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THE OKLAHOMA Observer

\$2.50



VOL. 42, NO. 13

An Independent Journal of Commentary

JULY 10/25, 2010

Can Democrats Hold Onto Mansion? Race To The Top

By Arnold Hamilton

Drew or Jari?

It's a gut-wrenching choice for many Oklahoma Democrats who revere both the attorney general and lieutenant governor but now must choose one to be the party's gubernatorial standard-bearer.

The decision in the July 27 primary is made even tougher because the stakes are so high in this year's elections.

The loss of the governorship, coupled with Republican majorities in both houses of the Legislature, would leave Democrats with little power to thwart a GOP devoted to corporate interests and religious fundamentalism.

The early poll numbers are not encouraging for Democrats: Republican front-runner Mary Fallin, the outgoing congresswoman and former lieutenant governor, holds a decisive edge over both Edmondson and Askins in mythical head-to-head matchups.

But it's important to remember that elections are not decided by spring or early summer polls that typically provide little more than a snapshot of party loyalty before the actual nominees are selected and voters begin to focus on the race.

It's also worth noting that Democrats have fared better than expected in statewide races the last 20 years – claiming the governorship three of the last five terms and controlling most of the down-ballot statewide offices, even as the state's congressional delegation turned almost exclusively Republican.

Further, the early polls may not have captured the depth of ambivalence



– Steve Hill

among Republican primary voters deciding between Fallin, the GOP establishment favorite, and state Sen. Randy Brogdon, the darling of the party's ultra-conservative wing that includes Tea Partiers, Tenters, Birthers and fundies.

The question for them: Vote for the candidate that polls show has the best chance to win in November? Or vote their conscience?

The polls show Fallin with an insurmountable advantage – but it's difficult to gauge the impact of energized supporters like Brogdon's in what is typically a low-turnout GOP primary.

It wouldn't be the first time a fringe candidate pulled an upset in the Republican gubernatorial primary. Remember Bill Price? And remember

what happened to him in November?

Brogdon's positions aren't even close to mainstream in Oklahoma – especially when it comes to public education – but they play well with GOP activists. Consider: In late June, Brogdon won a straw poll of the Republican state committee, besting Fallin 54% to 42%.

Even if Fallin, as expected, captures the GOP nomination, what would Brogdon backers do in November? Would they really support a candidate who voted for the Wall Street bailout? Would they cast a protest vote for the Democratic nominee? Would they stay home?

The fact Fallin has toed the Republican line during her two terms in Congress is hardly a liability in Oklahoma, where far too many voters have been hoodwinked into embracing the GOP's plutocratic agenda, neatly packaged and sold with a heavy dose of religious fundamentalism.

Still, it's way too early for a coronation. Fallin's nasty divorce [she has since remarried] didn't hurt her in the solidly Republican 5th Congressional District. Will opponents attempt to use it against her, hoping to peel off enough social conservatives to torpedo her candidacy?

And how will Oklahoma's deep red-neck strain affect the general election, if Fallin is the nominee? The state's largest religious denomination, the Southern Baptists, teaches that women should be submissive to their husbands and are not eligible to serve as clergy.

How many ultra-conservatives would be unable – in the privacy of the voting booth – to cast a ballot for a woman? Would some vote for Edmondson, if he were the Democratic nominee, because they refuse to put a woman in charge?

Edmondson's anything but the GOP's stereotype a wild-eyed liberal. He's a Navy veteran and former district attorney who, as attorney general, is leading the federal court fight to protect Oklahoma's water quality from corporate poultry polluters.

Of course, Oklahoma could end up with women as the nominees of both major parties.

[Imagine that – the state that locks up more women per capita than any other and whose Legislature works overtime to roll back reproductive rights to the Dark Ages.]

What happens then? Don't bet against Askins, a former district court judge, parole board member and state representative known for her child advocacy efforts.

There's another Wild Card in the general election: State Question 744, the constitutional amendment that would require lawmakers to finally put their money where their mouths are and fund public schools at the regional per pupil average.

Oklahoma is currently dead last, behind even Arkansas and New Mexico. Polls indicate that likely voters, by a large margin, support the initiative – and oppose a competing proposal, SQ 754, that the Legislature put on the ballot in an attempt to nullify the mandate.

The state's most powerful corporate interests – and even some teachers groups – are opposed the so-called HOPE [Helping Oklahoma Public Education] initiative. Expect them to

See GOVERNOR Page 18

Observations

Sleeper?

Eleven candidates are battling for the seat in Congress given up by Republican Mary Fallin who is running for governor.

It is assumed to be a safe Republican seat but that hasn't stopped Democrats Billy Coyle and Tom Guild from throwing their hats in the ring – two excellent candidates.

Well-known Republicans such as ex-State Rep. Kevin Calvey and Reps. Mike Thompson and Shane Jett are assumed to have the inside track.

Don't bet on it – there's a sleeper in the race.

Write this name in your memory bank: James Lankford of Edmond, a political unknown, He's the fundamentalist candidate – a fixture at the Southern Baptist summer camp Falls Creek – and will probably win the Tea Party vote.

The Libertarian vote is expected to side with Independent candidates Clark Duffe and Dave White.

Lankford reported \$59,350 in contributions in early June. While that doesn't rattle political cages, you should see who it is from: churches, ministers, physicians and businessmen, mostly linked to fundamentalism – early donors of \$200 or more [\$43,630]. He has also collected money from Texas and Missouri.

Don't say you weren't warned.

Resuscitated

State lawmakers' recent passage of legislation to ensure better ambulance coverage in rural Oklahoma is indeed a lifesaver.

Adequate ambulance coverage for unincorporated areas and other populations who need better ambulance coverage was in jeopardy.

HB 1888 requires each county with a population of 500,000 people or less to present an emergency medical services plan to the Oklahoma Department of Health by April 1, 2011.

The legislation also creates a petition process to allow registered vot-

ers to create an ambulance service district in their counties.

The legislation requires licensed ambulance services in the licensed area to respond to all emergency calls, regardless of the patient's ability to pay.

This ensures that individuals who may not be able to pay for the service are helped in an emergency. It is not unlike the law that says emergency medical services must be given to a person whose life is in danger.

Obama Poll

Are the American people dumb? Answer that question for yourself but first check out a poll conducted for Scientific American magazine.

Harris Poll conducted an on-line survey to gauge the attitudes of Americans toward President Barack Obama. The poll generated some fascinating data.

For example, 40% of those polled believe Obama is a socialist. [He's not – ask any socialist.]

Thirty-two percent believe he is a Muslim. Fourteen percent believe he may be the Antichrist.

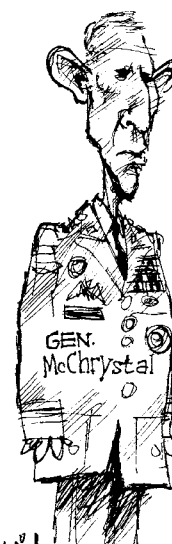
It's hard to figure how much of this is pure racism or pure stupidity.

Red Light

We know how vital the oil and gas industry is to Oklahoma, but there are limits to the perennial butt kissing that literally opens taxpayer wallets and purses for plundering.

There is no better example than Sandridge Energy's plan to demolish three historic buildings – including the 108-year-old India Temple in Oklahoma City.

Take a look at Devon's multi-acre downtown clearance to build the state's tallest building. The Daily Disappointment – which profits mightily from the industry – led the fight for Maps III to grant Devon the keys to



MIKE LYKOVICH 6-23-10
RELANDER PUNDEL-CONSTITUTION@ATC.COM



the city. Devon wanted a big park in front of their new building.

Greed knows no bounds when it comes to Oklahoma oil and gas folk. Not only do they have the federal/state 27.5% depletion allowance, Oklahoma favors them with tens of millions of tax dollars to keep on drilling.

They will drill as long as there is oil and gas to recover – they don't need more taxpayer money to do that.

It's Official

New results from a study by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development show that low-quality care in the first few years of life can have a small but persistent impact on a child's learning and behavior.

The study is the largest assessment of child rearing in the United States to date and has been tracking more than 1,300 children of various ethnicities, races, and socioeconomic backgrounds since 1991.

Researchers found that obedience and academic problems among those who received low-quality care in their first 4½ years of life continued through their 15th birthdays, unimpacted by the influence of other factors such as peers, teachers, and maturation.

Teenagers who had received higher-quality childcare were less likely to engage in problem behaviors such as arguing, being mean to others, and getting into fights.

Those who spent more hours in childcare of any kind were more likely to engage in impulsive and risky behaviors, and those who received moderately high- or high-quality care scored higher on tests gauging cognitive and academic achievement.

What was the surprise for us was that the effects at age 15 were the same size as we had seen in elementary school and just prior to school entry.

Trafficking Tool

The Oklahoma Legislature enhanced the penalties for human trafficking and gave law enforcement officials more tools to pursue criminals who enslave women and children.

This is a victim-centered approach that will clearly define "human trafficking" in state law and increase the state's ability to prosecute these criminals.

Unfortunately, the current trafficking law is not specific enough, making it difficult for state law enforcement to prosecute trafficking crimes. Instead, police have been forced to rely on lesser laws on prostitution or similar crimes to pursue these criminals. The new law will increase the state penalties facing perpetrators who horribly abuse women and children.

Those convicted of human trafficking face up to five years in prison and a fine of up to \$10,000. SB 956 increases trafficking penalties when victims are 18 or younger to 10 years in prison and a fine of up to \$20,000. Current law only enhances the penalties when victims are 14 or younger.

Just as importantly, the legislation allows law enforcement to seize "any vehicle or conveyance used in any manner to facilitate or participate in the commission of any human trafficking offense."

In 2003, the Department of Justice reported the largest concentrations of trafficking survivors who received federal assistance resided in California, Texas, New York and Oklahoma.

Say What?

What is going on in Tulsa Public Schools? On the one hand they're giving walking papers to teachers but on the other they have spent millions to buy a program called ACT America.

TPS eliminated substitutes and most teachers have little planning time. Next year classes will be crowded and quality of instruction will decline but a new program is purchased for millions!

TPS has replaced the Student Conduct Book with the "Behavior Response Book." It lacks any reasonable consequences for offending students.

For example, if a student uses abusive, profane or vulgar language against a teacher, the student will be sent to the dean but only after the teacher stops class instruction to call a parent. That's nuts.

The punishment for such offense is a brief conference with the student and the student is back in class immediately.

Doubt it? Check the BRB on TPS website.

We know these are tough times for public education, but it doesn't help morale when teachers are asked to sacrifice class time to deal with a rowdy student and a fortune is spent on a new program.

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.

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

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

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

Observerscope

Hard to believe that 40% of the legislators up for re-election this year drew no opponents. The average Oklahoma voter is oblivious to an epidemic of legislative corruption.

Laurel: To the tribal leaders and Little Dixie Democrats who, if necessary, will take their protest to court to block the sale of Sardis Lake water to OKC. It's a case of grand larceny.

A budget cut has cost OETA their three contract anchors – George Tomek, Gerry Bonds and weatherman Ross Dixon. They will still produce Oklahoma's best evening newscast.

Dart: To OKC Mayor Mick Cornett who voted against a Conference of Mayors' resolution opposing Arizona's profiling law. It passed easily.

Will the real Gary Jones please stand up? The GOP's outgoing party chairman declared publicly that he would not seek the state auditor's office, then he filed for it.

Laurel: To Barack Obama's recovery package, leading to the Fed announcement that America's household net worth increased 2.1% in the first quarter. That's \$54.6 trillion – fourth quarter of growth.

We note with sadness the death of McAlester's No. 1 citizen, Charles "Shorty" Repass, 78. He spent his adult life in dedicated service to his community after returning from the Korean War.

Dart: To Sarah Palin for endorsing Republican Mary Fallin for governor when Rep. Fallin voted for the Wall Street bailout that added billions to the national debt. A matched set of hypocrites.

Only a Newsweek political columnist would note that not one of 16 women serving in the U.S. Senate [ages 46 to 74] has gray hair. Who cares?

Laurel: To Dr. E.N. Scott Samara, 67, performing more than 2,000 kidney transplants since 1973. He's performed 1,000 at OKC's Integris Baptist Medical Center.

What do the founders or CEOs of Google, eBay and Yahoo have in common? None was born in America. Nail illegal immigration but don't forget what the legals contribute.

Dart: To Gov. Brad Henry, who is going out with some superb vetoes to his credit – but the energy stabilization act is not one of them. It would have evened out the boom and bust energy industry.

Thanks to a new law, the cranks who picket veterans' funerals will have to stay 500 feet from the property of the church or cemetery.

Laurel: To OETA for a superb hour-long interview with former Gov. David Hall. If you didn't see it you ought to order it. He asserts he was the victim of a vendetta launched by the Daily Disappointment and supported by the GOP.

Senate Leader Glenn Coffee and House Speaker Chris Benge are a pair of Republican prevaricators who claimed they were cutting public education a mere 2.9%. In fact, it was about 9%.

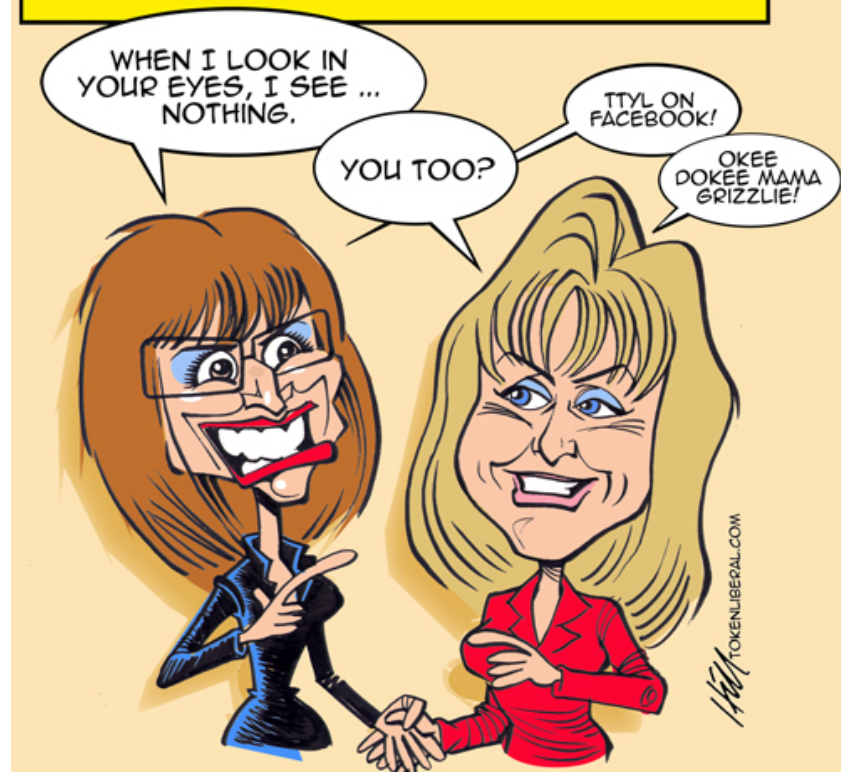
Dart: To Obama's Race To the Top, another example of preaching that money will solve the problem of low performing schools. Root causes: Poverty and sorry parenting. Ask any teacher.

You get an idea of how frustrating it is to cover the Legislature when its own members said they signed a corrupt conference committee report without reading it.

Laurel: To Medical Examiner spokesperson Cherokee Ballard who put the smoking gun in the hands of Rep. Randy Terrill, R-Moore, in that corrupt bill to increase the GOP Senate majority.

The Daily Disappointment is bending over backwards in praise of the state's first voucher program, even importing out of state rightwing plaudits. Bill Price, chairman of the Oklahoma School Choice Coalition, had a sickening op-ed piece.

A MATCH MADE IN ENDORSEMENT HEAVEN...



– Steve Hill

Dart: To the state of Oklahoma that continues to treat women as second-class citizens – including a blizzard of anti-female bills this year. Women now hold a majority of jobs in the U.S. [The Atlantic, July issue]

Laurel: To CPA Stephen E. Covert, MBA, Midwest City Democrat, is the only qualified candidate for State Treasurer, but has no money, no name recognition. It ought to be an appointed position.

