage of personal income Americans paid in taxes in 2009 was the lowest since 1950. Don't believe the Tea Party loudmouths.

More than 90% of white students complete high school compared to only 80.7% of black students. Whites completing college hit 30.75% last year compared to 17.5% of blacks. [Brookings Institution survey]

Dart: To the Muskogee Phoenix for an editorial asserting that physicians should pay their own way. The state invests in students because Oklahoma has the nation's lowest rate of doctors per patient - one per 3,000 population. Fifty-nine counties are below that.

The White House is moving a bill through Congress to protect public school teacher jobs. Oklahoma's share would be \$275 million if it wins final approval.

Laurel: To Democratic Arkansas Lt. Gov. Bill Halter, challenging U.S. Sen. Blanche Lincoln who has turned her back on all things Democratic. She is the leading flip-flopper in Congress.

Term limits have a least one upside - Senate Minority Leader Charlie Laster, D-Shawnee, was the weakest leader in recent memory, hitting the door on key issues. Sen. Andrew Rice, D-OKC, is new minority leader.

Dart: To Oklahoma's greedy big oil and gas lobby and the GOP Legislature, dealing with a \$155 million tax incentive "gift" by capping it this year but converting it to a future exemption. They've donated more than \$11 million to the politicians since 2004 - \$3.6 million in 2008.

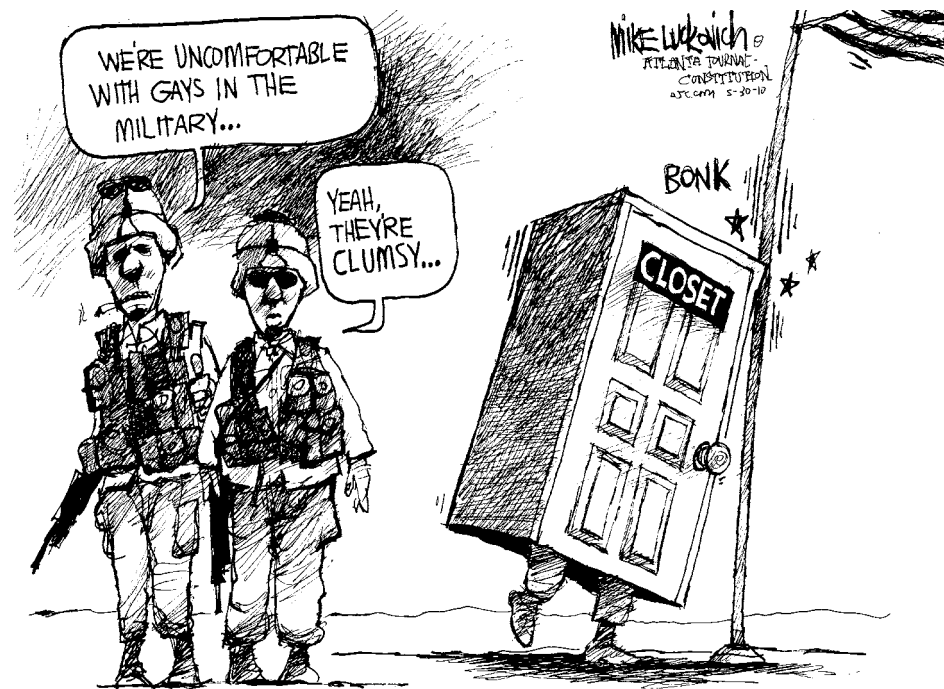
The 2010 list is out and the best jobs available are computer software engineer, systems analyst, network architect, biomedical engineer, environmental science technician and hydrologist. It's a high tech world. [U.S. News & World Report]

Laurel: To Rep. Doug Cox, R-Grove, for HB 2473 establishing a 1% fee insurance companies pay on health care claims. Counting the federal match, it's \$190 million sorely needed for the state's Medicaid program.

Let's hear it for U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn, a member of the President's Commission on Debt Reduction, telling fellow members it's past time to get a handle on the Pentagon budget - the worst waste and corruption in the federal budget.

Dart: To the Obama Administration for including Aubrey McClendon [Chesapeake] and Larry Nichols [Devon] on a panel to study energy - the moral equivalent of letting burglars case the bank.

More than 160 residents at the Southern Oklahoma Center for the Developmentally Disabled at Pauls Valley were facing loss of their center until Rep. Lisa Billy, R-Purcell, talked Speaker Chris Benge into killing the Senate bill.



Laurel: To The Week magazine for pointing out that the drive to put Ronald Reagan's face on the \$50 bill would be a joke. He added \$1 trillion to the national debt and had the highest tax hike in U.S. history.

One of the more nauseating things about the 2010 Legislature was seven Republican bills on abortion. It wasn't about abortion, it was about politics.

Dart: To Senate Leader Glenn Coffee, R-OKC, pushing through SJR 61 that gives AT&T a \$12 million tax break. He never met a corporation he wouldn't grovel for.

For the first time since records were kept, the number of county and city jail prisoners is down - a mere 767,600 as of June 1. That's 18,000 below the previous year.

Laurel: To Garrett Zwahlen of Casady School and Abbee Cox of Lawton's MacArthur High School, both named Presidential Scholars.

A reader wonders why Rand Paul, darling of the Tea Party, isn't known by his political name: Rand Paulin.

Dart: To both of Oklahoma's U.S. senators, Jim Inhofe and Tom Coburn. They voted against HR 4899 for disaster relief. It passed 67 to 28. What a pair of loons.

There were 14,180 murders and 33,289 suicides in America in 2008, making the U.S. way out front as the most violent nation on earth. [U.S. Department of Justice]

Laurel: To Sustainable Tulsa and Tulsa Southside Rotary, creating the Henry Bellmon Sustainability Award to raise awareness of what Tulsans can do to keep Oklahoma green.

The Department of Human Services has already spent \$2 million-plus fighting a lawsuit alleging foster children are being abused and neglected. Why not settle it and spend some of that money on social workers?

Dart: To the Daily Disappointment for blasting the President for considering bypassing Oklahoma in appointing a judge to the Tenth Circuit Court. What does Obama owe Oklahoma, reddest of red states?

Parents who use TV as a babysitter should know that researchers in Montreal and Michigan have proven that the more TV a toddler watches, the worse his grades and health will be later on.

Laurel: To Tulane University researchers who studied the long-term effects of spanking, proving it makes them far more aggressive later on. [Pediatrics Journal]

The Daily Disappointment is at it again, attacking state employees. When those egotistical editorial writers meet, they see I to I.

Dart: To Tulsa for dragging its feet for 16 years before agreeing to settle a racial discrimination lawsuit filed by black police officers. It cost Tulsa taxpayers millions, according to Federal Judge Terence Kern.

There is no end to the Daily Disappointment's editorial ravaging of the truth, attacking the Oklahoma Education Association for supporting a temporary freeze on tax giveaways. Check who got what for bringing the Thunder to town.

Laurel: To Actress Mary Kay Place, winner of the Distinguished Artist Award funded by the George Kaiser Family Foundation. Her movies have included The Big Chill and Private Benjamin.

Single motherhood soared to 41% of all births last year, testing the limit of five years maximum on welfare and unemployment capped at 99 weeks.

A Gallup Poll reveals that newspapers today are trusted by only 24% of the population, compared to 40% a decade ago. Only 12% have confidence in Congress - least trusted of any American institution.

The Oklahoma Corrections Department is trying to deal with a \$46 million budget shortfall, with 220 employees to be laid off and lots of furloughs.

It's ironic that after days of intensive reporting by OKC's Fox 25, the other media awoken to the fact that Asa Johnson and Kelsey Smith-Briggs would be alive today if social worker Yolanda Hunter had been sacked.

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

Per the BP oil blowout in the Gulf of Mexico ...

Having had real experience in dealing with oil wells blowing out in Deep Fork River bottom near Bristow, my suggestions:

A. We have in Oklahoma a red clay dirt that swells when put in oil well's orifices. Its expanding clay properties are similar to our elected politicians who swell up when placed in offices – both will work in off-shore blow outs!

B. Oklahoma legislators can and do kill everything, good or bad. Send them to BP's well.

Bob Jackman
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

I came across the following explanation written by an unknown author that is a response to all those conservatives who seek to blame the Gulf oil tragedy on President Obama or BP. This might also apply to Oklahoma conservative voters who mindlessly send our senators and representatives back to Washington each year to enrich the corporations and embarrass us with their idiocy.

Perhaps our state recession and budget shortfall for this year belongs with those voters who have decided to elect these "conservative Republicans" who have us in a huge budget hole for the foreseeable future with their inane policies to enrich the wealthy in the name of "freedom."

Let no one forget that the Conservative voters of the Gulf States have sent a solid block of government-hating, corporation-loving Conservatives to Congress for 40 years. For two generations, those Neanderthals have worked tirelessly to weaken every regulation on corporate behavior. For nearly half a century, they have opposed, blocked, gutted, or subverted every anti-pollution regulation, drilling regulation, workplace safety regulation, reporting regulation, wage regulation, and inspection regulation.

They vote to reduce the number of inspectors, reduce research, reduce enforcement, and reduce penalties for corporate misbehavior. Global corporations provide them with bribes, campaign contributions, pretty girls, and really great jobs in case they ever lose an election.

Corporate money is used to finance phony "scientific research" which "proves" that global warming is a myth, that air pollution is caused by cows, that tobacco does not cause

cancer, that the "free" market is self-regulating, and that government is incompetent, incapable, evil, and insane by nature. Conservatives in Congress quote these phony findings as if they actually believed them to be true instead of outrageous falsehoods.

So welcome to the "free" market, my fellow Americans. Unemployed Southerners are now "free" to move to Arizona and pick crops. In a few years, they will have saved enough to send for their families.

We should put an extra tax on Republican voters and use that money to clean up the Gulf. They are more responsible for this mess than BP. After all, we ALL knew that BP would cheat and cut corners wherever they could, just like every other corporation. Every corporation always does. Every corporation that is not closely regulated always will.

Larry Steele
Norman

Editor, The Observer:

I wrote [U.S. Rep.] Mary Fallin asking what programs she would eliminate. Surely not her free mailings she uses quite often.

Should the government cease helping disaster victims? How about cutting out farm subsidies? What of those tax incentives for homeowners?

Sure is great of the TP-ers [tea partiers] to wave their banner. Tell us what they would eliminate. Food stamps, unemployment insurance, Medicare and [God forbid, not mine] Social Security?

TP stands for its proper usage. Please tell us how you plan to put it to use.

Ernest Wirsich
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

We are appalled by the recent bills created in Oklahoma aimed at disempowering, harassing, stigmatizing and discriminating against women. House Bills 2656, 2780, 3284 and 3290 each represent biased, irresponsible legislation that target a women's legal right to have an abortion. The bills do nothing to protect the unborn child. Instead ...

• HB 2656 allows the doctor to withhold information about the health of the fetus thereby causing all pregnant women to wonder if they can ever trust their doctor again.

• HB 2780 monetarily rewards the doctor who performs the ultrasound by robbing the patient's pocket along



with her right to refuse a medical procedure.

• HB 3284 forces the doctor to ask and publish personal information about a woman's sexual history prior to abortion. Apparently a man's sexual history is unimportant. Nevertheless this gender-biased bill violates doctor/patient confidentiality.

• HB 3290 discriminates against low-income women – many of whom cannot afford birth control to prevent pregnancy in the first place – by removing all possible means of financing her abortion.

This isn't small government staying out of human life and it isn't smart government working to improve existing problems. This is nothing more than a big, dysfunctional elephant throwing its weight around where it doesn't belong. It's harassment of women. Meanwhile the state ranks among the highest in teenage pregnancies and among the lowest in quality education and health care. Everyday innocent children play around homemade "Meth" labs, while hundreds of others wait to be adopted! Honestly ... is abortion our biggest problem? Wake up, Oklahoma! Wake up!

Rev. Patricia Sibley
Carol S. Wimmer
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

People in Tulsa have been overheard to say how nice it is that the laid-off police officers got their jobs back. Somehow they've missed the news: 89 officers were not rehired. Eighty-plus families have had their lives turned upside down because Dewey [Mayor Bartlett] wants a less-educated, less-well-trained force, and he's about to get it.

When you lay off so many officers that the remaining officers are working around the clock, literally, you've set the stage to call in the sheriff's department to help out in the crisis. That's what Dewey wants.

Meanwhile, some officers driving cars and carrying guns have not been to bed in 24 hours. That's a recipe for risky decisions. And if the officers find themselves in need of quick wit and backup, they may not have access to either. Short staffing puts these officers and the people of Tulsa at risk, and it is all so the mayor can carry out his agenda.

We've already found that the Mayor Bartlett is willing to cut police and

firefighter salaries while adding personnel and giving raises in his own department. In what world is a political strategist worth more than \$100,000 a year, but the guys who put their lives on the line are expected to work for less than half that?

And what about those hours? Would the mayor be willing to work 27 hours straight, without overtime pay, as some officers have been asked to do? You know, maybe he is putting in some long hours. Sleep deprivation could explain some of the frightful decisions he has made.

Sharon Martin
Oilton

Editor, The Observer:

As the BP oil spill in the gulf continues to flood millions of barrels of oil into the ocean, now coming ashore in gulf states, there has been mounting criticism of the Obama Administration for not taking charge. Attempts are being made by conservatives to paint this as Obama's "Katrina," rivaling the incompetence of the Bush Administration in dealing with the flooding of New Orleans.

Don't believe it!

In 1998 the Congress was controlled by Republicans and they passed a law after the Exxon Valdez spill that dictates that oil companies be responsible for dealing with major accidents. The Obama Administration is prohibited by law, passed by Republicans, from taking over the problem. If that seems like a bad idea, then just remember who passed that law. When you hear a Republican making the claim about Obama not taking control, keep in mind who passed a law prohibiting him from doing what they're now complaining about.

They know the truth, but they hope you don't. Now you do.

Kenny Belford
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Lately I've started exploring Oklahoma's State Parks, something I've never taken time to do since I moved here. They're fabulous, clean, fun, affordable, and staffed by friendly and helpful people. I never expected a few camping trips to make me a little more proud of Oklahoma, a little happier to live here. Laurel to Oklahoma State Parks!

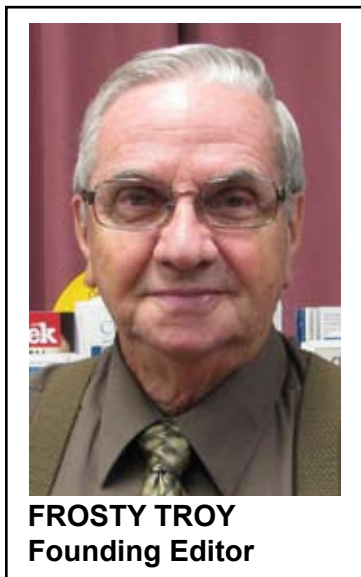
Beth Stevenson
Stillwater

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.

Wingnuts



FROSTY TROY
Founding Editor

In Oklahoma, conservative Republican leaders in the Legislature couldn't kill social programs because they were too popular, so they decided to starve them.

If you thought that they couldn't get more destructive, think again. And if you think that the charter school movement couldn't get even more removed from serving the public good, you also need to think again.

Now just about anybody can open a charter school and get state financing – a dead draw from public education funding, already hit by up to 9% cuts beginning July 1.

One of the things I've been trying for a couple of years to figure out is why the wealthiest Oklahomans have lined-up to support and get involved in the development of charter schools.

