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Threat To Oklahoma Water? Mercury Alley

By Arnold Hamilton

In the once pristine waters of at least 16 Oklahoma lakes, an invisible enemy lurks.

Mercury levels in some fish in the reservoirs have reached unacceptably high levels, prompting warnings the fish shouldn't be consumed, especially by children and women of child-bearing age.

The problem is particularly acute in the state's southeast quadrant where tests turned up consistently higher mercury concentrations in fish – disconcerting given the proximity of those lakes to coal-fired power plants in Texas and Oklahoma.

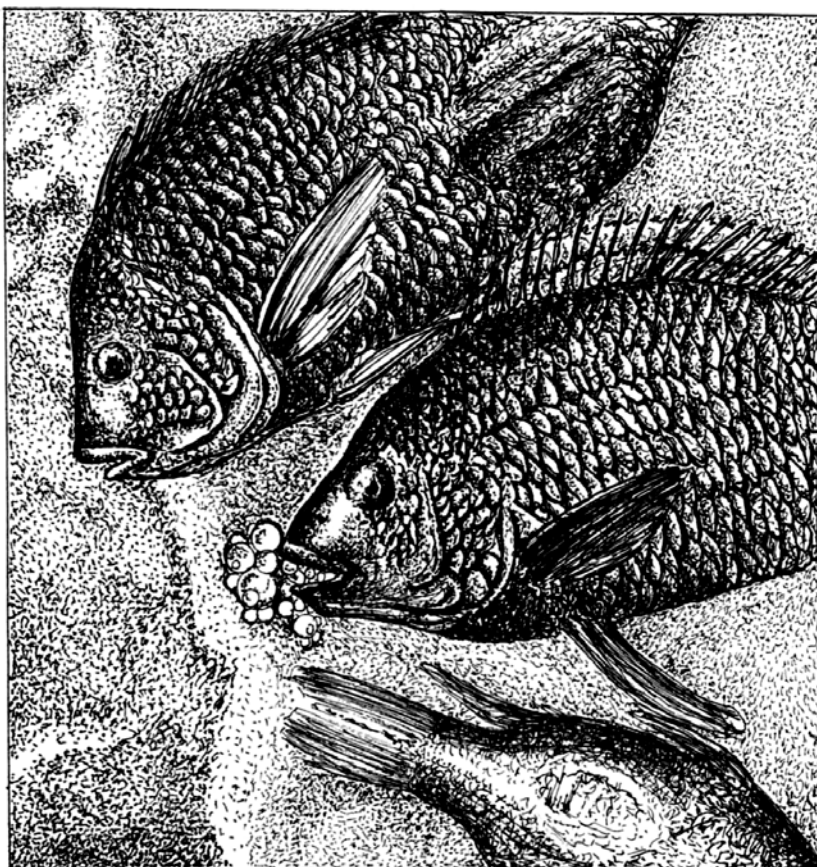
The disturbing Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality report briefly attracted front-page attention last month in some parts of the state, but it warrants serious, long-term statewide public discussion about what could be an emerging public health hazard.

It is especially critical given that the key to Oklahoma's future growth and prosperity is abundant, quality water – a resource that could be threatened more by human-generated pollution than north Texas' insatiable thirst for new water supplies.

Unfortunately, history is replete with cases where government leaders were sluggish in responding to evidence that human activity was responsible for spreading toxins that put public health at risk.

Tar Creek, anyone?

State and federal experts caution that some mercury – about a third to a half, depending on the study – is emitted to the atmosphere naturally, via volcanoes and forest and range fires,



among other sources. State experts, however, say they haven't identified any areas with abnormally high rates of naturally-occurring mercury.

Most mercury in the atmosphere is the result of human activity, particularly coal-fired power plants – which can be regulated to reduce health risks.

Indeed, the Obama Administration recently proposed new air-quality rules that would require coal-burn-

ing plants to install scrubbers and other pollution-reducing technology – strengthening standards that were loosened under President George W. Bush.

Though state environmental and health officials say it's too early to know with certainty what is causing mercury levels to rise, it is indisputable the nine southeastern Oklahoma lakes that were tested – and showed the state's highest levels of mercury in fish – are located between a series of Oklahoma coal-fired power plants to the north and Texas plants to the south.

Moreover, climatological data reflects that the prevailing winds in the region are directly from the south most of the year and mostly from the north the rest of the year, putting the lakes in the path of plant-generated pollution that might best be described as Mercury Alley. Heavier rainfall in the region also could exacerbate the problem.

Finally, three of the nation's five worst mercury emitters, according to the Environmental Integrity Project, are in east Texas, within 150 miles of southeastern Oklahoma and almost due south of the Oklahoma lakes with the consistently highest levels of mercury in fish – Atoka Lake, Broken Bow Lake, Coalgate City Lake, Hugo Lake, McAlester City Lake, McGee Creek Reservoir, Pine Creek Reservoir, Sardis Lake and Wister Lake.

The Environmental Protection Agency warns that mercury exposure can result in loss of fine motor skills and peripheral vision; impaired speech, hearing and walking; skin rashes, mood swings and memory loss.

Experts say the health problems typically depend on how much mercury has entered the body, length of exposure, how it entered the body and how the body responds to it. Most often, people are put at risk because they consume mercury-contaminated fish or are exposed to spilled mercury.

Though the recent state study found higher levels of mercury in fish in the southeastern Oklahoma lakes that were tested, consumption advisories were issued for seven other lakes – including three [Elmer Thomas Lake, Quanah Parker Lake and Rush Lake] in southwestern Oklahoma that are almost due north of another Texas coal-fired plant, the Oklaunion.

And three other lakes on the advisory list – Boomer Lake, Kaw Reservoir and Lake Heyburn – all are in close proximity to northern Oklahoma's Sooner coal-fired plant.

Perhaps it is just coincidental. Perhaps more extensive study – including analysis of more lakes – will point to other culprits. Or perhaps the mercury levels in the 16 lakes placed on the consumption advisory will turn out to be anomalies.

After all, the study found low mercury levels in fish tested in other state lakes near coal-fired plants – and experts note that water quality is a key determinant in the rate of mercury's conversion to methylmercury, regarded as one of the most toxic forms of

See MERCURY Page 19

Observations

Bad Bills

We have been asked on numerous occasions: "Where do these crackpot ideas come from in the Legislature?"

One of the prime sources is an outfit known as the American Legislative Exchange Council [ALEC]. Funders include Koch Industries, ExxonMobil and Peabody Energy.

ALEC constantly wines and dines legislators of both political parties, slipping them copies of "suggested legislation." They also put their money where their special interest is.

They move in lockstep with the Heartland Institute, the Heritage Foundation, CATO Institute and similar ilk.

Suppose you are a legislator and an official of the State Chamber asks if you'd like to go to Las Vegas to study oil and gas interests.

ALEC's Natural Resources Task Force [currently chaired by the American Gas Association] comes up with suggested legislation favorable to the industry.

They have swayed more than a few legislators that climate change is a hoax – despite solid science to the contrary.

Ignorant legislators sign on as authors of the bills that ALEC or its principals author, always tailored to the local or state situation.

For years we've tried to point out the schemes ALEC devise, then sucker in our legislators – especially Republicans.

Ask legislators who seek your vote to avoid falling for the ALEC ruse – which usually ends up slamming taxpayers.

A former head of ALEC put it in perspective when he said, "Take the countryside and the capital will fall."

Anti-Bullying

State Rep. Jeannie McDaniel, D-Tulsa, will lead an interim study on one of the most heartbreaking issues in Oklahoma – bullying.

Consider Ty Field who committed

suicide at 11 years of age due to bullying at school.

Oklahoma adopted the first anti-bullying statute in the nation but that was years ago and the issue needs to be addressed anew. Bullying often takes the form of threats on the Internet.

Kids today are living in a society of extreme violence so for some bullying comes naturally. They are a tiny minority of students but even one in a school is one too many.

The issue is especially tragic in the early grades. Most teachers haven't been trained to recognize the symptoms but that's about to change.

Thanks to McDaniel's interim study, the new Speaker of the House, Rep. Kris Steele, R-Shawnee, said new anti-bullying legislation would be a top priority, including teacher training.

Parents also need training to recognize symptoms because a lot of youngsters don't want to admit they are victims – they don't want to look like wimps.

Any new legislation should crack down hard on those who bully. All too often they end up wreaking domestic violence on their spouses and children.

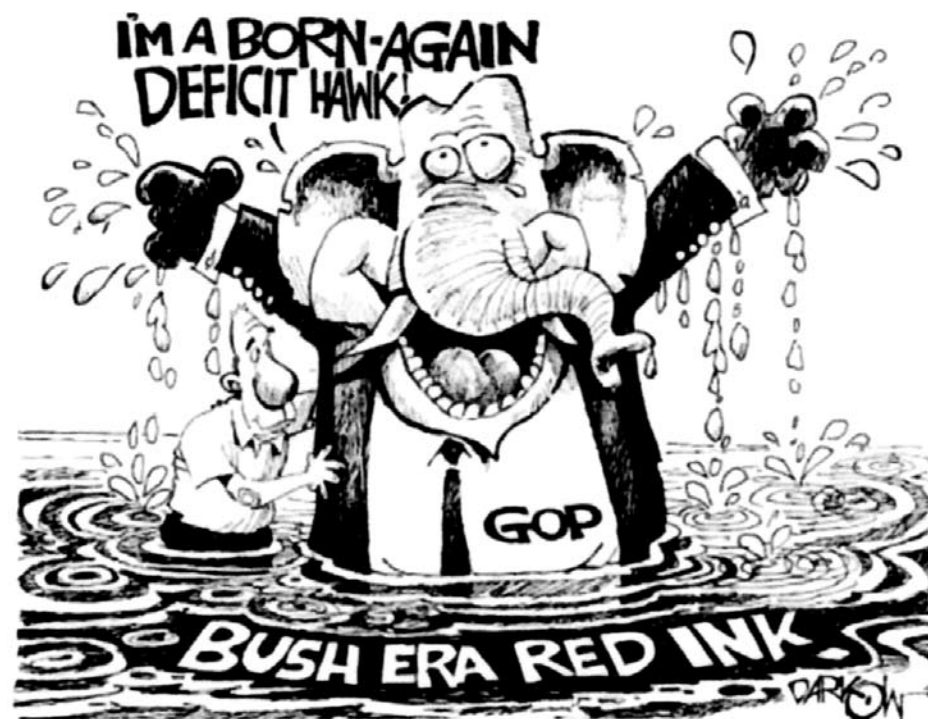
Where We Rank

Good news for a change: Oklahoma ranks 25th for being business-friendly, third lowest in cost of living and No. 3 in cost of doing business.

That's according to the Business Roundtable's annual report but it doesn't come as a surprise to those paying attention to the strides Oklahoma is yet to make.

Our problem is education – on that index we rank 40th but, in fact, we're 49th in what we spend on a child's public school education and we are far below average in the percentage of college graduates.

How many times must this state's leadership be reminded that it's the quality of life as well as the tax struc-



ture that entices business.

Oklahoma ranks 41st in the quality of life for only one reason – good schools, good public transit and affordable higher education.

Maybe the next governor will finally listen. Outgoing Gov. Brad Henry was busy signing more than \$700 million in tax cuts and cutting tax rates. In effect, cutting our economic throats.

We need to remind those willing to listen that the Tax Foundation lists Oklahoma as 50th in combined local, state and federal taxes.

When you hear a candidate talking about tax cuts, remember that candidate is about ruining our children's future.

Brandon Again

How many times have we had to correct the misstatement of facts in the propaganda newsletter of the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs? We have lost count.

Now along comes mouthpiece Brandon Dutcher with the flat statement that the Tax Foundation ranks Oklahoma's state and local tax burden at 19th highest.

The link he referred to ended up being one of their nobody experts, so we Googled the Tax Foundation. In fact, Oklahoma has the fifth lowest tax burden in the nation. As for state and local taxes combined, we pay less than the national average.

Why do they put out so much crap as fact? They are part of a nationwide campaign leading to the corporate takeover of this country. If you doubt it, look at the list of their sorry corporate-affiliated supporters.

Doc Shortage

Is there a doctor in the house? That familiar refrain is quickly disappearing in Oklahoma, far short of the family doctors we need.

Lack of funds halts more OSU-Tulsa physician training at a time when a lot of medical students have their eye on specialties that reap huge financial dividends.

Given the cost of a medical degree, they can hardly be blamed for looking out for their financial future.

A general practitioner averages \$199,000 a year. That pales to any specialty you can name. And consider that some students graduate owing

\$200,000 or more.

Today we're offering graduates \$25,000 a year for four years if they practice in a rural community. We need to double that.

Right now the College of Osteopathic Medicine in Tulsa has 115 slots per graduation but only enough money for 92.

Thanks to the OSU Center for Health Sciences, six clinics are operated in Tulsa, treating more than 125,000 patients a year – many of them indigent. The financial shortfall last year was \$3 million.

Osteopathic physicians are our front line for family practice. Somebody needs to drill that into the we small brains of what passes for legislative leadership today.

Economic Idiots

How many times have you heard it – the worst recession since the Great Depression. And the irony is that George W. Bush not only inherited a surplus, Bill Clinton paid down the national debt.

To hear our junior U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn tell it, it's all President Barack Obama's fault. In a long, rambling rant at the Daily Disappointment editorial board meeting, he said Americans are "petrified" about their future.

Come on, be honest, how many Americans have you talked to who are actually "petrified" about our future. It's going to be a long, agonizing recovery, but this country is far from its last days.

In fact, our debt as a percentage of our GDP is better than any other major nation. The recession is global but our problem is unregulated Wall Street greed and two wars we're fighting on credit.

Coburn is the same U.S. senator, along with Sen. Jim Inhofe, who refused to vote to extend unemployment benefits for jobless Oklahomans and jobless Americans. So much for their "compassion."

A third of the high deficit is a lack of tax collections while two-thirds reflect higher government spending to stave off economic collapse, including unemployment benefits and food stamps.

How would the turgid twins handle the economy? Quit spending, they say.

When that happens American can kiss its you-know-what goodbye.

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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

OU President David Boren endorsed a candidate for district judge – totally inappropriate. The last time he endorsed a candidate for judge, Clarence Thomas wound up on the U.S. Supreme Court.

Laurel: To Delilah Christine Gentges for challenging two state questions that should have never been on the Nov. 2 ballot – voter ID and English as the official state language.

Republicans set a record, but overall less than one-third of the state's registered voters bothered to cast ballots in the July 27 primary. Pitiful.

Dart: To the Elk City Church of Christ for a paid ad in the Oklahoman, including this statement: "Physical exercise is another idol worshiped by most Americans." Obesity anyone?

None who have ventured outside their homes are shocked by the fact that Oklahoma is 6th nationally in obesity – nearly one in three citizens. That doesn't include the Republican fatheads in the Legislature.

Laurel: To state Sen. Andrew Rice, D-OKC, joining Rep. Jason Murphey, R-Guthrie, on Common Cause's No Gifts List, pledging not to accept anything of value from lobbyists.

Urban poverty in Oklahoma is 15.5% of the 3.7 million population, 20% in rural communities. Why poverty? Low educational level, teen pregnancies and low paying jobs.

Dart: To gubernatorial candidate Mary Fallin, saying she is in favor of another \$145 million in income tax cuts to take effect when collections top a 4% increase.

The State Board of Education confirmed what was already known – the Republican Legislature didn't cut public schools a mere 2.9% as it claimed, but 9%.

Laurel: To Corporation Commissioners Bob Anthony and Dana Murphy, donating part of their pay back to the state – in line with an 18% agency budget cut.

More than \$32 million in state fees are now in effect – a tax by any other name, courtesy of the Republican Legislature that turned down a proposed constitutional amendment that would have cut their salaries.

Dart: To the Department of Human Services for taking action in 82 death and near-death cases only after five complaints per child. The agency needs real financial help in the area of child welfare social workers.

Illegally erecting a Ten Commandments monument on the courthouse lawn cost Haskell County taxpayers nearly \$200,000 in legal fees. A similar marker is being located on the Capitol's north lawn – exposing state taxpayers to a similar judgment.

Laurel: To Oklahoma County DA Prater, winner of the Project Safe Neighborhoods Achievement Award for his fight against gang violence.