Dart: To State Rep. Lucky Lamons, D-Tulsa, retiring to spend more time with his wife, a cancer survivor. His amendment to require the Legislature to be subject to the Open Records, Open Meeting Act got nowhere but pointed out the hypocrisy.

In 1913 only 13% of the world's population lived in cities. By last year it was 70% – the equivalent of seven New Yorks added to the planet every year. Much of rural Oklahoma is decimated.

Dart: To George W. Bush, whose tax cut would have eliminated the inheritance tax. Democrats put it on hold, preserving \$23.4 billion in 2009. Only 6,000 super-wealthy families even pay – it doesn't kick in until \$3.5 million.

The next governor and Legislature have a surprise package awaiting them – another round of Republican tax cuts totaling \$145 million to take effect unless they act to repeal them.

Laurel: To Oklahoma's medical fraternity, teaming up to help with a million signature petition to the President and Congress to fix the Medicare reimbursement problem.

Time will tell whether SB 2033 is public school reform or another way of forcing schools to meet another unfunded mandate. Little wonder new teachers are teaching five years and out.

Dart: To the Department of Human Services for ignoring more than 400 complaints of child neglect and abuse in 82 deaths or near deaths. The study was made by the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth.

The state's suicide hotline has registered an unprecedented 62% increase in calls. This at a time when the state's mental health agency is cutting back on services. The number is 1.800.273.8255.

Laurel: To this year's Labor & Friends banquet, a smashing success. Bob Spinks won the Friend of Labor Award and Lee Graham won the Legends of Labor Award.

Brace yourself – America may be heading for a national sales tax, known as a Value-Added Tax [VAT]. We've reached our limit with an annual \$1.4 trillion deficit. More than 150 countries have a VAT.

Dart: To Oklahoma Republicans still grousing about the Obama stimulus package. It has created 23,000 new Oklahoma jobs.

Republican U.S. Rep. Mary Fallin married more than lawyer Wade Christensen – she went from a net worth of \$110,000 to \$7 million.

Laurel: To the Southern Baptist Convention, blasting their preachers for not sermonizing against divorce – an epidemic in Oklahoma. Catholics have it right – mandatory instruction before marriage.

JPMorgan Chase & Co. put up \$325 million to finance charter schools, opening the door to fiscal manipulations hardly beneficial for students.

Dart: To college students who tell surveyors that would abort if they knew a fetus was predisposed toward obesity. How sickening. [Newsweek, 6.14.10]

Average four-year college graduate in Oklahoma owes \$19,500 – ranking 34th in the nation. Luckily, the Obama Administration has pulled private bank student loans out of the system.

Laurel: To 62 law school deans nationwide who signed a letter to the U.S. Senate that Elena Kagan is supremely qualified to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court.

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

Last night I just happened to catch a blurb on MSNBC: "In Oklahoma, where oil and natural gas drive the state's economy, Tea Party favorite Randy Brogdon, a Republican candidate for governor, said federal involvement in the BP disaster is only making the situation worse."

My first reaction was "What a stupid thing to say;" the second, "What a jerk."

I know Randy Brogdon. We grew up together. We were good friends for a long time, until Randy came to my house under false pretenses and tried to sell me Amway. I resented someone trying to use friendship to put a block in their pyramid then and still do. I haven't seen him since.

I hear about him from time to time. From what I understand he's a teabagging politician now. Brogdon likes to quote Ronald Reagan about government being the problem, not the solution. The mess in the gulf now is a direct result of people who think like Randy.

George W. Bush's regulators were in bed with big oil, literally, having sex and doing drugs. They never regulated or inspected anything. It's not too hard to imagine what the teabaggers would have had to say if Obama had set out, as he should have, to correct the abuses of Big Oil soon after his election. That ounce of prevention looks much better now than all the nasty oil on Pensacola beach. Greed unchecked will always win out and it is foolish to think otherwise.

Brogdon should know better, but when you never think past the slogans you spout it has a tendency to dumb you down.

My parents always thought a lot of Randy when he was a kid. They're dead now. My dad was a refinery worker who for years did not have the right to know what chemicals he worked with and their effects on his body. He died of cancer like so many of his co-workers soon after retirement.

Neither of my parents ever smoked or drank or abused their bodies in any way, except perhaps for that second piece of Randy's Mom's cherry cheesecake. My God that lady could cook. My mother passed only four years after my dad, of cancer; after all, she washed my dad's work clothes. As bad as I hated losing my parents at least I was grown at the time.

Not so for Brogdon's girl cousins who lost their dad to an industrial accident when we were kids. Those Big Government regulations teabaggers

love to hate came too late for all three and God knows how many more. If we had properly regulated Big Oil, several workers and a lot of dolphins might still be alive in the gulf. A lot of people would still have their jobs, 401Ks and houses had we kept a watch on Wall Street.

From what I can tell from here, like selling Amway, Brogdon will do anything for a buck or a vote. I watched the video of his "Testimony" on his web site. Interesting to say the least. While the years have been kind to ol' Randy, he came across with the sincerity of Jim Bakker and convictions of Jimmy Swaggart and they all have, not surprisingly, the same effect on me.

I won't be sending money to any of them. I quit the church denomination Randy and I belonged to as kids years ago when Jesus became a Republican. I think anyone who can read and understand the "red words" knows Jesus is a liberal. After all, Jesus gave away free healthcare, without even a co-pay.

It just seems impossible to me to square the love of money to the point of denying health care with true Christianity. Perhaps it's possible for those who Brogdon truly represents to get through the eye of a needle, but the final call is someone else's.

I can't help but think that Randy cannot believe much of anything on his web site. After all, he might be a politician but he's never been stupid. He's doing his best to be elected and has learned that an average of 27% of people will believe anything no matter how nonsensical it may be. It only needs the underlying effect to redistribute wealth from the poor to the wealthy.

All Randy has to do is "Out Crazy" the other guys and he has the 27% locked up. If he gets a few more to go with his base, he could be Gov. Randy. Who knows?

As smelly as it is, posting a staged testimony online could put him over the top.

But it all begs the question, does it not? Why will those who rail so loudly against government, try so hard to run it?

Jim Moreland
Americus, GA

Editor, The Observer:

In the debate over legislators giving up their authority to set state college tuition, Gov. Brad Henry sided with rich college regents doing the tuition-setting.



"If it's an election year, you can just pretty much guarantee that nobody's going to touch tuition in the Legislature," said Henry.

Well, here's an election year and higher education regents voted 9-0 for a 5.1% raise in tuition and fees at 25 state colleges and universities.

Legislators have to face the voters and justify their votes. That's why tuition should have never been turned over to regents.

That fat cats appointed by governors to boards of regents only have to satisfy their appointer, the governor.

Gov. Henry takes his cues from University of Oklahoma president David Boren who never met a tuition hike he didn't like.

The candidate for governor who pledges to not raise college tuition in his or her first four years will get the vote of this poor grandma who wants to go back to college but can't afford it.

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner
Wagoner

Editor, The Observer:

There's another "ask a cop" sign out, coupled with the words "[so and so] for judge." This notion is in flagrant ignorance of separation of powers. Judges are not supposed to be partial to one party or another, and particularly not before any trial or case has occurred. The opposite extreme, "ask a crook," would also be erroneous.

Stephanie Hershberger
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

As I paged through a recent copy of The Observer, I stopped and read the article. And I agree that justice is too often gender blind.

I come to this conclusion after dealing with the justice system for nearly three years. Though I am not a direct participant, my son is and therefore I am indirectly affected. I am speaking specifically about Family Law and the court's treatment of fathers in divorce cases.

The blame for my son's divorce rests equally on his shoulders, and he and I accept that, and even though many legal sites assure a reader that the Oklahoma courts are not gender biased toward the father in divorce and custody situation, this has not been true in his case. He and his ex-wife have shared custody: alternating weeks with each parent.

To date his ex-wife has not completed the co-parenting class the court ordered, did not complete the domestic violence counseling as a participant

and victim as the court ordered, was allowed to move more than 100 miles away without filing a 10-day notice, has not complied with the court's orders to allow generous telephone calls to the child [a son], did not consider that the ex-wife and her live-in boyfriend were arrested for misdemeanor and felony drug possession when asked to modify custody, did not consider that the ex-wife remarried in Texas prior to the finalization of the divorce [this is called felony adultery but is ignored in Oklahoma], is not requiring the ex-wife to fulfill her financial responsibilities toward the child but jumped at the opportunity to give my son only 10 days to arrange payment for a surgical procedure that the ex-wife has not pursued in the three years since the injury occurred [the decree stated that he is to pay for procedures when he is informed by the health care provider, yet the provider has not contacted him and will not share any information with him], allowed the ex-wife to file frivolous contempt of court charges, started the hearing by ordering my son's attorney to prove his case [my son's innocence], but then ended the hearing after only 15 minutes because he was reading the decree and came to the item that required mediation before returning to court, has not required the ex-wife to comply with multiple requests from my son's attorney to meet and discuss the things that are causing problems: telephone calls to the child, sharing holidays when that holiday falls in her week of custody, and others.

So justice is gender blind.

Charlotte Estep
Tishomingo

Editor, The Observer:

I believe most citizens have totally forgotten that this man who occupies the highest office on this planet came to the party as an untried youngster with a good brain. Perhaps it's time to give him a little more credit.

Being saddled with a Congress of addled brained old farts who spend most of their time campaigning for funds to keep their cushiony job with all the perks is not conducive to changing the nation in a few months.

Far more experienced men have occupied that office and done less in the first term than he has managed to do - and done it in spite of catastrophe after catastrophe.

I haven't even mentioned the 16 years of mismanagement by the Bush men that he has had to navigate!

Darla Reynolds-Sparks
Yukon

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.

War



FROSTY TROY
Founding Editor

Five more Americans – one from Oklahoma – were killed recently in Afghanistan, now the longest war in American history.

Since the beginning of the 20th Century, some 650,000 Americans have died fighting this country's many wars, including more than 5,000 in our two current wars.

My family history is replete with veterans – Uncle John Troy was gassed in World War I. My brother Leo was a Marine and my brother Pat was in the Navy in WWII.

I, along with my brothers Kevin and Johnny, served in the Korean War. Kevin was killed [the Silver Star] and Johnny stayed in and made it a career – including three tours in the helicopters in Vietnam.

Regardless of political affiliation and ideology, every American ought to reverence the selfless sacrifice and understand and share the grief that this tragic loss of life entails.

Though those of us who have known war hear the cries of the dying forever in our mind and suffer the pain and loss each day of our lives and need no holiday to remind us.

The disgraceful treatment of today's veterans is a low water mark for America. Granted, these are unpopular wars but that doesn't lessen the valor of the troops.

Tinker air shows, "exciting" demonstrations of the high tech, billion-dollar implements of war, have become an increasingly popular way to "celebrate" in many parts of the country.

With its enormous budget, Army recruiters set up what is, for all intents and purposes, a mobile military circus and amusement arcade.

Passersby, some as young as 10 years old, need only provide their contact information into the Army database to receive an array of Army recruitment material and souvenirs – personalized dog tags, T-shirts, hats, footballs, etc.

A Truthout blogger notes that once registered, students are encouraged to become "Army Strong," that is, participate in interactive physical fitness events such as climbing the "U.S. Army Rock Wall" ["strength of body," "rock strong"], "perform virtual music" on a stage in front of their peers ["strength to lead"], operate small remote control robotic devices known as Packbots through an obstacle course ["strength of technology"], "pilot" an Apache helicopter flight simulator ["strength to soar"] or "participate in a fully immersive, adrenaline-pumping, highly realistic [Humvee] experience" in which they conduct a "virtual mission," engage "insurgents" and kill them ["strength of team"].

It's hard to go to a movie without sitting through a military recruiting ad, glamorizing service but no mention of the ultimate sacrifice thousands will pay with life, limb or mental derangement.

We celebrate militarism, the machinery of war and entice young people, through highly manipulative and deceptive practices, into enlisting in the military.

It's considered unpatriotic not to celebrate July 4 and other holidays such as Memorial Day. The following is an excerpt from the Bethpage Federal Credit Union's 2009 New York Air Show web site, perhaps the mother of all such "celebrations" of the implements of death and destruction:

"If your company would like to go beyond typical marketing ... Huge family participation coupled with the extraordinary setting makes the air show at Jones Beach a great opportunity for corporate sponsorship and VIP hospitality.

"Our participating sponsors link their brand with the exciting, patriotic event



as they host their most valued clients, employees, family and friends in a truly first class setting. Hospitality tents lined up along the beachfront offer private beach enclosures and can be tailored to meet each sponsor's specific marketing aim ...

"The Business Package includes 10 Tickets to the Jones Beach VIP Tent and 4 VIP Parking Passes and you may also hang a small Corporate Banner inside the tent. Cost: \$2,000.00."

This blatant commercialization of patriotic sentiment, and celebration of the killing instruments of war, demonstrates once again that the primary concern and motivation of banking and corporate executives, the primary sponsors of these spectacles, is profit.

Guess who has enriched themselves by billions of dollars in Iraq and Afghanistan? Billions are unannounced for. Their arrogance, insensitivity and greed is an outrage to anyone who has proudly worn the uniform, loves America and who understands and appreciates the nature of sacrifice and service to country.

Corporations such as Halliburton and their offspring contribute mightily to members of Congress to keep the war wheels greased. Most grievously, it defiles the memory of those young men and women who have lost their lives in war, and an insult to their families who will never again caress their son, daughter, husband or wife ... and will never recover from their loss.

If you protested the winless Vietnam War, you were spit at and heckled. Military machinery, commercial marketing and military recruitment carries the day.

President Obama has a timetable for withdrawal from the Afghan tragedy. That country could not be conquered by Alexander the Great or the Russian army.

We will succeed in Iraq but Afghanistan is and always has been a lost cause. It isn't unpatriotic to say so.

Prison Numbers

Roughly 2.4 million people are behind bars in the U.S. If you include those on probation or parole, the number increases to almost eight million.

Oklahoma locks up a higher percentage of women than any other state and ranks fourth in incarcerated men. There are approximately 25,000 in Oklahoma prisons today.

When Gov. David Hall confronted a riot at the prison in McAlester, there were 2,600 prisoners in the entire system. He eventually reduced that by hundreds, concentrating on the non-violent.

Today we have Gov. Brad Henry, who will sit on a unanimous Parole Board recommendation six or seven months. He gives a new definition to dithering.

Forty years ago, fewer than 350,000 people were incarcerated in this country. The prison system consumes more than \$212 billion a year and employs 2.4 million people.

There are more than 1,800 prisons across the country, not counting local jails, juvenile lockups, and immigration facilities.

Although blacks and Latinos make up less than a fourth of the U.S. population, they fill approximately half of prisons. The same is true in Oklahoma.

During the height of Jim Crow, blacks went to prison at roughly four times the rate of whites; today the black imprisonment rate is seven times that of whites.

The Civil Rights Movement was supposed to lead us down the path to racial equality, but that clearly hasn't happened, so how did we end up where we are now?

In her new book, *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander writes, "In the era of colorblindness, it is no longer socially permissible to use race, explicitly, as a justification for discrimination, exclusion, and social contempt. So we don't.

"Rather than rely on race, we use our criminal justice system to label people of color 'criminals' and then engage in all the practices we supposedly left behind.

"As a criminal, you have scarcely more rights, and arguably less respect, than a black man living in Alabama at the height of Jim Crow. We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it."

If you want to assess the U.S. prison system, you have to focus on our neighbors to the south, Texas, the most locked-down state in the country.