I think I may have come across one of the reasons. There's a lot of money to be made in

charter schools, and I'm not talking just about the for-profit management companies that run a lot of charter schools.

It turns out that at the tail end of the Clinton Administration in 2000, Congress passed a new kind of tax credit called a New Markets tax credit.

What this does is give an enormous federal tax credit to banks and equity funds that invest in community projects in underserved communities and it's been used heavily now for the last several years for charter schools.

A new national study shows that on average charter schools don't do any better than public schools and often are worse.

Check out Albany, NY, the district with the highest percentage of children [20%] attending charter schools.

Why? Quite a few of the charter schools there have been built using these New Markets tax credits.

What happens is the investors who put up the money to build charter schools get to basically or virtually double their money in seven years through a 39% tax credit from the federal government.

In addition, this is a tax credit on money that they're lending, so they're also collecting interest on the loans as well as getting the 39% tax credit.

They piggyback the tax credit on other kinds of federal tax credits like historic preservation or job creation tax credits.

The result is you can put in \$10 million and in seven years double your money. The problem is that the charter schools end up paying in rents, the debt service on these loans.

Now a lot of the charter schools in Albany are straining to pay their debt service – their rent has gone up from \$170,000 to \$500,000 in a year. The rents are eating-up huge portions of their total cost.

And, of course, the money is coming from the state.

Think it can't happen in Oklahoma. Think again.

This is obviously a very bad deal for the public. It's even a bad deal for those who are true believers in the charter school sham. But it can be difficult to really understand what's going on – and what's fundamentally wrong with it – if you don't stand back to see the larger picture. So, here's a quick run-down.

When Otto von Bismarck created the first conservative welfare state, it was designed to co-opt the Social Democrat's most popular idea, while strengthening German industry internationally and strengthening the power of its elites internally by placing them in charge of caring for social needs.

The Story Of Rose

I have no idea who sent me this but it is worth passing along:

The first day of class our professor introduced himself and challenged us to get to know someone we didn't already know. I stood up to look around when a gentle hand touched my shoulder.

I turned around to find a wrinkled, little old lady beaming up at me with a smile that lit up her entire being.

She said, "Hi handsome. My name is Rose. I'm 87 years old. Can I give you a hug?"

I laughed and enthusiastically responded, "Of course you may!" and she gave me a giant squeeze.

"Why are you in college at such a young, innocent age?" I asked.

She jokingly replied, "I'm here to meet a rich husband, get married, and have a couple of kids ..."

"No seriously," I asked. I was curious what may have motivated her to be taking on this challenge at her age.

"I always dreamed of having a college education and now I'm getting one!" she told me.

After class we walked to the student union building and, sharing a cup of coffee, we talked.

We became instant friends. Every day for the next three months we would leave class together and talk nonstop. I was always mesmerized listening to this "time machine" as she shared her wisdom and experience with me.



In America, the pattern is a little messier, as it represents a convergence of different conservative interests, all the while being disavowed as conservatives repeatedly claim to be against the "nanny state."

But here we can see at least five different conservative ends being served at once:

The attack on public education itself is a prime example of the attack on social democratic ideas and institutions, paralleling Bismarck's co-opting of the Democratic Party's most popular idea. This serves to discredit public education, take money away from the public education system, and take money and jobs away from public employees and their unions.

The siphoning off of certain students into separate learning environments is part of the conservative agenda for inscribing hierarchical differences in society.

The creation of lucrative money-making opportunities funnels public money to more wealthy members of society.

The creation of private governance structures further strengthens the power of unaccountable conservative elites, weakening democratic control.

The private governance structures in turn empower crony networks that can also serve as organizing foundations [in Oklahoma, it's the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs] for further consolidation of conservative power.

There is no way to effectively deal with these problems [conservative goals] in isolation. They need to be seen and combated as a whole. If not, then one bad conservative idea will just be replaced by another, and another.

Of course this is easier said than done. But doing it begins with recognizing the nature of what needs to be done. Don't vote Republican in the Nov. 2 elections unless you specifically identify a progressive Republican such as Rep. Doug Cox, R-Grove.

If we wind up with Republican Gov. Mary Fallin and a Republican Legislature look for the privatization of public education and other vital social programs best run by state government.

Don't say you weren't warned.

Over the course of the year, Rose became a campus icon and she easily made friends wherever she went. She loved to dress up and she reveled in the attention bestowed upon her from the other students. She was living it up.

At the end of the semester we invited Rose to speak at our football banquet. I'll never forget what she taught us. She was introduced and stepped up to the podium. She began:

"We do not stop playing because we are old; we grow old because we stop playing.

"There are only four secrets to staying young, being happy, and achieving success. You have to laugh and find humor every day. You've got to have a dream. When you lose your dreams, you die.

"We have so many people walking around who are dead and don't even know it!

"There is a huge difference between growing older and growing up.

"If you are 19 years old and lie in bed for one full year and don't do one productive thing, you will turn 20 years old. If I am 87 years old and stay in bed for a year and never do anything I will turn 88.

"Anybody can grow older. That doesn't take any talent or ability. The idea is to grow up by always finding opportunity in change. Have no regrets.

"The elderly usually don't have regrets for what we did, but rather for things we did not do. The only people who fear death are those with regrets."

See ROSE Page 13

It's A Lifetime Between Now And November



ARNOLD HAMILTON
Editor

By the time you receive this issue of The Observer, the Campaign 2010 candidate lineup will be set. And the sprint to the July 27 primary elections will be full throttle.

But if you believe the polls circulating recently in Oklahoma, there's almost no point in even staging the primary, much less the general election this year.

The conventional wisdom declareth a Republican coronation.

Yeah, so. Steve Largent looked like a sure bet eight years ago. And Jack Mildren was the odds-on favorite in 1994.

The point is, polls this early – especially generic surveys that measure party loyalty or leanings – often prove to be poor predictors of November general election results.

You never know when someone is going to open-mouth, insert-foot. Or when an issue that wasn't even on the candidates' radar screens in

June will suddenly captivate voters, shaking the political landscape to its core.

All political junkies worth their salt know this. But of course it doesn't stop politicians, their handlers, financial backers or the chattering class from engaging in hours of breathless analysis and speculation.

The latest such Feeding Frenzy was triggered by a Sooner Survey headlined "2010: End of 'Oklahoma' Democrats?"

The April 19-22 survey of 500 registered voters [margin of error plus/minus 4.3%] found GOP gubernatorial front-runner Mary Fallin with a 22-percentage-point edge over either of the top Democratic contenders, Attorney General Drew Edmondson and Lt. Gov. Jari Askins.

Further, when asked their preferences in a generic state legislative race, surveyed voters gave Republicans a 45% to 25% advantage over Democrats with 30% undecided.

Here's the Democratic dagger, though: 47% of those polled view the Oklahoma Democratic Party as "too liberal." Even 32% of registered Democrats see their party in Oklahoma as "too liberal."

It's unwise to simply dismiss the Sooner Survey because its Republican roots run deep – it is a publication of Cole, Hargrave, Snodgrass & Associates, the political consulting firm founded by 4th District GOP Congressman Tom Cole.

It's equally unwise to give it more credence than it deserves. We don't yet know, for example, the breadth of Tea Party, anti-government sentiment. Or whether it is a GOP primary tsunami that establishment candidate Mary Fallin can't yet see. Or whether the Askins-Edmondson battle becomes so contentious that the two sides refuse to join forces in November against a common Republican foe.

Still, I'm amazed almost daily at how glum many Democrats profess to be. As one state senator put it, ruefully: "I don't think we've hit bottom yet."

There are myriad reasons to believe the 2010 elections will not be kind to Oklahoma Democrats. The state has trended Republican for nearly half a century. Six years ago, the GOP gained a majority in the state House of Representatives for the first time. Two years ago, it took over the state Senate.

Both of Oklahoma's U.S. senators are Republican, as are four of the five members of Congress – the lone exception is Muskogee's Dan Boren, oft-derided as a DINO [Democrat-in-name-only].

Two years ago, Oklahoma bolstered its claim as America's reddest state when President Obama failed to carry even one of the 77 counties. Given the history of mid-term electoral woes for the party that controls the White House, it's easy to envision GOP gains in Oklahoma without even conducting a poll.

Statehouse Democrats are pessimistic, fearing their 26-22 Senate and 62-39 House disadvantages could be made worse in November. All it would take is for Republicans to recapture the governorship and Democrats would be akin to Oklahoma Republicans for most of the 20th Century – their voices marginalized in a one-party-controlled state government.

You can't sugar coat this: The early poll numbers and recent history are troubling for Democrats. If nothing else, they serve to dampen remaining optimism that Democrats may be poised for renaissance.

There are significant details behind the raw data, however, that give context to the Democrats' precarious position – and may even afford hope that they will be more competitive in Oklahoma again, sooner rather than later.

First, it's hardly second-coming news that Oklahomans are increasingly identifying with the GOP. A Democratic presidential nominee hasn't carried the state since Lyndon Johnson in 1964. So almost any poll with generic matchups would automatically favor Republicans, even in once reliably Democratic regions such as southeastern Oklahoma's Little Dixie.

Of course, generic won't be on the ballot. Real people, with good ideas and bad, friends and enemies, will be the nominees. And in legislative races, party labels often mean less than personal connections or friendships with the candidates and their families.

The truism "all politics is local" is true for a reason. Just because many Oklahomans wouldn't vote for a Democrat for president doesn't mean they wouldn't vote for a Democrat for governor or state House.

Ask Brad Henry.

Second, the short-term picture may be bleak for Oklahoma Democrats, but the state's demographic trends give them reason for hope long-term.

It is all-but-inevitable that rural Oklahoma – where rightwing pulpit pounding exerts out-size influence and where communities tend to be more homogenous – will become staunchly Republican in the near term.

Pay particular attention to four, mostly rural state Senate seats the GOP is targeting this year – seats currently held by Democrats Kenneth Corn of Howe, Joe Sweeden of Pawhuska, Johnnie Crutchfield of Ardmore and Mary Easley of Tulsa. They will provide clues to whether Democrats have "hit bottom."


Even if those rural seats slip away, Democrats are better positioned long-term in the state's faster-growing urban centers, where many once reliable Republican neighborhoods are in transition. Younger, more ethnically-diverse voters are helping revitalize old guard GOP areas, putting Republican legislative incumbents at risk [watch Rep. Dan Sullivan in Tulsa and Rep. David Dank in OKC].

Third, it can be argued that the GOP statehouse takeover has breathed new life into Democratic constituencies that were moribund after years of the party controlling both legislative houses and, as many times as not, the governorship.

In the session's final weeks, large, noisy groups descended on the Capitol to campaign for reproductive rights and the developmentally disabled. Both were driven to action by fear of what Oklahoma will look like if self-righteous religious zealots and greedy corporatists not only expand their majorities in both houses, but also if there is no Democratic governor to provide a check-and-balance.

In addition, without much fanfare, Obama loyalists have hosted dozens of "house parties" across the state, aimed at turning out thousands of Democrats who cast ballots for the first time in the 2008 presidential election. Typically, two-thirds of first-time voters don't return to the polls in the subsequent mid-term election. Just a few turning out in the right precincts, in close legislative races, could make a difference for Democrats this year.


No one knows what will happen between now and November. Democrats clearly have much work to do. But Republicans best understand that hubris and over-confidence can be lethal.




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The Rise Of The Reasonable Majority

By Nathaniel Batchelder

For 30 years, Americans have watched – or supported – a march toward larger military spending; tax cuts benefiting largely the wealthy and budget cuts for programs serving vulnerable people; deregulation of banking and financial industries; support for global trade treaties and the exodus of tens of millions of American jobs to poorly paid workers in developing countries; deregulation of corporate responsibilities to the environment and their workers; a series of foreign military adventures clearly reflecting America's addiction to oil and unholy faith in military-industrial might; etc., etc., etc.

In Oklahoma, the drift has been toward government heavily influenced by narrow religious and political perspectives. Our state had laws prohibiting gay marriage but passed a constitutional amendment prohibiting gay marriage – a Trojan Horse strategy turning our Legislature over to radical right-wingers.

Gone are our mental health facilities, so our mentally ill now fill our jails and prisons. Cut are drug and alcohol treatment facilities which will result, again, in greater costs as untreated addicts and alcoholics wind up in prison. Our state incarcerates more women per capita than any other state or nation in the world.

Our public schools, once the best in the world, and teachers' salaries, are cut to the detriment of our children's education and future. And our Legislature has passed half a dozen laws thrusting government between every woman and her private reproductive decisions.

TALK RADIO BREEDING DIVISION

The daily drumbeat of national radio shock jocks would have us fear or dislike all those they say are “the problem” in America – including Hispanic immigrants, Muslims, homosexuals, feminists, labor advocates, environmentalists, liberals, and even our president, who they say is not an American, is a socialist, and wants “death care” to kill your grandparents.

The Reasonable Majority of Americans reels in dismay at this smallness of vision and selfishness of politics. We seek a world in which all nations collaborate for the protection of the planet and all its living inhabitants; where the rich graciously pay their fair share to support programs serving the less fortunate; where every child is wanted and has access to educational springboards to a better life; where every person is secure in access to basic health care and a dignified retirement; where people of all races, cultures and religions are received and welcomed with grace and dignity; where corporations are regulated to meet re-

sponsibilities to the environment and their workers; where banking and finance are regulated to prevent greed and malice from causing economic meltdowns that destroy savings and retirement hopes.

The Reasonable Majority is rising from its slumber to realize that their participation in the care and oversight of government is essential to shaping the world they envision.

They are taking heed from the words of Benjamin Franklin after the Constitutional Convention in 1787. To a questioner he said, “It's a Republic, if you can keep it.”

DUTY TO BE INVOLVED, ACTIVE

Well, now it's our turn: We are awakening to our duty to make political involvement a regular component of ours and our friends' lives – as essential as doing the laundry, visiting the dentist, changing the oil. We can catalyze others to join us in learning who our elected officials are and holding them to supporting our values, or electing better candidates when they do not. We will participate in their electoral victories, or campaigns to defeat them if they cannot support our visions. We are involving others in the excitement of political processes that affect all our lives and shape the world we will leave to future generations. Everything we value and hope for is on the line.

America votes again in November. We – The Reasonable Majority – must coalesce, collaborate, cooperate, energize and inspire others, and elect state and national officials whose vision is worthy of holding political office. The world hangs in the balance, calling everyone alive to engage in shaping a global community grounded in love, hope, conviction and commitment to sustainability and possibility for every person and every living thing.

It is awesome to be alive at this crossroads in the human experiment. Let us live and breathe our values and politics, and make them come alive in our public institutions as a result of our collective intentions and actions. It's our turn to seize the day and recapture our government of, for, and by The People.

Sound your trumpet and enlist the weary: “We are the ones we have been waiting for!”

– The author lives in Oklahoma City where he is director of the Peace House, a center for education and non-violent action on issues relating to human rights, economic justice, environmental sustainability, and nonviolence

Education Always ‘One Of My Passions’

By Susan Paddack

I agree with Sharon Martin that our next Superintendent of Public Instruction should have classroom experience [5.25.10 Observer, *Class Experience Key For Next Ed Chief*]. I also agree that our teachers must get involved in this very important race to determine Sandy Garrett's successor.

While Observer readers may know me as state Sen. Susan Paddack, I was involved in education long before coming to the Legislature.

Education has always been one of my passions. I was the first person in my family to be able to go to college. After receiving my Bachelor of Science in Education, I immediately went to work as a junior high science teacher. I married my high school sweetheart who, on my \$9,000 a year teacher's salary, I put through medical school in Texas.