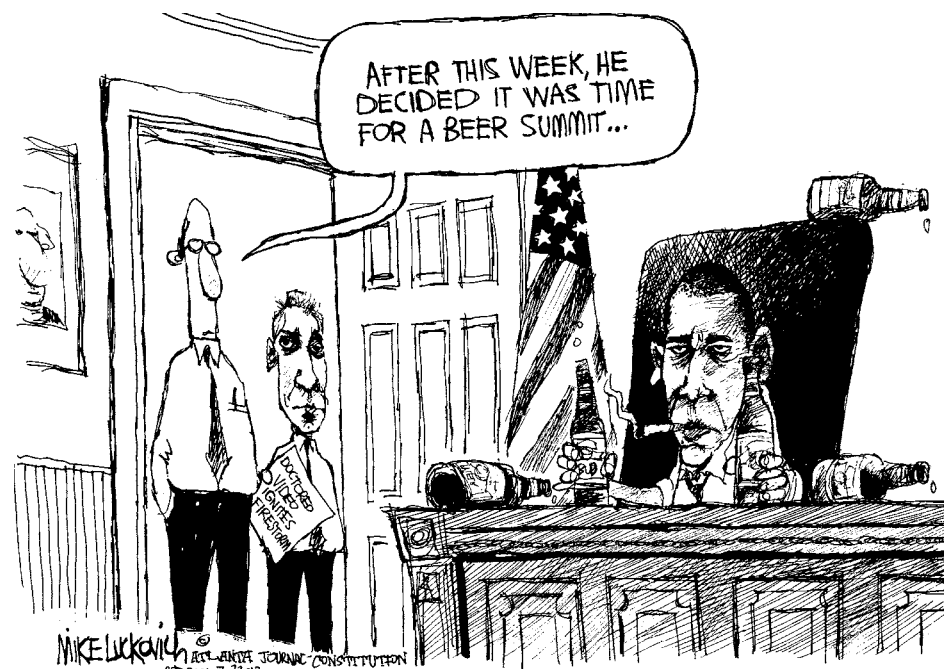
Watching Oklahoma junior U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn at the Kagan hearings brings to mind a question: What's the difference between God and Tom Coburn? Answer: God never thought he was Tom Coburn.

Dart: To the Legislature for the asinine number of interim "studies" – 76 in the House and 24 in the Senate. Guess how many will coincide with OU and OSU football games?

Our junior U.S. senator, Tom Coburn, spent an hour at a state town forum telling Oklahomans that America is petrified with fear of the federal government. The only thing we've noticed that is truly petrified is Coburn's brain.

Laurel: To the Oklahoma Ethics Commission for taking a close look at elected officials threatening an agency head. There is a difference between a threat and an inquiry.

America's military budget in 2008 was \$696,268,000,000. We have 1,429,215 armed forces personnel and 57 nukes. Russia has a budget of \$40 billion, with 1,027,000 military personnel.



Dart: To Tea Party crackpots [led by Sarah Palin] who claim the Obama Administration is creating a "Nazi State" and compare President Obama to Hitler.

Oklahoma Republicans have a new party chairman, Tulsan Matt Pinnell, 30, who was the only candidate. He was director of operations for several years.

Laurel: To Oklahoma State University for going green, saving more than \$11.5 million in just the past three years. Go Cowboys!

So Owasso Sen. Randy Brogdon finally endorses GOP gubernatorial nominee Mary Fallin. Is it enough to convince energized Tea Party types that Fallin shares their principles and is worthy of their support?

Dart: If we taught real sex education instead of abstinence, teen parents would learn of the new report that raising one child from birth to 17 costs \$222,360. [U.S. Department of Agriculture report]

Despite thousands of Iraqis suffering from war, bombing and sectarian violence, the country has only 100 psychiatrists.

Laurel: To co-founder Bill Stoller, filing a lawsuit calling for the ouster of Bob Funk, CEO of Express Services Inc., accused of using company money as some kind of personal slush fund.

Did you feel your I.Q. dip? No need to see a doctor, Glenn Beck was in town for a brief rant. Prepare yourself for Sept. 15 when American's foremost moron, Sarah Palin, hits OKC.

Dart: To Chesapeake Energy for taking tens of millions from Oklahoma taxpayers via the GOP Legislature, then gifting a private university, Oklahoma City University, with \$5 million. Only in Oklahoma.

We note the irony of those opposed to State Question 744 [bringing per pupil spending to the regional average] when they were cheering GOP legislative tax cuts and tax rate cuts.

Laurel: To Rep. Doug Cox, R-Grove, the only MD in the Legislature, warning against the Corrections Department ending its "no smoking" policy in some state prisons. Why not hand prisoners a loaded gun?

Sure the feds aren't perfect, but if the mindless, vicious criticism of the Rush Limbaugh gang prevails, we can lose all we value in this country, ending up in a fundamentalist theocracy.

Dart: To Oklahoma's Anadarko Energy, owner of 25% of BP but refuses to stand good for any damages.

The Obama Administration is finally getting on point – money aimed directly at low performing schools including \$36.6 million for schools in Tulsa and Oklahoma City.

Laurel: To Tulsan Art Rasher, named Big Brother of the Year by Big Brothers Big Sisters of America – chosen among those nominated by more than 400 agencies.

A national survey reveals that nine out of 10 emergency room physicians admit the fear of lawsuits results in overtesting – especially by male doctors. [Archives of Internal Medicine]

Dart: To the White House Correspondents' Association, awarding Fixed News a front-row seat in White House Briefing Room. It confers legitimacy on a rightwing propaganda machine.

First general election poll [Rasmussen] shows GOP nominee Mary Fallin with 21 percentage point lead over Democrat Jari Askins. Given the pre-primary polls, does Askins have Fallin right where she wants her?

The U.S. now spends more on defense than at the height of the Cold War, still protecting countries from Russia that are no longer threatened. Even Dick Cheney has called new weapons expenditures a "turkey."

In 1980 there were six exemptions [including newspapers, radio and TV] to the sales tax. By 2008 the list had grown to 143 – disgraceful.

THE OKLAHOMA Observer


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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

Re: "Sleeper?," Observations, 7.10.10:

With all respect, how do you figure that the Libertarian vote in the 5th Congressional District will "... side with Independent candidates Clark Duffe and Dave White"?

Siding with me, I understand. I'm now the Oklahoma Libertarian Party [OKLP] vice chair, after holding a series of other party positions. In 2000, I ran for state Senate as a true Libertarian – the last time we were officially recognized on the Oklahoma ballot.

Mr. White only left the Republican Party a few months ago, and describes himself as a "family values conservative." A look at his website shows little substantial difference with the Republicans in the race.

On the other hand, I support policies I doubt Mr. White would touch: Drug legalization, women's health freedoms, gay rights [I had a campaign booth at the recent PrideFest, and manned an OKLP booth at other, past PrideFests], reining in America's imperialistic foreign policy, immigration reform without police state tactics; the list goes on.

The Oklahoma Observer and I disagree a lot – especially concerning economics – but please, don't suggest that an unabashed conservative like Mr. White and I will appeal to the same voters, especially Libertarian ones.

Clark Duffe
Edmond

Editor, The Observer:

Everyone must have seen the TV ad with J.C. Watts endorsing Ken Miller for state treasurer. If not, it's available on YouTube. First J.C. says that Miller comes from the real world, unlike those professional politicians. And what real world is that, you may well ask? He has a PhD in economics! And he's worked in banking and corporate finance! I've got some news for J.C. That kind of experience has very little to do with the real world.

But wait, there's one more thing. Wouldn't you think he'd try to keep it quiet about working in banking and corporate finance? Aren't those the very same giant brains that tanked the economy, and had to be bailed out at vast expense? Does he really think our memories are that short? Yes, probably he does. And probably the Tea Partiers, convinced by J.C.'s iron logic, will march to the polls in lock step to vote for Miller.

Steve Tedder
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Even though Fallin and Askins are from different parties, they are cut from the same cloth. They are both anti-choice. Back when the women's movement first started, we were under the impression that all we had to do was educate women to their own situations, and they would fall in lock step with the feminists. NOT.

It turns out that many women parrot what their husband's think. I've done political calling where a woman will answer the phone, and I'll ask how she is going to vote. She yells to her husband, "Honey, who are we voting for this time?" She had not given one thought to how she, as an individual, was going to vote. Sad, but true.

Never did we envision women in power who would actively work against the welfare of other women. How sad.

Barbara Santee
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

The Observer is so excellent, especially in this climate of emotional, wild statements. Your intelligent, well thought out views refresh me. Please continue your good efforts.

I even enjoy your jokes. They really appeal to me!

Dorothy E. Spivey
Stillwater

Editor, The Observer:

I wonder if any of these self-righteous, holier than thou Bible thumping Republicans in Oklahoma ever consider the similarities between the Mexicans, that Oklahoma is trying to run out of the country, and the Okies who went to California during the Depression trying for a better life?

I know from family conversations what it was like for those people who, reluctantly, left their home state to go to California to work in the fields to try to make a living. I have heard the horror stories of how they were treated. The word "Okie" was an epithet just like the names the people from Mexico are now being called by these so-called "good Christians."

Have these hate mongers ever read *The Grapes of Wrath*?

For everyone who complains that Mexicans are taking our jobs, go to takeourjobs.org and sign up today. They'll put you to work immediately. You too can enjoy backbreaking work in 100-plus degree heat for minimum wage.

All this talk in Oklahoma, Arizona, Utah, etc. is nothing but racism. Re-



publican racism. The real deal. But they all claim to be on a first name basis with Jesus. Really? Wonder if Jesus knows about that. He probably had a dark complexion, too. Would He qualify to live in Oklahoma?

Jesus said, "What you do to the least among you, you do to me." He did not make any stipulations about nationality. I guess the Oklahoma Legislature will do that for Him.

Deborah Lewis
Garland, TX

Editor, The Observer:

I'd like to say a word or two to those who consider themselves "at war" against those not of their political party. In particular, I'm thinking of those who presume God favors one political party over another. And of course any "war" entails justification of almost all other unfairness and evil, such as even murder.

I might easily be in the very same position they are [I mean, who can argue with "God"?] had I not met a few too many hypocrites in life.

There's no such thing as "the God party." Political parties arise from the various and unique perspectives of humans, some with very un-honed life priorities.

Stephanie Hershberger
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Let me give you my take on this government employee that was dismissed by the Secretary of Agriculture. There is a personality out there that sets a trap for people and when they take the bait, they say with glee, "Now I've got you, you SOB."

This seems to be what happened.

Kate McDaniel
Crawford

Editor, The Observer:

Conventional wisdom of conservatives around here on the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act is it provides little stimulation and would be wasted on pet pork projects – and, boy, did they.

Exhibit A: The silly white elephant that is the Oklahoma River cruises, once alleged to be public transport so city officials could use millions from the \$10 million the city received for actual transport. Apparently the boats serve citizens looking for a really slow and expensive way to travel from

downtown to SW 15th and Meridian [in OKC].

The city spent the remainder on 10 diesel buses, "facility upgrades" and to activate some schedule listing monitors installed long ago and never activated.

Don't worry, they're not blowing only Uncle Sam's money on this boondoggle – the city funds it to the tune of \$700,000 annually with OKC tax collections. After the initial curiosity boon, ridership has become a Canadian River summertime trickle. The Oklahoman's own Steve Lackmeyer put the pencil and pad to the numbers – cost equals \$155 per passenger to operate.

Meanwhile, the city's pathetic public transport threatened to cut lines while doubling bus fare for the least of us. Disabled riders and some seeing eye dogs patiently sat through a city official's explanation why it's necessary to cut service and double fares in spite of receiving \$10 million for transport so they could plead for lines they depend on.

Apparently elected OKC officialdom found his seat uncomfortable and left after he finished yammering away.

Compare this shameful waste of precious public resources to what occurred in some progressive Oklahoma towns. Norman spent its \$1.8 million on five CNG buses to improve its CART system that serves Norman and has seen a jump in ridership. Up the pike Tulsa is replacing 38 beat up buses with new clean CNG rides. Price tag is \$60,000 more for a CNG bus, easily made up quick time with fill-ups at 50 cents a gallon.

If you haven't been keeping score, Norman bought half as many new buses as OKC, CNG technology, with \$1.8 million in stimulus funds. Tulsa spends her \$12 million on 38 new clean running CNG buses and OKC blows its \$10 million on 10 diesel buses, activates some schedule monitors and some ferry boat rides. Does employ some ferry boat captains, but it's Oklahoma, probably not natives.

The senseless destruction of the Union Station railyard, the white elephant river boat rides – you'd think the powers-that-be aren't interested in public transport and prefer we'd burn more gas, lots of it in our big American cars as is our God given right.

David Orr
Norman

Frosty Troy's Who Killed Free Enterprise?

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

Call Frosty at 405.760.1843 to book a speech.

Stop The Press?



FROSTY TROY
Founding Editor

It may be too early for the last rites for print media but it is not too early to consider what America would be without print journalism.

The press, in theory, is supposed to safeguard democratic principles. During a parliamentary debate in 1787, Edmund Burke referred to the press corps as the Fourth Estate. Hypothetically, the press was the champion of the public.

None can say that, on balance, newspapers and news magazines haven't done a fair job. History is littered with the relentless digging of good reporters backed by good editors and publishers.

I am a case in point with a host of scoops to my credit – but I didn't do it for the accolades of the public. It was expected of me as it is of all other journalists – even columnists.

Unfortunately, investigative reporting is in sharp decline across America, never more apparent than in Washington when the press

corps went to bed with Ronald Reagan, later with George W. Bush.

They paid far more attention to Bill Clinton's indiscretion than to the fact that he was building a huge federal surplus and paying down the national debt. Such issues aren't sexy but they are a vital component of the day's news.

There were exceptions, such as the Washington Post and the Nation magazine. Far too many members of the print media ignored Bush's deregulation of virtually every business and industry in sight. BP comes to mind, along with the West Virginia mines.

Financial reporting isn't glamorous but it's vital. Where were the headlines when Bush blew that huge Clinton surplus?

The Wall Street Journal fields the most impressive credentials for financial reporting. They also have the nation's worst major league editorial page, often canceling the good work of superb reporters. Then Fox bought it.

According to its supporters, the Fourth Estate acts as a mediator between the public and the elite. Journalists listen to and record the activities of those with power.

John Dewey believed that the public was capable of understanding and discussing policies and should be part of the public vetting process. Thus, the press would provide a forum where the people could weigh the consequences of policies being considered by those who governed.

A critical distinction is keeping the owners' opinions on the editorial page, not meddling with the news reporting. The classiest example of that in Oklahoma is the Tulsa World.

A journalist's foremost duty is to tell the truth, even when it hurts. I learned early as a Tulsa City Hall reporter that you don't socialize with those you cover.

One of the married friends I made at City Hall subsequently asked me if he could use my apartment [my wife and I both worked] for afternoon sessions with the woman he kept on the side. I made a personal enemy when I told him no.

Over the years there has been an erosion of the public trust in the Fourth Estate, as more and more of the media have been monopolized by those President Franklin Roosevelt in 1936 called "economic royalists" that control the country.

I learned early that the job of a good reporter is not to be swayed by the personalities of those you are covering – avoid drinking, eating or going to social events with them.

Those newly elected to office actually believe they can walk on water. It is the job of an honest press to sink them the moment they get off course.

Roosevelt schmoozed with reporters but Harry Truman didn't. He was blunt to the point of rudeness but he knew the job of those covering his administration was to tell the truth. He held them to that rigorous standard.

Consider Oklahoma's Capitol coverage. Only one TV station staffs the Capitol beat – OETA. When I was reporting for the Tulsa Tribune, every OKC station had a fulltime reporter. Channel Six in Tulsa kept a reporter in Oklahoma City.