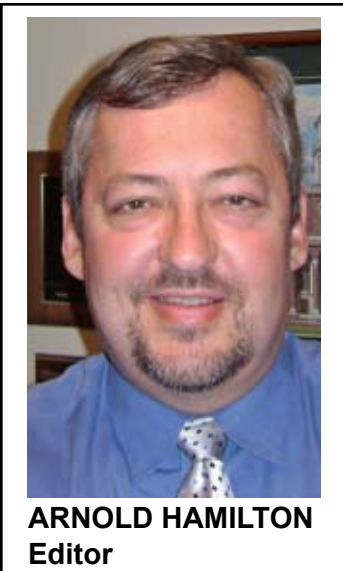
Tracing the evolution of Texas and American justice over two centuries explains how reform movements arose and were beaten back; how the divisive, fearful politics of law and order helped vanquish the hopes of Reconstruction and, later, integration; and how the specters of slavery survived to haunt the present.

In short, it explains how the land of the free became the most incarcerated society in the history of democratic governance.

Oklahoma needs to do two things – change the Constitution by getting the governor out of the parole process except in capital cases; expand the drug and mental health courts to divert the non-violent from prison.

It is to our everlasting shame that the largest mental hospital in Oklahoma is the Oklahoma County jail – more than 270 seriously mentally ill prisoners.

Cracking The State Budget Shell Game



ARNOLD HAMILTON
Editor

It's difficult to overstate the despair in the packed state education department conference room last month when Superintendent Sandy Garrett delivered the bad news.

Despite bald-faced spin from legislative leaders and the governor that public schools sustained a 2.9% cut, the reality was worse – nearly three times worse.

In an hour-long-plus presentation, Garrett sought to make sense, line by line, of what one state board member derided as a “faux budget” in which the Legislature, for the first time in decades, delivered a lump sum to common education – no specifics on how the money should be spent.

Then Garrett, retiring after five terms as superintendent, offered a blueprint – a “patchwork quilt,” she called it – to keep common ed afloat for the next year.

Gone – at least for now – is stipends for teachers who mentor new teachers, arts grants, funders

for the annual science and engineering fair, and financial rewards for teachers at top-performing/most-improved schools.

And that's just the beginning. Schools will receive 7.59% less funding via the state aid formula next year. The state education department budget will be trimmed 7.89%. The activities fund is down 14.6%.

There are some estimates that as many as 5,000 teaching positions could be in jeopardy. This much we know for certain: There were 1,831 fewer certified staff [teachers] and 1,358 fewer support personnel this June than last.

The budgetary bloodshed in general, and its effect on public schools specifically, renewed my interest in a plan – first championed this year by Lt. Gov. Jari Askins – to radically overhaul the way Oklahoma develops its state budget.

Askins, a former state House member now seeking the Democratic gubernatorial nomination, wants to scrap the current system – in which lawmakers annually negotiate a 12-month fiscal blueprint – in favor of a two-year spending plan that would force them to think longer-term when deploying the taxpayers' money.

As part of her proposal, the Legislature would continue to meet annually, but one year's session would be limited to regular, policy-related lawmaking, while the other would be devoted solely to hammering out the details of a biennial budget.

“That way we're not waiting until the last few days of the session so that three people can tell us what's in the budget,” Askins says. “A budget session allows all 149 legislators and the governor to be involved.”

Askins couldn't have scripted a better legislative session than the one that ended in late May in order to make her case for a budgeting revolution.

As usual, the spending decisions were largely made behind closed doors, by a handful of legislative leaders, in concert with the governor's negotiating team – then dumped into the vast majority of legislators' laps in the session's final week.

It's all but impossible for even the most earnest, dedicated legislator to read every word of the myriad spending bills, much less analyze their impact on state agencies, the services they provide and the Oklahomans who receive them.

What's worse is that the current, less-than-transparent is ripe for shenanigans and spin, meaning that it's often weeks or months before other legislators, state agencies and state residents know with certainty what the spending priorities have wrought.

Two examples from this year's last-minute chaos underscore the wisdom of Askins' proposal to create two-year budgets – slowly, publicly deliberated in a legislative session devoted solely to fiscal issues:

First, schools, teachers, staff, students, patrons and taxpayers were duped into thinking Oklahoma's beleaguered, financially-strapped public schools fared much better than many other state agencies as the state scrambled to absorb a \$1 billion-plus budget hole.

One of those who smelled a rat almost immediately was state Rep. Ed Cannaday, D-Porum, himself a former teacher and school administrator.

“I became concerned when I requested an Education, Appropriations and Budget meeting the day after we got the budget to review the line items on the State Department of Education budget,” he wrote in a letter published in the June 25 Observer. “I was told that this would not occur and would not be necessary.”

It didn't take education officials long to figure out legislative sleight-of-hand. Tulsa Superintendent Keith Ballard was one of the first to publicly expose the charade. Garrett and others soon joined the chorus, trying to explain to Oklahomans what had been done to their public schools.

State Education Board members were clearly stunned when Garrett laid out the details – and her proposed solutions – at the June 29 meeting in OKC.

Tulsa attorney Tim Gilpin accused the Legislature of passing “a faux budget” and leaving to the state board the “dirty work” of deliver bad budgetary news to “all of these worthy programs, worthy professionals and school children of Oklahoma.”

Gilpin correctly pointed out that lawmakers spent an inordinate amount of time this session on frivolous issues – how about those ridiculous anti-federal

government, states rights, Tenth Amendment windmill tilting? – rather than on the serious business of protecting Oklahoma's future – its school children.

At one point, board member Betsy Mabry of Enid turned to her colleague, former state Sen. Herb Rozell, D-Tahlequah, and asked: “How does this make you feel?”

“Don't get me started,” replied Rozell, who helped secure legislative approval for many of the education reforms enacted during Gov. Henry Bellmon's second term – many now lost because of recent budget cuts and endless attacks by anti-public school forces.

Legislative leaders work to create the illusion of an open-budget process, holding dozens of committee and subcommittee hearings where fiscal issues and priorities are debated, state agencies present their financial needs and constituencies campaign for a bigger slice of the budgetary pie.

In the end, though, each year's spending blueprint is decided behind closed doors, by a tiny group of House and Senate insiders, in concert with the governor's staff, whose priorities and biases and political agendas remain a mystery until the full impact of the budget can be deciphered.

Legislative leaders routinely argue that it's simply unworkable to involve all 149 members in the fiscal negotiations. Smaller groups, working privately, beyond the pressure of special interests, are essential if lawmakers are to complete the budget-writing process in the time allotted for each session.

A budget-only session not only would relieve the time pressure – lawmakers would be focused solely on spending, not myriad other policy issues – but also promises more transparency. Devoting four months to the budget would give lawmakers, interest groups and the public ample time to weigh-in on and determine spending priorities. A two-year budget also would require that legislators engage in longer-term analysis of fiscal issues, leading – hopefully – to a more proactive, less reactive spending process.

Another reason to seriously consider a two-year budget cycle: The funny business at the end of this year's session – involving the alleged misuse of state narcotics bureau monies – would be less apt to occur if lawmakers spent an entire session slowly, deliberately crafting the budget.

Sure, woolly boogers still could be slipped in at the last minute – like the \$80,000 a year state job, allegedly designed for a specific Democratic state senator. See **BUDGET Page 18**

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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Did We Learn From Tar Creek Disaster?

Editor's Note: Tar Creek homeowners who sued because they said their homes were under-valued, lost 9-0 in the Oklahoma Supreme Court. One of the worst American Superfund sites is now history. Did we learn anything? This background is from The Nation magazine.

If you head north on Route 66, past Kay's Kut & Kurl, the Okie Burger drive-in and the house where Mickey Mantle grew up, you come to a silvery, man-made mountain range.

These are metal mountains, massive piles of sand mixed with arsenic, lead, cadmium and manganese tailings – toxic leftovers from more than 300 mines that once made this northeast corner of Oklahoma a series of boomtowns.

From the turn of the century through the 1960s, miners dug in this area for lead, zinc and other raw materials, mostly used to make munitions for the military.

When Eagle-Picher and most of the other mining companies shut down their sites by the mid-1970s, they didn't bother to clean up the toxic heaps, called chat.

ABANDONED CHAT PILES

They abandoned the chat piles, some of which rose about 200 feet high and were as wide as two city blocks. The chat blew around Ottawa County, coating houses and yards with poisonous dust and saturating the air near schools and stores.

Oblivious to any danger, parents helped themselves to the chat to fill sandboxes, and kids raced dirt bikes over the peaks.

The mining companies also neglected to seal most of the mine shafts. Over the next few years the shafts slowly filled with polluted, acidic water, which by 1979 burst into nearby Tar Creek, dyeing it Day-Glo orange and killing fish and other aquatic life.

TAR CREEK CONTAMINATION

During frequent floods, the waters of Tar Creek would contaminate nearby neighborhoods, staining sidewalks and stones and leaving the soil unsafe for growing food – a particular problem for members of the Quapaw Indian Nation and other tribes accustomed to living off the land.

The sickly-looking river drew the attention of the EPA, which in 1983 designated Tar Creek an early and important target of Superfund, the landmark program enacted by Congress in 1980 to clean up the nation's worst toxic waste sites.

The EPA's roughly \$120 million effort to remediate Tar Creek failed because of poor planning and complications from the underground network of tunnels and mines, and so people in the nearby towns of Picher, Cardin and Hockerville, as well as some farther away in Miami and Commerce and across the state line into Kansas, continued to be exposed.

In 1994 Rebecca Jim, a member of the Cherokee Nation who worked as a school counselor in Miami, read about the dangers of exposure to lead. She insisted that the government test some of the schoolchildren.

The results were shocking: more than 43% of the kids had levels considered unsafe, capable of diminishing intelligence and causing other behavioral and physical problems.

A DRIVING FORCE

Jim was a driving force behind a massive education campaign that warned residents not to play in the chat, fish in the orange creek or eat food grown locally. Ten years later, the lead levels were much improved.

That didn't mean the people were safe. Harvard public health professor David Bellinger and his colleagues found that children who had the highest levels of a mixture of arsenic and manganese, as measured in their hair, did worse on tests measuring verbal skills and verbal memory than kids who were less contaminated.

These results led the National Institute of Environmental Health and Sciences to sponsor a second study by Bellinger, measuring more contaminants in the blood of Tar Creek community children and testing, among other things, whether exposure to chat has impaired their ability to think.

BRILLIANT RESEARCHER

Bellinger, a lean, blue-eyed 53-year-old with graying hair and a close-cropped beard, is modest, despite his reputation as a brilliant researcher. He's gentle with the children and their worried parents – who leave the clinic with a \$50 Wal-Mart gift certificate and a lot of unanswered questions.

He became close to the test subjects after spending weeks in the community and wishes it wasn't going to take so long to get results. This study will continue for another five years, and others are under way. "There's a lot of smoke suggesting that we need to be concerned," Bellinger says.

The results of his team's work may be used to justify stricter protection standards for exposure to certain chemicals; could push the EPA to expedite efforts to clean up other Superfund sites; and will add to the growing body of science on what happens when people are exposed, not just to one pollutant but to mixtures – as typically occurs in real life.

These changes will come too late for the children and adults of Tar Creek.

FAMILIES OFFERED BUYOUT

Unable to restore the land and water to a safe condition, the state in 2005 offered a buyout to families with children age six and younger.

See TAR CREEK Page 10

2010 Distinguished Pulpit Series

Mayflower Congregational Church, UCC



Lori Walke — July 25

Lori Walke is a 2009 graduate of Oklahoma City University School of Law. Prior to attending OCU, she received her Masters in Healthcare Administration from Oklahoma State University, together with her Bachelor of Science in Political Science. While at Oklahoma State, Lori was a Cowgirl basketball player and the 2005 Miss Oklahoma State

University. Currently, Lori is in the Master of Divinity program at Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa, Oklahoma. She will be graduating in December 2011. Upon graduation, Lori hopes to serve a United Church of Christ congregation. Lori's interests include her husband Collin, feminist theology, running and gardening.



Michael Dowd — August 1

The Rev. Michael Dowd is a leading voice in the Evolutionary Spirituality movement and the author of two outstanding books: "EarthSpirit: A Handbook for Nurturing an Ecological Christianity" (Twenty-Third Publications, 1991) and "Thank God for Evolution: How the Marriage of Science and Religion will Transform Your Life and Our World" (Viking/Plume, 2008) endorsed by six Nobel laureates. Michael was pastor of three United Church of Christ congregations, worked with Jewish, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical,

Unitarian Universalist, and New Thought leaders across America on environmental, peace, and justice issues, and managed government funded Sustainable Lifestyle Campaigns on both coasts. His great joy is telling the 14 billion year history of everyone and everything in ways that evoke awe, gratitude, and trust, inspire faith and openheartedness, and empower people to follow the path where their own great joy and the world's great need intersect.



Dr. Richard Ward — August 8

Dr. Richard Ward, Fred B. Craddock Associate Professor of Homiletics and Worship, is the coordinator for this specialization. Prior to coming to Phillips, Dr. Ward served on the faculty of Yale Divinity School in the Clement-Muehl chair in Communication Arts and with Fred Craddock on the faculty of the Candler School of Theology at Emory University. He

is the author of Speaking from the Heart: Preaching with Passion and Speaking of the Holy: The Art of Communication in Preaching. With Fred Craddock and Mike Graves, he co-edited Craddock Stories. Dr. Ward also serves on the editorial board for Feasting on the Word.



Senator Andrew Rice — August 15

Rice graduated in 1996 from Colby College (Waterville, Maine) with a Bachelor's Degree in Religious Studies and a minor in African American Studies. Rice received his Masters in Theological Studies from the Harvard University Divinity School in 1999.

Rice's older brother, David, was killed in the World Trade Center on Sept. 11th, 2001 and due to the tragedy, Andrew decided to rededicate his career to social justice work

and political reforms. He worked for the Texas Freedom Network, and is the founder of the Progressive Alliance Foundation which works throughout the state of Oklahoma advancing progressive, fair-minded and constitutional solutions to public policy problems. He also launched the Red River Democracy Project (RRDP) and is on the board of The People's Opinion Project. Rice has been in the Oklahoma legislature for four years.

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Coburn Draws Top Democratic Opponent

Not only does Oklahoma's embarrassment, Republican U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn, have an opponent – his opponent is better qualified.

Mark Myles was born in Nurnberg, Germany while his father, a U.S. Army officer, was stationed overseas. He is the oldest of four children and lived in Bamberg, Germany; Fort Meade, MD; Washington, DC; Camp Kilmer, NJ; Schwabach, Germany; and Schilling Air Force Base, KS before his family moved to Fort Sill and then Lawton, where his mother was a junior high school teacher for over three decades.

While attending Lawton's Eisenhower High School, Myles was an active student and leader, lettering in football, basketball and track. He was president of the National Honor Society, a charter member of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and co-captain of the track team.

OSU GRADUATE

Myles attended Oklahoma State University. As a member of the Colvin Center Expansion Committee, his input was instrumental in the construction of the Colvin Center Annex.

Myles was a driving force in initiating the very first OSU International Student Olympics which involved sports and cultural interactions between students from the U.S. and the myriad countries attending Oklahoma State.

Myles was president of the President's Leadership Council Class, president of Phi Beta Sigma [a national freshman honor society], a member of OSU Ambassadors, and president of the 7,000-member Residence Hall Association [RHA].

BA IN ECONOMICS

He received a BA in Economics taking topical coursework that included Microeconomics, Macroeconomics, Money and Banking Economics, International Economic Development, International Economic Relations, Problems in Government Public Policy, Development of Economic Thought, and Diplomacy.

From Oklahoma State, Myles went to work for IBM. He had a stellar 21-year career selling business solutions to small businesses and large corporations.

Myles won numerous awards while at IBM including the IBM Vice President's Leadership Award and multiple IBM Marketing Excellence Awards.

In Oklahoma City, he taught the principles of economics and the free enterprise system to inner city and suburban students as a Junior Achievement consultant.



sultant.

Myles was also a Red Cross volunteer as part of the IBM response to the Oklahoma City bombing. Myles was recognized in Strathmore's Who's Who Registry of Business Leaders in the 1997-98 edition.

OU COLLEGE OF LAW AT 48

After leaving IBM, Myles managed a small start-up company for a short time before he entered the University of Oklahoma College of Law at the age of 48.