We then moved to Colorado for his internship and residency where I also taught junior high science. In 1980 after my husband completed his training, we moved to Ada, where he went to work at the Carl Albert Indian Hospital and I taught science at Latta Junior High.

TEACHING WOULD-BE TEACHERS

With two young children, I decided to become a stay-at-home mom and enrolled at East Central University where I received my Master of Education Degree in Secondary Education. After I completed my Masters, I stayed on at ECU as an adjunct professor in their Education Department where I taught graduate level classes and supervised student teachers.

During this time, I had served as a volunteer and board member for the Oklahoma Foundation of Excellence. In 1996 they asked me to become their director of Local Education Foundation Outreach, which I did for almost 10 years.

In this role I traveled our state on the mission of recognizing and encouraging academic excellence in our public schools while also working with local education foundations to tailor presentations and workshops for their specific needs. During my tenure, the number of local education foundations grew by 31% and over \$22 million was awarded to schools by their foundations since their formation.

In 2004 with both of my children now graduated from Ada High School and term-limits taking effect on our state Senator, I decided to run for the state Senate. After a long and tough campaign – primary, runoff and general – I won my seat making only one promise to voters: no one would work harder than I if elected.

Proudly, in 2008 I was re-elected without opposition. I have served as both the Chair of the Senate Education Committee and the Co-chair of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Education during my time in the Senate.

ENCOURAGED TO RUN

When Sandy Garrett announced last July that she would not seek a sixth term as our State Superintendent, many friends and colleagues began coming to me



“

... [T]his campaign is truly about the future of our children, the future of our public schools, and the future of our state.

– Sen. Susan Paddack, Democratic candidate for State Superintendent

”

asking me to run. I thought long and hard about this job and prayed about it for two months. Then, on Nov. 9, I announced that I would seek election as our next State Superintendent.

While you now know a little more about my experience, for me this campaign is truly about the future of our children, the future of our public schools, and the future of our state. If you are an educator, if you are a parent or a grandparent, and if you care about quality public education in Oklahoma, I ask you to become involved with our campaign.

Of the announced candidates for State Superintendent, I have the most lifetime experience in public education from various vantage points – in the classroom as a student, teacher and parent – and I understand the challenges we are facing.

I am optimistic about our future and about the quality of education that we can give our children. No one will work harder on their behalf.

You can learn more and sign up to help our campaign by visiting our website at www.VotePaddack.com.

Thank you for allowing the opportunity to respond.

– The author, an Ada Democrat, represents District 13 in the state Senate

Next Up For State's Bedroom Police? Viagra?

By Wanda Jo Stapleton

Dear Senator,
Would you please complete this Viagra Reporting Act because this should be a priority for the next session:

Public Health and Safety: Creating the Statistical Viagra Reporting Act

1) Have you needed the assistance of Viagra?

2) Was your need for Viagra a medical necessity?

3) Was your need for Viagra prescribed by a doctor?

4) Was your Viagra paid for by insurance?

If so, was the method of payment:

• A private insurance?

• A public health plan?

• Medicaid?

• Private pay?

• Other [specify]?

5) What was the date of your Viagra prescription?

6) County in which your prescription was issued?

7) Your age at date of prescription?

8) Your marital status at date of prescription?

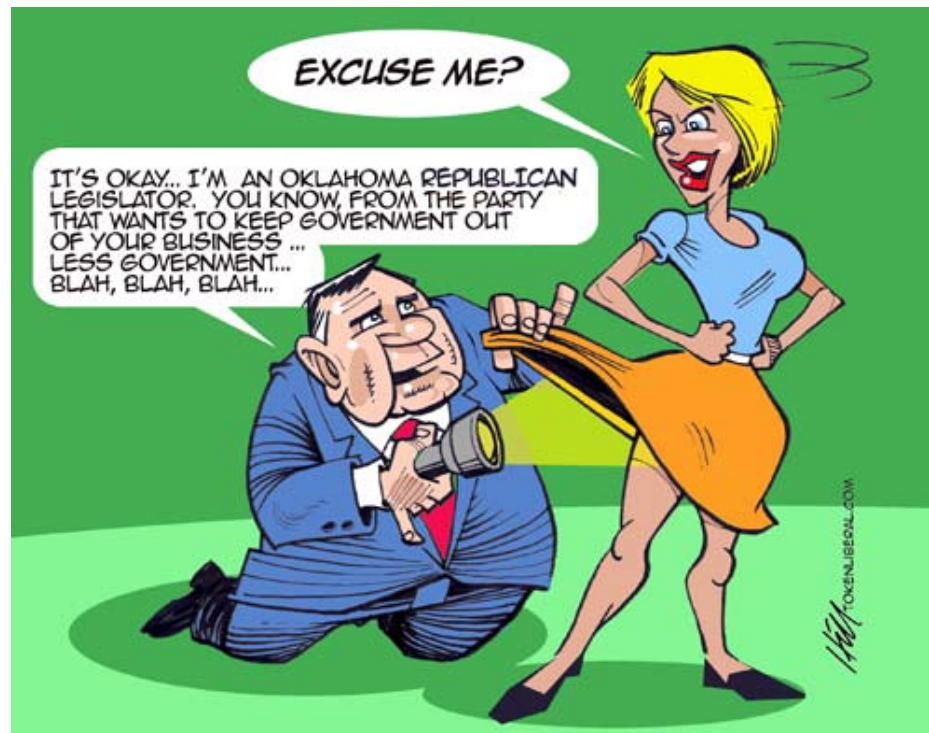
9) Your race?

10) Your years of education?

11) Your state or foreign country of residence?

12) Number of previous pregnancies which you fathered in which Viagra was the leading cause?

13) Number of live births influenced by Viagra?



— Steve Hill

14) You couldn't take responsibility for a live birth induced by Viagra because:

• You had other children or dependents?

• You could not afford the child?

• You were not married to the mother?

• You were a student or planning to be a student?

• You could not afford child care?

• You could not afford the basic needs of life?

• You were unemployed?

• You did not want to be a single father?

• You were having relationship problems with the mother?

• You were not certain with your relationship with the mother?

• You were not willing to marry the mother?

• You do not want people to know that you had sex with the mother?

• You do not feel mature enough to raise a/another child?

• Your sex partner wanted an abortion?

• There was a problem affecting the health of the fetus?

• Physical or emotional health of the mother was at risk?

• You wanted a child of a different sex?

• The pregnancy was the result of your committing incest?

• The pregnancy was the result of your committing forcible rape?

• Your rape or incest was not reported at the appropriate time?

15. Did your feeling of sexual inadequacy prompt you to legally control women's bodies by overturning the governor's veto of HB 3284, the Statistical Abortion Reporting Act?

Please complete and return this survey. You will not be individually identified. The data requested above will hopefully be reported on the Internet at only \$250,000 per year from state taxpayers. What a bargain!

Cordially,

Wanda Jo Stapleton

Oklahoma City

— The author is a former Democratic state representative living in south Oklahoma City

Anti-Choice, Woman-Hating Goes Mainstream

By Carol Joffe

"She consented in the murder of an unborn child. There are some situations where the mother may in fact die along with her child."

With this brief quote, the speaker, the Rev. John Ehrich, medical ethics director for the Diocese of Phoenix, deserves credit for achieving a twofer in a recently revived [if not formally declared] misogyny competition that is now sweeping the anti-choice world.

He is not only stating that a gravely ill woman [the mother of four children] should have been left to die, rather than being permitted an abortion; he is also explaining why Sister Mary Margaret McBride, the nun-administrator of a Catholic hospital who authorized the abortion [thereby saving the woman's life] deserves to be excommunicated.

This case, which has received wide coverage in RH Reality Check and other media, has predictably stunned many people, across the abortion divide.

MISINTERPRETED?

Some have pointed out that the Phoenix diocese misinterpreted Catholic health care directives, and that abortion is permissible under these rules when a woman's life is at stake.

Others have made the common sense observation that if the woman had died, not only would her four children remain motherless, but the 11-week old fetus would not have survived either.

Inevitably, some commented on the disparity between the nun's swift excommunication and the fact that none of the identified pedophile priests have received such punishment.

But while the Phoenix case may cause the most jaw-dropping, with its undisguised preference for a woman's death over an abortion, there are other recent instances that similarly suggest an upsurge of blatant woman-hating in the anti-abortion world.

NOTORIOUS UTAH LAW

Take the notorious Utah law passed earlier this year in response to the deeply sad case of a pregnant teenager who paid a stranger to beat her in the hope of inducing a miscarriage. [In spite of the severe beating that occurred, the pregnancy resulted in a live birth].

Outraged that the male in question received a jail sentence but that there was no legal mechanism with which to charge the teen, a Utah legislator pushed through legislation that criminalizes the seeking of an illegal abortion, and which many observers believe has the practical effect of making all miscarriages in the state theoretically suspect.

Had this law been in effect at the time of the incident described above, and had

A Catholic archbishop decries the "hasty" excommunication of the doctors for, and mother of, a 9-year-old Brazilian girl who underwent an abortion after being impregnated by her step-father.

— Page 17

the fetus not survived, the desperate young woman could have received 15 years to life.

NOBODY ASKED HER

As the untroubled sponsor of the bill told a reporter, the young woman "has to face the consequences of her barbaric actions." No one stopped to ask under what conditions she had gotten pregnant nor why she took such drastic measures.

Then there are the mandatory ultrasound laws. These are occurring in a number of state legislatures, but nowhere to date with such viciousness as the one recently passed in Oklahoma.

There the new law stipulates that one hour before her abortion, the patient must receive an ultrasound, with the monitor positioned so that she can see it, and the doctor must point to and describe the heart, limbs and organs of the fetus. There are no exceptions for victims of rape or incest.

The current Supreme Court has also shown an unprecedented and disturbing hostility to women with respect to abortion. In its most recent decision on the subject, the 2007 *Gonzales v. Carhart* case which upheld a ban on a certain abortion technique [intact dilation and extraction, or so-called "partial birth abortion"], the Court, shockingly, for the first time upheld an abortion restriction which did not allow any exception for a woman's health.

ANYTHING NEW?

Do these examples of misogyny represent anything new? To be sure, in some extremist anti-choice circles, full throated woman-hating never went away. [See, for example, the video from several years ago of Flip Benham screeching at women entering a North Carolina clinic that "Satan will drink the blood of your child!"]

But in other, more mainstream quarters of the movement, the heated, and hateful rhetoric of the period immediately after *Roe* — where women seeking abortion were routinely called "sluts" and "baby killers" — gradually became replaced by a new frame: abortion hurts women.

Given that by the early 1980s, about 40% of American women were estimated

See MISOGYNY Page 9

PUBLIC FORUM

Poor Gaza? Wealthy In Natural Gas

By Bob Nichols

Everybody knows Israel does not possess any oil and gas. Right? Right.

As the legendary former Prime Minister of Israel, Golda Meir, stated, "Let me tell you something that we Israelis have against Moses. He took us 40 years through the desert in order to bring us to the one spot in the Middle East that has no oil!"

The Israeli Defense Forces [IDF] and the Israeli government are going to extreme lengths to prevent these Freedom Flotillas from getting directly to the Gaza shore. Why? Are the Israelis trying to hide something?

The political leaders in Gaza are using unyielding military discipline and truly have nothing left to lose; or do they?

As a result of this huge contrast, the common people of Gaza die like flies before a rigid, unflinching onslaught of U.S.-supplied F16s, bunker buster missiles, GBU-39 smart bombs, Israeli main battle tanks and small arms fire.

Why the slaughter of ready and willing to die, dirt poor Palestinians?

It appears the Freedom Flotilla sailing to Gaza would go through a thicket of off-shore oil and gas rigs and wells. The wells are sucking an estimated minimum of \$6 billion [U.S. dollars] of Palestinian off-shore natural gas through rigs set up for slant drilling.

The drilling consultant on the hidden project is the former Noble Drilling Co. of Ardmore, Oklahoma, USA, experts in "oil field management." They are also allegedly experts in illegal slant drilling techniques Noble pioneered in the early Oklahoma oil fields back in the day.

Slant drilling is the best way to steal your neighbors' oil and gas.

So much so that the formerly oil and gas poor Israel of Prime Minister Golda



– Peter Eyre, *The Palestine Telegraph*, 9.8.09, 14:29 EDT

Meir is now floating the idea of natural gas exports to the European Union [EU] of presumably Palestinian Natural Gas.

Future Freedom Flotillas are said to specifically have escorts from the Turkish Navy. The Turkish Air Force version of the American F-16 Fighting Falcons were not mentioned. The Turkish Navy protection is symbolic and problematic without the Turkish F-16s. Will the Turkish government commit their 200 plus F-16s?

Small world, eh? Greed and force of arms count. Always have. Always will.

– The author is a Project Censored Award winner, a correspondent for the *San Francisco Bay View* newspaper and a frequent contributor to various online publications. He reports on war, politics and the two nuclear weapons labs in the Bay Area and is writing a book based on 20 years of nuclear war in Central Asia. He is a former employee of an Army Ammunition Plant in eastern Oklahoma. Nichols may be reached at duweapons@gmail.com

World Domination Or Domestic Resiliency?

By James Nimmo

By the merest happenstance, pure coincidence, being in the right place at the right time, I've run across a very good and straight-forward DVD from Canada, *Fatherhood Dreams*, that follows three gay families who have chosen to raise children.

Canada is the second largest country in North America, a parliamentary democracy and the only one that recognizes same-gender marriage throughout the country, not just in five of its states like the United States, or one city like Mexico.

The DVD follows some family scenes among three groups of gay and lesbian parents with both biological and adoptive children. The details of government support are hinted at but not detailed. You can read about how a strong government program, called Employment Insurance [EI] supports its citizens without regard to sexual orientation or religious belief by going to this Service Canada link, <http://tinyurl.com/2g5mv2q>.

Randy and Drew, married under Canadian law, adopt a baby boy from a woman whose family has a history early teen pregnancy through three generations. In this case, the adoptive and biological parents have agreed to stay in contact.

Early in his life, Stephen, a patent attorney in British Columbia, married a woman who knew of his gay orientation. He fathered a child with her. Later, the birth mother acknowledged her lesbian orientation and began a domestic relationship with another woman, who herself had a child by artificial insemination. The three share parenting duties and at the time of filming Stephen and wife were discussing the pros and cons of divorcing in order to insure the best custody situation for the two children.

Third, but not the least, is the example of Scott, a single gay man with a strong need for parenting, who through surrogacy, has not only the one child he was thinking of, but twins, boy and girl. Interviews with the surrogate mother are included in the 55-minute DVD.

The DVD extras include two additional stories of gay men and the acceptance and discrimination faced by those who are gay and feel the need for parenting. There's also a seven-minute Q & A session with some of the principles and the director of the film.

Though parenting is not on my life list of things to do before I die I found this DVD expanding and challenging to my civil rights activism.

It isn't enough to just be comfortable about what I find necessary in my situation, it's also important to know there are many avenues to a productive life that advance peace and happiness for others.

I don't want to fall in the trap of thinking the grass is greener on the other side of the border by comparing this legal recognition of same-gender marriage in Canada to the religiously-dominated repression that has so entrapped the United States of America with its constant boasting of liberty and freedom. But one has to consider what is important for the livelihood and welfare of a country: dominating the world economically and militarily, or maintaining a strong domestic resiliency that promotes personal fulfillment without creating divisive class discrimination.

Fatherhood Dreams is available through DVD rental and at public libraries. The website is <http://fatherhooddreams.com/>.