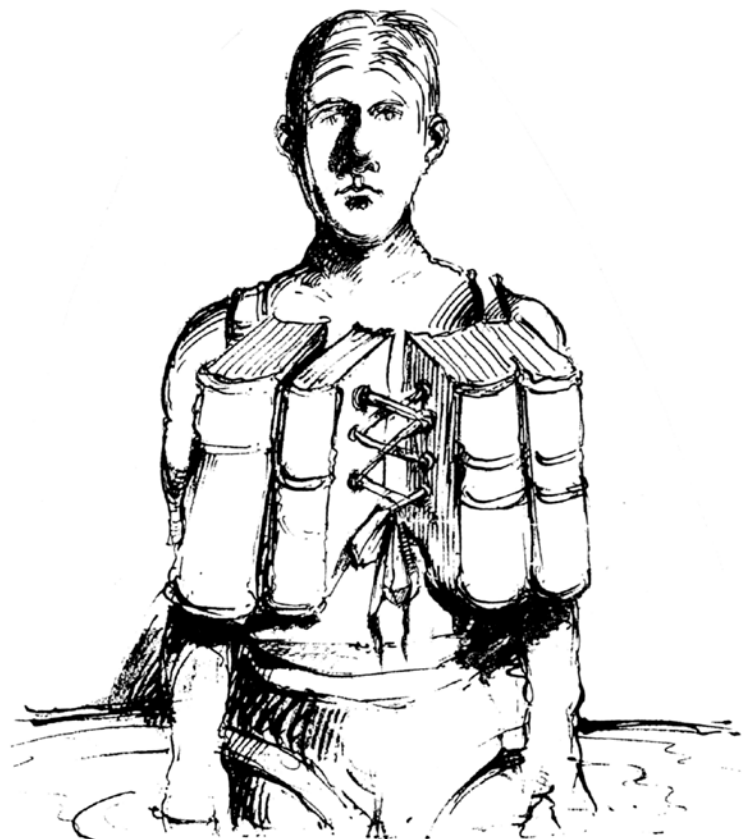
Thanks to a slippage in ad lineage, the Oklahoman has only two Capitol reporters and the Tulsa World has only one. Both papers send reporters to assist when hot things are popping. It's not the same.

Believe it or not, for years the Bartlesville Examiner-Enterprise had a fulltime reporter at the Capitol. The Norman Transcript no longer keeps a fulltime Capitol reporter.

One reason the Capitol produces little news compared to yesteryear can be summed up in a single name: Gov. Brad Henry, the first governor in state history not to hold regularly scheduled news conferences. When you see him on the news it's probably a dog and pony show – his field of expertise.

Roosevelt recognized the truth about the growing media monopoly that brought on the Depression: "New kingdoms were built upon concentration of control over material things. Through new uses of corporations, banks and securities, new machinery of industry and agriculture, of labor and capital – all undreamed of by the Fathers – the whole structure of modern life was impressed into this royal service."

He should see it today. Check David Blatt's blog [reprinted on page 8] – \$150 million from the kept Legislature so oil companies will keep on drilling. Say what?



Press critics are furious at the Arizona media as the worst example of an institution abandoning its mission to educate the public.

Oklahoma has lurched to the far right, mainly because, as Henry lamely explains it, it isn't his job to "build a party but to build a state." He has never attended Democratic Party Central committee meetings and for several years refused to see a party chairman he disliked.

Did he flunk Politics 101? It is political control that makes the difference – and that comes from a two-party system in Oklahoma. While he dithered, unwilling to call out the crazies in the GOP, they took over the Legislature.

He could have learned from Henry Bellmon, first Republican governor, whose first 200 appointments were all Republicans. He wasn't afraid to defy the Old Guard Democrats who controlled the Legislature.

Edward R. Murrow would be horrified by what passes for TV news in Oklahoma – joking, kidding celebrity hungry newscasts heavy on the police blotter. It was a sad day for TV news when "consultants" took the reins.

If there's one thing the Oklahoma news media does well it's weather reporting – even the print media. For half a century it was the *Grapes of Wrath*. Now it is the *Wrath of Weather*.

There is no dearth of stories to be covered over and over – Why does Oklahoma have a 25% high school dropout rate? Why are we one of the most obese states in the union? Why do we send so many women to prison? Why do we lead the nation in domestic abuse? Why do we lag in college graduates? Why are we lacking in family doctors and RNs? Why do so many thousands of seriously mentally ill go untreated? Why are 625,000 of us uninsured? Why do we elect morons to the Legislature?

These are a few questions that the media ought to pursue non-stop, not an occasional feature or a story on a new national report showing where we lag.

Some say it's a fear of libel lawsuits that keep more of the print media in check. That's nonsense – Oklahoma has the honest mistake law. If someone feels harmed, all they have to do is ask for a correction.

When the print media is no longer a factor in this country's life, you can prepare for a theocracy. That didn't work out very well for the crowned heads of Europe did it?

OBAMACARE

Ten Terrible Things are happening since the Obama health care overhaul!

1. Most people will now have health care.
2. The insurance companies can no longer [have a Death Panel] deny people health care.
3. The insurance companies can no longer [have a Death Panel] cancel your insurance when you become ill.
4. Parents can keep their dependent children on their health insurance policy until they are 26.
5. Insurance companies will have to be accountable for increases in premiums.
6. Ceilings on annual or lifetime benefits will be eliminated. Also, people will be able to take their coverage with them if they leave a job.
7. Insurers will have to reveal how they spend premiums – how much is used to cover medical care vs. how much is spent on executive salaries and administration costs. They will have to pay at least 85% of individual plans on medical care.
8. The doughnut hole in the part "D" Medicare drug plan will eventually close.
9. We have always helped the people that don't work or don't want to work – now we will help the people who work and cannot afford to have health insurance.
10. Jesus would most certainly be for health care for everybody. Jesus would help those who can't afford health care and so should we!

The insurance companies spent millions of dollars trying not to let this happen by advertising, spreading lies and buying off the GOP. It happened anyway and now we have to live with it. What is this world coming to? This is terrible?

State's Theocrats Insist On Playing With Fire



ARNOLD HAMILTON
Editor

The final number: \$199,000. That's the legal judgment Haskell County taxpayers will pay for their county commissioners' decision to allow placement of a Ten Commandments monument on the courthouse lawn.

It was an unconstitutional melding of church and state from the get-go, but self-righteousness all-too-often trumps common sense in today's America, especially in ultra-red states like Oklahoma.

And so the taxpayers will foot the bill for the intemperate decisions of a few elected lunkheads who were more than willing to lead their constituents to a most dangerous place: the intersection of politics and religion.

Haskell County isn't the first government entity in America to test the bounds of the principle of separation of church and state, of course.

And it most assuredly won't be the last – especially in Oklahoma where some lawmakers are obsessed with the notion this is a Christian

nation as opposed to a nation of religious freedom.

It's difficult to imagine that erection later this year of a similar Ten Commandments monument on the state Capitol's north lawn – the brainchild of state Rep. Mike Ritze, R-Broken Arrow – won't be challenged in court.

Or that elective Bible classes in public schools – Democratic Sen. Tom Ivester of Elk City won legislative approval for it this year – won't end up before a judge because a zealous instructor uses it as a platform to promote his or her particular religion or denomination.

There is no question that faith – or lack thereof – informs our politics as *individuals*. It reflects of our core principles and values, whether we believe in a higher power or not – which is, of course, a fundamental right of choice that we enjoy *individually* as Americans.

But it's dangerous when lawmakers, clergy and religious groups conspire to break down the wall that ensures each of us is free to worship in our own way. Look no further than theocratic states elsewhere in the world that are routinely scorned by our elected officials who seem oblivious to the fact that they're leading our state and nation down the same troubling path.

What could one day be government-mandated Christianity – whose brand? – could another day be government-mandated Islam or Judaism or Buddhism or who knows what.

Think it couldn't happen here? Don't be so sure. Religious crusades and conquests are a staple of world history. Which is all the more reason to protect our noble experiment – the idea that people of different faiths can live in proximity, in relative harmony, with respect for each other, all because we cherish the individual right to freedom of religious choice.

Of course, such high-mindedness hasn't stopped those zealots determined to stamp out any religious thought but their own – and institutionalize their religious tenets in American government, law and life.

What's worse: they often use fear – of other faiths or races or of homosexuality – to browbeat others into embracing their narrow-minded view of America and its spirit of openness.

Oklahoma was back in the news recently for just that very thing when a Washington, DC-based religious liberty watchdog formally asked the Internal Revenue Service to investigate whether a group calling itself Reclaiming Oklahoma for Christ violated federal law by promoting a campaign rally for state Rep. Sally Kern.

Kern, R-OKC, is perhaps best known for asserting in 2008 that homosexuality is a bigger "threat" to America than "terrorism or Islam." In the national firestorm that followed, Reclaiming Oklahoma for Christ publicly rallied behind Kern.

Americans United for the Separation of Church and State charges the Oklahoma group – founded by Paul Blair, a former Oklahoma State and Chicago Bears lineman who now pastors a Baptist church in Edmond – distributed an e-mail in June that supported Kern's re-election and urged people to attend a campaign rally on her behalf.

"Organizations like Reclaiming Oklahoma for Christ should not be permitted to make a mockery of our laws," said Bruce Prescott, a Baptist minister in Norman who also serves on the Americans United board of trustees.

"Religion should never be politicized. It undermines the integrity of our houses of worship and is certain to divide congregations and communities."

Blair has denied any wrongdoing, but federal tax law is clear: Non-profit groups holding tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) status – including many churches and religious organizations – are prohibited from intervening in partisan campaigns by endorsing or opposing candidates.

It's perfectly OK to discuss issues from the pulpit, urge parishioners to vote, conduct non-partisan voter registration, even sponsor non-partisan candidate forums. But it's illegal to endorse or oppose candidates from the pulpit or in voter guides, use church resources to do so, and contribute to candidates' campaigns.

Pretty simple. But some religious leaders, like Blair, are purposely provoking legal fights, hoping to find the right court that will overturn the federal tax law ban on partisan politicking.


Will these zealots ever learn?

They should pay particular attention to Haskell County. In the years ahead, taxpayer money that could have been spent on vital government functions like law enforcement and bridge repair will be siphoned away ... into the coffers of the – heaven forbid! – American Civil Liberties Union.

The ACLU represented a Haskell County resident troubled by the monument's presence on public property – an unconstitutional government endorsement of religion.

More than one federal judge ordered its removal. Even the most conservative Supreme Court in recent memory refused to hear the case – a point that seems lost on those so certain of the religious righteousness of their causes.


Blair, Kern, Ritze and other religious zealots are working overtime to turn this state, and nation, into a Christian theocracy. They are playing with fire.




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VERY PUNNY

- With her marriage, she got a new name and a dress.
- The man who fell into an upholstery machine is fully recovered.
- You feel stuck with your debt if you can't budge it.
- Local Area Network in Australia – the LAN down under.
- Every calendar's days are numbered.
- A lot of money is tainted – Taint yours and taint mine.
- A boiled egg in the morning is hard to beat.
- He had a photographic memory that was never developed.
- A midget fortune-teller who escapes from prison is a small medium at large.
- Once you've seen one shopping center, you've seen a mall.
- Bakers trade bread recipes on a knead-to-know basis.
- Santa's helpers are subordinate clauses.
- Acupuncture is a jab well done.

STATE QUESTION 744

The Right Kind Of HOPE For State Schools?

Editor's Note: State Question 744, known as the HOPE [Helping Oklahoma Public Education] initiative, will appear on the November general election ballot. It would require the Oklahoma Legislature to fund public education at the per pupil average of our neighboring states. Currently, Oklahoma is dead last in the region in per pupil spending – behind even Arkansas and New Mexico. Republican leaders promised if they gained legislative majorities, they would fund education first – no later than April 1 – and at the regional average. They've done neither since gaining control of the House in 2004 and Senate in 2008. The Oklahoma Education Association and other public school supporters gathered enough signatures to force a statewide vote that would hold lawmakers to their promises. This may well turn out to be the most expensive fight over a proposed constitutional amendment in Oklahoma history. Opposition is fierce, not only from other special interests who fear their funding might be cut if SQ 744 is approved, but also from education insiders, including the American Federation of Teachers. Early polls suggest the public supports the education spending mandate. In these essays, David Blatt, director of the non-partisan Oklahoma Policy Institute, explains why he thinks the think tank believes passage of SQ 744 is bad public policy, and Rey Madrid, president of the League of United Latin American Citizens, explains why he believes approval of SQ 744 is essential to Oklahoma's future prosperity.

By David Blatt

If passed Nov. 2, State Question 744 would require school spending to rise to the per pupil average of the six surrounding states. We project that spending on Common Education would have to increase by nearly \$1.7 billion over the three-year phase-in period.

Given that the state must also replace over \$1 billion in non-recurring revenue in its base budget, passage of SQ 744 would require deep spending cuts to the rest of state government, substantial tax increases, or both.

The measure also suffers from unclear language, lacks mechanisms to ensure improved educational quality, and would hand authority for Oklahoma's budget over to legislators and courts in other states.

SQ 744 should lead us to reconsider what we must do to ensure an adequate investment in education and our other state priorities.

Many Oklahomans are dissatisfied with the state's investment in public education. According to recent data, Oklahoma ranks 49th in per pupil expenditures for K-12 education, spending only 75% of the national average on elementary and secondary education and falling steadily further behind our neighboring states.

The state fiscal crisis has now led to two consecutive years of shrinking education budgets, forcing school districts across the state to lay off teachers and staff, increase class sizes, and eliminate programs and services.

Even before the downturn, the ability or willingness of Oklahoma legislators to provide adequate funding for education through the normal appropriation process was widely questioned.

These concerns have generated willingness among some to consider constitutional change as a solution to Oklahoma's school funding challenges.

WRONG APPROACH

There is no question that passage of SQ 744 would lead to a massive increase in spending on education in Oklahoma over the coming years. However, once carefully thought through and understood, it becomes clear that SQ 744 represents the wrong approach to the problems it aims to solve.

Since the measure does not provide for any new revenues, passage of SQ 744 would ensure a severe funding shortage for all other areas of state government. Budget policies should not be decided by constitutional formulas.

The language in SQ 744 is unclear and does not reflect the reality of how we fund education. SQ 744 is not the best means of achieving the goals of improving educational quality and education. By mandating huge spending increases for common education without ensuring an overall expansion of state revenues, we create the strong likelihood of setting the state further behind in all the other areas of public investment that Oklahomans, including our schoolchildren and teachers, rely on.

Our conclusion is that SQ 744

By Rey Madrid

Passing SQ 744 in November will help Oklahoma reduce the dropout rate, strengthen Oklahoma's economy and empower our kids to achieve their full potential – both academically and professionally.

Today an intolerably high number of our young people drop out of high school. In 2009 alone, 14,700 of Oklahoma's kids did not graduate. No parent wants to see their child fail to receive a complete education, especially when you consider that the lifetime lost earnings of those high school dropouts totals approximately \$3.8 billion. You can imagine what this loss costs an individual over the course of his or her lifetime. This is a heartbreaking reality with serious repercussions for our state and local economies.

The impact of failing to finish high school can reach beyond home, community and bank account. Oklahoma's prisons are bursting at the seams with men and women who have broken our state's laws, and studies show that 75% of

Oklahoma's prisoners are high school dropouts. Those individuals are a drain on state resources, and are not contributing to the state's economy. If we lower the male dropout rate by just 5%, Oklahoma's economy would see a combination of crime-related savings and additional revenue equaling nearly \$96.4 million per year.

Take a moment to imagine the benefits if we gave all of our sons and daughters the resources they need to be successful.

Oklahomans will have the opportunity to vote for State Question 744 this fall. A Yes vote on SQ 744 will increase the state's investment in our kids' future to at least the average spent by our neighboring states – states like Arkansas and Texas that we compete with for jobs and economic opportunities.

As our children start school this year, they will be forced to learn in increasingly crowded classrooms, share old books and use outdated classroom technology. They'll do all this while losing critical support services such as library programs and career counseling.

How can we possibly expect our children to compete with the children from Arkansas and Texas for jobs when our politicians refuse to give them the tools they need to be successful?