While in law school Myles served as the Chair of the Graduate Student Senate, worked as a licensed legal intern in the law school's criminal defense clinic, did pro bono work for the Oklahoma Indigent Defense System, and did volunteer work in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

Myles studied Alternate Dispute Resolution, Public International Law, Supreme Court Decision Making, Commercial Law, Corporations, Oil and Gas Law, Oil and Gas Contracts, International Environmental Law, Water Law, First Amendment, Personal Income Tax, Antitrust I and II, Capital Punishment, Criminal Litigation Skills and Administrative Law.

He attended Brasenose College, Oxford University in Oxford, England, in the summer of 2006 where he studied British Constitutional Law. He was certified in English Legal Systems by the Oxford Centre for International Law and Justice.

AWARD WINNING LAW STUDENT

He received the J.R. Morris Campus Life Award for outstanding leadership and service to the University of Oklahoma in 2007. Myles received the Best Oral Ad-

See MYLES Page 9

New Senate Leader Hits Extremist GOP

By Andrew Rice

As the next Democratic Leader of the Oklahoma Senate, I am very excited about the slate of candidates we have lined up to take the majority back from a Republican Party that is dominated by the far right wing.

First of all, I want to congratulate my Democratic colleagues in the state Senate who won re-election without opposition: Sen. Randy Bass [District 32], Sen. Sean Burrage [District 2], and Sen. Tom Ivester [District 26].

We have terrific candidates across the state to fill our term-limited seats, incumbents working hard for re-election, and perhaps three of the strongest challengers we have had in over a decade who are attempting to try and win three vulnerable GOP-held seats.

I will be highlighting our different candidates in the coming weeks and I encourage you to find ways to help them, from contributing money to helping them knock on voters' doors.

FATALLY OVERCONFIDENT

The Republicans are fatally overconfident about this year's elections. This past legislative session they offered no solutions to Oklahoma's persistent problems while falling all over themselves trying to concoct different ways to divert Oklahoma's attention to Washington, DC with meaningless resolutions.

Their election year message to Oklahoma voters: be scared of Washington so you won't notice that we do not know how to govern now that we are in charge!

Meanwhile, it was the Senate and House Democrats who stood firm with Gov. Brad Henry to bring the GOP to the bargaining table to protect senior nutrition programs, the rural economic development program, and pass historic legislation that will bring a 3-1 federal match of Medicaid dollars to save hospitals all over Oklahoma, and allow us to finally fully fund the "All Kids Act of 2007."

It was the votes of House and Senate Democrats, along with our ability to veto the GOP's extreme budget cuts proposal, that led to these concessions from the GOP leadership.

DEMOCRATS URGED TO DONATE

We will do well in November if we have the resources to compete in our competitive races. Can Democrats contribute \$15, \$25, \$50 or \$100 today to get State Senate Democratic candidates out of the gates fast this election year?

One hundred percent of contributions go to put experienced staff on the ground in our key races, polling research to determine where our dollars will be most effective, and direct mail communications with persuadable voters in key districts. Your money will only be used in races that we can win. We take the task of responsibly using our PAC resources very seriously.

Thank you Oklahoma Observer for your steadfast support and for standing beside us as we fight to protect Oklahomans from the GOP's extreme agenda.

- The author, an Oklahoma City Democrat, represents District 46 in the state Senate

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Newspaper's Double Standard Duly Noted

State policymakers don't always get the advice they need to make informed policy decisions. Not so in Oklahoma, where a recent Oklahoma Policy Institute report presented lawmakers with a detailed list of the tax giveaways embedded in Oklahoma's tax system.

It suggested a set of principles for evaluating these loopholes, and urged the state to evaluate each of these "tax expenditures" as part of their budget-balancing process.

The editorial board of The Daily Disappointment said lawmakers should find "sensible new sources of revenues." Citizens for Tax Justice knocked the paper for its double standard.

Specifically, the board embraced capping or eliminating any tax credits that are ineffective in accomplishing their intended purposes, which is exactly what OK Policy's report recommends.

WELCOME REPRIEVE

New law – a two-year moratorium – represents a welcome reprieve from the all too common, yet irrational practice of addressing budget shortfalls by taking the knife to valuable spending programs, while giving the kid-glove treatment to spending that is done through the tax code.

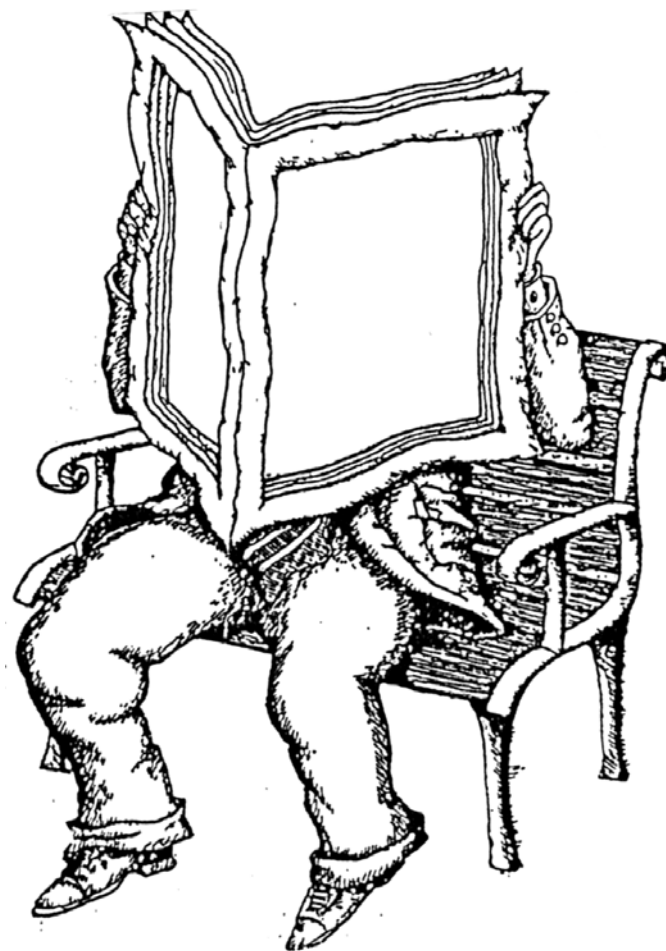
But The Oklahoman fell flat when given the chance to apply this important principle to one of the odder tax giveaways in the state's toolbox, a state income tax deduction for state income taxes.

They complain that the state's top income tax rate of 5.5% is "uncomfortably high," and that any proposal that would affect upper-income taxpayers should therefore be rejected.

But rejecting a tax base-broadener because the rates are too high is getting it exactly backwards. Tax Policy 101 says if you want to avoid increasing tax rates, you should make sure your tax base is sufficiently broad.

Leaving aside the very contestable notion that a 5.5% top rate is "uncomfortably high," the fact is that eliminating the state income tax deduction would strengthen the Oklahoma income tax base in a way that would make it a more efficient revenue-raiser, and would reduce the likelihood that lawmakers will be forced to hike rates down the line.

The Oklahoman's unwillingness to see this basic inconsistency between principle and practice is all the more maddening because OK Policy has recently



shown that eliminating this tax break could raise substantial revenues at little cost to low- and middle-income families, and because one other state, New Mexico, eliminated an identical tax break to help balance their budget earlier this year.

If The Oklahoman's editorial board really wants to see "ineffective" tax breaks eliminated, it should become one of the most fervent supporters of eliminating an illogical state tax break that exists only because the state happens to have built its income tax rules on top of those in place at the federal level.

Instead, one of the principals at The Disappointment enjoyed a multi-million dollar tax break for bringing the Thunder basketball team to Oklahoma City. No mention of this conflict in the paper's editorials.

Short-Term Policies Cripple Roads, Bridges

By Terry Harrison

Without question or much fanfare, the most fundamental role of state government is falling further behind on maintaining safe roads and bridges for Oklahoma drivers.

Following reviews of all 95 truss bridges in the state highway system, the Oklahoma Department of Transportation recently announced two state bridges would be temporarily closed along with new load limits for 25 others. Included in the release was the disclaimer that additional temporary closings and load postings are possible.

The needs of our transportation system are far outpacing the funding the Legislature appropriates, and while discussion of roads and bridges may appear less than enthralling, the consequences of our increasingly deteriorating infrastructure compromise the safety of all citizens.

In a few short weeks school buses will begin picking up children, and traffic will increase on our crumbling roads and decaying bridges. The majority of bridges flagged for safety issues are within my district and southeastern Oklahoma, which is known as ODOT's Division Two.

The new load limits mean that heavier vehicles are restricted from crossing the bridges for fear of the structural integrity of the bridge.

LOST LIVES, DAMAGED VEHICLES

To some this may be a mere inconvenience or a delay from being rerouted, but it signifies much more than short-term maintenance issues and, in cases across the nation, has led to instances of not just damaged vehicles, but the tragic and preventable loss of life.

Beyond public safety concerns is the economic health and viability of our state in which truck transportation plays an essential role. How can we expect our economy to grow when trucks cannot drive on our roads or cross our bridges?

The deterioration of our bridges did not happen overnight and did not occur by accident. It is the natural result of short-term policy decisions that place other considerations ahead of public safety.

We have in place tax preferences and incentives that annually cost Oklahoma \$5.6 billion in lost revenue, and although moratoriums were issued on several this year given our budget shortfall, a growing consensus is acknowledging that many of these should be eliminated altogether.

IMAGINE THE REPAIRS

How many of our bridges could receive the repair and maintenance warranted if but a fraction of these were eliminated?

I understand the tremendous pressure our public transportation system is under given the loss of almost \$30 million in state appropriations this year, on top of cuts suffered the previous year. The Department of Transportation is working hard to do as much it can with the dollars it has.

However, as I depart the Legislature this year, I do challenge returning lawmak-

ers to find funding to take care of our existing roads and bridges that are in disrepair – and to be more proactive, rather than reactive, to the public safety issues these hazards create.

– The author, a McAlester Democrat, represents District 18 in the state House. He is not seeking re-election this year, but instead is running for district attorney.

MYLES

From Page 8

vocate award and the Best Petitioner's Brief award in the 2007-08 Frederick Douglass Moot Court Competition.

Myles also received the Kelly Beardslee Criminal Defense Award for his advocacy in the Law Center's Criminal Defense Clinic in 2008.

Myles graduated from law school in May 2008 and was admitted to practice before the Oklahoma Supreme Court the following September. Myles is also admitted to practice before the United States Court of International Trade, the United States Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals, and the United States District Courts for the Western, Northern, and Eastern Districts of Oklahoma.

ATTORNEY HELPING PEOPLE

Myles currently practices law at the Law Firm of Albert J. Hoch, Jr. where he does administrative, criminal, and family law and represents indigent clients.

He is a member of the American Bar Association, the National Bar Association, the Oklahoma Bar Association, the Oklahoma County Bar Association, the Logan County Bar Association, and the Oklahoma Criminal Defense Bar Association.

His avocations include sports, photography, and travel. He is a past member of USA Track and Field [USATF] and the United States Cycling Federation [USCF]. Myles served as the USCF District Representative for the state of Oklahoma, taught swimming in the National Youth and Sports Program and was a PADI certified open water and rescue diver.

He currently volunteers with the Bishop McGuinness High School cross-country program.

Myles officiated basketball at the high school and college levels, including 12 Oklahoma Secondary School Activities Association state championship basketball finals between 1985 and 1997.

He officiated women's and men's college basketball at the junior college, NAGWS, NAIA, and NCAA Division II and III levels in Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas, Arkansas, and Louisiana. He officiated postseason games at the junior college and NAIA levels.

He is the father of two talented daughters who currently attend public school in Oklahoma City. He is a member of Crown Heights Christian Church.

BOOKS

Religious Right's Fear Of An Obama Nation

By Don Wilkey

RADICAL RULERS

By Robert Knight

Coral Ridge Ministries

176 pages, No price listed

Robert Knight has packaged a box full of charges that represent what the Religious Right fears about President Obama.

Knight writes for Coral Ridge Ministries, the fruit of the labors of the late D. James Kennedy, longtime pastor of the church with the same name.

Once Kennedy was known as the leader of an evangelistic movement to win converts. Towards the end of his life he appeared more interested in recruiting Republicans than Christians.

A great deal of the sermons he preached towards the end of his life centered on how well David Barton had exposed the truth of American History. Sermons typically spoke more about Supreme Court decisions than they did Biblical stories.

MEDIA CONSPIRACY

Knight writes that the media secretly conspired to "airbrush" Obama and eventually threw Hillary Clinton overboard, treating her like ... a Republican.

The media refuse to tell the real truth about the radicals in the President's administration, but Knight wants to set the record straight. He does this with the help of the always unbiased Glenn Beck and Fox News.

Knight wants to tell the public that the current President wants to destroy the free market system and nation's moral foundation. He will attempt to do this with a group of radical Marxists.

The author echoes Hal Lindsey's theory that Obama wants to take the once Christian nation and turn it into a Muslim state.

Wright believes the small percentage of Muslims in the nation wields a huge influence with the President far exceeding their current strength.

SLIMED AS A COMMUNIST

Typical of the accusations in the book is the Obama link to Frank Marshall Davis. Davis is called a Communist who worked for a Communist Party newspaper.

A quick check on Davis reveals he flirted with Communism working with the Civil Rights movement. Much like Martin Luther King's connection to Communist groups, the record is there.

Neither Davis, nor the paper he wrote for, claimed the mantle of Communism.

In the South many old South segregationists still call King a Communist. The same logic is used in this book regarding people around Obama.

Lucille Ball was once a Communist, but the connection never blacklisted her in Hollywood. On the other hand people like Woody Guthrie never outlived their association with Communist organizations.

Religious Right magazine author Marvin Olasky was once a Communist, a quickly excused lapse from youthful adventures, according to his supporters now.

CHRISTIAN NATION

The President's friends are not given the same free pass and their youthful ideologies are drudged up to make them dangerous.

The book documents the links many of the advisors did and still have to unpopular movements. The work reminds me of Bruce Short's *The Harsh Truth About Public Schools*.

There are tens of thousands of public schools and digging up the worst and the craziest cases and making them sound like the norm is what Short accomplished.

For instance, President Obama is supposedly leading the increased war effort in Afghanistan. If his desire was to promote the Islamic state, how could you explain the effort against the Taliban?

Knight attacks Obama for statements made against the idea of a Christian Nation. Even John McCain agreed that such a concept as "Christian Nation" was not healthy in the light of the First Amendment.

Christian Reconstruction's latest magazine has a quote from the Southern

TAR CREEK

From Page 7

Then the EPA offered a second buyout, paying to relocate all those willing to leave - but leaving behind Quapaw tribe members, to whom abandoning the ancestral burial ground was unthinkable, and those who didn't qualify for any more land.

Across the border in Kansas, the EPA is working on a buyout for the townspeople of Treece.

Tar Creek is just one of more than 1,200 seriously contaminated hazardous waste sites the EPA is charged with cleaning up under Superfund.

At 30 years old, the program is staggering under the weight of its enormous mandate. Underfunded and at times badly managed, Superfund has been slow to start cleanups, sluggish to complete them and, in recent years, incapable of standing up to the Defense Department and others responsible for some of the worst pollution.

It was another black eye for Oklahoma.

Baptist's chief critic of public education. He wrote, "The way these public school teachers are trained, they're already Marxists, already pagans, by the time they enter a classroom."

MCCARTHYISM, REDUX

The article went on to state that public schools are committed to teaching children to embrace sodomy as a valid lifestyle as well as rants against capitalism.

Recently a Houston talk radio program was hosted by a woman who kept repeating that Obama was a fascist.

Knight brought up the birther movement to add fuel to the fire. Claiming the President is a closet Muslim, not born in America and is connected to extreme radical movements is standard fodder for the fires being lit across the nation with Religious Right connections.

It reminds me of McCarthyism and its basic premise: if you ever had a second cousin that dated one, you are one.