– The author lives in Oklahoma City

MISOGYNY

From Page 8

to have an abortion during their reproductive years [the number now is about 33%], arguably such hate speech was counterproductive for the opponents of abortion: too many Americans either themselves had had an abortion or knew someone who did.

Thus, antiabortion rhetoric shifted to professed sympathy for women, and abortion providers – those doing the hurting – became the main objects of demonization.

RESTRICTIONS ARE CHANGING

The nature of laws restricting abortions has also undergone changes in the recent past, reflecting a heightened mean-spiritedness. While all such laws have as their goal the objective of making the procedure more difficult to obtain, earlier laws – for example, the waiting periods, or the TRAP laws governing minute, arguably irrelevant physical features of freestanding clinics – these measures did not have quite the same blatant cruelty as current measures do, given the mandates to force a woman to hear a description of her ultrasound or to be told terrifying lies about supposed links between abortion and breast cancer, suicide and infertility, as is required in a number of states.

Why has this increase in undisguised misogyny occurred? Certainly part of the answer is the election of Barack Obama. Like other sectors of the rightwing,

the anti-choice movement has been both enraged and energized by the Obama presidency.

There not only has been a change in rhetoric and in the quantity and quality of abortion legislation since the 2008 election, but also an upsurge in aggression and violence at the site of clinics themselves [though most of this violence to date has been directed at providers, rather than patients, as we saw with the tragic murder of Dr. George Tiller one year ago].

Another explanation lies in the considerable success the anti-choice movement has had in stigmatizing abortion, and therefore those who both receive abortions and provide them.

As the overall number of abortion patients drop, and as poor women of color disproportionately comprise the population of abortion patients, it has become far easier for mainstream actors in the anti-choice movement to see a split world, in which good women do the "right thing" when faced with an unwanted pregnancy and bad women don't.

This deeply stigmatized view of abortion recipients enables the "respectable" opponents of abortion – the legislators, the Church officials and so on – to go a rhetorical place where their extremist colleagues have always been.

– The author teaches at the University of California

BOOKS

Alter's Tale Of Obama's First Year Fascinating

By Tim Rutten

THE PROMISE

President Obama, Year One

By Jonathan Alter
Simon and Schuster
480 pages, \$20

Instant histories of presidential administrations based on privileged access to White House insiders have become so de rigueur that vetting the appropriate journalist/historian really ought to be part of every new chief executive's transition process.

The author needs to be discreet enough to abide by the rules of high-level access and sympathetic enough to be open to the administration's explanation of things, but sufficiently independent to produce a credible book. Barack Obama's decision to open the White House to Jonathan Alter meets all three criteria, and in *The Promise: President Obama, Year One*, the longtime Newsweek columnist has produced a deeply reported, soberly appraised account of the president's tumultuous first months in office through passage of healthcare reform.

Alter, a Chicago native, has known Obama since his days as a state senator and unsuccessful congressional candidate. He's sympathetic to the president's goals, casts a cold eye on his most vociferous political antagonists and is independent enough to criticize the administration's – and the chief executive's – shortcomings.

RICH IN DETAIL

As one would expect from a reporter of Alter's experience, the book is rich in the kinds of insider detail that make for an entertaining, as well as informative, reading experience.

Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, for example, is so trusted an advisor that his White House nickname is "Yoda," while economic advisor Lawrence H. Summers' outlook is so often grim he's known in the Oval Office as "Kevorkian."

There's also fascinating note taken of books read by officials in the administration and in the Pentagon and how these influenced them at crucial junctures.

As the author of a fine history of Franklin D. Roosevelt's first 100 days [that Obama admires], Alter brings an extremely useful perspective to this administration, which he believes inherited a breadth of crisis unparalleled since the 1930s.

In a fireside interview near the end of 2009, Obama told Alter, "This is not a normal presidential situation that I find myself in. I mean, we have the most difficult set of challenges facing the country since the Great Depression. And that's not hyperbole — it's subject to objective proof."

FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE

Alter credits Obama's economic recovery plan for far greater success than is generally conceded, arguing that it rescued the country from the brink of depression, but fell short when it came to job creation and aiding distressed homeowners. He also argues that passage of the healthcare reform measure has earned Obama a place alongside FDR and Lyndon B. Johnson while conceding that the program's real impact may be years away.

By Alter's account, the president chose to pursue that reform almost alone and against the strongest advice of his closest advisors.

The author convincingly faults the president, however, for his general failure to communicate his often subtle policy views to the American people, a surprising fault in the greatest White House orator since Ronald Reagan. Alter credits Obama with a dramatic, decisive assertion of civilian authority over the military that has gone largely – and unjustly – unnoticed.

When Obama forced a change of military commanders in Afghanistan, he also enforced a pause in nonessential operations while he convened what Alter calls the most intense, extended series of White House national security deliberations since the Cuban missile crisis.

ASSERTIVE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

As the process unwound, the president and his chief aides became increasingly angry over leaks from the Pentagon that they thought were designed to push the president into agreement with the military's leaders. The White House also became convinced that the Joint Chiefs' chairman, Adm. Michael G. Mullen – the son of Bob Hope's onetime Hollywood publicist – and his equally media-savvy ally, Gen. David H. Petraeus, were using the naive commander on the ground, Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, as a political stalking horse.

After sitting down alone with McChrystal, Obama came away even more convinced that he was a good commander being used by his superiors. The result was what Alter calls "a presidential dressing down unlike any in more than half a century."

"In the first week of October, Gates and Mullen were summoned to the Oval Office, where the president told them he was 'exceedingly unhappy' with the Pentagon's conduct. He said the leaks and positioning in advance of a decision were 'disrespectful of the process' and 'damaging to the men and women in uniform and to the country.' In a cold fury Obama said he wanted to know 'here and now' if the Pentagon would be on board with any presidential decision and could faithfully implement it.

"'This was a cold and bracing meeting,' said an official in the room."

It also was a highly effective one. Gates pledged his conduct would change – "and it did." Mullen and the rest of the generals "'swore loyalty,' said one senior civilian official. 'And we chose to believe them.'"

This wasn't the only time when the supremely controlled – rather icy – chief executive surrendered to justifiable [by Alter's account] anger. When public rage mounted over Wall Street executives' post-bailout bonuses, Obama became impatient with the defense that the payments were necessary to hold key people in place.

"Obama later told a friend that the angriest he got as president in his first year was when he heard [CEO Lloyd] Blankfein" justify his compensation by saying "that Goldman [Sachs] was never in danger of collapse. That was flatly untrue," Obama said.

The Promise is the sort of solidly reported book that will provide readers with a full measure of instructive color to events that even those who closely follow the news think they know. There's a great deal of interesting, if less significant detail, including where the president goes to sneak the odd cigarette and, more important, relations with and between various members of his administration.

In his introductory chapters, Alter is modest about his abilities to discern the ultimate significance of the events he has reconstructed. Still, when it comes to what we've all come to call the first draft of history, *The Promise* is more polished – and far more thoughtful – than most. For those attempting to get a fix on the character of a fascinating but strangely elusive chief executive, it's essential reading.

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All I Want Is The Truth ...

By Steve Blow

Max in Richardson probably wishes he had never mailed me. I had the gall to ask a question.

A few days ago Max forwarded me and 39 others an item about how President Barack Obama was irked with U.S. military veterans.

It said Obama wanted veterans to carry private health insurance to cover service-related injuries, but that opposition forced him to scrap the idea.

The e-mail said: The President admitted that he was puzzled by the magnitude of the opposition to his proposal.

"Look, it's an all-volunteer force," Obama complained. "Nobody made these guys go to war. They had to have known and accepted the risks. Now they whine about bearing the costs of their choice? It doesn't compute ... "I thought these were people who were proud to sacrifice for their country," Obama continued. "I guess I underestimated the selfishness of some of my fellow Americans."

The e-mail cites the quotes as proof that Obama is "the worst president in American-history" and urges readers to "pass this on to everyone."

I wrote back to Max and asked for the source of the quotes.

"I wish I could," he replied. "This was an e-mail that came to me, and I forwarded it. I have heard or read these comments before, but I don't know the source."

A few minutes later he e-mailed me again. "My memory is not infallible," he wrote, "but I seem to remember hearing these quotes on Channel 8 or Channel 4 news."



No, he didn't.

It took me about 60 seconds on the Internet to discover that the president never said those outrageous things.

Of course not.

The made-up quotes come from a satirical column written to ridicule the president.

But now they get passed around as fact. And I sigh once again over our low regard for truth these days.

A few days before Max's e-mail, I got a similar one. Seems like this

guy's name was Pete.

He forwarded a popular e-mail making the rounds and asked why the media never reports such things.

That was easy.

"Because it's not true," I replied.

This one had to do with Michelle Obama supposedly ordering champagne and caviar from room service at the Waldorf-Astoria. It even includes a copy of the signed bill.

But it's all bogus. Ms. Obama wasn't even in New York at the time.

I attached a link to a Web site with

more information about the hoax. Pete wrote back: "No, not that. The other."

I scrolled further down his original e-mail and found the one about Ms. Obama supposedly having a far larger staff than any previous first lady.

Not true either. Her staff may be slightly larger, but it's right in line with that of Laura Bush and other predecessors.

The Internet is a wonderful thing. It spreads information like never before.

But it spreads lies just as quickly.

Do we care? Or do we care more about smearing our political enemies?

Neither Pete nor Max showed any hint of regret about spreading false information.

This isn't partisan concern. I'd say the same if this was circulating about a Republican in the White House. And, no, the jabs at former President George W. Bush never reached this level.

It's so easy to determine if a circulating e-mail is true or false. Go to www.snopes.com or www.factcheck.org. Or just type a few key words into Google.

Please resolve to do that before forwarding anything. If you can't confirm it, don't send it.

Our editorial pages embarked on a campaign last week to bring more civility into public discourse.

That's nice.

But right now I'd settle for more truth.

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Beware The Dangers Of An 'Angry' Electorate

By Harry T. Cook

The Prime Minister of France, Émile Combes, in 1903 called the Catholic Church's fulminations over the Dreyfus affair an "unwarrantable interference in the civil and political domain."

Catholic monarchists opposed to the secular republicans found a rallying point in their persecution of Alfred Dreyfus, a Jew serving in the French military who had been falsely accused of treason. They stoked up an anger that did not lessen even upon Dreyfus' eventual vindication that came after six years of solitary confinement in the penal colony on Devil's Island off the coast of French Guiana.

France's inbred anti-Semitic anger would come to a boil again in the 1930s and '40s with the Vichy regime's capitulation to Hitler and his Nazi thugs.

It may seem like a long way and a long time from turn-of-the-century France and the Dreyfus affair to the end of the first decade of the 21st Century in America, but the parallels appear more obvious and more disturbing every day.

MEDIA STORY LINE: THE ANGRY VOTER

The media have created "the angry voter." Just go ahead and count how many times in an edition of a newspaper or news magazine that the adjective "angry" is applied to the mythical voter who is supposedly turning everything upside down with the rejection of incumbents. It is said, moreover, that "the angry voter" will be the deciding factor in November's bi-election.

This media creation is said to be angry about "big government" at the same time that the government is expected to deliver Social Security checks on time and make Medicare ever better - but not by raising taxes. The "angry voter" lauds Rand Paul for speaking out against the 1964 Civil Rights Act and its prohibition of race-based discrimination. Why?

Because the ill-mannered bullies of talk radio and the blogosphere have made boorishness acceptable in the same way Hitler made his Big Lie believable: by incessant repetition.

Let's look at how "the angry" in several historic instances have given truth alarmingly short shrift and in the process brought on suffering and disaster, some times for an individual, sometimes for a whole nation and once for the entire world.

ANGER DROVE OUTRAGE

We can begin with the travails of Dreyfus, who for the convenience of French

monarchists was tried and convicted in a process with which even the John G. Roberts court might find fault. Many who joined in the demonization of Dreyfus were angry, but not at Dreyfus, rather at the looming end of a Catholic, traditionalist society and the advance of a secular republic. To focus that otherwise inchoate anger upon a framed Jew did the trick. It was torture for Dreyfus and his family, and it took years for him to clear his name and return to society.

True, Dreyfus was redeemed, but it would not be but a generation until Jews on a whole continent would be branded undesirable garbage deserving only of imprisonment, torture and death. Anger drove that monumental outrage.

Germany had been impoverished by the strict terms of the Versailles Treaty. The Weimar Republic was a joke, and the Great Depression served to compound the nation's economic woes. Adolf Hitler emerged, an angry man himself, to personify and ignite the nation's ire. The result: some six millions of Jews were herded into cattle cars, concentration camps, the gas chambers and finally the crematoria - all with the complicity of millions of Germans.

PROHIBITION THEN, TEA PARTY NOW

Beginning in mid-19th Century America, a movement that ended up giving the nation 12 years of Prohibition was getting under way. With flames fanned by Frances Willard and Carrie Nation, the Anti-Saloon League convinced white Protestant bigots that when the Irish and other immigrants [chiefly Italian and Polish] and Negroes consumed beer or liquor they became a mortal danger to white womanhood and the general peace and welfare of the nation.

The Anti-Saloon League created fear and anger where there had been not a lot of either, thus setting in motion the Great Experiment that gave us the murderous Al Capone and such horrors as the Valentine's Day Massacre.

Now comes the Tea Party seething with anger. Anger over what? The Party spokesfreaks say it is over taxes and the alleged expansion of a government that should be smaller or just plain small. The partiers are said to be angry, furthermore, that the electorate of which they are a part has returned to office too many incumbents who, it is alleged, do not share their opinions and desires. The partiers are said to be angry about "the immigrant problem" without the slightest knowledge of what kind of problem it is, if it is a problem.

See ANGER Page 13

Coburn & Paul

Why Doctors Make Craziest Politicians

By Kent Sepkowitz

What do the Sen. Tom Coburn and almost-Senator Rand Paul have in common? I mean, in addition to being cranky white guys who won't shut up.

They're both doctors. The medical profession, once known for attracting the intellectually curious, the save-the-world dreamers, or at least those who could kill a standardized test, has now become a magnet for a special type of political uber-nut: the doctor senator, a confusing amalgam of an infantile selfishness, Marlboro man frontier integrity, and the crude insensitivity that masquerades as straight talk.

As a doctor, this is painful to watch. And for me, it's even worse. Tom C. [class of 1983] and I [class of 1980] share something important: We are both graduates of the University of Oklahoma College of Medicine [though only I am a true Okie: Dr. Tom, born in Wyoming, is just trying to pass].

Coburn was three years behind me at OU and I never once saw him or heard of him till he began running for Congress by driving his truck along rural roads around Muskogee. But in our post-Richard Blumenthal world, let the record state clearly that my dear friend Tom and I attended medical school together.

In the history of the Senate, 51 doctors have served [including President William Henry Harrison, who never practiced medicine or, for that matter, the presidency, as he caught pneumonia and died soon after his inauguration].

Most served in the 19th Century. In fact, since World War II, besides Coburn and John Barrasso of Wyoming, only two other physicians have sat in the upper chamber: William Frist, the [lousy] Senate Majority Leader in the Bush Junior days, and Ernest Gruening, a New Yorker educated at Harvard who became a journalist rather than a practicing doctor.

HOWARD DEAN AN EXCEPTION

Just a few other doctors have played well in the larger political sphere; Howard Dean comes to mind.

Tom and Rand will change all of that – and not just by swelling the numbers. They also would become the most extreme duo in the recent history of the U.S. Senate, a place that already has its share of flat-earthers and Jefferson Davis revisionists.