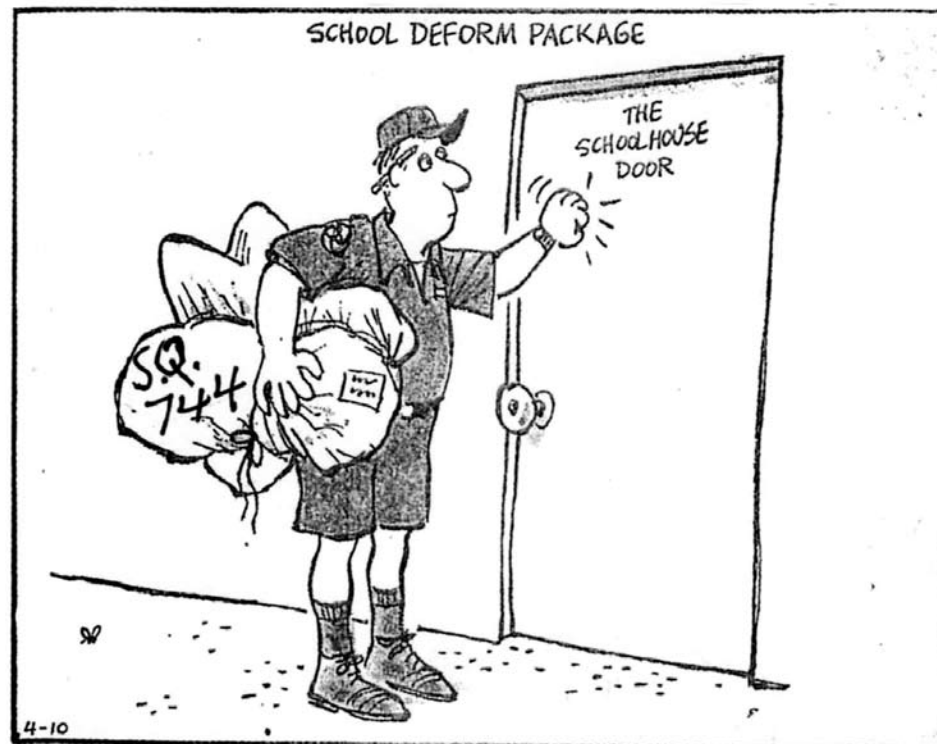
If we want to improve economic opportunities for our children, and spur economic growth in our state, we need to reduce Oklahoma's dropout rate. Reducing the dropout rate requires an investment in education that can occur only if we approve SQ 744.

We owe it to our children to give them the tools they need to compete with their peers in surrounding states. That means investing resources while they are in school to encourage them to complete their education.

SQ 744 is necessary to provide those tools.

Passing SQ 744 will help our state, our economy and, most of all, our students.

– The author is the president of LU-LAC Oklahoma



would cause real and serious harm to the state of Oklahoma. However, the measure should serve as a starting point for an urgent and honest discussion of what we can and must do to ensure an adequate investment in a quality education for our children and our other state priorities in a fiscally responsible manner.

OKLAHOMA RANKS POORLY

Oklahoma already ranks in the bottom fifth of states in total state and local per capita expenditures, and the state fiscal crisis has slashed budgets and forced painful cuts across all agencies and functions of government.

In the coming years, we will face the acute short-term challenge of replacing the substantial non-recurring revenues used in this year's budget, along with such long-term challenges as funding the health care costs of an aging population and keeping our public pension systems solvent.

THE CASE FOR SQ 744

The main argument made by supporters of SQ 744 in materials posted on their official website [www.ye-

son744.com] is that Oklahoma has been shortchanging children, schools, and teachers by consistently underfunding common education.

They point to the substantial gap in per pupil funding between Oklahoma and our surrounding states, as well as the national average. According to data from the National Education Association [NEA], Oklahoma's per pupil expenditure in FY '09, \$8,006, is 20.3% [\$1,627] below the surrounding state average of \$9,663 and 21.4% [\$2,187] below the national average of \$10,193.

Although proponents do not cite this, the funding gap between Oklahoma and its neighboring states has grown in recent years. Using data from the National Center for Education Statistics, Oklahoma's annual per pupil expenditures have fallen from 94% of the regional average in 1997-98 to just 84% in 2007-08.

CASE AGAINST SQ 744

There are four major arguments against SQ 744:

1. SQ 744 would ensure the severe
- See EDUCATION Page 19

\$150 Million Scam

Flawed Oil And Gas Subsidies Are Political

By David Blatt

In their efforts to find additional revenues for the upcoming budget year, legislative leaders and Gov. Henry took some strong and politically risky steps to suspend tax credits for various forms of economic activity.

But when it came to tax incentives for the oil and gas industry, expected to amount to some \$150 million in FY '11, it was the industry that seemed to have the upper hand.

HB 2432, which passed in the final days of session, allowed the state temporarily to defer incentive payments to oil and gas producers – but only in return for some permanent and questionable concessions to the industry.

Under HB 2432, approved as part of the FY '11 budget agreement, payment of the rebates owed for horizontally drilled and deep wells produced in Fiscal Years 2010 and 2011 will be deferred until July 1, 2012 and then paid out in monthly installments over the next 36 months.

NINE PERCENT INTEREST!

The state will be assessed interest at 9% on any payment that is not made by the end of the month it is due. This does not involve a moratorium or suspension of these tax rebates – just a deferral in payments.

This procedure made available an additional \$85 million for appropriation in FY '11 that would otherwise have been paid out in rebates.

In return for this one-time deferral of their rebates, the oil and gas industry extracted three significant changes to the system of tax breaks for production.

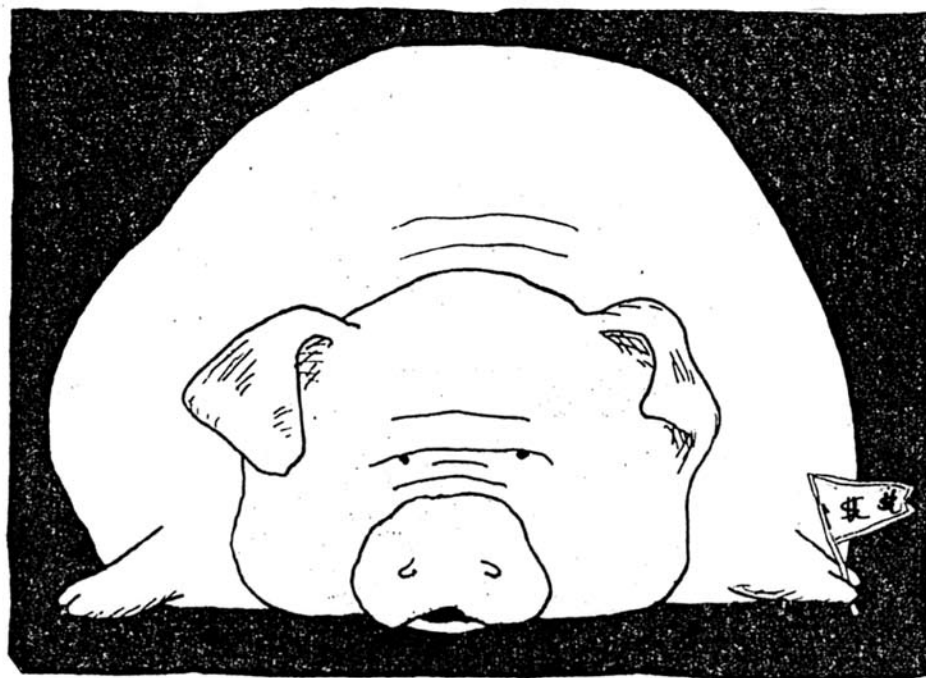
WHAT IT WILL COST THE STATE

First, beginning in FY '13, drilling incentives for horizontally drilled and deep wells will be paid out as front-end credits, rather than as rebates that are applied for and refunded after the end of the year. This switch will involve a one-time cost to the state in the crossover years from back-end to front-end payments that is projected by the Tax Commission to be \$65 million. It also precludes any future attempt to defer incentive payments.

Secondly, the law changes how horizontally drilled and deep wells are taxed. Under HB 2432, beginning in 2011, deep wells drilled below 15,000 feet will be taxed at 4% [compared to 1% currently], but the current cap limiting total incentives for deep well drilling to \$25 million per year will be abolished. For horizontally drilled wells, HB 2432 strikes the language in current law that makes producers eligible for incentives only until project payback has been completed.

WHEN INCENTIVES ARE CLAIMED

Finally, for other forms of drilling, in which incentives are subject to a price trigger, HB 2432 indexes the trigger to an annual inflation-based increase. Currently, incentives can be claimed for oil production only in years when the average price is below \$30 per barrel or for gas production in years when the average price is below \$5 per MCF; this floor will rise based on the Consumer Price



Index.

We fully appreciate the important of the energy industry for Oklahoma's economy. But this deal leaves us with a pair of troubling questions. The first is, at a time when budgets for almost all government functions are sustaining deep and enduring cuts, does it make sense to extend additional tax breaks for oil and gas producers?

While the switch in how deep well drilling is taxed is purported to be revenue-neutral, the lifting of the project payback limit on rebates for horizontally drilled wells is expected to reduce taxes by an additional \$13 million.

AND THERE IS MORE

This is on top of the approximately \$60 million in gross production tax breaks already going to horizontal drilling, along with oil and gas depletion allowances and other tax benefits.

Rather than provide unlimited credits, we should be looking to limit the state's fiscal exposure and provide greater budget certainty by establishing reasonable caps on the total amounts of credits that can be claimed by producers.

The second question relates to how HB 2432 exacerbates a system where certain forms of production, dominated by large producers, are subsidized regardless of the price of oil and gas. When natural gas is at \$3.50 per MCF, tax rebates or credits may, perhaps, make the difference in the decision to drill a well.

But should production be fully exempted [in the case of horizontally drilled wells] or partially exempted [in the case of deep well] even from gross production taxes when gas is at \$8.00 per MCF? What about \$15.00 per MCF?

The additional concessions granted to these producers by HB 2432 only strengthens the perception that when it comes to the subsidy system for oil and gas drilling, policies are being driven not by geology or economics, but rather politics.

– The author is director of the non-partisan Oklahoma Policy Institute

Ignorance No Longer Excuse For Blowouts

By Walter Jenny

BP's out-of-control oil gusher in the Gulf of Mexico wasn't the first to grab the world's attention. In fact, one of the most infamous blowouts was right here in Oklahoma.

The Oklahoma City oil field became the largest oil producer in the United States after it was discovered in 1928. In fact, until oil was found in the Middle East, the Oklahoma City field was the largest known oil reserve in the world.

The Indian Territory Illuminating Oil Company had been poking around looking for black gold in Oklahoma County for 27 years. Finally, after 25 dry holes and having spent \$400,000, ITIO hit a gusher on Dec. 28, 1928 that blew 5,000 barrels of oil in the first 24 hours. That well eventually produced more than a million barrels of oil.

But that discovery well was nothing compared to what happened on March 26, 1930.

A few miles further south, near present-day I-240 and Bryant Avenue, ITIO was drilling another well on the farm of Vincent and Mary Sudik. Tired roughnecks forgot to fill the hole with mud before starting to pull 25 tons of pipe that, unknown to them, had pierced the top of the Wilcox sand 6,741 feet below them. The pipe began vibrating. Then came a roar, heard in Purcell 30 miles away, that permanently deafened some of the workers. The joints of pipe were shot like toothpicks into the air by gas that had built up over millions of years, waiting for this day to be released.

This was born the Wild Mary Sudik well. For the next 11 days, she vented 200 million cubic feet of gas and up to 75,000 barrels of oil a day. When the wind came from the south, oil coated downtown Oklahoma City and the state Capitol building 10 miles away; when it shifted from the north, an oily mist rained down on Moore and Norman. Housewives couldn't hang their laundry outside; fires and pilot lights were prohibited, and land and air traffic was rerouted.

The scene attracted worldwide attention. Newsreel photographers arrived by train, and their films were shown in theaters around the globe. Twice-daily national radio reports kept the world updated. The coverage, for 11 days, was every bit as extensive in its day as the BP Gulf oil gusher was this summer.

After two failed attempts, the third try to cap Wild Mary was successful. An es-

timated 800,000 barrels of oil were lost, and 211,589 barrels of oil were recovered from ponds and ditches. Thousands of acres of oil-soaked land had to be plowed under, and hundreds of buildings had to be repainted. Once tamed, the Mary Sudik well would eventually produce five million barrels of oil.

Wild Mary was only the most famous of hundreds of wells that tapped into the Oklahoma City oilfield. She was not the last gusher, either. Seven months later the No. 1 Stout ran wild for three days, gushing between 60,000 and 75,000 barrels a day. It was finally capped using lessons learned on Wild Mary.

By this time pools of oil were stored behind earthen dams all over Oklahoma City. One of those dams collapsed, spilling a layer of oil three inches thick onto the North Canadian River. Besides killing fish and birds, the river actually caught fire, with flames blazing 40 feet into the air. Black smoke was visible in Enid. Two bridges were destroyed, and damage reached as far downstream as McLoud.

The Oklahoma story is best understood in the context of a nascent industry. Problems arose because drillers didn't know better. Blowout preventers and drilling mud were recent innovations, and nobody expected the gas pressure to be that intense.

A moratorium on production was imposed, not because of the environmental impact, but because the production glut caused the price of oil to drop below 15 cents a barrel. Once the price rose above \$1 a barrel, drilling was allowed to resume.

Now, 80 years later, the oil and gas industry is dealing with another gusher, this one a mile beneath the Gulf of Mexico. While we don't yet know exactly what caused it, we do know that safety and cleanup considerations have lagged behind our zeal to find new domestic sources of energy. There's still a little too much of the wildcatter's vinegar in a dangerous and dirty business that can cause widespread and long-lasting harm. And, while redundant precautions will add to the cost of drilling, they're necessary until we can transition to cleaner and safer fuels.

Ignorance is no longer an excuse, especially when the stakes are so high and the rewards so lucrative.

– The author lives in Edmond

Dan Boren 'Stars' In New Documentary

By Howie Klein

I was tweeting about Blue Dog Dan Boren's repulsive attack ad against populist Oklahoma state Sen. Jim Wilson.

It looks like someone had the foresight to cut off the price tags, but Boren was clearly out of place in the tree and clearly wearing brand new, never-before-worn hunting duds that someone from a movie prop shop had bought for the ad shoot.

Inspired by the ridiculous and outrageous ad by a gun-toting Dale Peterson, at least Peterson did serve in the military. So did Sen. Wilson. Not gun-toting, inauthentic loudmouth Boren.

Just because Boren paid off an ad firm to make a slick ad for him doesn't mean that all of Hollywood is on his side. Filmmaker Josh Fox has a new film, being shown now on HBO, Gasland.

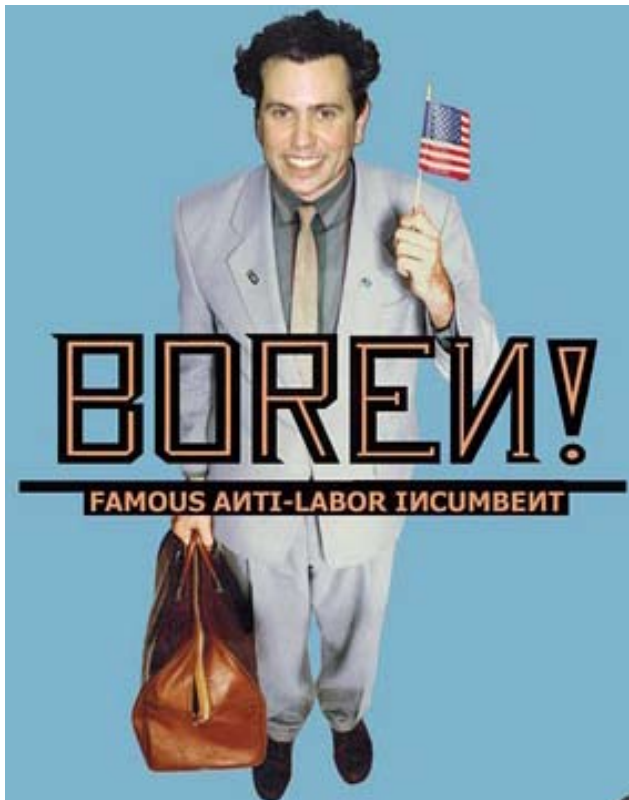
WHO IS THAT CONGRESSMAN?

In it you will notice that there's a congressman defending the outrageous behavior of Big Oil corporations poisoning ground water across America.

That isn't an actor. It's Oklahoma's own Dan Boren, one of Big Oil's most dependable, fully-owned subsidiaries.