- The author is pastor of the First Baptist Church in Onalaska, TX

Editor's Note: Knight's book appears to only be available through Coral Ridge Ministries. The cost? A "generous gift of any amount."

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Even More Hidden Than Puppy Mills?

By Ruth Steinberger

Editor's Note: According to the Humane Society of the United States, Class B animal dealers, licensed by the United States Department of Agriculture, are allowed to buy dogs from owners or raise dogs and sell them to research facilities. They also may obtain animals from auctions or from shelters through so-called "pound seizures."

My effort to learn the number of dogs transacted by USDA Class B – or "random source" dog dealers – in Oklahoma each year [specifically for the years 2007-09] hit a dead end within the very federal agency that monitors the Class B dealer licensees.

The USDA's system shields this information even from the agency itself, and it will likely "take an act of Congress" to change it.

Oklahoma is one of the highest in the number of Class B dealers licensees in the nation [34 out of 969 active Class B licensees are located in Oklahoma] and this trade in dogs and other animals, which go to research, product testing and resale for pets, may be even more hidden than in the puppy mill world.

The Class B underworld was exposed in the HBO documentary *Dealing Dogs*. That case involved the seizure of over 800 dogs from the Arkansas-based USDA Class B dealer C.C. Baird.

COLLECTED, NOT TABULATED

Videotapes and taped confessions regarding Baird and his associates revealed that he was involved in purchasing large numbers of stolen pets for over two decades while he was licensed by USDA. Ultimately Baird was charged by the State of Arkansas, but not by the USDA.

What I have learned is that information which reflects the number of dogs transferred by each dealer is actually collected from the dealer, but then is not forwarded to the USDA or tabulated or tracked in any way. It is virtually impossible to find how many dogs are processed by a single dealer, much less how many are processed through a single state.

Despite the fact that wrongdoing has been exposed in the Class B system, and this wrongdoing has been exposed to Congress, the system remains set up to prevent an elected official from determining numbers or seeking accountability.

Some dog dealers have been tied to theft by deception. For example, people called "bunchers" are known to respond to free-to-good-home advertisements posing as a prospective home and getting dogs for the dealer for a fee. Yet, it would be virtually impossible for a law enforcement entity to use USDA transfer records if they suspect pet theft.

MINORITY ARE LEGITIMATE

Although a National Geographic expose revealed pet theft to be a problem nationwide, the numbers still are not tabulated. Commenting on Class B dealers, Stephen Barthold, director of the Center for Comparative Medicine at the University of California at Davis, was quoted Feb. 26 by www.sciencemag.org as saying, "There is a minority of dealers that is totally legitimate and doing the job well."

Class B dog dealers mainly get dogs from "random sources" to be resold. Some supply research facilities, they also supply pet retailers, and some are exhibitors [this includes exotic animal exhibitors].

"Random source" is supposed to mean that owners who have raised the pets actually sell the dog or cat to the dealer. However, it's unlikely that most people



would knowingly sell a dog to go to research; having no method of accountability invites, indeed almost condones, wrongdoing.

On my first attempt to find out how many Oklahoma dogs are processed by Class B dealers, I was told by USDA to submit a request through Freedom of Information Act [FOIA], which I did. Two months later, a letter came explaining that USDA does not collect that information.

Recently I spoke with a man named Wayne [he did not offer his last name] at the USDA Colorado office. Wayne said that each dealer uses a disposition form which records anywhere from one to several dogs which are transacted, and that the dealer keeps one copy, one copy goes with the dog or dogs, and a third copy is held for the inspector who, according to Wayne, picks up the forms when USDA performs their inspection. He said the inspection is "annually, bi-annually or tri-annually ..."

CONCEALED BY OMISSION

According to him, no copy is submitted to a central USDA office, nor are any figures or basic information tabulated by the USDA. Each inspector collects and simply keeps these forms somewhere. The numbers are kept from the public by omission, continuing a lack of oversight of a system which has been wrought with wrongdoing for decades.

Wayne explained that essentially the USDA inspectors who receive the forms do not have a mechanism for allowing the forms to provide oversight or public access, the figures on the forms are not tabulated within a database, and inspectors do not submit numbers from the disposition forms to the agency itself.

Random source dogs end up as randomly released dogs, and their fates and numbers still cannot be determined from the USDA record keeping.

As it stands now, there is no mechanism that keeps the infamous C.C. Baird tragedy from recurring.

Please ask your federal representatives to mandate that numbers which are already on USDA forms be added up and posted so that the number of dogs processed in a county, state or within our nation can no longer be hidden from the public.

– The author lives in Bristow

Group Linked To Cult Pays For Trips

A handful of members of Congress have accepted more than \$100,000 worth of free international travel from the religious organization affiliated with the "C Street house," a Capitol Hill townhouse linked to recent congressional sex scandals.

While most of the members have taken a trip or two from the Fellowship Foundation, also known as the International Foundation, Rep. Robert Aderholt, R-AL, accepted foreign trips worth more than \$50,000 over the past four years.

Sens. John Ensign, R-NV, Tom Coburn, R-OK, and Jim Inhofe, R-OK, have also traveled abroad for The Family. Inhofe spent more than \$187,000 of taxpayer money for 20 trips to Africa for The Family.

Other members who have accepted trips from the Fellowship Foundation are Rep. Mike Doyle, D-PA, who also lives at the C Street house, and Republican Reps. Frank Wolf of Virginia, Joe Pitts of Pennsylvania and John Carter of Texas, according to House records.

THEY KEEP A LOW PROFILE

The Fellowship Foundation is a low-profile religious cult that has been in the news recently because of its connection to the C Street house, a townhouse on Capitol Hill that hosts regular prayer meetings and serves as the DC residence for several members of Congress.

Since 2000, the organization has spent just over \$101,000 on 13 foreign trips for members of Congress to meet and pray with political leaders in other countries, according to Congressional travel records.

Aderholt alone has accepted seven trips from the group in the past four years, at a total value of \$62,000.

In 2006, Aderholt accepted three fellowship-funded trips – to Kazakhstan, Sudan and Serbia – worth a total of about \$28,000.

Coburn and Inhofe have made numerous trips abroad to "Christianize the world for Christ." Theirs is a strange form of Christianity described by Jeff Shalat

in his book *The Family*, which he wrote after two years living under-cover in the C Street address.

JUST BUILDING FRIENDSHIPS

Stan Holmes, an official with the Fellowship Foundation who arranged several of the Congressional trips, told Roll Call the travel is intended "to follow up with some of the leaders that come from other countries to those prayer breakfasts. It is mostly about building those relationships and those friendships."

Holmes said that while many of the participants in the gatherings are political figures, "there is no policy agenda" and the events are not political. "It's built around the spiritual realm. That is the purpose of the trips."

C Street has received increased attention since Ensign admitted that he held a meeting there with Coburn and others to discuss his affair with a campaign staffer.

SANFORD WENT FOR COUNSELING

South Carolina GOP Gov. Mark Sanford also admitted that he went to the C Street house for counseling during his extramarital affair, and the wife of former Rep. Chip Pickering alleged in divorce proceedings that the Mississippi Republican carried on an affair at the C Street house.

According to Washington, DC, property records, the house is owned by the organization C Street Center, and the registered agent is Marty Sherman.

The Fellowship Foundation's tax returns list Sherman as one of four paid staff members, and prior to 2008, it listed the C Street Center as an organization that is related to the foundation "through common membership, governing bodies, trustees [or] officers."

Holmes also emphasized that the Fellowship Foundation does not call itself a Christian organization. The group believes in the teachings of Jesus, but it also believes that those teachings are of relevance to anyone regardless of their religious faith, he said.

PUBLIC FORUM

If Obama Really Wants To Kick Some ...

By Harry T. Cook

Some weeks ago, the allegedly bloodless, unfeeling Barack Obama, in an effort to appear legitimately angry, used the “a” word in response to a question from the Today show’s Matt Lauer.

It was unconvincing.

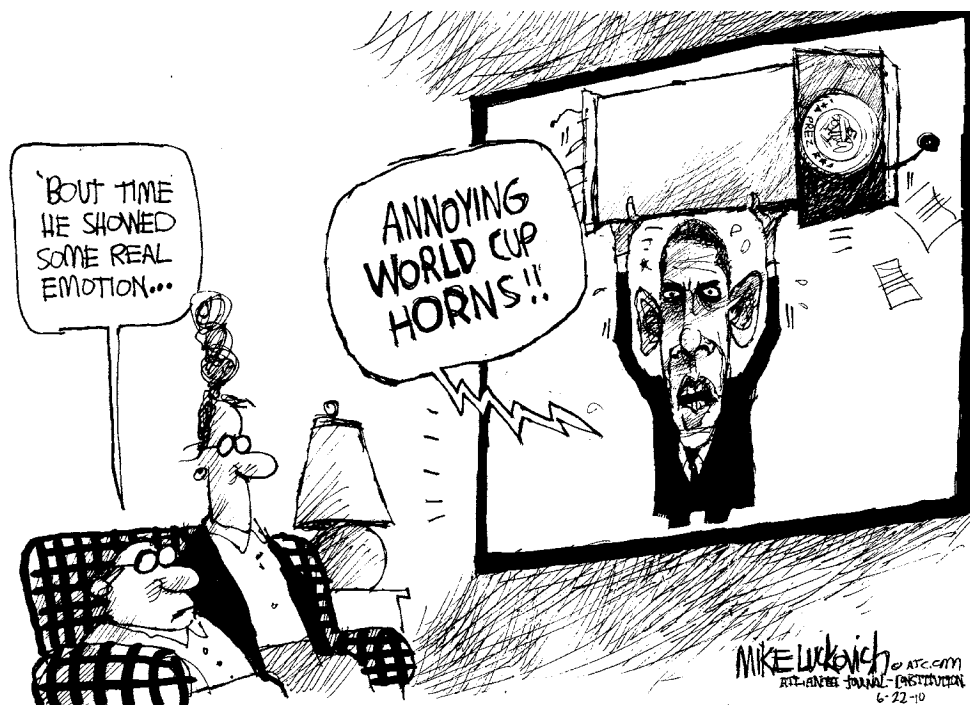
The president of the United States remains steadfastly rational – an unfortunate mien in light of the smack-down politics now so au courant in the land of the free and the home of the nuts.

We are told by our media therapists that in order to appear to be effective, Obama needs to whip off his shoe after the manner of Nikita Khrushchev and pound it on the nearest surface, letting spittle form at the corners of his mouth while speaking at an ear-ringing decibel level.

Then, of course, his rightist detractors would raise a collective eyebrow and revolve a finger at the side of the head. “Mashugenah,” they would say with relish.

Actually, I would have my president go ahead and use the “a” word again, and in this wise: “I don’t give a rat’s a-- if I get re-elected. Hell, I may not even run again in 2012. Who needs this job anyway? So shut the hell up and listen. Here’s what I’m going to do:

“First: I’m going to take the advice the late Vermont Sen. George Aiken gave to Lyndon Johnson back in the Vietnam war era. LBJ didn’t take it, but I’m going to take it now. I am going to declare victory in Afghanistan and get us out of there as fast as Gen. [Stanley] McChrystal can run a marathon. We can’t win the frigging war there because we don’t know



who the enemy is, and it may be us anyway. The generals over at the Pentagon will just have to suck it up and merely say, ‘Sir! Yes, sir!’

“Second: I’m going to see to it that the immense savings accrued from cutting off the war go first to the neediest public school districts of the several states, albeit under strict supervision, to save them from further collapse and our children from ignorance.

“Third: I will be directing some of the war savings into the state Medicaid programs to restore cuts that have adversely impacted the poor.

“Fourth: I will keelhaul Tony Hayward to his yacht and re-christen it ‘Ship of Fools.’ That’s after I

have let him and his people and the entire rest of the oil industry know that we’re done coddling their sorry behinds, that we will press for full payment of drilling royalties and use as much of those dollars and others of theirs as we can get our hands on to help get that well capped, the gulf clear of the oil and the beaches cleaned up – yes, even Haley Barbour’s pristine Mississippi strands.

“Fifth: I will, if necessary, issue an executive order to impose a \$1-per-gallon surcharge on gasoline at the pump to begin an effort to wean us off the stuff. People who can prove poverty by displaying their food stamp card or other relevant documentation will be exempted. Any

cheating I find out about will be punished to the full extent of the law.

“Sixth: I will breathe fire in public and in private at the U.S. Congress and let them know I will veto any financial reform bill that does not impose strict regulations on Wall Street and the nation’s banks. I will not accept, I will not sign into law any bill that does not regulate derivatives and like instruments that were almost the death of us.

“Seventh: I will swallow the bile rising in my throat and execute to the best of my ability every last term and clause of the recent health care legislation. It didn’t go far enough to help enough of our people, but it will do until I or my successors can improve it.

“We’ve got a lot of unfinished business around here and across America. I am trying to attend to it. The Republicans in Congress can’t see beyond the next election, and neither, for that matter, can some people from my own party. As Spike Lee might say, we have to do the right thing in every area of governance.

“I’m going to do it, and I will require those who work for me directly to do it. I expect each and every American to do it, too. That includes all 535 members of Congress.

“Have a great Fourth of July and remember what Benjamin Franklin reputedly said about hanging together and what is likely to happen if we don’t.” Or putting it this way: ‘It’s our collective a-- we’re talking about here.’”

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

The Slippery Slope Of Corporate Personhood

By Lewis E. Patrie

Enola Gay Commander Robert Lewis’ 1945 statement, “My God, what have we done?” upon bombing Hiroshima, applies as we consider current threats to human survival by nuclearism, and also through subsequent environmental devastation.

Recall Ike’s oft quoted, but largely ignored, warning about the military-industrial complex. It has become increasingly clear our decision makers have established militarism as the top national priority commanding our nation’s grossest expenditures, exemplified by the Cold War, and our wars in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan.

In addition to deaths and injuries among our troops, wars’ immense costs have nuked our economy.

According to Stephen Schwartz’ 2008 report, among underreported “defense” costs, from 1940-96, the United States spent a minimum of \$5.5 trillion on its nuclear weapons program.

SADDLED WITH DEBT

And Everett Thiele wrote, “Military Spending: Cost of Iraq War is but the Tip of the Iceberg.” Since 1948, an accumulated defense budget of more than \$20 trillion has sunk the U.S. Economy. He points out that the war “is harming U.S. taxpayers by saddling them with an enormous debt burden, since war is financed with deficit spending.”

Thiele continues, “... No country could afford this much military spending. It has not only robbed us and all people of the world of needed healthcare, educational and social programs, but it is responsible for the impossibly large debts we in the U.S. and our children are facing. Barring the apocalypse, it will soon reduce the U.S. to a second rate power.”

We have experienced many other assaults on our heretofore comfortable and confident middle class, including a lifestyle offering unlimited energy from the carcasses of ancient dead creatures. Recently it has become popular to admit our addiction to oil, coal and natural gas.

The disaster in the Gulf has awakened us to certain realities; we cannot maintain the status quo of cheap and abundant energy.

Though many had prophesied this for decades, why have our leaders and the media been so hesitant to caution us about this untenable situation? Isn’t it clear there are national and global forces at work making critical decisions without the wisdom to comprehend their unintended consequences?

MEDIA MONOPOLY

Perhaps we should consider the behavior of corporations and the persons who control them.

First consider the media upon which we derive the information which attracts our attention and affects our attitudes, regardless of whether we realize it. In *The Media Monopoly*, Ben Bagdikian described how within a 20-year span, five corporate billionaires gained control of all the media that had previously been controlled by 50 corporations.

Despite our assumption that we enjoy freedom of speech, what we are fed displays corporate bias, while the voices of ordinary people are stifled by those controlling the media – rightfully a public commons – creating major public relations campaigns which manipulate our thinking and behavior.

Furthermore, media corporations are in bed with those massive companies that reap obscene profits, the military, health care, oil, energy, food industries, and, of course, Wall Street. Their great influence has just been enhanced by the Supreme Court, further magnifying their exercise of “corporate personhood,” documented in Thom Hartmann’s *Unequal Protection, The Rise of Corporate Dominance and the Theft of Human Rights*, dating back to an 1886 allegedly mistaken Supreme Court decision.