Next to them, their physician-mate, Barrasso, a conservative orthopedist currently representing Wyoming, seems of standard Republican cloth-coat issue – small government, lower taxes, sanctity of life, blah blah. Reagan redux with a yawn.

Why oh why is my profession so oddly represented in Washington? We are probably not that much worse than any other group in our socioeconomically matched demographic, are we?

There are among us lefties and righties, whack-jobs and dullards just like the citizens across this great and glorious land of ours. So what gives?

A FEW THEORIES

I have a few theories. First, doctors get to hear themselves talk. A lot. Yes, I know we are supposed to be good listeners, but please – patients want to hear what we have to say.

Unlike, say, your lawyer or your accountant, where you kind of nod out and hope nothing important is being said, with a doctor you tend to hang on the words – at least if you're seeing us with a specific problem. As such, we are given a bully pulpit every day to make pronouncements and recommendations. People write down what we say; they call and tell their friends about the visit, "Well, I saw the doctor and he said ..."

Such a zealous fan base can go to a guy's head. We start to think that, unlike most everyone else, we actually have something to say. And what's the difference between treating a malady of the digestive system and treating a malady of the U.S. tax code? Besides everything, that is.

Doctors also possess a native sobriety – if not dullness – that seems flat-out senatorial at times. We are a profession of solid but never snappy dressers who wear nice but not too nice shoes. The abstemious face, the dry mechanical hand-



shake, the steady gaze, the uninflected tone: These are the markings of a good doctor – or of Senator Bigwig.

WHAT DOCTORS DEAL WITH

But I suspect the most compelling reason is this: Doctors more than just about anyone else deal endlessly with the regulatory aspect of government.

For us, every day is April 15. We are awash with forms: Entire cottage industries have appeared to deal with both the forms and the regulation to assure compliance with the forms. It is the coin of our realm and has been since Medicare and Medicaid were hatched.

Most of us can stand it most days; it is a major pain, an annoyance, a waste of time, etc. – but not more.

For a few people, however, Tom and Rand among them, it appears to represent a systematic threat to manhood, one that, my fellow Americans, cannot, should not, and must not be tolerated.

Articulating their aversion to filling out forms has become their *raison d'être*, proof and justification of their worldview. Articulating their aversion to filling out forms has become the proof and justification of their worldview, the perfect example of the clumsiness and inevitable inefficiency of health care [and all government].

And in response we hear the sustained adolescent shriek YOU CANT MAKE ME CLEAN MY ROOM that is the heart and soul of the libertarian movement – the thing that gives it its visceral appeal as well as its high-voltage, seemingly infinite energy.

The problem is that the hard-core libertarians too often go off the deep end: Theodore Kaczynski and Timothy McVeigh, anyone? That's where Rand and Tom come in. They're doctors – they can't be that crazy, right?

SONS OF SUCCESSFUL DADS

With the doctor duo, you get both the primal tantrum but also the smug confidence of privilege: Both men are the well-educated scions of successful dads.

Tom and Rand are not hardscrabble hard-luckers, though that is the brand they are selling – and being from Muskogee, Oklahoma, and Bowling Green, Kentucky, certainly helps.

As they advance their radical politics, they bring not just the suave calmness of a doctor at the bedside but also its implicit social standing: For despite appearances, they are not countrifying the libertarian movement, but rather country club-ifying it. Now that's a trick their senatorial colleagues can truly understand.

– Dr. Kent Sepkowitz is an infectious disease specialist in New York City. He has contributed to *The New York Times*, *Slate*, and, oh-so-briefly, *O Magazine*. He also writes academic medical articles that are at times pretty tough sledding.

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DEAR DAD: THERE ARE SOME THINGS WORSE ...

A father passing by his son's bedroom was astonished to see that his bed was nicely made and everything was picked up. Then he saw an envelope, propped up prominently on the pillow that was addressed to "Dad."

With the worst premonition he opened the envelope with trembling hands and read the letter:

Dear Dad:

It is with great regret and sorrow that I'm writing you. I had to elope with my new girlfriend because I wanted to avoid a scene with Mom and you ...

I have been finding real passion with Gina and she is so nice. But I knew you would not approve of her because of all her piercing, tattoos, tight motorcycle clothes and the fact that she is much older than I am. But it's not only the passion ...

Dad she's pregnant. Gina said that we will be very happy. She owns a trailer in the woods and has a stack of firewood for the whole winter. We share a

dream of having many more children. Gina has opened my eyes to the fact that marijuana doesn't really hurt anyone.

We'll be growing it for ourselves and trading it with the other people that live nearby for cocaine and ecstasy. In the meantime we will pray that science will find a cure for AIDS so Gina can get better. She deserves it.

Don't worry Dad. I'm 15 and I know how to take care of myself. Someday I'm sure that we will be back to visit so that you can get to know your grandchildren.

Love,

Your Son John

P.S. Dad, none of the above is true. I'm over at Tommy's house. I just wanted to remind you that there are worse things in life than a Report card ... That's in my center desk drawer ... I love you. Call me when it's safe to come home.

A Fair Tax System Requires Taxing Rich

By Arthur G. Broadhurst

The sense of entitlement by the wealthy never ceases to amaze me. The wealthy are no smarter, nor do they work harder, than anyone else in society [and for those that think so, I can point to examples of wealthy and poor who are dumber than rocks and who don't work hard].

The continued right wing claim that a robber baron whose company purchased another with borrowed funds, fired a bunch of people to show "profit" at the end of the quarter, then bankrupted both companies by strategic errors is "smarter" or that he "worked harder" than other people and therefore deserves his \$100 million bonus is so blinded by ideology that he cannot see the facts.

So here is a fact, from the IRS, about the super wealthy – they paid an effective tax rate of 16.6% on their average income of \$344.8 million, a tax rate slightly lower than my tax rate, because of loopholes, capital gains and other tax gimmicks that favor the wealthy.

ANOTHER FUN FACT

Here's another fun fact about how the tax system transfers wealth from lower income people to the wealthy – Social Security tax is paid on wage income up to \$106,000 at a rate of 7.65%.

An individual making \$50,000 per year has \$3,825 taken out of his wages. An individual making \$2.5 million has \$8,109 taken out of his wages, for a net tax rate of .00325%. The lower paid person pays a rate 2,354 times HIGHER than the millionaire.

All the screaming by the wealthy that they pay too much is to disguise the fact that they pay too little and benefit from a tax code that is riddled with special favors and tax breaks for the wealthy that the rest of us do not.

If we really want to fix the structural deficit and our national debt we could start by removing all those tax breaks for the wealthy and for corporations from the tax code so that they pay their fair share.

We have all heard the protest of the "Tea Party" movement that taxes are too high, but the facts seem to suggest otherwise. The objective of the tax cutting movement is to lower the "marginal" income tax rates to benefit the wealthiest Americans and the essence of the argument supporting lower marginal income tax is "fairness" and the tactic is a proposed "flat tax" that everyone would pay at the same rate that would have the added benefit of simplifying the tax code.

FAIRNESS COMPLICATED

The question of "fairness" is a complicated one and could be answered in different ways depending on what values and assumptions are considered, but regardless the practical effect of lowering taxes on the wealthy inevitably involves shifting more of the burden onto the middle class and the poor.

Tax Would Favor Wealthiest Americans

President Bush's massive tax cuts for the rich included a provision that repealed the estate tax in 2010. Though the tax is slated to spring back to the 2001 rate in 2011, the House passed a bill late last year to re-establish the tax at the reduced 2009 level.

Under this rate, estates worth less than \$3.5 million pay no taxes at all, while larger estates pay 45% of anything above that threshold.

As a bill to reinstate the tax is negotiated in the Senate, some senators have been pushing to cut this tax on multi-millionaires even lower to 35%, while raising the exemption to \$5 million. Iowa's Republican Sen. Chuck Grassley has signed onto the plan, thus coming out in support of what could be an enormous tax break for his own family.

Grassley's net worth is between \$2.1 and \$5.2 million, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, so his entire estate could be exempted under a \$5 million exemption.

Moreover, Grassley's proposed tax cut would affect few families other than his own. If the 2009 rate were made permanent, 99.8% of estates would owe no tax

ROSE

From Page 5

She concluded her speech by courageously singing "The Rose."

She challenged each of us to study the lyrics and live them out in our daily lives. At the year's end, Rose finished the college degree she had begun all those months ago.

One week after graduation Rose died peacefully in her sleep.

Over 2,000 college students attended her funeral in tribute to the wonderful woman who taught by example that it's never too late to be all you can possibly be.

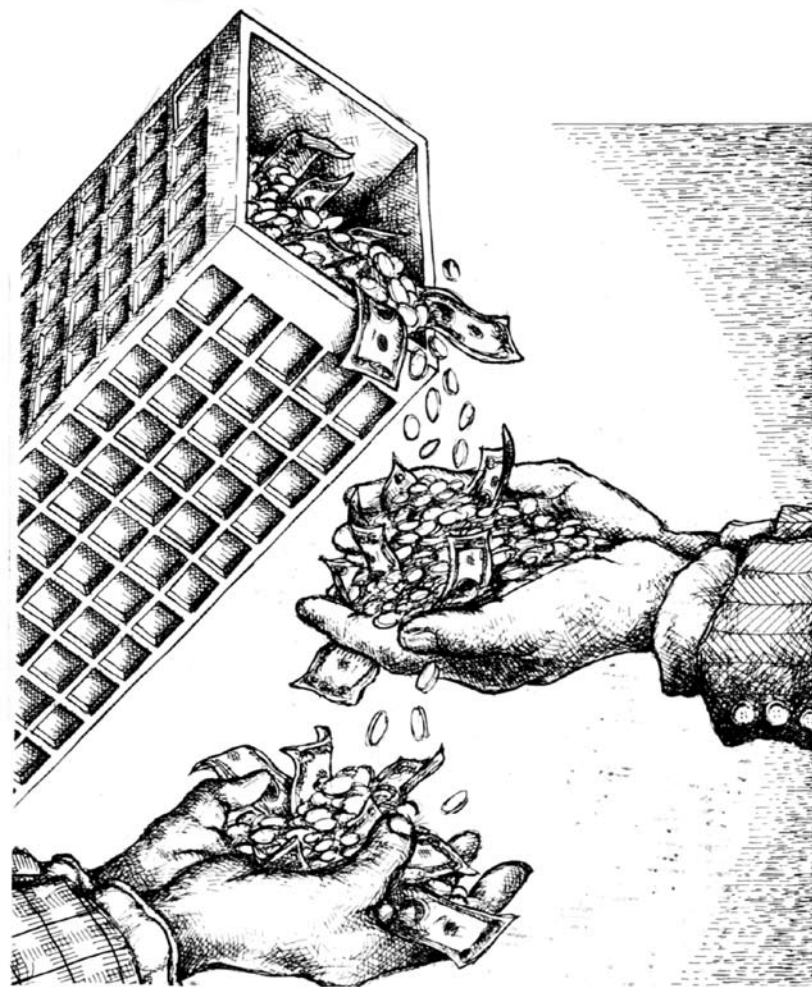
When you finish reading this, please send this peaceful word of advice to your friends and family, they'll really enjoy it!

These words have been passed along in loving memory of Rose.

Remember, growing older is mandatory. Growing up is optional. We make a Living by what we get. We make a Life by what we give.

God promises a safe landing, not a calm passage. If God brings you to it, He will bring you through it.

"Good friends are like stars ...You don't always see them, but you know they are always there."



It is reasonable to argue that "fairness" of the tax burden means fairness in terms of ability to pay and that those who are wealthy have profited more from society and should pay more for its support.

It is also obvious that requiring a wage earner with a middle class income to pay 10% of their income as tax, which cuts into the amounts required for food, clothing and shelter, creates a much greater burden on the middle class than 10% tax on the income of a millionaire creates on the lifestyle of the wealthy.

Contrary to the argument made by the wealthy, lowering taxes on the wealthy and shifting the burden onto the middle class involves a wealth transfer [redistribution of wealth] from the lower and middle class to the wealthy, and that cannot be fair in any reasonable sense of what "fairness" means.

It's time to end the entitlements for the wealthiest American taxpayers that are built into our archaic tax code.

– The author is writer/editor of *The Christian Humanist*, based in Vero Beach, FL. He is a graduate of the University of Richmond and Colgate Rochester Divinity School.

at all.

If these levels were made permanent, the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities points out that "only 3% of taxes owed" would be from estates that are, like Grassley's, worth less than \$5 million.

The vast majority of current estate tax revenue comes from the "extremely wealthy," with 62.5% of revenue coming from estates worth more than \$20 million.

Beyond this, the cut would cost \$60 billion to \$80 billion in lost revenue, which would have to be offset with spending cuts or other tax increases. As the *Wonk Room's* Pat Garofalo has noted, it's a huge waste to spend as much as \$80 billion in order to help the wealthiest .2% of households while we have soaring deficits and high unemployment.

ANGER

From Page 11

Rand Paul, the Republican nominee for the U.S. Senate in Kentucky, in his assault on the Civil Rights Act of 1964, demonstrated what he and his fellow Tea Partiers are really angry about. They're angry that a relatively young and incandescently intelligent man with Negroid features, Arabic first and middle names and an African last name was elected President.

I implore the print and electronic press of this country to stop generalizing about "the angry voter" and to call to account those of their profession who persist in doing so. I implore the press not to give "unwarrantable" attention to their counterparts in talk radio whose sworn duty seems to be to incite and encourage anger when what is needed is calm, cool and informed thinking about what is happening.

Émile Combes was right to ask the Catholic monarchists to cease and desist from "unwarrantable interference" that drove the banshees of anger and ignorance.

The "angry voter" of American in 2010 is to be compared to a three-year-old prone on the floor kicking, screaming and pounding his fists into the carpet. When attention is paid him, he will kick and scream and pound all the more. Such a voter should be ignored and maybe he will shut up and find something useful to occupy his time. His tantrum is an "unwarrantable interference in the civic and political domain."

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

Myth Of Low Military Pay Is Debunked

By Carlton Meyer

One great myth in American society is that military personnel are poorly paid. That was true until the 1980s, when a push to improve recruit quality boosted military pay each year at twice the inflation rate.

The military was once known for low pay yet great retirement, but now has great pay as well. This fact is hidden from the public with absurd propaganda from military associations about the need to boost pay, and fear in the Pentagon that if Congress catches on, the days of big pay raises may end.

For example, inflation was flat last year and Social Security recipients received no increase for 2010. However, military personnel just got a 3.2% pay increase, while civilian wages fell 1.6% last year.

Some Congress members worry the U.S. will go bankrupt unless it cuts spending, so why the pay boost? First, it's a form of vote buying. Second, federal civilian pay increases follow military pay increases. Congressional staffers and everyone inside the beltway benefit, so they profit from this deception.

CHECK THE FIGURES

Look at what the average 20-year-old American earns. The latest data is from the third quarter of 2009, which shows Americans ages 16-24 on average earn \$429 a week, or times 52 equals \$22,308 a year. The DOD has a simple online pay calculator. The average age for a recruit is 19, so the typical pay for a 20-year-old sailor is E-2 equaling \$37,637 a year.

If he has a wife and two kids, it's \$41,021, nearly twice as much as he could make in the private sector! This does not include special pays and bonuses.

If someone joins the military rather than going to college, after four years he will be at least an E-4, and, with a wife and two kids, make \$48,180 a year!

This more than college graduates and at least \$14,000 more than the average salary of any other occupation in the U.S. where most workers have decades of experience and seniority.

Finally, it is very rare to find subsidized childcare, free gyms and tax-free shopping in the civilian world.