Since 1990, Big Oil has invested around \$144 million in the careers of congressmen, almost all conservatives. Almost 70% of the payoff has gone to Republicans.

And among current members of the House there's only one Democrat in Big Oil's Top 10: Dan Boren



[\$565,460]. As you can see, Big Oil is, by far, the biggest source of cash for his political endeavors.

What you haven't been able to see, until Fox caught it on tape, is that Boren, who bragged about not voting for Obama and who has voted against virtually every piece of Democratic legislation since Obama has become president, has never found anything in the oil industry's agenda that he didn't get behind.

BOREN IS RAKING IN THOUSANDS

And, as a member of the Committee on Natural Resources – and on the subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources – that support has been worth a lot more to Big Oil than the \$565,460 they've given Boren for his campaigns.

On May 19, 2005, Boren voted with Republicans to allow the kind of deepwater drilling that led directly to the current Gulf of Mexico ecological disaster.

In fact on April 21, 2005, he voted, again with the GOP, against Raul Grijalva's amendment to the Energy Policy Act that would have stricken from the bill a provision directing the Secretary of the Interior to stop collecting royalty fees for the government from oil and gas companies operating in the deep waters of the Gulf of Mexico, a giveaway to his gas and oil patrons and as clear a case of non-statutory bribery as you'll find in Congress.

Please take a look at the Gasland trailer. You'll get a feel for what a corporate shill Dan Boren is.

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What Does Tom Coburn Really Want?

By Sharon Martin

When Sen. Tom Coburn questioned Supreme Court nominee Elena Kagan, he made clear his belief that original intent trumps legal precedent. He seems to know what our Founding Fathers intended when they created the Constitution; he called their intentions "pure."

The Founding Fathers wanted freedom from oppression. They put their lives and reputations on the line when they demanded that freedom. However, if we go back to original intent, do we go back to the premise that white, male landowners are free and women and minorities are only as free as the white, male landowners allow them to be? Not a single woman or person of color signed the Declaration of Independence. Where were their voices when the Constitution was first penned?

Our country has evolved, and so has our Constitution. We freed the slaves. Women earned the right to vote. We made the sale of liquor illegal then made it legal again when prohibition didn't work.

Our Constitution is a living, breathing document, capable of changing as our nation, itself, evolves.

Some conservatives profess to be strict constitutionalist. What is it they really want to conserve? If we go back to original intent, our president counts as three/fifths a person, and his wife would not be a successful lawyer but a cook

in someone's kitchen. Neither Mary Fallin nor Jari Askins would be running for the office of governor of Oklahoma. Women couldn't own property unless they inherited from their fathers and did not marry.

There are plenty of women and even people of color who have jumped on this constitutionalist bandwagon. They need to be careful, because they could get what they're asking for. If we return to those darker times, when people could be bought and sold in this country, women and minorities won't remain on the bandwagon for long. They'll be standing along the roadside watching the wagon go on without them. Or worse, shoveling the manure the horses leave behind.

Our Constitution is an amazing instrument. It survives because it can adapt to the times. The original authors were intentionally vague because they anticipated change.

A true conservative seeks to conserve and preserve. We must conserve what's left of the old growth forests. We must protect endangered species. We must preserve historic sites.

American citizens and our Constitution, however, must be allowed to change and adapt so our country can survive in a change-is-inevitable world.

Dr. Coburn, legal precedent is a sound avenue for that change.

– The author lives in Oilton

A Remarkable Family Gives Up On Oklahoma

By Jay Paul Gumm

The Lord has blessed Oklahoma, and the greatest of those many blessings are the families who make their home here.

The one thing that truly distinguishes our state from the others is the quality of people who weave themselves into the tapestry that is Oklahoma.

Recently, a thread was pulled from that tapestry as a family that had hoped to make Oklahoma its home forever reluctantly left our state.

Wayne and Robyne Rohde and their sons, Austin and Nicholas, moved to Minnesota. You probably have heard of the Rohdes; their son, Nick, is afflicted with autism and he is the namesake of "Nick's Law," a bill for which I have tenaciously fought the past three years.

Nick's Law would require health insurance policies in Oklahoma to cover the diagnosis and treatment of autism in children. Autism is a national epidemic. Studies show that out of every 100 children born in America, one will be diagnosed with some form of autism. For little boys, the risk is four times greater than it is for girls.

While Nick's Law, which passed the Senate on at least four different occasions, has yet to become Oklahoma's law, we made progress for families who have children with autism.

The discrimination against these children did not end with denying coverage for autism; it extended to denying claims for injuries and illnesses not connected to autism.

This year, I amended a bill to require insurance companies to treat children who have autism the same as they treat children without the diagnosis. The new law passed both the Senate and House without opposition.

Parents of children with autism who sacrifice to pay health insurance premiums – knowing that autism is not covered – can rest assured their child will get the health care they need for other illnesses or injuries. A major newspaper called it one of the Legislature's finest hours, and I am proud we made this step.

Still, the crushing weight of more than \$30,000 in annual treatment costs for Nick with no health insurance coverage for autism was too much for the Rohde family. They are not alone; many families have left Oklahoma for one of the growing number of states requiring coverage of autism.

Not only was this a loss of a passionate advocate for Oklahoma children who have no voice of their own, the Rohdes' leaving was a personal loss for my family and me. Our families have become very close over the past three years.

Certainly, we will keep in touch, and my prayers go with my friends. Still, our work here must continue. There are thousands of children with autism, and each one of them is precious. There is no greater statement of the values of a state than how we treat our children – and I am committed to ensuring our laws truly reflect Oklahoma's values.

– The author, a Durant Democrat, represents District 6 in the state Senate

BOOKS

First Woman Speaker Puts Stamp On Office

By Tim Mauldin

SPEAKER NANCY PELOSI AND THE NEW AMERICAN POLITICS

By Ronald M. Peters Jr. and Cindy Simon Rosenthal
Oxford University Press
320 pages; \$29.95

Bob Dylan's folk song of the 1960s, "The Times They Are a-Changin'," might well be the anthem of American politics and society in the first decade of the 21st Century.

Nationally, we have witnessed the election of America's first president of African-American heritage and the selection of the first woman to serve as speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives.

On the local level, many women are advancing in elected leadership, including author Cindy Simon Rosenthal, who in 2007 became the first woman elected mayor of Norman.

Oklahoma voters this year will select their first woman to serve as governor, as both major state political parties have nominated a woman to lead their tickets.

These events are historic and reveal profound changes in the country.

FIRST WOMAN AS SPEAKER

Several good books have been written about the 2008 election of the nation's first African-American president. Widely considered the second most powerful leader in our government is the speaker of the House. However, the selection in 2007 of America's first woman to serve as House speaker has not received similar attention until the publication this year of *Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the New American Politics* by two leading scholars, Ron Peters and Rosenthal.

Peters is a Regents Professor at the University of Oklahoma and former director of the Carl Albert Center for Congressional Research and Studies. Rosenthal is the current director and curator of the Carl Albert Center.

Their book is an important contribution because it fills a real void in our understanding of America's new political realities.

PELOSI'S RISE TO POWER

Pelosi and the gradual rise of women in American political leadership are central to the book, and the book deals with these topics well. Who is Nancy Pelosi – personally and politically? Where did she come from? San Francisco? Baltimore? The answer is she is from both, and both are significant for Pelosi's rise to power.

What about the "work-life" issue? Women seem to be asked about this more than men. Has Pelosi sacrificed her home and children for her career? The authors pursue these questions using Pelosi as an example of larger trends and forces at work in our society.

The book then goes beyond biography and gender topics to consider just exactly how American society has changed for all Americans – what the authors describe in their title as the "New American politics."

NEW AMERICAN POLITICS

In turn, the book examines five aspects of our new politics: changing partisanship, money and campaign finance, recent changes in campaign organization, the impact of technology, and the concept of representation.

While these categories are not novel, the authors "drill down" to describe and to analyze the profound changes rapidly taking place. Professional campaign managers, political pundits, and journalists – not to mention general readers – should find the book quite revealing.

Beyond these considerations, the book brings us up-to-date on major changes taking place in Congress and the speakership.

While many Americans understand something of the powers and leadership

of our presidents, fewer Americans know much about the speaker of the U.S. House.

Moreover, at times in U.S. history, the speaker in reality has been our most important office. There have been speakers who have been in fact more powerful and consequential than the U.S. presidents serving with them.

While by law the speaker is third in line to the presidency, several speakers, including Oklahoma's Carl Albert, have been only "a heartbeat" away from the presidency. This happens when there is a vacancy in the office of vice president.

PELOSI ENGINEERS CHANGE

Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the New American Politics makes clear that Nancy Pelosi is not only the first woman to hold the office, but that she has brought substantial change to a very powerful position. Voters and the news media would do well to understand these changes.

The book is not only informative, but also a "good read." It is a noteworthy blending of scholarship and good writing. Those who want to know how "The Times They Are a-Changin'" would do well to pick up a copy.

– The author, a political science professor at Oklahoma City University, lives in Norman

Oklahoma Showing Education Progress

In a national report released by Education Week, Oklahoma ranked 27th in the nation in high school graduation rates for 2007.

The report, "Diplomas Count 2010, Graduation by the Numbers: Putting Data to Work for Student Success," examines the high school graduation trends in each state, as well as Washington, DC.

Nearly 72% of Oklahoma's Class of 2007 received diplomas compared to the national average of 68.8%. And Oklahoma's rate was better than Texas' [65.1%] and Arkansas' [69.3%].

New Jersey boasts the highest rate [83.3%] and the state with the gravest rate is Nevada [41.8%].

In terms of policies, Oklahoma is one of 48 states with a "single standard diploma."

Plus, compared to the nation, Oklahoma requires more course credits [23.8] for a diploma versus the national average [20.8]; is one of 25 states to require one or more exit exams for students to earn a diploma; is one of only 23 states that have defined college readiness standards; and is one of 30 states that have also defined work readiness.

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For Democrats, Optimism Vs. Pessimism

Ben Odom Asks, 'Are We Going To Be Crushed?'

By Ben Odom

Many pundits, and well-respected ones like Charlie Cook, are saying Democrats are now in big trouble for November. I don't think that in itself is news; the midterm for the party in power in tough economic times is seldom a positive result. But this year is looking rough indeed, has not corrected itself, and in many places is looking worse than it was a few months ago.

It now looks like we may lose the Congress. Here are the reasons why, and where the fault lies. This analysis may upset some people, but I have been in the arena for a long time and sometimes the truth hurts.

On health care, Obama, Pelosi, and Reid bungled the process, lost control of the debate early, and should have had one plan and one voice from the get-go. Instead of making everyone feel better and more secure, they have managed to scare the crap out of the independents, give the lie to the campaign pledge that no one's taxes would be higher than they were under Clinton, and amazingly they were shocked – shocked! – to discover the GOP at the end of the day did not deliver any votes. As if they ever were.

HEALTH CARE FAILURES

We could have started with a "children only" plan that would not have scared people, and would have put the GOP in a box if they came out against it, but the DC team was swinging for the fences on this one.

Now it looks like the plan will be massively changed by the next Congress anyway, since most of the provisions don't kick in for years. Leadership failed us on this one big-time.

On taxes and regulation the Republicans have been handed the ammo for lots of 30-second spots. Taxes are going to be raised to pay for health care [the nuance that it is for the higher brackets will NOT be in the 30-second ads], and there is going to be more federal oversight on a host of issues. The looming 1099 problem scheduled to occur in 2012 is going to lead to a mountain of new paperwork for small business – millions more 1099s required – hitting the very folks we always say we are for on the campaign trail.

Business interests will pump millions into elections this year to show Democrats are the "tax and spend" crowd. The Congress has played to every stereotype voters have of us.

REMEMBER MONDALE?

Worse, someone has convinced the administration that families that make \$200,000 a year are the rich. Look for these HENRYs [High Earners Not Rich Yet] to howl like banshees when they see the taxes go up on their incomes and investments; there are about five million of them, and they are suburban swing voters.

Blame the bean counters and policy



wonks who have never "run for sheriff," as Sam Rayburn would say. You will not have to be a rocket scientist to be a Republican political consultant in the next two cycles. They have a 10-second answer to cutting the deficit – "spend less." Our 10-second answer is, "Tax more?" Which one do you think will get more votes? Remember President Mondale?

Immigration is an area where the Democrats are looking for real solutions and have devoted more resources to the problem, but that is lost in the stupid P.R. move of filing suit against Arizona. That made the administration seem like they were FOR illegal immigration to voters.

Could they not have waited until the law took effect, see what problems occurred, and do it after November? Noooo, they had to add another hot-button issue to take us off the jobs message, and another issue where Obama looks "weak." Thanks, Eric Holder. At least he hasn't tried to push through any of his gun control ideas!

FALSE CHOICE ON SPACE

Obama is wrong about giving us a false choice on space – we could easily have done both the old and new plans. Instead we are grounding manned space flight, giving up a lead we have had for years [and the

Karen Webb Is Fighting Mad Over Defeatism

By Karen Webb

Are we going to be crushed? Ben thinks so.

I agree that we should have never even attempted to get the GOP on health care. Ben always likes to take it a step at a time. Personally, I would have gone for universal health care because if this could be your last at bat, go for the fences.

How does a guy talk about baby steps on health care and advocate revitalizing the space program? How many jobs will space exploration create? Not many, but Florida has all those electoral votes.

Was Ben for or against filing suit on the Florida recount? Let's all gore the Gores while they're down. Environmentalists should plan their time better.

BIRTHERS WON'T CHANGE

Does Ben really believe people – who still think Obama wasn't actually born in Hawaii and that his parents were just forward thinking and snuck an announcement in the Honolulu papers because they knew he was presidential material – are going to change? I think three senators said they think filing suit over Obama's birth certificate is worth the effort.

However, Ben thinks "slap you in the face" racial profiling is not worth filing suit over. Right, we need to wait and see how they manage to ask for papers from people who look like illegals from Mexico without racial profiling. Don't say it isn't because of their looks – if it's not, then what is it?

Did he really say being against racial profiling makes you appear to be for illegal immigration?

STOPPING BLONDS?

Ben, I know you are young, but you weren't born yesterday. Will they be asking a lot of blonds for papers? They won't be finding reasons to stop people who look Hispanic?

Is Ben so far above the "HENRY" [High earners, not rich yet? How cute.] income level, he gets to be condescending and snarky.

I am sure that \$200,000 is just peanuts to Ben, but it sounds like a lot to most of us and a fortune to the millions of unemployed.

WHAT ABOUT UNEMPLOYMENT?

Why didn't Ben mention unemployment benefits in this piece? Right, he wants to employ them all as NASA engineers or astronauts.

Crawling to BP by "THAT" Texas Republican? Which Texas Republican? They all do that?

Ben isn't really saying Oklahomans don't suck up to big oil? OMG, I was a Hillary fan, too, but surely he isn't blaming all of this on Obama?

Ben is so close to the DNC his wife should be charging him with alienation of affection.

– The author lives in Moore

Chinese and Russians get to fill the void] and again we have Obama looking weak.

Politically this really only hurts in Florida, but it is an important state. Ask Gore, if you can find him these days. [Yes, I am upset with him. We needed him talking about the environment more than ever, not dealing with a self-inflicted personal crisis and scandal.]

The gulf spill isn't helping, but it isn't hurting the "drill, baby, drill" Republicans like it should, either. Obama needs to stay on the offensive on this one. We need to constantly remind voters of the pathetic crawling to BP done by that Texas Republican and others. Call this crisis even so far.

Now you may be saying "Ben, what is the good news?" The answer is our Oklahoma candidates, Jari Askins for governor and Ken Corn for lieutenant governor, are excellent, on message, and are vastly superior to their GOP opponents in every possible objective measurement.

Our challenge will be to make the election about them and Oklahoma, not the tone-deaf Obama Administration.

COMMUNICATION FAILURE

It is frustrating that a team that did such a good job with message in 2008

See CRUSHED? Page 14

Wilson Vs. Boren Wasn't A Lost Cause

By Frosty Troy

To the delight of Oklahoma Democrats and Independents, the most beloved and progressive state legislator in Oklahoma, Sen. Jim Wilson, challenged so-called Democrat Dan Boren in the July 27th primary.