CHENEY’S CABAL

Current Minute Men’s praising of corporate “free enterprise” veers off course when considering recent history. One outstanding example of many took place

See CORPORATE Page 14

Saving America From White-Wing Ranting

By Sheila Samples

"Suppose you were an idiot. And suppose you were a member of Congress ... but then, I repeat myself." – Mark Twain

Much has been written – argued heatedly by ideological TV pundits – over the past several years about the inability of members of Congress to agree on anything.

Republicans stomp around like elephants in a china closet, shouting "No! No! Hell No!" no matter what legislation comes before them.

Democrats, in a timid effort to reach across the aisle, stumble and fall down, where they just sit, plaintively begging, "Please don't hurt me ..."

Both parties are adrift; cut loose from their moorings – in total disarray. Much of the chaos is a result of the previous administration lighting a myriad of fuses before slinking into the shadows, setting off a string of political and financial explosions designed to blow this republic all to hell.

What they failed to consider – and what the bumbling members of Congress have yet to realize – is when the ship of state sinks, everybody on board is going down with it.

WHITE-WING RANTING

Which appears to be what the race-baiting Rush Limbaugh, the self-appointed "leader" of the Republican Party, is feverishly attempting to provoke. Anybody who doubts that Limbaugh hasn't been in racist meltdown since 2007 when it became obvious that Barack Obama was a threat to White-Wing Limbaughesque "values" just hasn't been paying attention.

Throughout the campaign – from constantly airing the insulting Barack, the Magic Negro jingle to calling Obama and actress Halle Berry "Halffrican-Americans," to accusing Obama of "disowning his white half and deciding to go all in on the black side" – Limbaugh led the pack.

And he still does. Republicans are united in support of the "I Hope He Fails" Limbaugh Doctrine which El Rushbo announced as millions of relieved – even giddy – Americans gathered at the nation's Capitol for Obama's inauguration. Just a day later, Limbaugh hit the racist trail, telling Fox's Sean Hannity:

"[R]acism in this country is the exclusive province of the left. We're witnessing racism all this week that led up to the inauguration. We're being told that we have to hope he succeeds, that we have to bend over, grab the ankles. Bend over forward, backward, whichever, because his father was black, because this is the first black president. We've got to accept this. The racism that everybody thinks exists on our side of the aisle has been on full display throughout their primary campaign. So I think they've done a great job, the media has, of covering up his deficiencies."

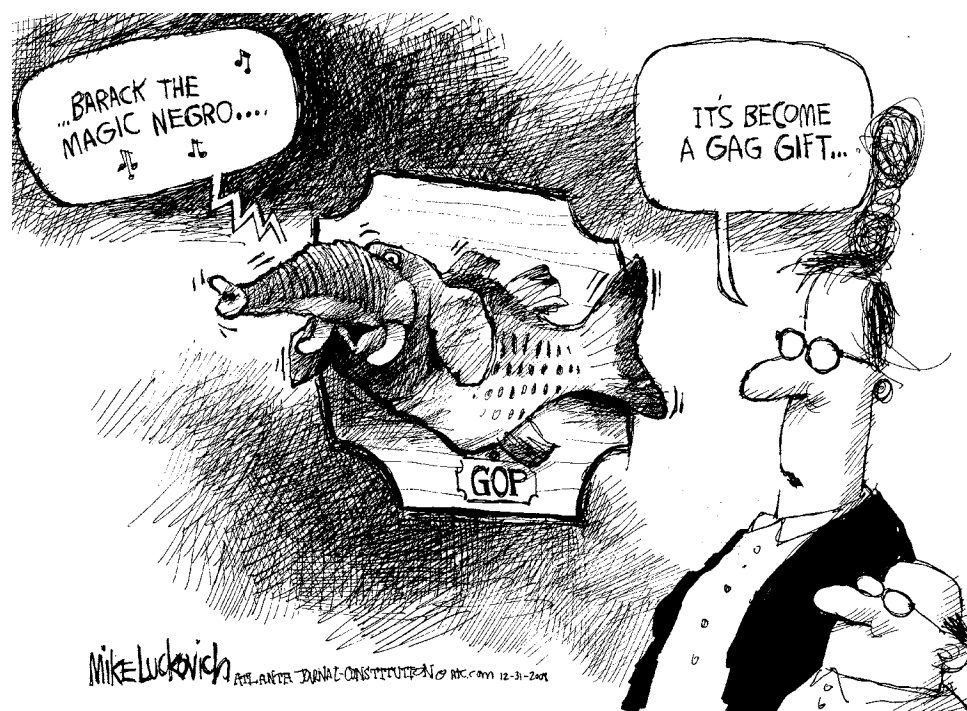
LIMBAUGH'S LOGIC

So, it's all the Democrats' fault. The Democrats are militantly racist. If we buy into Limbaugh's rationale, none of his hateful, cruel, racist remarks would have been necessary if the Democrats hadn't selected a Halffrican-American who threw his grandma under the bus and then backed over her before going over to the black side as their candidate for president.

On his Oct. 12, 2009 show, Limbaugh explained just how innocent and color-blind he is:

"I'm interested in people's hearts and their souls, because that's what animates us as human beings. Not our skin color. I'm colorblind. I have reached the point where everybody professes we need to go. I treat everybody equally. Nobody is – in the political arena – I don't care.

"Male, female, black, white, gay, straight, bisexual. If you are opposed to the things I think are great for the country, I'm going to say so. I'm going to criticize you. Not because of whatever it is distinguishes you from me on a surface basis, but because of ideas. I'm just a lone guy here, in the arena of ideas, sharing



mine."

The Democrats quake with fear at the thought of being labeled "racist."

REID'S APOLOGY

When Mark Halperin and John Heilemann in their January 2009 book, *Game Change*, wrote that, during the campaign, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid was delighted that Obama was the Democratic presidential candidate, and had said privately that "Obama, as a black candidate, could be successful thanks, in part, to his "light-skinned" appearance and speaking patterns "with no Negro dialect, unless he wanted to have one," all hell broke loose.

Reid immediately apologized to the media, to "any and all Americans," and personally called President Obama, as well as "House Democrats Jim Clyburn of South Carolina and Barbara Lee of California; the Rev. Al Sharpton; CNN political contributor and Democratic strategist Donna Brazile; NAACP chairman Julian Bond; and the head of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, Wade Henderson."

If there is evidence of Limbaugh or any of his White-Wing cohorts in the media, in Congress, or in the dangerously leaderless, out-of-control Teabagging movement offering even the semblance of an apology for their hateful rhetoric, I am unaware of it. Just last week, on July 2, Limbaugh was in full, bouncing racist fervor. According to Media Matters:

Rush stated that President Obama is "no different than Castro, in the sense that neither will be stopped by a governing document." He also asserted that "[w]e are not a Third World country here, putting up shacks and huts like the president's brother lives in." And if that wasn't bad enough, Rush "speculate[d]" that Michelle Obama did not attend the late Sen. Robert Byrd's funeral because of her "authentic slave blood."

RACISM ROTTS SOUL

Is anybody, other than a bunch of Dittoheads or his obedient followers in Congress, listening to this guy? As if we didn't have history to remind us, racism rots the soul of a nation, and the upheaval in Congress has its roots in racism.

This is about so much more than destroying one man, or even one party. Americans – not just Democrats – must find the courage to shout "No! No! Hell No!" to the destruction planned for this republic. Unless we stand up, shake ourselves off, and dare to fight back, the evil glory of White-Wing Politics will devour us.

We have no choice. Because this ship is going down.

– The author is an Oklahoma writer and a former civilian U.S. Army Public Information Officer. She is an OpEd editor, and a regular contributor for a variety of Internet sites.

PEACE IS PATRIOTIC

By Sharon Martin

On Independence Day, we are reminded of the sacrifices our soldiers have made. How many of those sacrifices have been in vain?

War is a black hole that can swallow a nation. It hurts the economy and destroys families. A war that doesn't secure peace or grant independence from tyranny doesn't make a country stronger.

One does not have to be pro-war to be patriotic. Building our economy is patriotic. Giving the next generation a better country in which to live is patriotic.

Peace is patriotic.

- Fact: Through 2008, the United States spent 804,000,000,000 dollars on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. That's \$804 billion.

- Fact: We have not raised taxes to pay for the wars, and the cost of the wars have not been included in the federal budget until this past year.

- Fact: The money for our two wars has been borrowed and must be paid back.

- Fact: Borrowing money to pay for wars increases their costs.

- Fact: Thousands of people, ours and theirs, have died, many of them civilians.

- Fact: Wounded soldiers must be given the care and treatment they deserve for laying their lives on the line for us. Our commitment to our soldiers and their families does not end when the war is over. We are passing this financial burden on to our children and grandchildren.

My uncle, Lawrence Edge, died at the Battle of the Bulge. His picture in the living room and Grandma's stories were all I knew of him. His absence and my grandmother's grief taught me the true cost of war. Can we afford to spend more lives and our children's futures?

It's time for a new peace movement. We can't just turn tail and run from a fight we've started, so let's put our best thinkers to work devising a way to bring the soldiers home.

During peacetime, a nation grows its economy and moves forward. Soldiers and other patriots can work to rebuild the country's infrastructure and financial system and still sleep in their own beds at night.

That is my devout wish for this Independence Day.

– The author is a retired educator living in Oilton. More of her essays appear at www.okobserver.net

Most Obstructive Senate In Modern History?

By Edwin E. Vineyard

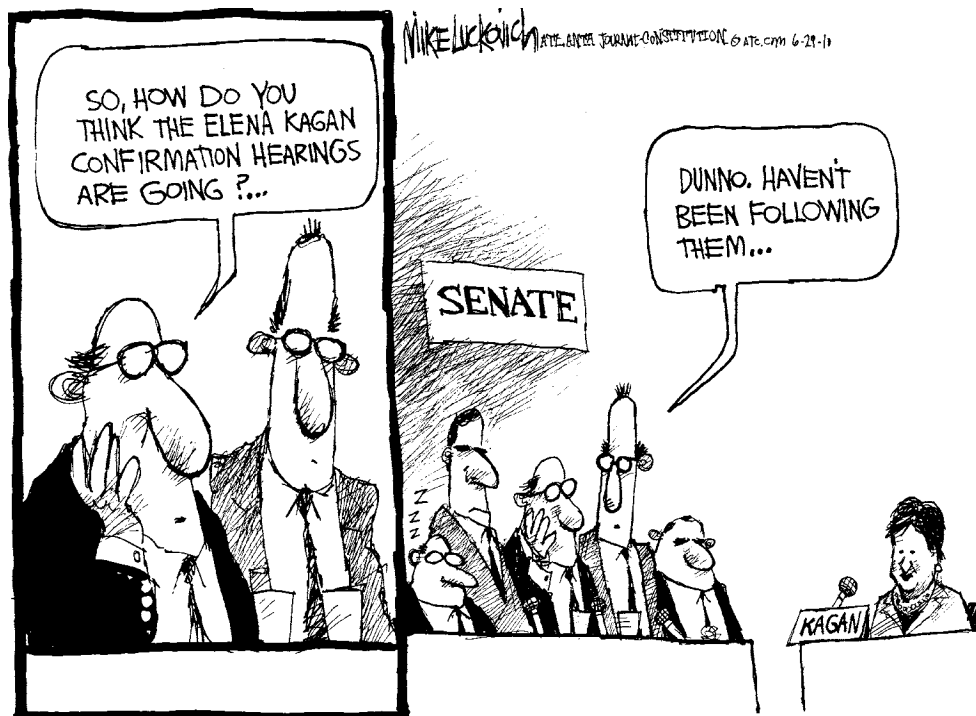
The ubiquitous arrogance in Congress has never been more apparent than in the conduct of some Republican senators in the confirmation hearings for the Supreme Court nominee. For anyone presumably qualified for such a high post of dignity and responsibility in our government to have to endure such personal, political, off-the-wall tirades from senators is embarrassing to the citizens of this nation – at least to those who still have sensitivity to such.

Rather than ask sensible questions, these Republican senators have spent their time grandstanding for a particular political constituency back home – a constituency that makes one wonder what kind of voters they must have out there. Of course, there is that other constituency, donors and lobbyists, to which all congresspersons play to some extent. What that lady has had to endure from those senators is way over the line of decorum, courtesy, and decency.

To what extent should any public servant have to endure the accusations, taunts, and lectures from a member of any legislative body? True, these folk have been elected by somebody, although one may often wonder how and why. Those in public service leadership positions must in some ways be responsive to them, the law and the Constitution says so. But we have seen nothing in the Constitution or the law which compels a public servant to endure unjustified abuse from members of a legislative body.

On a different level and scale, the history of Oklahoma higher education is replete with instances of the attempted browbeating of college and university presidents at the hands of some arrogant legislators in committee hearings on appropriations.

No president dared not go and answer legislators' questions as respectfully as their temperament would allow. Some of these were good, even penetrating, questions. Most were superficial, often based upon complaints heard. Many were "gotcha" questions based upon a legislator's superficial perusal of a few financial or purchasing documents in



the state finance office.

The late and legendary Dr. George L. Cross, president of the University of Oklahoma, used to tell a story of such hearings to remind the rest of us of the benign frivolity of it all.

He told of encountering a legislator's question, "What about this expensive brassiere the university paid for?" The legislator cited the cost of several hundred dollars and wanted to know who it was for, and why such an expensive brassiere.

Dr. Cross said, "I pondered and pondered, trying to figure out what this man was asking. Finally, it came to me that he was referring to an ancient Egyptian brazier which had been bought for the university's museum collection."

We recall an instance when a legislator, armed with copies of claims paid through the finance office, inquired pointedly of the late, great president of Tulsa Community College, "What is this I see here where you signed a claim for a suit of clothes? Would you explain to me

why the State of Oklahoma is buying a suit of clothes for somebody?"

Dr. Al Philips, in a calm and dignified manner, explained that the claim was for a security guard's uniform.

Usually, by the time they got down the line from the major universities on to me, the questions were short and perfunctory. I liked to think that was because we had few glaring, publicly noticed faults.

One year during a time when state finances were bad and the appropriations committee was particularly tough, I observed the cross-examinations of those before me and became more and more angry.

At my turn I mistakenly undertook to lecture the committee. "You are asking all the wrong questions," I said. "Instead of grilling us, you should be asking what you can do to help us serve the higher education needs of the young people of Oklahoma. You should be concerned with

assisting us do a good job, rather than with trivia."

When I paused for breath, four or five legislators immediately started to attack me, while several others jumped vocally to my defense. The late legislative leader of some renown, John Miskelly, the committee chairman, came up from the back of the room and restored order with words that went like this: "Leave this man alone. He's a friend of mine. He's telling you the truth. You need to listen to him."

And, thus I escaped the wrath of some arrogant legislators who were accepting of nothing but subservience from agency heads dependent upon them for budget finances.

Returning to the hearings for Elena Kagan, nominee for the Supreme Court, she is enduring what might be thought of as some sort of initiatory verbal hazing which one must experience before admission to that holy sanctum. It should not be so.

Democrats are ordinarily more civil to nominees of a Republican president, not totally so but much more so. Only in the Robert Bork case, for good cause, has there been any such rough treatment of a Republican nominee as experienced by each of the Democrat nominees. Only in that instance has there been any serious threat made of filibuster.

With the current Republicans in the Senate, every matter is one for a potential filibuster stalemate threat. This is the most obstructive Senate in modern history.

Some pundits are saying that Republicans fear appearing to be compromising or being seen as bi-partisan on anything. Tea Party assaults on colleague Republicans in recent elections have produced an aura of fear in incumbents of their own voters. They are afraid to be senatorial and statesmen.

What a shame!

– The author, AKA *The Militant Moderate*, is former president of Northern Oklahoma College and lives in Enid. More of his essays appear at www.okobserver.net.

CORPORATE

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when vice-president Cheney's secret industry dominated cabal flagrantly wrote energy policy for George W. Bush's Administration.