HOURS MAKE LITTLE DIFFERENCE

It is true that many military people work more than 40 hours a week, yet so do many civilians. There are many service members who work less than 40 hours a week, and some work less than 20 if you discount the hours at "work" they spend surfing the web, exercising in the gym, getting a haircut or playing softball.

Military personnel receive 30 days paid vacation, enjoy 12 paid federal holidays, several extra days off as part of "long weekends," unlimited sick leave, plus the common practice of going home soon after lunch on Fridays. In contrast, American workers average just 13 paid days off, and around 40% of Americans never get a paid day off and have no benefits such as health care.

Yes, many servicemen endure stressful occupation duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, which is why combat pay should be boosted. However, most career service members rarely spend time in combat zones, and they usually enjoy the adventure and the extra pay involved.

Keep in mind that Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard personnel are paid the same as soldiers and marines, and if deployed into a combat zone, it is normally very safe and comfortable duty aboard a ship or a large base.

CAREER ENLISTED PAY

Career enlisted men earn ultra-high pay. An E-7 with 20 years of service with a wife and four kids earns a whopping \$78,221 a year! That's much more than Americans with advanced college degrees, like an MBA. E-9s can make over \$100,000 a year!

Enlisted can retire after just 20 years of service without contributing a cent toward their generous retirement plan. If the U.S. military advertised these facts, recruiters would have lines outside their office.

Officer pay is ultra high as well. The DOD's online pay calculator shows that a new officer starts at \$54,800 a year. The Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS] collects data on pay for new college graduates, broken down by occupation. Several types of engineers start off at around \$70,000, so pay for new officers seems reasonable.

The BLS provides the average pay data for all college graduates, and its latest data is from the third quarter of 2009. This shows the median pay for American workers with a bachelor degree is \$1,020 a week, times 52 equals \$53,040 a year. This shows that an officer fresh out of college earns more than the average college graduate with years of seniority and experience.

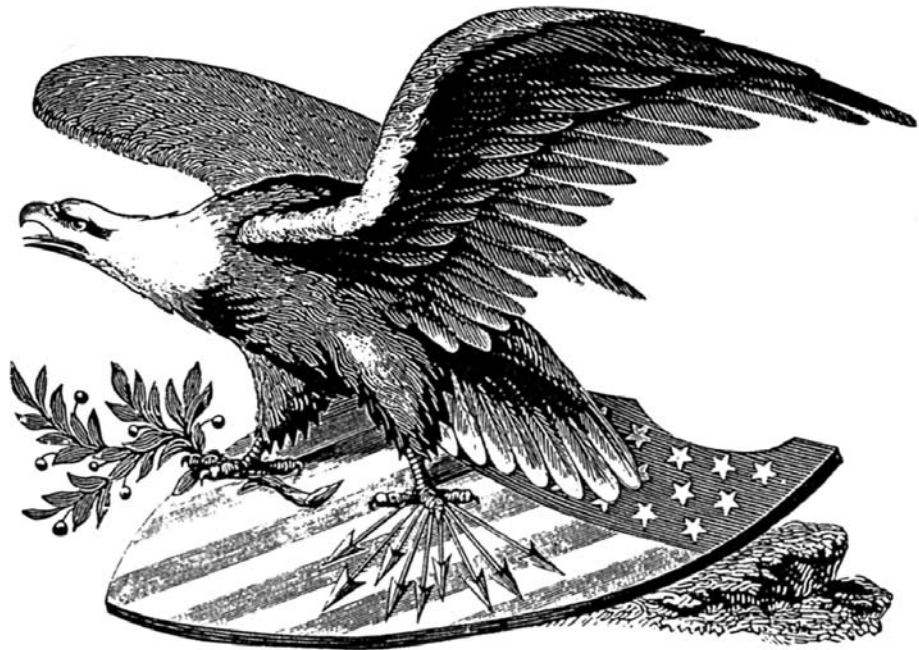
COMPARING WORK

Let's say the average college graduate works between ages 23 and 63, so a direct comparison for an average officer would be a 43-year-old at 20 years of service who is an O-5 [lieutenant colonel or Navy commander].

With a wife and four kids, he earns a massive \$136,000 a year! That is more than twice as much as the comparable American wage. The excuse is that officers have much more responsibility, but that is questionable. Officers in charge of units have limited authority, and since there is an officer for every five enlisted, many do not command anyone.

Many officers are students, co-pilots, aides or desk clerks who rubber stamp paperwork. The U.S. Army has trouble keeping captains because of the endless deployments and a perception of low pay, but it has no problem keeping mid-grade officers.

Some officers have advanced degrees, but most were paid to obtain one. No company in the private sector pays employees to attend college for two years to obtain a masters degree. Nevertheless, the BLS data shows the median pay



for American workers with advanced degrees is \$1,309 a week, times 52 equals \$68,068 a year. So, your average mid-career military officer earns twice as much! How is this justified?

CAREER OFFICERS LOVE IT

This explains why career officers love the military and fight to remain in the force. Keep in mind that these DOD pay figures do not include special pays and bonuses, which often adds thousands of dollars a year.

It was once common for military pilots to leave after six years and join an airline. This is rare today since military officers now earn far more than airline pilots.

Congress seems unaware because, a few years ago, officers in the Pentagon produced a bogus study showing they were underpaid, so Congress authorized a special pay boost for mid-ranking officers. It seems they decided they are comparable to top lawyers at top law firms, rather than the average pay for Americans with advanced degrees.

Also note that while most Americans have a retirement plan, nearly all are matching plans where employees must contribute half and the benefits are limited. People in the military never contribute one cent and have defined benefits that are never depleted. Since most retire at around 45 years of age, they earn retirement pay and heavily subsidized medical care for decades more.

VA BENEFITS PASSED ALONG

High military pay explains support for the recent law that allows servicemen to pass their VA college benefits along to their children. Why should enlisted leave the service and struggle through college on a small stipend only to graduate and earn less money?

It is far better to re-enlist, so that after another four years they are an E-6 with eight years and pocket \$63,000 a year, some \$10,000 more than the average college graduate with decades of experience! Keep in mind that going to college also results in the loss of over \$200,000 in pay during those four years.

High pay causes depression among disabled veterans. The VA pays an adequate disability rate for them to live comfortably, but it is far less than their generous active duty pay. Many are outraged when, partially disabled from combat injuries, they are punished as doctors say they cannot remain on active duty, so their income falls in half.

INJURED VETS CONFUSED

This has led to confusion as injured vets awarded a disability rating attempt to re-enlist after discovering that private sector pay is less than half as much. The Army recently drew the line at 50% disability, meaning anyone with a disability rating of 50% or more is not allowed to re-enlist.

Let's look at the pay disparity with an example of two brothers. One graduates from a four-year college, followed by two years of graduate school at a cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars in expenses and lost wages. He worked for 12 years and now earns the national average for his educational level of \$68,068 annually. His brother joined the military, never took a college class and didn't work hard, so he is just an E-6 after 18 years in the military, yet he earns more than his hard-working and highly educated brother who spent six unpaid years and over \$100,000 to toil through six years of college.

DRAWBACKS OF HIGH PAY

Over the past three decades, private sector pay remained flat, while Congress routinely provided annual military pay raises higher than the inflation rate. As a result, military personnel now earn twice as much as comparable Americans. What wrong with that?

1. Every dollar spent on unneeded pay is a dollar that could have been spent to develop or procure new items of equipment;

2. Less pay allows for more manpower. If troops were paid the same as back in

See MILITARY Page 15

Rightwingers Support Obesity Epidemic?

First Lady Michelle Obama and several administration officials unveiled Solving The Problem of Childhood Obesity Within A Generation, a report produced by the White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity.

Oklahoma children are the fifth most obese in the nation, prompting efforts to get sugary treats and fatty food off the menu and out of the schools.

The White House goal is bold: "Solve the problem of childhood obesity in a generation." But the goal is so ambitious only because the crisis of childhood obesity is so grave – with the current generation of Americans "on track to have a shorter lifespan than their parents."

Obesity "is estimated to cause 112,000 deaths per year in the United States, and one third of all children born in the year 2000 are expected to develop diabetes during their lifetime."

OBESITY IS COSTLY

Each year, obese adults incur "an estimated \$1,429 more in medical expenses than their normal-weight peers," and overall, the nation spent up to \$147 billion on obesity-related costs in 2008.

At unveiling, the First Lady seemed humbled by the magnitude of the problem but also confident that the Task Force's recommendations, if fully implemented, could begin reducing the nation's obesity rates.

"For the first time – this is the key – we're setting really clear goals and benchmarks and measurable outcomes that will help tackle this challenge one step, one family and one child at a time," she said.

Noting that "approximately one in five children are overweight or obese by the time they reach their sixth birthday," the report recommends informing women about the importance of conceiving at a healthy weight and encouraging breast feeding, which could lower the risk of becoming overweight by as much as 22%.

The law also promotes breastfeeding by mandating that "employers with more than 50 employees must provide break time and place for breastfeeding mothers to express milk," gives grants to community based obesity intervention programs, invests in broader population-level obesity intervention efforts, and promotes primary care and coordination efforts that emphasize prevention.

Still, none of this alone can significantly lower obesity rates. For that, policymakers must do much more to enact the Task Force's recommendations and look beyond health care into the nutrition of food in school cafeterias, the physical education programs, America's agricultural policies, and the food options in lower-income neighborhoods.

CONSERVATIVES ON THE ATTACK

Unfortunately, some in the conservative media are using the Task Force to further the theme that the administration is undermining personal freedoms and liberties. Matt Drudge ran a headline saying, "White House seeks controls on food marketing."

On the May 11 edition of his Fox News show, Sean Hannity said: "An Obama government obesity task force." "Does every American family need a dietitian appointed by the government to tell them that this food is going to make you fat and this food is not?" he asked.

Conservative blogger Michelle Malkin also turned the Task Force into a hit, saying that her "problem with the Obama Administration is that it's more concerned with policing grocery aisles and our refrigerators than it is with our borders.

"And we'd be heck a lot better off if they got their priorities in order."

MURDER AT WAL-MART

Tired of constantly being broke and stuck in an unhappy marriage, a young husband decided to solve both problems by taking out a large insurance policy on his wife with himself as the beneficiary, and then arranging to have her killed.

A "friend of a friend" put him in touch with a nefarious dark-side underworld figure who went by the name of "Artie." Artie explained to the husband that his going price for snuffing out a spouse was \$5,000.

The husband said he was willing to pay that amount, but that he wouldn't have any cash on hand until he could collect his wife's insurance money.

Artie insisted on being paid at least something up front, so the man opened his wallet, displaying a single dollar bill that rested inside. Artie sighed, rolled his eyes, and reluctantly agreed to accept the dollar as down payment for the dirty deed.

A few days later, Artie followed the man's wife to the local Super Wal-Mart. There, he surprised her in the produce department and proceeded to strangle her with his gloved hands. As the poor unsuspecting woman drew her last breath and slumped to the floor, the manager of the produce department stumbled unexpectedly onto the murder scene.

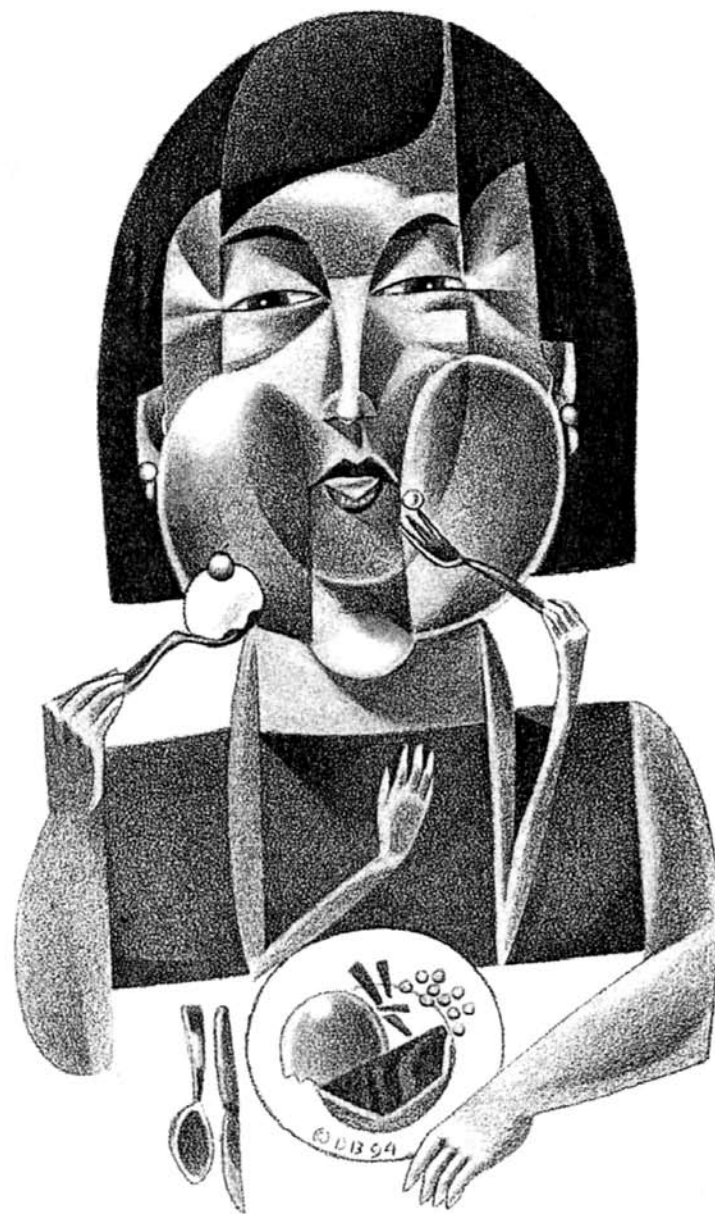
Unwilling to leave any living witnesses behind, ol' Artie had no choice but to strangle the produce manager as well.

However, unknown to Artie, the entire proceedings were captured by the hidden security cameras and observed by the store's security guard, who immediately called the police. Artie was caught and arrested before he could even leave the store.

Under intense questioning at the police station, Artie revealed the whole sordid plan, including his unusual financial arrangements with the hapless husband who was also quickly arrested.

The next day in the Eunice News, the headline declared:

ARTIE CHOKES 2 for \$1.00 @ WAL-MART!



MILITARY

From Page 14

the Reagan years, our military could afford twice as many troops. One solution to reduce deployment time is less pay and more manpower;

3. Meeting re-enlistment goals is no problem today, but that increases stress as everyone must compete [and brown nose] to remain in the career force. One mistake and upset officer may end their career;

4. As the nation faces bankruptcy, it is unpatriotic to demand larger budgets to fund unnecessary pay raises.

FREEZE PAY FOR A FEW YEARS

The Pentagon reform is simple: freeze pay for a few years. Use some of the savings for more combat pay and for deployment pay. Also, Congress should scrutinize re-enlistment bonuses, which have become a tradition even though most are unjustified.

It is true that some service members are over-deployed, but that is the result of poor leadership by generals and admirals who use GIs as pawns in their political games for larger budgets.

There was never an urgent need for more soldiers in Afghanistan. Navy admirals now brag that half their ships are underway. Congress should ask why.

Has the Soviet fleet reappeared? Does al-Qaeda have a threatening Navy? Keeping the OPTEMPO [operating/operations tempo] high burns up fuel, wears out ships and sailors.

Meanwhile, private military organizations, which act like unions, blatantly deceive Congress and the American people with greedy demands for ever-higher pay.

WHAT PAY GAP?