Wilson, a genuine Democrat, represents a rural district in the northeast part of the state that has been poorly served by Boren.

Adair County, which is on the Arkansas border, is about 42% Native American. The per capita income in 2000 was \$11,185. Around 20% of the people live below the poverty line.

Just to the west is Cherokee County, which is around 32% Native American and where the per capita income is \$13,436, and something like one in five residents live below the poverty line.

Sequoyah County is south of the other two and its population is around 20% Native American. Per capita income was \$13,405, and slightly less than 20% of the population lives below the poverty line.

POOREST OF THE POOR

The three counties are part of Oklahoma's sprawling 2nd Congressional District [25 counties], represented by one of the most conservative of all the Blue Dogs.

Yet these three counties are represented by the most progressive member of the Oklahoma state legislature, Wilson.

The two lawmakers, both Democrats, could hardly be further apart politically. Boren flaunts his default position as an aisle crosser who votes against virtually every major Democratic Party initiative – healthcare reform being only the most recent.

Wilson's signature issue in the state Legislature has been fighting for the kind of healthcare reform his constituents need so badly.

In the congressional primary, Wilson was challenging one of the House's most entitled members. Boren, widely viewed as among the most mediocre and ineffective politicians in Washington, is the son of David Boren, former Oklahoma governor and U.S. senator, currently the president of the University of Oklahoma.

HIS DAD SUPPORTED OBAMA

David Boren was a strong supporter of Barack Obama and serves on his Intelligence Advisory Committee.

Dan's grandfather, Lyle Boren, also represented a large portion of the district in Congress.

Among the most reactionary Democrats in Congress, Boren is on the board of directors of the NRA and made a news splash by refusing to endorse President Obama. According to Fox News, he voted against Obama's election.

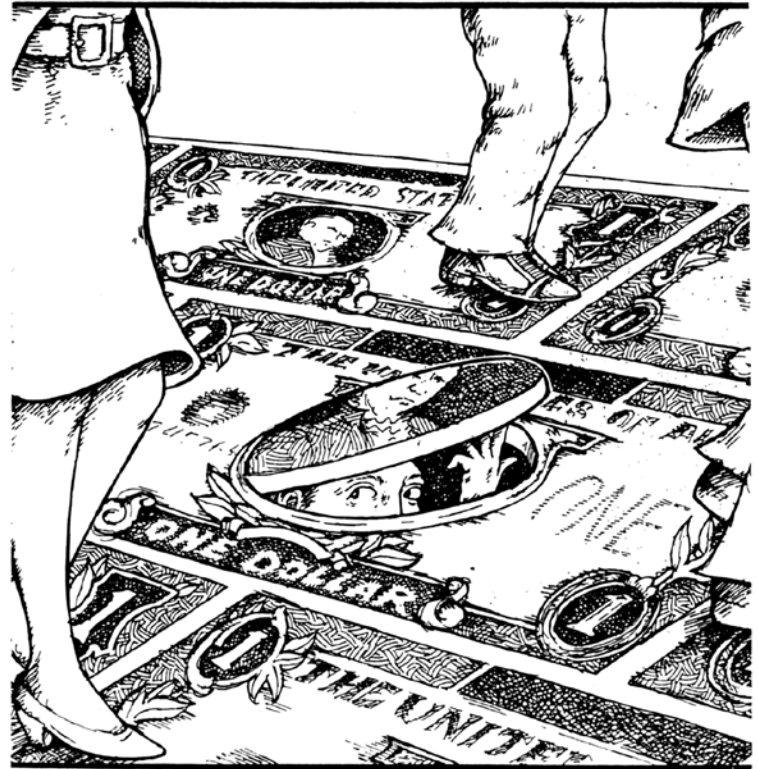
A member of the Natural Resources Committee, he takes immense amounts of money [\$504,610 so far], generally seen as thinly veiled bribes, from the oil and gas interests whose profits he protects.

Boren is a sponsor of H.R. 25, John Linder's proposal to abolish progressive income taxes and replace them with a highly regressive flat sales tax, something that would dramatically shift the burden of taxation away from the wealthy and powerful and onto the backs of the middle class.

HE JOINS THE NUT CHORUS

It would likely destroy the federal government's already limited ability to act as a control on the power of avaricious transnational corporate predators. Every other sponsor is an extreme rightwing Republican, characters like Steve King, R-IA; Mike Pence, R-IN; Paul Broun, R-GA; and Trent Franks, R-AZ.

Boren is even better known as one of the least environmentally friendly members of Congress and has the lowest environmental score of any Democrat in the House. On the other hand, Boren is the only politician other than George W.



Bush, who was endorsed by Toby Keith.

Wilson wasn't running as another Republican-lite reactionary but on a solid record as a forward-looking state legislator.

In 2007 he was one of only 13 members of the state Senate to vote against Oklahoma's ban on funding abortions and one of only eight members to oppose redefining homicide to include a fetus.

In 2006 he was one of only five members of the Senate to vote against a law that made it legal to shoot anyone you feel threatened by, including in public areas.

JIM WILSON STOOD TALL

Last year when the governor vetoed a ban on stem cell research, Wilson was one of the 19 members to keep the veto from being overridden.

Wilson has been working on healthcare in the Legislature for 10 years. Oklahoma ranks 50th in overall delivery of healthcare statewide. And 49th in education funding.

But the movers and shakers in the state – wealthy oil and gas interests and the big media outfits – are eager to continue defunding public education, while having no problem at all with \$60 million of taxpayer money going into incentives to lure the Seattle Sonics, now the Oklahoma City Thunder, to the state.

Wilson has a different set of priorities.

"Twenty one percent of the people in the 2nd District are living below the poverty level. Average household income is around \$32,000 but for a family that has to pay for their own health insurance there's a \$13,000 outlay. It's just unachievable ...

"The Oklahoman is the state's ultra-right big newspaper. [Recently] in an editorial they tried disparaging me as the Harry Reid of the Oklahoma Senate because I reject further cuts to education. I'll wear that as a badge of pride."

It was a tough, uphill battle. It was not a total loss since Wilson outed one of the worst members of Congress. He terms out of the Legislature in two years, a perfect time to be better known, better financed.

Don't rest on your laurels, Danny boy.

Lloyd Fields Wins Praise For Leadership

While few were paying attention, Lloyd Fields became one of the best Labor Commissioners this state has had in the more than four decades we've covered state government.

Fields took over at a time when that office had hit rock bottom – politicized to the detriment of the life and safety of Oklahoma.

We know Fields in a previous life had his bumps. We're far more interested in what he's done today.

To wit:

- In just three years, Fields and his Safety Pays Program saved Oklahoma employers' over \$21 million in potential OSHA fines while significantly reducing their workers comp costs.

- Under Fields leadership, Oklahoma is a safer place to live and work for Oklahoma families. Private and public sector employers' drastically reduced overall injuries and illnesses sustained on the job by 20% and 10% respectively.

- An independent audit in 2008 reflected the Fields Administration saved taxpayers' over \$22,000 in operating costs compared to the previous administration.

- In 2008, Fields foresight led to GPS units being installed in agency vehicles and saved taxpayers' \$55,000 in excess mileage costs. Fields concept was later adopted by agencies statewide.

- Fields is the first Labor Commissioner in the nation who is also a certified

amusement ride inspector. He was successful in working with the Legislature on passing amusement ride legislation where Oklahoma was first to require ride operators be trained prior to operating a ride, resulting in no major accidents in 2009.

- Boiler and hot water heater inspections are up-to-date for the first time under the Fields Administration making Oklahoma's public schools and universities safer for our children.

- Fields successfully worked with the Legislature on passing legislation requiring Oklahoma water parks be inspected for the first time to insure the safety of our children.

- In 2007, Fields called on the governor and the Legislature to reform Oklahoma's Workers Compensation system and establish a Rehabilitation Consultation Program to assist injured workers on returning back to work quicker and save employers millions of dollars in increased premiums.

- Under Fields' leadership, the Oklahoma Department of Labor established for the first time a Tulsa licensing office along with several others statewide so citizens would not be forced to drive to Oklahoma City to apply or renew occupational licenses.

- Fields licensing program was the first in the state to adopt and enforce immigration and citizenship requirements set forth by HB 1804. Today, the program

See LABOR Page 14

Political Junkie Laments Broken System

By Norm Rourke

I've tried to wean myself from discussing, thinking about and generally stewing over politics and anything related to this subject. It's difficult with many setbacks and I'm still struggling with this demon.

For most of my adult years I've been interested in and involved in some form of politics. Some of this interest can be attributed to my stepfather who ranted and raved about the "... [expletives deleted] political mess we're in!" Although a hard-core Democrat, he didn't hesitate to fire a shot across the bow of that party if he felt they needed it.

As a reporter in my younger days, I covered the political scenes around southeastern New Mexico. One assignment put me on the regional campaign trail of a Hispanic candidate for U.S. senator who came from a well-known New Mexico political family.

His campaign speeches were in Spanish for his primarily Hispanic audience. He provided me with an English version of his talk. We bantered about this as I questioned if I was getting the same speech as he was giving. Actually I was because one of his campaign staffers was a good friend of mine. Fortunately he had a great sense of humor. He won the Senate seat and was a good one.

POLARIZED, NASTY

Back in those days, politics and the give-and-take of the struggle to win political office was more fun.



There were the usual I-said-you-said charges and counter-charges. But they didn't seem to be as nasty and people didn't seem to be as polarized as they are today.

Followers of each political party were just as adamant about their candidates and their party's philosophy as they are now. But unless my age has dimmed recollections [and that's a strong possibility] I don't remember so much splintering of political philosophies.

Today you've got to be a liberal or

conservative, pro this, pro that [or anti if it fits your thinking], ultra right, ultra left – the list goes on and on. I don't know the definition of most of these tags and doubt anyone else does, either.

Over the years I've registered as a voter in both parties. But like most, when the general election came I voted for whomever I thought would be the best regardless of party. This ultimately led me to going independent. The down side is not being able to vote in the primaries [a topic that

is also hotly debated].

GIVING UP?

I've even come to understand [sort of] why many people don't bother to vote. And to make a confession I've actually thought of becoming one of them.

Regardless of party, philosophies or whatever, in today's political climate nothing really seems to change. Politicians continue to be more distant from those who elect them. They are increasingly arrogant. They dole out billions of taxpayer dollars without blinking or asking permission. They go from bragging about their "humble beginnings" to becoming millionaires after a short while in Washington. They say they want to "fix" Washington, but soon become career politicians and part of what needs to be fixed. It's the same old story.

In all fairness it must be pointed out that those who complain about the politicians they elect continue to vote for the same people.

And that's what the politicians are counting on.

See, it's not as easy as you think to stay away from the subject.

P.S. If the president and vice president can only serve two terms, why should congressmen and senators be allowed to remain in office until they become senile or die in office? Maybe it's time for term limits for these career politicians.

– The author lives in Beggs

How Democrats Can Avoid November Rout

By Froma Harrop

When the pollster calls and asks whether I think the country is going in the right direction, I will say "no." When she asks if I approve of the job Congress is doing, I will say "no." And when she follows up with a question on President Obama's performance, I will answer: "Sometimes good, sometimes bad. The guy drives me nuts at times."

But when they ask whether I want Republicans to take back Washington, I'll respond: "Are you out of your mind? We're still recovering from their last round of debauchery – their fiscal irresponsibility, servility toward Wall Street, disrespect for science, contempt for the environment."

"Thank you, Ms. Harrop. One more question. Are you registered as a Democrat, Republican or independent?"

To which, I will respond:

"I'm an independent who usually votes for Democrats. I used to help send the occasional Republican to Washington, back when the party seemed to care more for the country than the least-informed member of its so-called 'base.'

"Did you hear Mitch McConnell say the other day that 'there's no evidence whatsoever that the Bush tax cuts actually diminished revenue'? This is our Senate minority leader spewing absolute ignorance! He must be trying to yank more campaign money out of the fat cats. Or he's playing to the yahoos who believe they can have big tax cuts, Medicare, wars and balanced budgets all at the same time.

"Republicans doubled the national debt under Bush. Perhaps they'd like to triple it the next time.

"But now that Democrats are in power, they're suddenly worried about deficits, which they hope to cure by – give me strength! – permanently cutting taxes even more.

"Republicans ran ruinous deficits when the economy was doing well. Now that the economy is depressed, Washington must spend more than it takes in to get the heartbeat going. Even conservative economists agree – certainly the honest ..."

"Gotta go," interrupts the poll-taker. *CLICK.*

Dear reader, I'm a reasonable woman. I don't care much about ideology. My bottom line is what's good for the country. While the country is on a bad path, Republican voodoo is what put us on it. Surely, many voters agree with me.

That's why these predictions of a Democratic rout in November seem so over-

See HARROP Page 15

By Joe Conason

So often are the certitudes and pronouncements of the chattering class simply mistaken that they must always be treated with deep skepticism. That is especially true when anything important is at stake – from the arguments for invading Iraq several years ago to today's economic stagnation. Whatever the conventional wisdom tells you must be true is almost certainly false.

The choral complaint emanating from every mainstream-media outlet – and the mouth of nearly every mainstream pundit – is that the federal government is spending too much and that the public will not stand for it anymore. "We must bring deficits under control!" they tell us. "The American people distrust government because spending is out of control!" they cry. Rick Santelli, the loudest mouth on the CNBC business cable channel and a revered figure in the Tea Party movement, put it most succinctly the other day when he screamed, "Stop spending!"

Cutting spending is not just bad economics; it's bad politics, too.

Demands for the government to stop spending usually come with an asterisk and a footnote: stop spending on everyone except me. A self-styled conservative in Congress who supposedly hates spending will vote against extending unemployment benefits, then turn around and protect federal subsidies to wealthy corporate farmers. Other conservatives will fight against increased spending on mass transit, new schools or infrastructure, while promoting bloated weapons programs that the Pentagon doesn't even want – because the contractor has donated to their campaign or operates a manufacturing plant in their districts. Cut spending, but don't cut spending on my priorities, no matter how wasteful.

Even if hypocrisy were not so rampant, however, the demands to slash government spending at this stage in the economic recovery are profoundly in error. While one pundit after another warns of the risks of growing deficits, none of those potential risks is imminent. Instead, the nation and the world face the risk of a renewed recession, worse than the last – just as the country sank into recession again in 1937, following the first signs of growth after the Great Depression.

Corporate investment and consumer confidence aren't nearly strong enough to provide the number of new jobs needed – and only when employment begins to move sharply upward will revenues begin to grow and deficits start to shrink.

Cutting spending is not just bad economics; it's bad politics, too. The Obama Administration's stimulus spending last year was just enough to prevent the

See CONASON Page 15

Nuclear Energy Causes Global Warming

By Morton S. Skorodin

We need energy to heat our homes and provide electricity for our appliances. Most commonly in our world, coal, oil, natural gas, and radioactive [nuclear] materials, especially the heavy metal, Uranium, supply our energy.

Radioactive elements that produce nuclear energy do it a certain way – and the same way each time. The basics are easy to understand:

These materials, such as Uranium, change into other materials during which a huge amount of energy is released. Remember Albert Einstein's famous equation, $E=mc^2$. Well, it is kind of like magic – that c^2 is a very large number; E is the energy you get at the end; m is the very tiny amount of mass or "stuff" that changes from stuff you can see into unseen but powerful energy.

But before we go on we need to make sure we know what we are talking about. What is energy? Several kinds come to mind. We have mentioned three already: nuclear, electricity and heat. There is also "mechanical motion"; think about working out at the gym. Notice another thing at the gym – one's muscles get warm; so heat is produced as well as mechanical motion.

IT NEVER GOES AWAY

Another thing about energy: once it is released, it never goes away. It can never be destroyed. This is a perfect rule with which everyone agrees. It is actually called a "law" --- the first law of thermodynamics.

What happens to the energy, after we use it, such as when I have finished moving my fingers typing this sentence?

It is lost as waste heat out "there" somewhere. It is dispersed and spreads out in all directions and can not be reused. This is called entropy and is the second law of thermodynamics.

Now what does that have to do with nuclear power and global warming?