As Sen. Al Franken noted, "There is such a thing as judicial activism, there is such a thing as legislating from the bench and it is practiced repeatedly by the Roberts' Court, and it has cut in only one direction – in favor of powerful corporate interests and against the rights of individual Americans."

Hasn't our government, including all branches and both political parties, succumbed to corporate influence? Mustn't we wrench control away from these megacorporate giants, if we are to end the folly that threatens the survival of America, if not all earth's future inhabitants? Shouldn't we carefully reapply those words of the Enola Gay's commander, "My God, what have we done?" in order to resuscitate our country? Is there anything short of a constitutional amendment that would abort this Supreme Court enhanced affliction?

A growing movement is emerging. Start with Women's International League for Peace and Freedom at <http://www.wilpf.org> and Move to Amend at <http://movetoamend.org/>.

– The author, a former Edmond resident, lives in Asheville, NC where he chairs the western North Carolina chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility

THE LAST NICKEL

A father walks into a restaurant with his young son. He gives the young boy three nickels to play with to keep him occupied. Suddenly, the boy starts choking, going blue in the face. The father realizes the boy has swallowed the nickels and starts slapping him on the back. The boy coughs up two of the nickels, but keeps choking. Looking at his son, the father is panicking, shouting for help.

A well dressed, attractive and serious looking woman in a blue business suit is sitting at the coffee bar reading a newspaper and sipping a cup of coffee. At the sound of the commotion, she looks up, puts her coffee cup down, neatly folds the newspaper and places it on the counter, gets up from her seat and makes her way, unhurried, across the restaurant.

Reaching the boy, the woman carefully drops his pants, takes hold of the boy's testicles and starts to squeeze and twist, gently at first and then ever so firmly. After a few seconds the boy convulses violently and coughs up the last nickel, which the woman deftly catches in her free hand.

Releasing the boy's testicles, the woman hands the nickel to the father and walks back to her seat at the coffee bar without saying a word.

As soon as he is sure that his son has suffered no ill effects, the father rushes over to the woman and starts thanking her, saying, "I've never seen anybody do anything like that before – it was fantastic. Are you a doctor?"

"No," the woman replied. "I'm with the IRS."

– Thanks to Glenn Hightower for this gem

Sarah Palin Won't Lead Religious Right

By Sarah Posner

Despite her claim to a conservative form of feminism, Sarah Palin will never lead the religious right for one simple reason: She's a woman.

To the Republican base, Sarah Palin represents many things: a trailblazer for female candidates, a "pro-life" stalwart, a devoted mother, an athletic superstar, a moose hunter extraordinaire and a stylish crowd-pleaser unafraid to speak her conservative mind.

But for a segment of the Republican base – the religious right – Palin represents something more divine: a heaven-sent, conservative answer to the sort of feminism claimed by liberal women.

But while Palin's call for the "Mama Grizzlies" of the conservative movement to roar their version of feminism does get that part of the base riled up, Palin will never rise to be more than a motivational leader of the religious right.

In her Newsweek cover story, "Saint Sarah," Lisa Miller wrote, "The Christian right is now poised to become a women's movement – and Sarah Palin is its earthy Jerry Falwell."

A MAJOR PREDICTION

That's a major prediction, and not one that is suggested either by the past or the present.

Palin, it's true, has a certain star power that other religious right women lack. To her fellow Pentecostals and charismatics, especially, Palin is "anointed" – a figure sent by God to perform his will. But that's very different from being the organizational leader of a movement.

To those outside the Christian right, it's hard to get this until you talk to a Palin supporter or see Palin in person, in front of a crowd. I remember the moment when it really clicked for me, when, two weeks after John McCain chose her as his running mate, a charismatic evangelical source told me he believed Palin was anointed.

"By anointing," he said, "I mean more than just stage presence. I mean authority. Palin believes what she is saying. It comes through. She is confident because she believes she is right ... She is gifted in that area."

CAMP MEETING STYLE

Six weeks later, at a Palin campaign rally in York, PA, I saw the crowd react to Palin's "gifts."

"She's got that thing," I told a colleague.

Evangelical Scholar Is Booted Over Evolution

A noted evangelical Old Testament scholar "resigned" from his faculty position at a seminary in the wake of a controversy over his public acceptance of evolution.

On March 24, a video featuring Bruce Waltke, Professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary, was posted on the website of the BioLogos Foundation. [Founded by Francis Collins, the BioLogos Foundation "explores, promotes, and celebrates the integration of science and Christian faith."]

Entitled "Why Must the Church Come to Accept Evolution?" the video discussed "the danger that the Church will face if it does not engage with the world around it, in particular by acknowledging the overwhelming amount of data in support of biological evolution, which many evangelicals still reject."

TAKE DOWN THE VIDEO

On March 29, however, Waltke told BioLogos that the administration of Reformed Theological Seminary asked him to request that the video be removed.

According to a blog post at BioLogos, "Dr. Waltke himself indicated that he still agreed with the content of the video. Indeed, Dr. Waltke has written previously on his support for theistic evolution ...

"However, given the brevity of the video, Dr. Waltke is concerned that his views might not be correctly understood ... But despite repeated attempts to find an alternative solution, it has become clear that Dr. Waltke feels that the only remedy to his predicament is to remove the video."

BioLogos complied with Waltke's request, while lamenting the necessity.

But that was apparently not enough for the seminary. Inside Higher Education

Too Many U.S. Teens Want To Get Pregnant

By Tatiana McKinney

According to Business Week, "More than 40% of unmarried U.S. teenagers – or 4.3 million teen males and females – have had sex at least once, a new U.S. government report shows."

"One of the great success stories of the past two decades has been the extraordinary declines in teen pregnancy and childbearing," said Bill Albert, chief program officer at the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. "This progress has recently stalled out."

The interesting aspect of this new information is that one in five girls and one in four boys said they would be pleased if they or their partner got pregnant.

"This is really quite alarming," Albert said. "I don't think it takes a PhD to understand that in this day and age and in this economy the route to success doesn't begin with a family at age 16."



Palin "is a flat-footed, I'm-in-the-back-of-the-camp-meeting-truck-preaching-woman in the style of the trailblazing early-20th-Century evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson," religious historian Anthea Butler told me during the presidential campaign.

While that's an improvement on the role of woman as submissive wife required by the doctrine of, say, the Southern Baptist Convention [which doesn't allow women to be clergy], it won't catapult her to the leadership of the Christian right.

Movement leaders are no doubt pleased by Palin's ability to pull off the theatrics that excite and motivate followers, but that's unlikely to convince them to step aside for Sister Sarah.

Newsweek's Miller wrote of how followers of the religious right see in Palin the echo of the Bible's Esther, queen of Persia, who saved her fellow Jews from the genocidal designs of the evil Haman, an advisor to her husband, King Ahasuerus.

By convincing the king of Haman's evil, Esther, who was just a humble [albeit beautiful] young woman, saved her people from annihilation. Evangelicals convince each other that anyone – even the most humble among us – could be, like Esther, part of God's will for saving the world from satanic plots.

© Alternet

[April 9] reported:

"Michael Milton, president of the seminary's Charlotte campus and interim president of its Orlando campus, where Waltke taught, confirmed that the scholar had lost his job over the video."

Technically, Waltke offered his resignation, which officials at the seminary decided to accept. Milton explained that Reformed Theological Seminary's faculty members are allowed to have different views on creation, but "Darwinian views, and any suggestion that humans didn't arrive on earth directly from being created by God [as opposed to having evolved from other forms of life], are not allowed, and faculty members know this."

HIS VIEWS ON THE RECORD

Waltke's views were already on record. In a post on BioLogos's blog, BioLogos's president Darrell Falk quoted Waltke's endorsement of theistic evolution from his book *An Old Testament Theology* [Zondervan, 2007], and commented, "Bruce made some equally strong statements with the BioLogos camera running and gave us the written permission to post the now-controversial video."

"What Bruce said on the video was simply an elaboration of things he had written already."

Falk added, "Decades from now, when the Evangelical Church has come to terms with the reality of evolution, we hope she will look back at those who were the pioneers on its journey toward a fuller understanding of the manner by which God has created."

Waltke was quickly offered a position at another seminary.

The GOP's Genetic Link To Big Oil

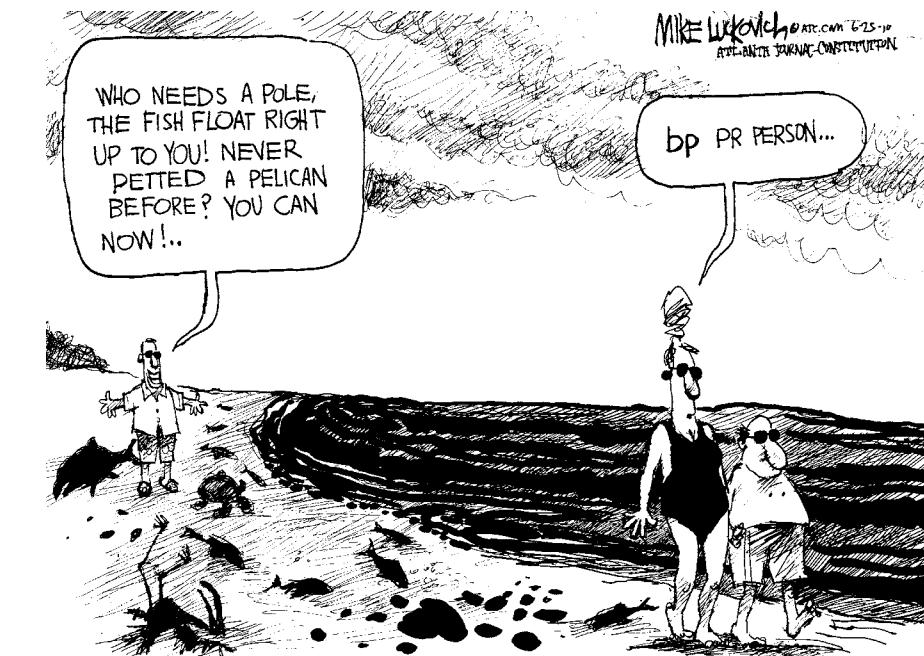
By Jim Hightower

If scientists were to compare the DNA of Republican congress-critters and of oil corporations, I'll bet they'd find that they match perfectly. After all, the two species have identical political instincts and seem to have a natural affinity for each other – so I'm pretty sure they sprang from the same genetic pool.

How else can you explain the remarkable gusher of compassion that Republican lawmakers are presently directing toward Big Oil in general and BP in particular? For example, only hours after winning his party's nomination for a Kentucky Senate seat, GOP teabag darling Rand Paul was on national TV decrying Barack Obama as “un-American” for daring to demand that BP be held accountable for its human and ecological destruction in the Gulf of Mexico.

Next came Minnesota's Lioness of Loopiness, Michelle Bachmann, implying that the hard-hit people of the gulf are shiftless moochers who're using the oil disaster to grab corporate cash. Brimming with tears of compassion, the kooky congresswoman wailed that, “[BP] shouldn't have to be fleeced and made chumps to have to pay for perpetual unemployment and all the rest.”

And who can ever forget the astonishing public apology to BP's CEO by the oil-soaked Texas Republican Joe Barton? After Obama had gotten



agreement from BP to set aside \$20 billion to cover some of the damages it has caused, Barton called Obama's actions a presidential “shake-down.” He asserted that it made him “ashamed” to live in America, and he obsequiously begged forgiveness from the recklessly CEO whose faulty wells killed 11 American workers and continues to do inestimable economic and ecological harm.

Speaking of ecological harm, nature needs us to focus. All of us who love polar bears, whales, seabirds

and other wildlife should put our minds together to send an urgent telepathic message to the animals in the Beaufort Sea north of Alaska. Our message is blunt: Flee! Flee as fast as you can! Flee, because BP is coming!

While our public attention has been riveted on BP's disastrous blowout in the gulf, the British oil giant has been quietly and quickly drilling another risky offshore well three miles off of Alaska's north coast.

Dubbed “Liberty,” this project re-

quires a technique called “extended reach,” which is even more prone to explosions than the gulf process. First, BP is drilling down two miles under the Beaufort Sea, drilling sideways for up to eight miles to tap into one of our national oil reserves.

But wait – didn't Obama impose a moratorium on such offshore drilling? Yes ... BUT: When Liberty was planned in the George W. Bush years, it was magically declared by his Republican devil-may-care regulators to be an “onshore project.” How can that be? Because the rig sits on a tiny artificial island that BP built, so – voila! – it's “onshore” even though it's three miles offshore.

Also, just as in the gulf, industry-cozy regulators let BP write its own environmental impact statements for Liberty. And – guess what? – BP's 2007 statement said BP would cause no environmental problems. A-OK, said the winking regulators, as they rubber-stamped the project. And what about a disaster response plan, just in case, you know, something bad does happen? Not to worry, BP assured everyone, because the likelihood of a blowout is very remote. Didn't we hear that about BP's Deepwater Horizon well, too?

Meanwhile, as another oil giant drills away in the Beaufort Sea, GOP lawmakers are dutifully working in

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The Supremes Say NO To The People – Again

By Michael Winship

At a dinner party, an ever-so-proper aristocrat who had been at the British evacuation of Dunkirk 60 years ago remained tightlipped despite intense questioning from the other guests about what he had seen there. Finally, he shuddered at the memory and exclaimed, “The noise, my dear, and the people!”

An apocryphal story, perhaps, but the high-falutin' Supreme Court of the United States has the same attitude toward America – this would be such a great country if it wasn't for all the noise and people.

Bad enough that the court narrowly redefined Miranda rights in such a way that seems to say that if one of those aforementioned people is arrested and remains silent about their right to remain silent, anything you do say, if you say something, can and will be held against you. An interpretation as worthy of Lewis Carroll as it is George Orwell.

But of course such reasoning is not surprising from a court that ruled earlier this year that corporations are people, too – really BIG people – whether you're a major banking entity bilking the little guy for billions or a petrochemical giant obscenely filling the Gulf of Mexico with crude, like Rabelais' Gargantua, relieving himself from the towers of Notre Dame and drowning the city of Paris.

The Supreme Court's infamous Citizens United ruling cited free speech as its reason, giving corporate America the right to pour unlimited money into political and issues campaigns, lavishing cash on whichever candidates run fastest to do their bidding.

MEGAPHONE DOLLARS

Now the Supremes went even further, proving once again that when it comes to American politics and government, money talks, and it does so with the biggest, loudest megaphone dollars can buy.

Recently, the court issued an unsigned, emergency order halting an essential part of Arizona's model campaign finance system. It grants matching funds to candidates who accept public financing limits but find themselves running against wealthy candidates whose pockets are so deep, money is no object.

As The New York Times reported, the stay “will probably remain in effect through both the primary in August and the general election in November. The court instructed the candidates challenging the matching fund law to file a prompt appeal. If the court agrees to hear the case, as is likely, it is unlikely to be argued and decided before the November election.”

By then, of course, the damage will be done. In the long run, the ruling could have an impact on similar finance campaign laws in other states, including Connecticut and Maine, but it immediately impacts 133 candidates running for state office in Arizona, including incumbent Gov. Jan Brewer, whose recent signing of the state's notorious illegal immigration bill has made her the favorite for the

GOP gubernatorial nomination.

But she is a publicly funded candidate who was due to receive more than \$2.1 million under the current Arizona system. Without the matching funds, according to the state's Clean Elections Institute, “That amount will drop by 66% to \$707,447.”

One of her opponents, businessman Buz Mills, already has spent \$2.3 million, much of it his own money. Not surprisingly, he hailed the Supreme Court's order as “a tremendous victory for Arizona taxpayers and the First Amendment.”

TOUGH LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

The New York Times quoted Richard Hasen, a professor at Los Angeles' Loyola Law School:

“The developments in Arizona show just what a tough litigation environment it is right now for those in the lower courts seeking to defend reasonable campaign finance regulations.