The Association of the U.S. Army's current legislative agenda includes its traditional demand to "eliminate the pay gap." How can military officers, who claim to have high standards of honor, patriotism and honesty, support that deception? Freezing military pay will upset some military personnel, but only the selfish ones.

Yet, they should realize that national bankruptcy is a major threat to their career and retirement plans. If the dollar collapses and inflation hits 30% a year for several years, a newly elected Congress of "teabaggers" may slash pay and retirement benefits in half.

Other service members consider themselves patriots, and agree that a nation facing bankruptcy should not continue to grant them unnecessary pay raises. While some may express outrage, they will never leave their prosperous military career, even if their pay is cut.

Meanwhile, military recruiters and retention specialists can distribute this article and await an avalanche of applications.

Editor's Note: Defense Secretary Gates has announced that the Pentagon spends far too much money and has ordered a study to reduce the mindless billions wasted by Pentagon spenders and their private armies.

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Mass Incarceration Destroyer Of Minorities

The Obama Administration, instead of having the Drug Czar focus on addiction recovery and prevention programs, should change the policy of the racialized criminal justice system that has used the "War on Drugs" policy to put more black males in the criminal justice system than slavery in 1850.

Around this time last year, the Obama Administration's Drug Czar, Gil Kerlikowske, said he wants to banish the idea that the U.S. is fighting "a war on drugs," which is a move that favors treatment over mass incarceration.

While this approach is being taken, more than 60% of the people in prison are now racial and ethnic minorities. In Oklahoma, 30.4% of prisoners are black but they represent less than 10% of the state's overall population.

For black males in their 20s, one in every eight is in prison or jail on any given day. These trends have been intensified by the disproportionate impact of the "war on drugs," in which three-fourths of all persons in prison for drug offenses are people of color, according to a report by The Sentencing Project.

CONSIDER RACIAL DISPARITIES

The Obama Administration and the states must take racial disparities in our criminal justice system seriously because it affects the public safety of entire communities.

Research shows that people of color who live in high crime areas fear victimization and express a need for increased public safety, yet empathize with offenders and the struggles that they face upon release from incarceration.

What are those struggles?

For example, ex-offenders struggle to find housing, transportation and basic health care upon release from prison, according to Minnesota's Council on Crime and Justice.

In fact, according to Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, ex-offenders aren't eligible for public assistance such as public housing, Medicaid and welfare. Moreover, they are legally discriminated against when applying for employment.

Furthermore, if ex-offenders are fortunate enough to even find employment, in some states the government can garnish up to 100% of their income for the cost of their imprisonment, court and legal fees.

RETURNING OFFENDERS NEGLECTED

This inequity – by our justice system in its failure to address the immediate needs of returning offenders – causes the families and the communities they live in to bear the burden of providing support.

Don't forget about Native Americans in this injustice. Much of the literature written about mass incarceration tends to be primarily about the Latinos, blacks and whites. What about our Native brothers and sisters?

The incarceration rate of Native Americans is 38% higher than the national rate. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights attributes this higher rate to differential treatment by the criminal justice system, lack of access to adequate counsel and racial profiling.

R-e-s-p-e-c-t Disappearing From American Life?

By Norm Rourke

In the past few weeks we've attended a granddaughter's college graduation and a grandson's high school graduation. As with all graduations these special events are preceded with well orchestrated elements. One of the most stirring to me is the presentation of the colors, Pledge of Allegiance and singing of the national anthem.

When it comes to patriotism I'm old fashioned. I respect our flag and the ceremony that goes with its presentation. Bad or good, it's my country and I love it even though I might criticize how it's governed from time to time. Regardless, showing respect for our flag and our national anthem is foremost.

Yet too often it seems at events like this, there is blatant disrespect and downright rudeness shown for these symbols of our great country.

LAUGHING, TALKING, FIDGETING

People are laughing, talking, on cell phones or generally making first class fools of themselves as they fidget around. Men and boys don't remove their hats when the national anthem is played or sung. And God forbid if the macho types show respect by placing their hands over their hearts during the Pledge of Allegiance.

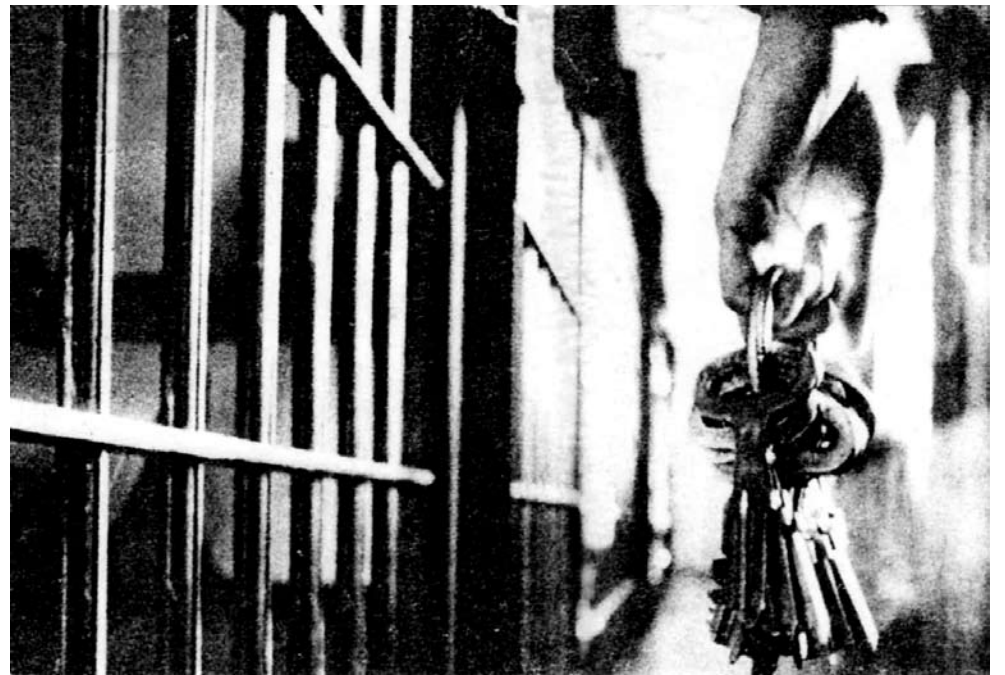
I've got news for these jerks: If you lived anywhere else – especially in a controlled dictatorship – you'd probably never see daylight again if you didn't honor the flag and what it represents to that country.

Yes we are a free country, but we're free because that flag was held high at places people never heard of, or have a clue about because most Americans are ignorant of their history.

I fault parents for not teaching their kids respect for our flag and the ceremony that is part of honoring America. But what should we expect when the parents are as disrespectful as their jerky kids?

WHERE'S THE COMMON DECENCY?

There is no law I know of that says we must be respectful of the flag and ceremony. But common decency and basic respect should be part of our makeup. Clearly it isn't with some people. They are the same people who have and show no respect for anything. They are ignorant and lacking of any understanding of what such things mean to others.



One example: in South Dakota, Native Americans make up 8% of the state's population, yet they compose 22% of the state's male prison population. Native women compose 35% of female prison population, according to a Dakota-Lakota-Nakota Human Rights Advocacy Coalition Report.

INDIANS FACE DISCRIMINATION

Law enforcement agents arrest American Indians and Alaskan Natives at twice the rate of the greater U.S. population for violent and property crimes. On average, American Indians receive longer sentences than non-Indians for crimes.

They also tend to serve longer time in prison for their sentences than non-Native Americans. The suicide rate is higher among Native American inmates incarcerated in jails than non-Indians.

What needs to happen? We need to admit that racial disparities are tied to our unequal justice practices, and develop strategies, in cooperation, with law enforcement and community that will reduce racial disparity and enhance public safety.

We need to change policy by removing barriers for those with criminal records so they can gain access to employment, housing and civic engagement. What is the point of being released back into society if you can't positively participate in society?

We need to create programs that support ALL families of offenders/ex-offenders. It is important for ex-offenders, the children of incarcerated parents, and their caretakers to establish a network of social support.

Thankfully, there are some states, NGOs, associations and research institutions around the nation advocating for the rights of ex-offenders and combating racial disparities in America's prisons. However, there needs to be a shift in the administration and the states' thinking and action.

Race needs to be explicitly discussed as it relates to policy change, mass incarceration, and criminal justice. Also how the racially disproportionate enforcement of the "War on Drugs" has negatively affected communities of color.

Along with the flag ceremony at some events is the honoring of military people who are serving or have served their country. This is always an emotional time for me as I see young and old veterans stand proudly when their particular service song is played. I see those who fought in long ago wars whose bodies are weakened with age as they slowly make their way to their feet to stand as representatives of a great nation that is proud of its flag and all that it means.

Also at each ceremony where military men and women are honored, there are young ones scattered among the old vets who are just as proud of what they represent. If in uniform, they present sharp salutes; if not in uniform they still have the clean military presence that shows respect.

A VETERAN'S TAKE

As I stand when the Air Force song is played, I'm privileged to be among the older group of veterans and I'm humbled to be surrounded by men and women of all ages who are respectful of their country's flag and the ceremony that goes with its presentation.

I hope this message is read and shared with others. We are a great people. We are not a perfect country. We have many problems to overcome. But when our flag is presented and our national anthem is played, this is when we should be unified and respectful for all the things they represent.

Please remember this when you attend any event where the American flag and the ceremony honoring our country are presented. Please teach your children to respect these symbols of their country. Please remember that many people before you and me gave us a priceless gift so that we can live as we do.

God bless America!

– The author lives in Beggs

DIVINE LOGIC

A Sunday school teacher asked, "Johnny, do you think Noah did a lot of fishing when he was on the ark?"

"No," replied Johnny. "How could he, with just two worms?"

Raped Nine-Year-Old Undergoes An Abortion

A 9-year-old Brazilian girl and the doctors who performed the girl's abortion needed the Catholic Church's care and concern, not its condemnation, said a leading Vatican official.

Archbishop Rino Fisichella, president of the Pontifical Academy for Life, criticized what he called a "hasty" public declaration of the excommunication of the girl's mother and the doctors who aborted the girl's twins.

The girl "in the first place should have been defended, hugged and held tenderly to help her feel that we were all on her side," he wrote in the Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*.

"Before thinking about excommunication, it was necessary and urgent to protect her innocent life and bring her back to a level of humanity of which we men of the church should be expert witnesses and teachers," he said.

IT APPEARS INSENSITIVE

"Unfortunately, this is not what happened and it has impacted the credibility of our teaching, which appears in the eyes of many as insensitive, incomprehensible and devoid of mercy," he said.

Doctors at a hospital in Recife, Brazil, performed an abortion on the girl, who weighed a little more than 66 pounds and reportedly had been raped repeatedly by her stepfather from the time she was 6 years old. Abortion in Brazil is illegal except in cases of rape or if the mother's life is in danger.

After the abortion, Archbishop Jose Cardoso Sobrinho of Olinda and Recife said it was "a crime in the eyes of the church" and that human laws can never override the laws of God.

He told a Brazilian newspaper that, while it was true the child ran health risks if she continued the pregnancy, "the end does not justify the means. The good aim of saving her life cannot justify the killing of two other lives."

The Vatican's prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, said excommunication against those responsible for the abortion was legitimate.

AUTOMATIC EXCOMMUNICATION

In an interview with the Italian newspaper *La Stampa*, the cardinal underlined that according to canon law anyone who procures an abortion incurs automatic excommunication, meaning there is no need for an official decree from church authorities.

However, canon law indicates several conditions – for example, not yet having turned 17 years old – that would render an individual exempt from the penalty of excommunication.

The church officials' statements puzzled Brazilian Catholics and were criticized in the media. Many priests were called upon by their parishioners to explain the church's position. Nongovernmental organizations criticized the fact that the stepfather would not be excommunicated.

Fisichella criticized the way Archbishop Sobrinho handled the situation.

ALL TOO COMMON VIOLENCE

"Only because the archbishop of Olinda and Recife hastily declared the excommunication of the doctors" did this story of despicable, yet all too common, violence against girls and women make newspaper headlines, he said.



Fisichella said that because of the Brazilian girl's young age and her "precarious state of health her life was in serious danger" by continuing the pregnancy.

"How should one act in these cases?" he asked, underlining that the girl's case represented an "arduous decision for doctors and moral law itself."

Doctors deserve respect for the difficult decisions they must often grapple with, he said, adding that no one nonchalantly makes life-and-death decisions and to even suggest it "is unjust and offensive."

He said the Catholic principle that upholds the sanctity of life is unshakeable and "abortion has always been condemned by moral law as an intrinsically evil act."

He told the young girl in his written article: "We are on your side. We feel your suffering and we would like to do everything that would help you restore the dignity that you have been deprived of and the love that you will still need."

"There are others who deserve excommunication and our forgiveness, not those who have allowed you to live and who will help you regain hope and trust despite the presence of evil and the wickedness of many people," he said.

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Paying A Political Price For Playing Hardball

By Susan Estrich

Even prominent Republicans, such as former Attorney General Michael Mukasey, agree that you don't need a special prosecutor to investigate whether former President Bill Clinton can have a conversation with Congressman Joe Sestak about job possibilities other than running for Senate, or whether White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel's deputy can call former Colorado House Speaker Andrew Romanoff to find out whether he's interested in jobs other than challenging the state's incumbent Democratic senator.

Yes, there's a law against bribing people not to run for office, just like there's a law against offering money to members of Congress in exchange for their votes on issues. But the elements of the crime, much less the challenge of proving them, pretty much limit prosecutions to sting operations [like Abscam] or cash in the freezer.

The Republicans who are demanding further investigation of White House efforts to protect incumbents from outside challenge include many who, just last week, were criticizing the White House for not managing to convince one of the two Democrats running in a special election in a Democratic district in Hawaii to drop out of the race. They are doing what the White House itself stands accused of doing. It's called politics.

SCORING POLITICAL POINTS

That is not to say they don't have a point, or that they aren't scoring some.

President Obama got elected, in part, by running against business-as-usual politics in Washington. He promised transparency and reform and open doors and all kinds of good things every outsider – Democrat or Republican – who is running for office is promising.

Then he won, and he turned to some experienced DC hands, starting with Emanuel, to ensure that when he got to town, he could get something done. And he has. Agree with him or not, this administration has passed major legislation – starting with the stimulus package and health care reform.

Against the odds disfavoring an incumbent party in the middle of a still-pain-

ful jobs recession, not to mention a disastrous oil spill, they are fighting hard to protect their majorities in the House and Senate. If they weren't, believe me, the knives would be out.

Does that include helping those who have been loyal to the president – who helped give him the 60 votes he once had in the Senate? Of course it does.

CHANGING WASHINGTON'S CULTURE

But what about Obama's campaign promises? Has he really been different? Has he really changed the way Washington works?

Maybe not so much. But he got health care reform through. Democrats have been winning special elections [until Hawaii], despite the way the stars are aligned. He seems clearly headed toward victory on financial reform.

How has he done all this?

Politics. Hardball. Being tough and smart and persuasive.

The big mistake the White House made in handling this latest "jobs" crisis was not that they tried to encourage the challengers not to run. It was turning it into anything more than a one-day story about the business of politics. By initially denying that Sestak had been offered anything, by not coming clean at the first reports and not embracing their efforts to assure a Democratic majority through perfectly legal means, they added fuel to the fire.

A POLITICAL MISTAKE

The desire not to appear too political was, in the end, a political mistake – for which the president is paying. But anyone who thinks you can succeed in Washington without being very skilled at the business of politics should think back to the early years of Jimmy Carter, a decent man who tried to do things differently in Washington, who relied on a cadre of aides inexperienced in the ways of Washington, and who paid a very heavy price for doing so.