Once you release all that energy from Uranium, as in a nuclear reactor, it is here forever, except for some fraction that radiates out into outer space as "long-wave radiation." The rest goes into the air, waterways, glaciers, dirt and rocks as waste heat, also called thermal [heat] pollution, increasing the temperature, thereby bringing about global warming.

Is nuclear the only source of energy that releases waste heat?

No. Coal, oil and natural gas [hydrocarbons, so-called "fossil fuels"] also release waste heat when burned.

Why is this fact not included in the title of this article?

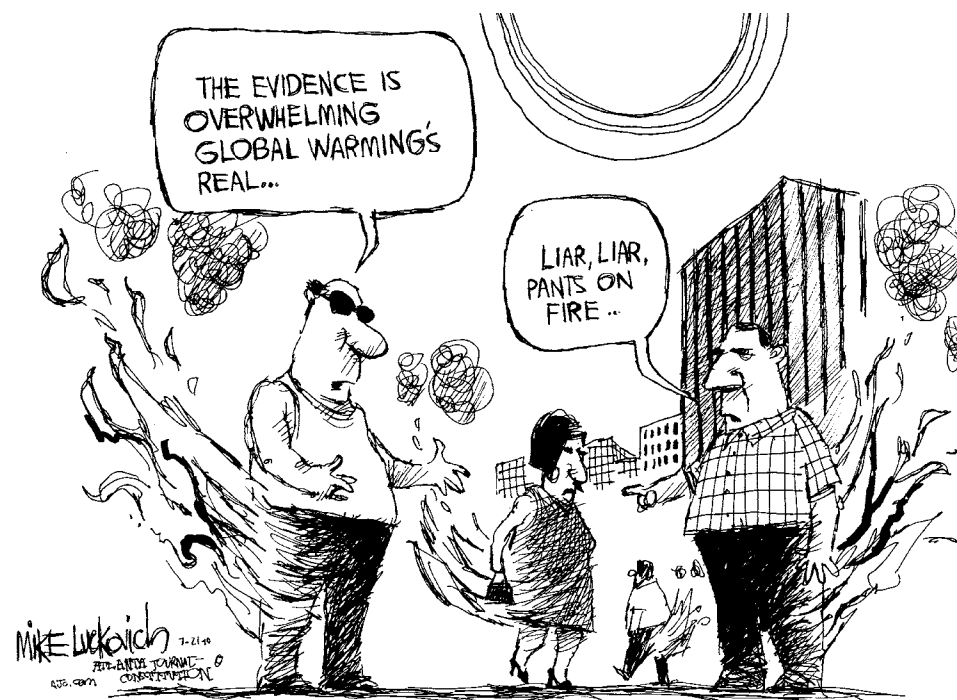
NUCLEAR DOESN'T SOLVE PROBLEM

Because many people already know that use of hydrocarbons causes global warming. Also, many believe that nuclear power does not cause global warming and that it may actually solve the global warming problem. Nothing could be further from the truth, because it produces heat and, therefore, thermal pollution.

What about greenhouse gases that are discussed on TV and the internet, such as carbon dioxide? What about other greenhouse gases such as water vapor and methane?

This is best approached by admitting that this is an area of great conflict. Well-connected scientists almost universally claim that global warming is occurring, that it is from human activity, that activity that causes the emission of "greenhouse gases" [especially carbon dioxide or CO₂]. These are gases that make up a small part of the air we breathe, but they are able to hold in heat.

Millions of people agree with this. Other millions disagree. Leaders [or misleaders] of both factions present plausible evidence of wrongdoing by and conflict of interest on the other side. Both are correct about this and we should not be surprised that this is the case. Though startling claims are made about the need to save the planet, it is really about money and power, meaning here a different kind of power, that of authority and control. Imagine the wealth and personal power to



be derived from selling and controlling the flow of energy to billions of people.

Hydrocarbons produce CO₂. Businessmen and their agents who back hydrocarbons stand to lose a great deal of money and power if CO₂ elimination is made a top priority. The other side has its own investors who stand to profit by promoting nuclear power in competition with coal, oil, and natural gas energy sources, and also by selling CO₂ reduction technologies. There are also military and political reasons for nuclear promotion. [Incidentally, this side also erroneously claims that nuclear power does not result in CO₂ pollution.]

MAKING GLOBAL WARMING WORSE

In fact, it appears that greenhouse gases have a small but definite effect and work together with the direct heat pollution discussed here to make the problem of global warming worse.

Neither side is interested in promoting the facts as presented in this report, because they both stand to lose. They both cause thermal pollution [global warming].

Fortunately solar and wind power do not cause thermal pollution because they use the Sun's heat, which we will get whether we use it for our energy needs or not. These technologies have matured and their costs have come crashing down and will continue to do so. The best solution for the long-term supply of electrical energy is to institute these renewable sources at the municipal level and as a cooperative effort. This gives everyone energy independence.

Of course, municipally owned, cooperatively run energy sources will be vigorously opposed by hydrocarbon and nuclear barons and those who will want to privatize, for their own profit, renewable energy sources. They will want to centralize renewable energy, and dole it out to large areas through grids under centralized control.

We, the public, must assert and struggle for what is best for us and our Planet. If we do not switch to non-heat adding solar and solar-derived energy sources, we will burn to a crisp.

– The author is a physician living in Stillwater

LABOR

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continues to be adopted by other agencies and looked upon as the leader in efficiency and accuracy.

- Since 2007, Fields has been a leader in negotiating state and federal OSHA alliances with business leaders such as Devon Energy. The cooperative alliances assist business leaders in communicating potential problems with OSHA prior to any fines being issued, saving businesses millions of dollars in potential fines.

- In 2009, Fields worked with the Legislature on passing legislation changing the size of wage posters so employers' could finally print their own from the ODOL website, saving businesses and taxpayers thousands of dollars in unnecessary postage and undue costs.

- In 2009, Fields was also successful in getting legislation passed allowing employees the entitlement to the reimbursement of fees and costs associated with insufficient payment of wages owed, a feat which has not been accomplished since the wage act of 1965.

- In 2008, Fields teamed up with CareerTech on developing a brochure where small and large businesses can easily locate services available through state agencies, including the Department of Commerce and Insure Oklahoma. The brochure continues to be a vital link for information leading to economic development in Oklahoma.

- Since 2007, Fields has continued his commitment to the safety and fairness of workers statewide, resulting in over \$13 million being ordered for unpaid wages and over \$1.5 million being cited for lack of workers compensation coverage.

- In 2010, Fields established a partnership with the Oklahoma Department of Education to create an online Student Work Permit program saving taxpayers

THE OKLAHOMA OBSERVER, AUGUST 10, 2010, PAGE 14

nearly \$51,000 annually.

- Considered one of the most public friendly agencies in the state, Fields attributes his success to a great staff and most importantly the elimination of any automated answering machines. Fields believes the public deserves open communication with a live operator or staff member rather than a computer driven answering system.

If you judge Lloyd Fields by the enemies he has made by not looking other way, he's been a roaring success and deserves re-election.

CRUSHED?

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has delivered such a poor job on what issues to lead with and how to proceed on them ... to the extent we have lost 20 points with swing voters in a year. It is difficult to both solidify a base AND reach swing voters, but what we are doing clearly is not working.

The "change" swing voters wanted was competence, not left-wing ideology. I said in a speech a year ago, forget the pros/cons of the policies, Pelosi and Reid are the worst possible leaders on TV for us, and Obama better stop acting like a professor-in-chief and start gut-fighting. That is still my belief today.

If we don't fight like we have never fought before, we are in for a rough night in November. So get busy.

– The author lives in Norman

The Fourth Estate Serves Corporations

By Rodolfo Acuna

The press, in theory, is supposed to safeguard democratic principles. During a parliamentary debate in 1787, Edmund Burke supposedly referred to the press corps reporting the activities of the House of Commons as the Fourth Estate. Hypothetically, the press was the champion of the public.

According to its supporters, the Fourth Estate acted as a mediator between the public and the elite. Journalists listened to and recorded the activities of those with power.

An enthusiastic John Dewey believed that the public was capable of understanding and discussing policies and should be part of the public vetting process. Thus, the press would provide a forum where the people could weigh the consequences of policies being considered by those who governed.

SERVING ECONOMIC ROYALISTS

Hence, the journalist's foremost duty was to tell the truth. But, over the years there has been an erosion of the public trust in the Fourth Estate, as the media has been monopolized by those President Franklin Roosevelt in 1936 called "economic royalists" that control the country.

President Roosevelt summed up this process of the monopolization of society saying, "New kingdoms were built upon concentration of control over material things. Through new uses of corporations, banks and securities, new machinery of industry and agriculture, of labor and capital – all undreamed of by the Fathers – the whole structure of modern life was impressed into this royal service."

The Arizona media is the worst example of an institution abandoning its mission to educate the public.

On the current immigration crisis, the media's coverage of SB 1070 has been spotty both inside and outside the state. Regarding HB 2281 that outlaws ethnic studies, the media have been mute, with the news either distorted or not reported.

NEW MARCHING ORDERS

I learned recently from two reporters that new editors around the state had directed their staffs not to cover opposition to the laws. For example, coverage of civil disobedience by students has gone unreported.

In order to shine a bright light on what is happening, I contacted several Chicano journalists. A respected journalism professor wrote of Arizona: "As you well document and others have also, in recent years Latinos have been unfairly targeted, scapegoated and vilified by much of the general audience media, not just the usual right wing targets.

"This isn't the first time, as we both know from our long work in this area. But at a time when the 'mainstream' media are steadily losing audiences, they seem to think they can build a more credible news report by either ignoring or misrepresenting the largest and fastest growing segment of the population ... "

SYSTEMIC PROBLEM

The problem in Arizona, and indeed in most of the country, is nothing new – it is systemic. As the traffic of undocumented Mexicans and others increased through southern Arizona in the 1980s and 1990s due to federal policy changes, the issue of immigration was politicized.

Border Patrol sweeps in El Paso and San Diego channeled the traffic of undocumented Mexicans through southern Arizona, forcing many to brave the hazardous desert of southern Arizona. In this atmosphere, many of the ranchers took the law into their own hands: hunting down Mexicans and entreating others to

HARROP

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wrought. Sure, Democrats will lose seats – but do the voters want a return to the crazy years?

The threat of a Republican takeover seems gravest when the Obama Administration does stupid things like attack Arizona's tough immigration law. The law may be misguided, but it does reflect real public frustration with a real problem. Does Obama think it wise right now to use this volatile issue for shoring up support among some Latino voters?

Disappointing can't begin to describe Attorney General Eric Holder's explanation for suing Arizona. He said that "diverting federal resources away from dangerous aliens such as terrorism suspects and aliens with criminal records will impact the entire country's safety."

We don't have the resources to go after criminals and enforce our labor laws at the same time? Try again, Holder.

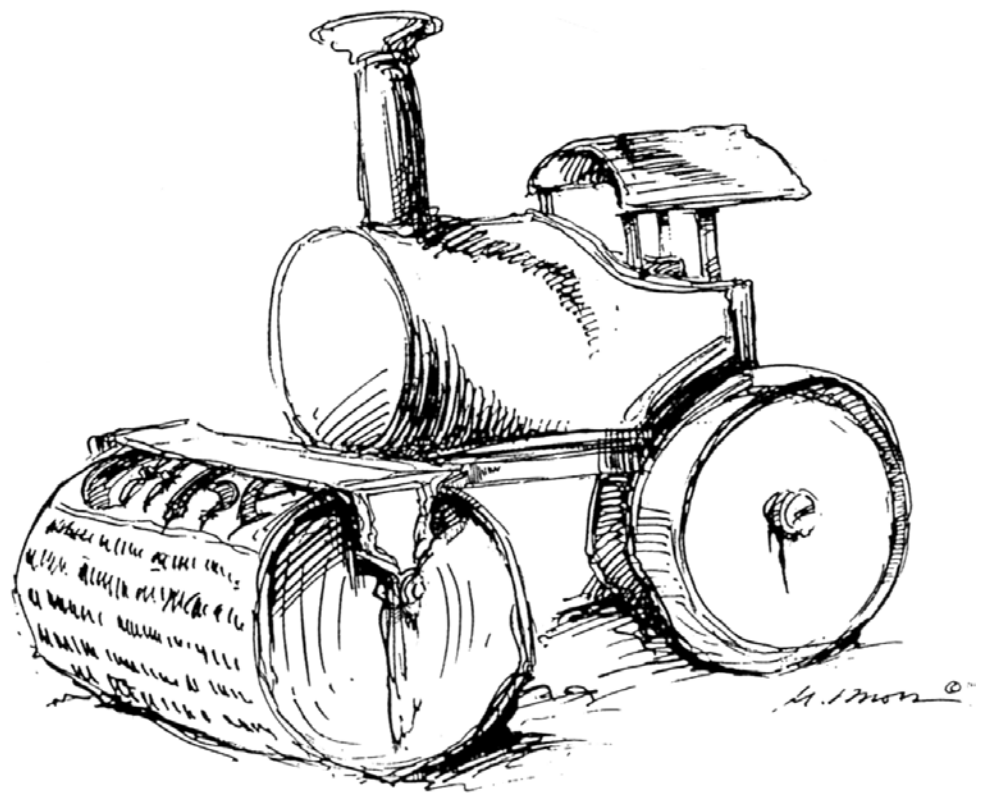
Still, he's better than George W. Bush's first attorney general, John Ashcroft. Shortly after Sept. 11, Ashcroft found the time and resources to go after businesses selling marijuana pipes.

When it comes to confidence levels, Republicans always seem to be taking uppers, and Democrats downers. But the pill that Democrats really need is the one that cures the urge to play identity politics.

What's good for the country should be good for everyone in it. That includes Latinos, blacks, whites from Northern Europe, whites from Southern Europe, Asians, Indians, Polynesians.

One thing that would be good for the country: More meaningful polling questions.

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join them in the hunt.

Beside herself, Professor Guadalupe Castillo of Pima College asked a New York Times reporter in 1980 why the national media was so silent. He responded, "The border is a Third World country, and people just don't give a damn."

TORTURING BY A FAMILY

The silence of the press encouraged Patrick Hanigan, his brother Thomas, and their father George, in August of 1976 to round up three undocumented workers who crossed their ranch, which fronted the Mexican border west of Douglas, AZ.

The Hanigans tortured them, using hot pokers, cigarettes and knives, and fired a shotgun filled with bird shot at them. The ordeal lasted several hours before the Hanigans sent the three workers naked and bleeding back across the border.

An all-white jury acquitted Patrick and Thomas Hanigan in 1977 of 14 counts of assault, kidnapping and other felonies. Their father died before the trial. A public outcry led by Chicano organizations forced the Jimmy Carter administration to try the Hanigans on civil rights violations in 1981.

FEDERAL JURY ACTS

A federal jury found Patrick guilty. Thomas, because of his young age, was acquitted. At least 15 killings and more than 150 incidents of alleged brutality occurred against Mexicans in Arizona alone during the 1970s.

In 1981, another all-white jury in Arizona state court found a former rancher, W.M. Burris Jr., 28, guilty of the unlawful imprisonment and aggravated assault of a Mexican farm worker. Burris suspected his employee of stealing, so he chained the worker around the neck. The jury, however, found him not guilty of the more serious charge of unlawful imprisonment and kidnapping.

The most obnoxious wanna-be ranger was Roger Barnett, who boasted that he made thousands of arrests of Mexican migrants on "his ranch." Barnett and his followers sent out a racist flyer inviting white supremacist groups to come help them "hunt" Mexican "aliens."

BETRAYING PUBLIC TRUST

During these three decades a reasonable person would have expected the Arizona media to inform Arizonans about civil behavior. Instead, they had been intimidated by those who shouted the loudest. They had betrayed their public

See **FOURTH ESTATE** Page 16

CONASON

From Page 13

Great Recession from deepening into another depression, but not nearly enough to lift the country toward a broad and full recovery. Lacking the courage of their traditional convictions, the president and his Democratic majorities in Congress tried too hard to please the Republicans, the conservatives and the Washington press corps. Trimming the stimulus too much and refusing to push hard for a second round this year has made the Democrats look weak – and left too many working families in distress.