“Without matching funds provisions, public financing programs are unlikely to attract substantial participation from serious candidates, who fear being vastly outmatched by self-financed opponents or major independent spending campaigns.”

The ruling came down the same day that California voters rejected Proposition 15, which would have experimented with a publicly financed campaign system similar to Arizona's – starting with the next two elections for California's secretary of state.

Ironically, that defeat and the Supreme Court's action in Arizona occurred on a primary election day that saw Meg Whitman and Carly Fiorina emerge victorious as California's Republican Party candidates for governor and senator, respectively.

Each of them spent millions and millions of their own money to win. Whitman says she's ready to spend \$150 million of her eBay fortune to defeat Democratic candidate Jerry Brown.

No matter who comes out on top, that kind of cash will generate a lot of smoke. Ordinary people may once again be shouted by monied interests that wield their financial power like an authoritarian, plutocratic cudgel.

We need a constitutional amendment rejecting the anti-democratic course this Supreme Court has chosen. An amendment that establishes an equitable, public campaign financing system that levels the playing field for anyone who wants to run for office, no matter what their income or bankrolling connections. And we need it now.

– The author is senior writer at Public Affairs Television

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Why Are So Many Christians Far Right?

By Mike Lux

When you are in the political world, you have decisions to make every single day about who you will try to help and who you won't. In spite of the earnest quest of good technocrats everywhere, the simple fact is that there are only a few win-win solutions.

Who you tax, who you give a tax break to, what programs you cut or add to, who you tighten regulations on, and who you loosen them on, what kind of contractors are eligible for government work, which school districts and non-profit groups get federal money, etc.: These political decisions are generally not win-win.

Instead, they mean that one group of people win, and one group of people loses. It is the nature of politics, and you can't take the politics out of politics.

WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON?

The most fundamental difference between progressives and conservatives is that question of which side you are on.

Conservatives believe that the rich and powerful got that way because they deserve to be, that society owes its prosperity to the prosperous, and that government's job when they have to make choices is to side with those business people who are doing well, because all good things trickle down from them.

Progressives, on the other hand, believe it is the poor and those who are ill-treated who need the most help from their government, and that prosperity comes from all of us – the worker as well as the employer, the consumer as well as the seller, the struggling entrepreneur trying to make it as well as the wealthy who already have.

Perhaps like a great many folks, you have been turned off by all the high-profile preachers who claim to speak for Christianity but preach a brand of narrow, intolerant conservatism that you can't relate to.

My view is that even if that is the case, it is still important to know something about the Christian New Testament because it is such a historical and cultural touchstone in our country.

I also think it's important to have a sense of just how different the Bible is from how conservative Christians represent it.

JUST SPIRITUAL MATTERS?

Conservative Christians' primary argument regarding Jesus and politics is that all he cared about was spiritual matters and an individual's relationship with God.

As a result, they say, all those references from Jesus about helping the poor relate only to private charity, not to society as a whole.

Their belief is that Jesus, and the New Testament in general, is focused on one thing and one thing only: how do people get into heaven.

The Jesus of the New Testament was of course extremely concerned with spiritual matters: there is no doubt whatsoever about his role or interest in the issues of the day, that the spiritual well-being of his followers was a major interest of his.

How much He was involved with or interested in the political situation of the day is a matter of much debate and interpretation. Some say it was a lot and others that it was pretty limited or, as conservatives would say, not at all.



However much of a priority or focus it was, though, if you actually read the Gospels, it is clear that Jesus' main concern in terms of the people whose fates he cared about was for the poor, the oppressed, and the outcast.

Comment after comment and story after story in the Gospels about Jesus relates to the treatment of the poor, generosity to those in need, mercy to the outcast, and scorn for the wealthy and powerful.

TAKING CARE OF, LOVING OTHERS

His philosophy is embedded with the central importance of taking care of others, loving others, treating others as you would want to be treated.

There is no virtue of selfishness here, there is no "greed is good," there is no invisible hand of the market or looking out for No. 1 first. There is nothing about poor people being lazy, nothing about the undeserving poor being leeches on society, nothing about how I pulled myself up by my own bootstraps so everyone else should, too.

There is nothing about how in nature, "the lions eat the weak," and therefore we shouldn't help the poor because it weakens them. There is nothing about charity or welfare corrupting a person's spirit.

Judeo-Christian scripture is a rich and complicated work of literature. Written over the course of [at least] several hundred years by dozens of different authors, there are a variety of perspectives.

Many times there are outright contradictions in the theology and the politics of the writing [if it's all inspired word for word by God, He seems to have changed his mind a lot].

But one thing is extremely certain: the poor seem to be who God is most concerned about. Yes, there are a few quotations [four, if I remember right] trashing gay people, along with quite a few more about the right way to do animal sacrifice and to be careful about eating shellfish and hanging out with women who are menstruating.

Mercy, kindness, and concern for the poor and the weak and the outcast seems to matter a lot more, with literally several hundred verses referencing those agenda items. If you are a progressive, that is a pretty good ratio.

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Do Lesbians Raise Healthier Kids?

By Tracy Clark-Flory

Ooh, James Dobson is going to hate this: A new study has found that the kids of lesbian parents turn out just as well-adjusted as their peers. What's more, they have fewer behavioral problems and greater self-confidence. That is to say, lesbian parents not only do just as well as hetero households on the child-rearing front, but they actually manage to do some things better. Who's "focusing on the family" now?

You might be familiar with the past research frequently cited by marriage equality activists finding that kids raised by gay families do just as well as those reared in straight homes. But this study, published recently in the journal *Pediatrics*, is the first of its kind.

Over the span of 25 years, researchers Nanette Gartrell of the University of California at San Francisco and Henry Bos of the University of Amsterdam followed 84 families in which mothers identified as lesbian at the time of artificial insemination. That's key, as it ruled out women who got pregnant while in a heterosexual relationship before transitioning into a lesbian relationship.

Using a standard behavioral checklist, the parents evaluated their kids' emotional, social and academic behavior five times from birth until age 17, and the young 'uns were interviewed at age 10 and age 17. The outcome: Kids raised by lesbians were less likely to have behavioral issues, and exhibited greater confidence and academic performance.

So, this is all just wonderful. Surely "pro-family" organizations will take this as a directive to legalize gay marriage in the name of children's well-being, right?

Of course not, silly goose. Wendy Wright, president of the Concerned Women for America, told CNN: "This study was clearly designed to come out with one outcome – to attempt to sway people that children are not detrimentally affected in a homosexual household." It is certainly true that the study was partially funded by LGBT advocacy groups; it's also true that this is a peer-reviewed study.

I heartily encourage Concerned Women for America to fund its own study and attempt to get it into a reputable scientific journal.

The truth is, we don't know why these kids fared better in certain behavioral respects – and it might not have to do with having lesbian parents, per se. One factor that seems awfully important here is that these pregnancies were all planned. Like, really, really planned. There were no forgotten pills, broken condoms or one too many glasses of red wine; these women had to actively seek out sperm donors and then undergo artificial insemination.

It's always possible these results have less to do with gay parenting than with planned parenting – not that ultra-conservatives would find that any less upsetting.

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GENETIC

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Congress to limit the legal liability of BP and its partners to a paltry \$75 million each. For Republicans to continue marching in lockstep with Big Oil, despite public outrage at BP's greed, makes no sense at all. But they can't help it – they're knee-jerk response is genetically programmed. They might even have oil in their DNA.

So, here we go again, putting Mother Nature at the mercy of insatiable oil profiteers. To learn more about BP's Liberty escapade, and to learn what you can do besides warning the sea animals to flee, call the Center for Biological Diversity in Alaska: 907.274.1110.

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Abstinence Only Pols Are Flaming Hypocrites

By Joshua Holland

Let's play the Telling Juxtaposition Game!

One of the bigger stories was the resignation of Rep. Mark Souder, R-IN, a fiery culture warrior and staunch advocate of abstinence-only education, after it was revealed that he was cheating on his wife with a part-time staffer, perhaps in public parks.

In less salacious news, the Guttmacher Institute released a new study, Winning Campaign: California's Concerted Effort to Reduce Its Teen Pregnancy Rate.

From Guttmacher's press release: California's teen pregnancy rate declined by 52% between 1992 and 2005, the steepest drop registered by any state over that period – and far above the national decline of 37%.

"Public health experts credit this record decline to California's aggressive and evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention efforts dating back to the 1990s.

"California has made teen pregnancy prevention a high public policy priority, with a strong emphasis on providing teens comprehensive sex education and the health care services and counseling they need to prevent pregnancy," says Heather Boonstra, author of the new analysis.

"Above all, California's success demonstrates that policies matter – both in allotting the necessary resources and in ensuring that the right types of information and services are available."

Telling juxtaposition, no?

And it should come as no surprise. Back in May, NPR did a segment on Red States and their "family values."

Many of our assumptions about the cultural divide between red and blue states may be wrong. New research shows that more liberal states, like Massachusetts, tend to have the lowest rates of divorce and teen childbirth.

In other words the most stable families, the homes with two parents to nurture their kids, are found in the liberal strongholds along the East and West Coasts.

BUDGET

From Page 6

tor who would step aside and not seek re-election, creating an opening for Republicans to bolster their Senate majority.

But there would be less opportunity for such trickery – most often attempted in the chaos of a session's final, frenzied hours – if the entire session were devoted to one subject – the budget – giving all 149 lawmakers and the governor time to really analyze the fiscal blueprint.

In my view, there is no time like the present to seriously consider this fundamental change. After all, next year's state budget outlook is even more bleak. Unless Washington again comes to the rescue, the state won't have \$1.2 billion in federal stimulus money that helped preserve vital services in the 2010 and 2011 fiscal years. Worse, only about \$100 million is left in the state's Rainy Day fund.

Askins, for one, believes most legislators would support the two-year budget plan. The problem is, legislative leaders are loath to change, because they fear it could diminish their political power. As Askins put it, "It's difficult when legislative leadership is asked to change procedures they are familiar with. We would be asking the Legislature to change the process, so it's uncomfortable."

Not as uncomfortable as being forced – year after year, at the last minute – to vote on \$6 billion-plus spending plans into which they've had little input, much less reasonable time to review.

PREGNANT

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"While it's encouraging to hear that a majority of them are using some form of birth control, many of the attitudes revealed in this report tell us that there is plenty of room for more comprehensive sex education that includes information about abstinence, contraception, healthy relationships, and responsible decision-making."

I agree with Cecile Richards in that comprehensive sex education would be a responsible way to address the unwanted pregnancy epidemic, but you have to realize that sex education should also be taught at home.

Oklahoma, among the top five in teen pregnancies, is also tied with Arkansas for the highest percentage of people that have been married three times or more.

Conversely, the higher rates of teen childbirth and divorce occur in the red states that conservatives so often celebrate as the heartland of family values.

I've always thought abstinence-only was among the best examples of privileging ideology over common sense. Mark Souder himself explained why in the now-infamous abstinence-only video he produced with his staff paramour.

At one point, he complained that efforts "to get kids to abstain from sex" are just really, inherently difficult. "Guess what?" he asked at one point in the video, "Nothing works very well."

And he's right! One thing that's held true during tens of thousands of years of human existence is this: simply telling teenagers not to have sex has never actually kept them from doing it.

And when they do the deed, as they inevitably will, those who have only ever been told not to have sex don't know how to prevent pregnancies. Or they know but don't have access to birth control in their conservative communities.

When they get knocked up, they're less likely to have a real choice to abort the pregnancy – either because of social stigma or practical barriers to reproductive health services. So, many get married when they're still kids themselves, and many of those marriages go belly up a few years down the road.

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spend millions in an attempt to defeat it because they fear it could inhibit their special interest feedings at the taxpayers' trough.

Further, they're concerned it could empower their arch-enemies, the state's largest teachers' union, the Oklahoma Education Association.

Consider the irony: Many of the corporatists who are complaining the loudest that SQ 744 would unfairly tie the Legislature's hands on spending decisions were the ones backing SQ 640 that all but thwarts lawmakers from raising taxes.

It's difficult to project SQ 744's impact on the general election. But it's easy to imagine that many educators and public school backers will be more motivated than ever to cast their ballots – turnout that most likely would benefit the Democratic gubernatorial nominee, not the candidate of a Republican Party whose legislative initiatives all-too-often undercut public education and favor private and homeschools.

This also is one time when – barring a last-minute primary blowup – it doesn't appear Oklahoma Democrats will have trouble uniting behind their nominee.

Edmondson and Askins are widely admired among Democrats, often referred to simply as "Drew" or "Jari." More than a few Democrats have lamented that Askins and Edmondson ended up in the same race, forcing supporters of both to choose sides.

Perhaps the most potent unifying factor: The fear of what state government would look like if Republicans controlled both the governor's office and the Legislature.

Gov. Brad Henry didn't wield power as decisively as many Democrats would have liked the last eight years, but he uncapped his veto pen often enough to thwart many of the worst Republican excesses – or at least expose their venality.

With the GOP House majority too large to overcome in a single election, Democrats best hopes for influencing the next session are in retaining the governorship, evening up the Senate numbers [currently 26-22 Republican] or forging a Democratic-GOP Senate coalition that wrests power from Republican plutocrats and theocrats.

None will be easy. But Democrats can't help but feel better about their chances with either Edmondson or Askins atop the ticket.

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The Fight Against Plutocrats, Wingnuts

Dear Friends:

It's our mission to provide the full, unvarnished truth about Oklahoma's government and elected representatives. Sadly, the news all too often is bad – or worse. And it wears on those of us fighting daily for a progressive Oklahoma, a state that affords all – regardless of race, creed, sexual orientation, social standing or bank balance – a fair, equal shot at the American dream.

As the plutocrats and wingnuts cement their control over the Legislature, it's increasingly difficult to find many silver linings. The Republican majority fiddled this year while Oklahoma burned: The corporatist crew devoted itself to preserving scandalous tax breaks for the wealthy and limiting the rights of injured workers. The theocrats, Birthers, Tenters and Birchers tilted at every conceivable windmill, crowing about States' Rights, rolling back reproductive rights and fighting to keep the 650,000 Oklahomans without health insurance from receiving help under the new federal health care act. Meanwhile, bridges and roads crumble, prisons burst at the seams and the mentally ill are tossed to the streets or into county jails.

Small wonder that we increasingly hear that members of our Observer family have reached the breaking point and are departing [or thinking of departing] our state for bluer pastures. We, too, fight the red state blues almost every day. It was bad enough to sit through the 2010 session hijinks. Now we live with the results of their unconscionable handiwork.

Take public schools, as one example: The state's powers-that-be crowed that education was such a priority, they limited cuts to 2.9% in a tough budget year. Baloney! The actual cut was closer to 9% – and it could be worse if some questionable, revenue-generating assumptions don't pan out. As the 2010 fiscal year ended June 30, Oklahoma's schools already had 1,831 fewer certified workers [teachers] and 1,358 fewer support personnel than in 2009. Thousands more could be gone in the next year, leaving teachers and students in overcrowded classrooms where learning is difficult, if not impossible.

As dire as the immediate future seems, we have faith that Oklahomans eventually will "get it." They will come to realize they've been duped – by plutocrats focused on transferring the state's collective wealth into the pockets of an elite few and by fundamentalist leaders working overtime to amass their flocks into a political army that eventually will usher in a state religion.

Unfortunately, if Oklahomans are forced to rely on their mainstream media for

the full story, they may never "get it." That's why The Oklahoma Observer is more important than ever. We tell the stories and provide the facts that Oklahoma's mainstream media don't – often because they're too cozy with the powerful elite. We give voice to the voiceless and speak truth to power.

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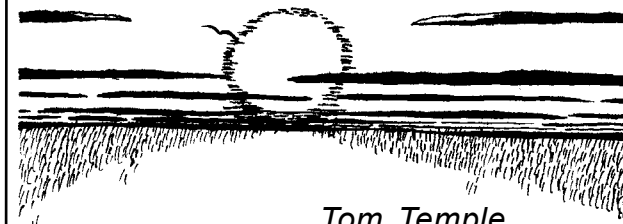
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