Chicago-style politics isn't any different from the game played everywhere else. They're just better at it.

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It's Time To Call The Tea Party's Bluff

By Froma Harrop

I'm done trying to hack through the Tea Party thicket of self-contradiction, self-delusion and self-serving positions. My last straw is Rand Paul, a Tea Party favorite and now Republican nominee for senator from Kentucky.

What damns Paul wasn't the flap over his views on the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Presumably, Paul isn't a racist. He's just a privileged white guy – a doctor and son of 11-term congressman Ron Paul – who lacks feeling for America's tragic history of racism.

What makes Rand Paul so exasperating is his crashing hypocrisy on Medicare. The hero to the cause of smaller government and balanced budgets also vows not to touch Medicare – the biggest and fastest-growing expense on the federal balance sheet.

Rand's compromised stance reflects the political necessity of keeping the Tea Party people happy. The group is heavy with older folk, who have carefully drawn a line of self-interest around the king of government

entitlements, Medicare.

Here's a sample view from a leader of the Rhode Island Tea Party: "We understand that the federal government cannot take \$500 billion out of Medicare and provide the same medical services to our elderly, all the while offering health care to 30 million new people, without a vast increase in the number of providers, the imposition of massive new taxes and/or the rationing of care."

Where does one start?

First off, the new health care legislation does not cut a single guaranteed Medicare benefit. It actually expands the offerings to include screening services and closing the drug-benefit doughnut hole. The savings come largely from ending overpayments to the private Medicare Advantage plans.

As for "the massive new taxes," would the Tea Party folk please tell us where they are? While they're looking, the public should note that money for the new health care legislation is honestly allocated. That

can't be said of the Republicans' 2003 Medicare drug benefit – a corporate bonanza for which not a penny was funded.

Our Tea Party spokeswoman goes on to claim that, in any case, "we paid" for Medicare. Oh, really?

It happens that Medicare payroll taxes provide 40% of the program's funding and premiums another 12%. The remaining 39% comes from general revenues [mostly income taxes]. Much of the payroll and income taxes are born by people who won't live long enough to collect benefits themselves. And given the spiraling costs of the program, today's young taxpayers will never see the level of benefits that they are now subsidizing.

What is the extent of the support? A typical couple retiring in 2020 will have paid about \$100,000 in lifetime Medicare taxes but will receive \$500,000 in scheduled Medicare benefits over the premiums they pay to the program. This is according to C. Eugene Steuerle, a tax policy expert at the Urban Institute.

I asked Steuerle about the income taxes that many Medicare beneficiaries paid and continue to pay. He responded that "given the large deficits we're running and the benefit level relative to previous or current tax levels, there's still no doubt that current generations are being subsidized by future generations."

My question to the Tea Party's lovers of liberty: If you really think you've paid for Medicare and hate big government, why don't you demand that this expensive program be ended?

Hey, the same Constitution that [you keep insisting] says nothing about a universal right to health coverage doesn't guarantee health benefits for older people, either. Of course, you will get a refund for those payroll taxes you've paid.

But Tea Party patriots are not clamoring to lift the taxpayers' yoke of subsidizing their retirements. The phoniness of this movement is hard to calculate.

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Government Impotence And Corporate Rule

By Jim Hightower

Many news reports about the Gulf oil catastrophe refer to it as a "spill." Wrong.

A spill is a minor "oops" – one accidentally spills milks, for example, and from childhood, we're taught the old aphorism: "Don't cry over spilt milk." What's in the Gulf isn't milk and it wasn't spilt. The explosion of BP's Deepwater Horizon well was the inevitable result of deliberate decisions made by avaricious corporate executives, laissez faire politicians and obsequious regulators.

As the ruinous gulf oil blowout spreads onto land, over wildlife, across the ocean floor and into people's lives, it raises a fundamental question for all of us Americans: Who the hell's in charge here? What we're witnessing is not merely a human and environmental horror, but also an appalling deterioration in our nation's governance. Just as we saw in Wall Street's devastating economic disaster and in Massey Energy's murderous explosion inside its Upper Big Branch coal mine, the nastiness in the gulf is baring an ugly truth that We the People must finally face: We are living under de facto corporate rule that has rendered our government impotent.

Thirty years of laissez-faire, ideological nonsense [pushed upon us with a vengeance in the past decade] has transformed government into a subsidiary of corporate power. Wall Street, Massey, BP and its partners – all were allowed to become their own "regulators" and officially encouraged to put their short-term profit interests over the public interest.

Let's not forget that on April 2, barely two weeks before Deepwater Horizon blew and 11 people perished on the spot, the public's No. 1 official, Barack Obama, trumpeted his support for more deepwater oil drilling, blithely regurgitating Big Oil's big lie: "Oil rigs today generally don't cause spills." He and his advisors had not bothered to check the truth of that – they simply took the industry's word. That's not governing, it's aiding and abetting profiteers, and it's a pathetic performance.

But that was only the start of Washington's oily confession that it has surrendered control to corporate arrogance and avarice. With an unprecedented volume of crude gushing from the well and the magnitude of the disaster multiplying geometrically by the day, who was in charge of coping with that? Not the White House, not the interior secretary, not the EPA. As we saw when Wall Street's greed exploded our economy, the polluting scoundrels were left in charge!

While BP's dapper CEO issued patently ridiculous statements [such as, "Everything we can see at the moment suggests that the overall environmental impact of this will be very, very modest."], our government blindly went along with BP's false assertion that only some 5,000 barrels a day were pouring from the well, when independent experts were shouting at the White House that the correct volume was up to 19 times that much.

Finally, almost a month after the blowout, Obama ordered a moratorium on drilling new offshore wells and on granting environmental waivers to the oil giants. Bravo, Mr. President! But ... his moratorium was simply ignored. Days after his order, oil companies were handed at least seven more drilling permits and

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Israel's Self-Inflicted Wounds Demoralizing

By Joe Conason

The government of Israel is supposedly run by the Jewish state's toughest and most ardent defenders, but so far they have inflicted worse damage on its security and its future than its enemies ever could. By treating a Gaza-bound aid flotilla as a military threat, killing nine civilians and imprisoning hundreds more, that government achieved the only foreseeable outcome: another episode of international isolation and internal demoralization.

Whether Israel's commandos committed any criminal acts will be determined by investigation, but in the meantime it is safe to say that what happened was not only wrong but exceptionally stupid. Yet while shortsighted brutality has long been a hallmark of Israeli policy toward the Palestinians, that tendency is now clearly undermining the strategic interests of both Israel and its traditional friends, including the United States.

Consider the events over the past two years that have led up to this moment. The war on Gaza, initially justified by Hamas rocket attacks on Israeli civilians, was grossly disproportional and resulted in war crimes against Palestinians that completely overshadowed the *casus belli*. Since then, the blockade of Gaza has stopped humanitarian assistance and prevented reconstruction – which has only provoked worldwide support for Hamas' human rights complaints against Israel.

Meanwhile, that war proceeded covertly, as well, leading to the clumsiest intelligence operation in Israel's history – the murder of a Hamas official in Dubai by agents who left behind copious evidence of connections with Mossad. That evidence included passports issued by friendly nations, which of course strained diplomatic relationships with them. Worse, the choice of Dubai as an assassination location put severe pressure on Israel's unofficial but strong relationship with the United Arab Emirates – a powerful force for moderation and tolerance in the region and beyond.

Whatever Hamas lost when Mahmoud al-Mabhouh was throttled in a Dubai hotel room, the damage to Israel was considerably greater.

Certainly the same can be said of the latest fiasco, which has severely damaged if not ruined Israel's longstanding ties with Turkey, whose citizens were among those killed and apprehended in the flotilla attack. Until the evening of May 30, the Islamic government of Turkey was prepared to permit its army to participate in joint exercises with the Israel Defense Forces – a stunning development that shows just what Israel's government so casually risked.

Yet Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his right-wing government seem blithely unaware or uncaring in the wake of its ruinous actions. The question that Israel's friends must ask is the same question that sane Israelis are now openly asking themselves: What is their government's strategy?

Indeed, what strategy could these tactics possibly serve to advance? How is their survival, let alone their future peace and prosperity, enhanced by behavior that alienates every friend and potential friend, while encouraging every foe and creating more of them?

If Israel and the United States believe that the most important security prob-

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PERFORMANCES

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bill. His criticism of public education is non-stop. He was Senate author of the failed bill to opt out of ObamaCare. He obviously never read the new federal law. He's a likable guy but his politics are far north of libertarian – somewhere in a galaxy far, far away.

Sen. John Ford, R-Bartlesville, set out as chairman of the Senate Education Committee to wreck public education. When Gov. Brad Henry vetoed Ford's first attempt, he came back with a weaker version. He obviously despises the Oklahoma Education Association, which he says is running public education. Really? If so, why are teachers 48th in pay and Oklahoma 49th in what it spends on a student's public education?

Sen. Clark Jolley, R-Edmond: Jolley was the Senate leader's running dog during the entire session, personally handling most of Coffee's agenda. His attempt to put a kind face on the intrusive personal questionnaire of a rape or incest victim seeking an abortion was ludicrous. It was vetoed but they overrode it. He dropped his name from the race for attorney general when word spread that he might be the new Senate leader. Arrrrrg!

Sen. Steven Russell, R-OKC: The bitterest critic of public education in the modern history of the state, Russell is a homeschooler who even voted against two education shell bills – the language to come later. His hatred goes far beyond any reasonable criticism – he sticks it to public school teachers again and again. He bitterly protested that education accounted for 53% of the state budget, yet he had no bills improving education. His tirades stooped to name-calling. He's a medical miracle – walking upright without a spine.

House Best

Rep. Mike Brown, D-Tahlequah: A workhorse, not a show pony, nobody

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five waivers.

Last week, with 63% of the public disapproving of his meek deference to BP, the president of the United States of America was reduced to convening a press conference to insist that he was “engaged” and, behind the scenes, was “monitoring” BP's efforts.

Wow, monitoring! Excuse me, but who's the president here? Obama should personally take charge – cancel all of his social and political events, convene an emergency response team of the best scientific minds in the world, announce a clear plan of clean-up actions, install all relevant Cabinet officials in a Gulf Coast command center to direct the actions, make daily reports on progress to the public, fire a mess of failed regulators and go to Congress with sweeping legislation to replace America's oil dependency with a crash program of conservation and renewable energy sources.

Oh, he should also wring a few corporate necks. Instead of monitoring these criminals, prosecute them – and put the public back in charge of our government.

fought harder to protect average Oklahomans against the GOP's corporate onslaught. He championed serious revenue-generating proposals aimed at protecting vital state services, knowing political opponents would use them to vilify him as a tax-and-spend liberal. And he teamed with Sen. Wilson to end domestic violence as a pre-existing condition.

Rep. Doug Cox, R-Grove: An independent voice unafraid to publicly challenge his party's leadership, Cox derided as “pure politics” and “mean-spirited” a bill that would ban private insurers from paying for abortions. An emergency room physician, he also won approval for legislation aimed at protecting young athletes from head injuries.

Rep. Kris Steele, R-Shawnee: In presiding over daily sessions, the speaker pro tem often makes more than his share of enemies. Not Steele. He patiently steered the House through a tumultuous session, ensuring he will be the next Speaker. He successfully promoted a smart-on-crime alternative to imprisonment for non-violent offenders who are primary caregivers to minor children.

Rep. Mike Shelton, D-OKC: Shelton used the session's single slickest parliamentary maneuver to kill Sen. Russell's dangerous bill that would have prevented state law enforcement from cooperating with federal agencies investigating hate crimes. His outrage over “Portraitgate” prompted Speaker Chris Benge to order a public apology from the lawmaker who moved Obama's photo in the House chamber without authorization.

Rep. David Dank, R-OKC: Yes, he's conservative. And yes, he's pro-business to his core. But Dank has more guts than most House members combined. He didn't buckle to pressure from House GOP leaders who weren't keen that he pressed non-stop for a

systematic review of the \$5.6 billion in tax credits. He remains a champion of good government ethics reforms.

House Worst

Rep. Rex Duncan, R-Sand Springs: The single worst member of the House, the self-righteous, self-styled “super patriot” accused Obama of undermining national security and authored a resolution to prevent Oklahoma courts from considering “Sharia Law.” It was his hair-brained “open carry” bill that would have returned Oklahoma to the Wild West. He opted to run for district attorney rather than re-election to the House. Good riddance.

Rep. Dan Sullivan, R-Tulsa: A silk-stocking attorney who represents big money interests, Sullivan routinely serves as point man for legislation that enhances corporate power and limits the rights of average Oklahomans. Tort reform, workers comp reform, malpractice insurance reform – he carries the water for the wealthy on each. He also plays abortion politics with zest, displaying misogyny that is breathtaking even by Oklahoma's low standards.

Rep. Lee Denney, R-Cushing: A veterinarian, Denney finally won restrictions on Oklahoma's out-of-control puppy mills. But her good deed paled

next to her anti-public education agenda. She claims she's pro-public ed, but she never met a voucher or charter school scheme she wouldn't promote or support. At a time of meager state revenues, Denney single-handedly made the task of Oklahoma's public schools more difficult.

Rep. Charles Key, R-OKC: The Tin Foil Hat he donned right after the OKC bombing shone as brilliantly as ever this session. Key embraces a spooky world of black helicopters and jack-booted thugs, ever fearful of vast conspiracies and federal control. Key introduced the Oklahoma Sovereignty Protection Act, but insists he isn't behind any effort to create an armed state militia to defend Oklahoma against the feds. Maybe so, but he surely would be a card-carrying member.

Rep. Lewis Moore, R-Arcadia: Moore wrapped up his first term with a bang. He embarrassed Oklahoma nationally by moving Obama's portrait – hijinks that more closely resembled Animal House than the statehouse – in a fit of pique over the president's health care reform package. He also hopped aboard the Bigotry Train, co-sponsoring the “Save Our State” resolution that would forbid courts from using international law or Sharia Law when making rulings.

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lem is Iran and that regime's possible acquisition of nuclear weapons, then the sane response is to build regional and global alliances in response. Iran's neighbors in the Gulf are almost as unhappy about that looming threat as Israel is. A wise policy would draw those states into regional security arrangements and enhance connections with them.

Of course, that kind of policy would mean refraining from such destructive acts as the Gaza blockade, the Dubai assassination and the flotilla attack. It would require the serious pursuit of renewed peace negotiations with the Palestinians and the Syrians, so that Iran, not Israel, would face isolation. And that, in turn, would demand the end of settlement construction and the acknowledgment that Jerusalem is an international holy place that cannot be controlled by a single state.

As Bill Clinton bluntly reminded Israelis in Jerusalem last winter, none of the fundamental factors that imperil the Jewish state's democratic and peaceful future have changed since his own peacemaking efforts ended in frustration. How unfortunate – and dangerous – that the Netanyahu government is so determined to ignore his warning as its strategic position deteriorates.

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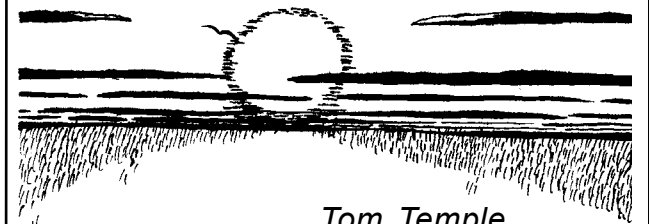
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