The noisy Santelli and the publicity surrounding the Tea Party movement have fostered the misleading notion that most Americans oppose spending to put the country back to work. In fact, as Michael Lind pointed out recently in Salon.com, the latest USA Today/Gallup Poll shows that a substantial majority favor more spending rather than less. Published last month, that survey reported 60% support "additional government spending to create jobs and stimulate the economy," with fewer than 40% opposed.

For Democrats hoping to stem their expected midterm losses in November, that poll contained an important message. Fully 83% of Democratic voters and 52% of independents said that they support a second round of stimulus spending – while 61% of Republicans were opposed. The Republicans who favor more spending, nearly 40%, are most likely to be white working-class males who have lost their jobs or fear losing them. Why are Democrats in Congress and the White House missing the opportunity to motivate their own base, while appealing to independents and disaffected Republican workers?

They are listening too closely to the conventional wisdom, that's why – and as always, it is leading them in the wrong direction.

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Is John Stossel More Dangerous Than Beck?

By Daniela Perdomo

This year, a prominent commentator on Fox News called for the repeal of the section of the 1964 Civil Rights Act that bans discrimination in places of public accommodation.

"Private businesses ought to discriminate ... it should be their right to be racist," he said.

Fox News has a longstanding policy of giving race-baiters a soapbox, but the fascinating thing about this particular bit of vile nonsense is that even other figureheads at the channel like Bill O'Reilly, Charles Krauthammer and Steve Brown – each known for their own ignorant worldviews – voiced disgust at the suggestion that racial discrimination ought to be a right granted to businesses.

Perhaps most interesting is the fact that this affront to the hard-fought civil rights movement was uttered not by hysterical, completely bonkers Glenn Beck – from whom we have all come to expect such outrageous statements.

WHERE IT ORIGINATED

Instead, it came from none other than John Stossel, the mustachioed reporter familiar to most TV-viewing Americans, and who recently joined Rupert Murdoch's rightwing propaganda network after leaving ABC News late last year.

Stossel has come a long way from his local consumer reporter days in 1970s New York City. Considered a solid consumer advocate back then, he worked his way to a job at ABC News.

But somehow, along the way, during long stints at stalwarts like "Good Morning America" and "20/20," he became much too ideological for a mainstream network like ABC.

His last decade at ABC News even included a relatively rare on-air apology for a story he reported on organic produce. Stossel had cited pesticide tests that were never done to debunk the benefits to eating organic foods.

HE APOLOGIZES – SORT OF

"I am deeply sorry I misled you," Stossel said to his viewers, before undermining the apology by stating that his general thesis was still correct.

Stossel now hosts an eponymous show on Fox Business dedicated to spouting his staunchly libertarian ideology, and appears regularly on Fox News' shows as a commentator.

He is something of an anomaly for the conservative channel, because while he can make racist statements as well as the rest of them, he couches his particular brand of hate in his passion for libertarianism.

So his calls for the "right to be racist" come alongside his support for ending the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and legalizing all drugs, prostitution, abortion and assisted suicide.

Has Fox News identified a new form of fury to monetize? It would appear so; and they picked the right man. Stossel has become something of a Tea Party hero [he has an effigy of Barney Frank hanging above his sofa], has long been one of the most popular speakers on the conservative lecture circuit, and his syndicated column is increasingly popular.

FOX IS AFTER THE MONEY

With the rise of the Tea Party, whose loose framework of ideas is centered around anger at an out-of-control government and its runaway spending, libertarianism stands to rake in money and ratings for Fox.



The media watchdog group FAIR has a page tracking Stossel's reporting inaccuracies back to 1994. Joe Strupp, senior editor at Media Matters for America, has been following him more recently.

Among Stossel's egregious conflicts of interest is an interview he conducted for ABC last year, where he reported on and moderated three Town Hall-style meetings on health care reform organized by the conservative group Americans for Prosperity, which opposed reform.

And just this April, Stossel – who has spoken on global warming from a very skeptical [read: unsupported by broad consensus of scientific researchers] standpoint – was set to keynote a fundraiser for the Institute for Energy Research, a front group for the energy industry.

This June, after President Obama ordered BP to set aside \$20 billion in reparations for its epic Gulf of Mexico oil disaster, Stossel appeared on Bill O'Reilly's show, calling the \$20 billion fund a "shakedown" and "thuggish behavior" on Obama's part.

'WRONG AGAIN' STOSSEL

O'Reilly ended the debate by telling Stossel he was "wrong again." John Stossel, called "wrong again" by one of the biggest cheerleaders of the disastrous U.S. invasion of Iraq.

Stossel's call for the repeal of the public accommodations portion of the seminal Civil Rights Act was of course another opinion met with disdain by some of his Fox News colleagues.

ColorofChange.org, a Web-based grassroots civil rights group, which has an ongoing campaign to pull Glenn Beck off the air, seized on those comments by launching a campaign to pull John Stossel off the air, too.

There you have it. Racism and closed-mindedness, in the respected figure of a Princeton graduate and decorated journalist, whose soft-spoken yet hate-filled speech is made palatable by his disclaimer that although he believes businesses should have a right to be racist, he personally would boycott such establishments.

This new generation of conservative hate wants to make us believe that market forces will solve America's racial problems.

This is, of course, wrong – and very dangerous.

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Daniel Schorr Was The Fearless Voice Of NPR

Lord, give us more reporters of the caliber of Daniel Schorr, a journalist whose fierce independence landed him on President Nixon's enemies list and whose award-winning 62-year career spanned newspapers, radio and television.

Schorr, who began his career in 1948 as a stringer in the Netherlands for The Christian Science Monitor and in 1953 became part of Edward R. Murrow's famed team of CBS News foreign correspondents, never stopped working.

His last on-air appearance, at age 93, was on NPR's Weekend Edition July 10 when he joined host Scott Simon to review the week's news.

We will take to our grave our pride when he was willing to go to jail rather than reveal a news source before a congressional committee.

Schorr was notable for staying a reporter and commentator his entire career – he never stepped into the revolving door between politics and the press. Schorr became the story twice in his career. His reports for CBS News about the Nixon Administration's failings enraged the president.

During the Watergate hearings in 1973, Schorr found himself on television one night to reveal Nixon's enemies list. Reading the list on the air for the first time, Schorr was surprised to find his own name at number 17. "I remember that my first thought was that I must go on reading without any pause, or gasp," Schorr wrote in his 1977 book *Clearing the Air*. He won three Emmys for his Watergate coverage.

He was also at the center of developments while covering CIA and FBI scandals for CBS. In February 1976 the House of Representatives voted to suppress the final report of its intelligence investigating committee.

Threatened with a contempt citation if he did not reveal his source, Schorr said "to betray a source would mean to dry up many future sources for many future reporters ... It would mean betraying myself, my career, and my life."

In addition to the Emmys he won for his Watergate coverage, in 1996 Schorr

received the Alfred I. DuPont Columbia University Golden Baton for "Exceptional Contributions to Radio and Television Reporting and Commentary." He also was honored with a George Foster Peabody personal award for a "lifetime of uncompromising reporting of the highest integrity."

FOURTH ESTATE

From Page 15

trust and not had the courage of their convictions.

Edward R. Murrow must be turning over in his grave. The media have abrogated any duty to objectively inform the public. For instance, Arizona just passed a law allowing almost any adult to carry a concealed or unconcealed weapon for any reason – with or without a permit. The media have refused to take a position. However, I wonder what the position of the media would be if Mexicans, Latinos and African-Americans started showing up at rallies with guns strapped to their waists?

Occasionally the media get it right. Recently, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and News Corp. CEO Rupert Murdoch advocated the securing of the border, but also called for providing a path to legal status for all undocumented immigrants.

Neither is a liberal, but they recognized good economic policy. The news conference was mentioned by the press and then dropped; the electronic medic was even less probative.

Clearly the Fourth Estate is no longer a factor in American life. It does not want to offend the Burrises and Barnetts of Arizona. Hence, as Roosevelt foresaw, "... the whole structure of modern life was impressed into this royal service," with the media serving clients and investors.

Millions Are Starving As Obama Reaches Out

The Obama Administration is expanding pilot programs to get food aid to the needy faster.

A close observer of current events could be forgiven for thinking that world hunger is waning, given that the issue has largely disappeared from headlines since the global food crisis that led to riots in 2008. Sadly, the opposite is true.

Continued high food prices, drought and a worldwide recession that has reduced remittances from immigrant workers in developing countries have all contributed to swelling the ranks of chronically hungry people.

Although development experts need to address the global shortfalls in production, distribution problems and other underlying causes of famine, the immediate challenge always is to feed the hungry.

NUMBER IS INCREASING

In 2007, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization reported 923 million undernourished people worldwide, an increase of 80 million over 1992.

Last fall, the organization counted more than one billion hungry people – an estimated 15% of the world's population – up by nearly 80 million in just two years. Population growth, rural-to-urban migration and other factors mean the numbers will continue to rise over the coming decades.

This is dispiriting news by any measure, but there is at least some progress to report in U.S. efforts to feed the hungry.

The United States is the world's largest food donor, and historically the U.S. government has required that its food aid be purchased at home and shipped by American companies to the countries in need.

OTHER NATIONS SWITCHED

International aid organizations have long argued that this is expensive and inefficient, and most other developed countries have made the switch to cash allocations that allow the food to be purchased where it makes the most sense – sometimes in the donor countries, but more often in the region where it will be consumed.

Now the U.S. is beginning to follow suit with pilot programs that allow aid groups to buy food elsewhere, rather than exclusively in the United States, or to distribute vouchers to the poor.

The pilot programs, begun under the George W. Bush Administration and advanced under President Obama, can cut the cost of food aid by up to one-third in parts of Africa, according to the Government Accountability Office, and deliver the goods three times as fast.

LIFE AND DEATH

For the hungry, that can mean the difference between life and death. Right now, that life-and-death struggle is most acute and concentrated in the West African nation of Niger, where drought has devastated the grain harvest and there is fear of a famine even more widespread than one in 2005. More than 2 million people already require food assistance, and the government estimates that about half of the country's 15 million people are at risk.

The U.N. special envoy to Niger declared the problem a disaster in January, clearing the way for international humanitarian aid that needs to be in place by summer.

Disturbingly, food shipped directly from the United States probably wouldn't arrive for months, whereas food from the region could be delivered much sooner.

HELP RELATIVELY SMALL

The amount of food aid funds authorized for local and regional purchases through the pilot programs is relatively small – about \$325 million of the \$1.9 billion in U.S. food aid this year. Yet groups that distribute sustenance to the hungry, such as the U.N. World Food Program and the not-for-profit Mercy Corps, say it is a good beginning that gives them more flexibility to address a variety of problems.

In some instances, famine is caused by a failed harvest and there simply is no food in the region. In those cases, it may still make the most sense to buy food in the United States.



Sometimes the problem is limited to one country in a region or to a certain part of the country, and food is readily available for purchase nearby; buying it there cuts transportation costs and delivery time.

HUNGRY LACK MONEY

In still other cases, hunger is the result of poverty – there are grains in the market, but people don't have money to buy them. That's where vouchers are useful. Vouchers and purchases of indigenous crops also ensure that people get culturally appropriate foods that they are accustomed to eating.

Buying locally is not always the answer. In Latin America, for example, it may be cheaper to ship food from the United States, according to the GAO report.

Many local markets have a limited number of reliable suppliers, poor or insufficient inventory and lack legal systems necessary to enforce contracts, making strict oversight essential.

Huge purchases on the ground can also drive up prices, forcing consumers who might have been able to buy their own food out of the market and into the ranks of the needy. Nonetheless, with proper care and oversight, the benefits frequently outweigh the risks.

HOW SYSTEM CAN WORK

Local and regional food purchases can stimulate agriculture in underdeveloped countries and feed dollars into hungry economies, as well as food into hungry bellies, while also reducing global greenhouse gas emissions by planes, ships and trucks.

Furthermore, shipping food to impoverished countries can undercut their agricultural base, as former President Clinton noted to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in March when he expressed regret for policies implemented during his administration to export U.S.-subsidized food to Haiti, making it cheaper to buy U.S. rice there than the Haitian-grown commodity.

THE NEED IS FOR BALANCE

Similarly, too much food charity shipped from the United States can discourage production in the recipient country and damage its ability to feed itself even in good times.

In the United States, resistance to cash allocations came from farmers and longshoremen, for whom the aid purchases amounted to a kind of backdoor subsidy.

The Bush Administration tried and failed to pass a farm bill that would have allowed 25% of U.S. food aid funds to be used to purchase food abroad – compared with at least 50% in Canada and nearly 100% in the European Union.

The Bush Administration finally was able to get \$60 million over five years in a pilot program under the 2008 farm bill, and the Obama Administration has authorized \$300 million in International Disaster Assistance funds this year.

Moreover, the Obama Administration has made global hunger and food security a foreign policy priority, promising to attack the underlying factors that contribute to food crises, from population growth and deforestation to crop and food distribution problems.

In the meantime, we concur with the food aid groups that the administration has made a good start. Faster food deliveries can save lives.

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Check The Facts On The ObamaCare Law

“Starting in September, some of the worst abuses will be banned forever. No more discriminating against children with pre-existing conditions. No more retroactively dropping somebody's policy when they get sick if they made an unintentional mistake on an application. No more lifetime limits or restrictive annual limits on coverage. Those days are over.” – President Barack Obama

President Obama announced a Patient's Bill of Rights made possible under health reform – a basic set of consumer protections that end some of the health insurance companies' worst abuses. Patient's Bill of Rights:

1. Prevents insurance companies from canceling your policy if you get sick. Right now, insurance companies can retroactively cancel your policy when you become sick if you or your employer made an unintentional mistake on your paperwork.

2. Stops insurance companies from denying coverage to children with pre-existing conditions. Beginning in September, discrimination against children with pre-existing conditions will be banned—a protection that will be extended to all Americans in 2014.

3. Prohibits setting lifetime limits on insurance policies issued or renewed after Sept. 23, 2010. No longer will insurance companies be able to take away coverage at the very moment when patients need it most. More than 100 million

Americans have health coverage that imposes lifetime limits on care.

4. Phases out annual dollar limits on coverage over the next three years. Even more aggressive than lifetime limits are annual dollar limits on what an insurance company will pay for your health care. For the people with medical costs that hit these limits, the consequences can be devastating.

5. Allows you to designate any available participating primary care doctor as your provider. You'll be able to keep the primary care doctor or pediatrician you choose, and see an OB-GYN without referral.

6. Removes insurance company barriers to receiving emergency care and prevents them from charging you more because you're out of network. You'll be able to get emergency care at a hospital outside of your plan's network without facing higher co-pays or deductibles or having to fight to get approval first.

The Patient's Bill of Rights starts to take effect this fall—but the benefits for individuals and families under health care reform don't stop there. Over the course of the next several years, the historic health reform law will make care more affordable, hold insurers accountable, and finally give all Americans the coverage they deserve.

To learn more about what's in the health care reform bill, visit <http://www.whitehouse.gov/health-care-meeting/reform-means-you>

Re-Booting American Economy Is Simple

By Harry Compton

With only 5% percent of the world's population, 20% of the world's consumer spending is in the USA.

Every country in the world has an "industrial policy," meaning that it has a government subsidy for certain products it exports and same tariff – direct or indirect – on imports. But the USA has the faintest industrial policy even with the lion's share of world trade. We are the consumer spending engine of all other countries including China. American consumers have lifted all the others.

Most people don't have a good grasp of macro-economics because all of us are concerned on a daily basis with micro-economics. We understand our personal budgets but not international finance, currency moves, or wealth transfers.

But the dollar is the world's "reserve currency," a special status no other can challenge now or in the near future. Not the Euro, the Yen, or the Renminbi.

Some are disdainful of "redistribution of wealth," but the United States has redistributed wealth on a massive scale to oil sheiks. Oil is sold in dollars. Dollars replaced the other reserve currency, the British Pound, 77 years ago.

So here's the amazing thing: We worry too much about deficits and not enough about Japanese-style deflation – the possibility that what happened in the 1930's could re-occur. Housing prices fell, jobs were lost, and a vicious cycle took everything down in a spiral where everyone cut spending at the same time. People tried desperately to pay off debts but with too many doing that at the same time the whole economy went into psychological, and economic, depression.

Now here's where a reserve currency can change everything. The U.S. Treasury doesn't have to borrow. It can print money. Capitalism needs a little inflation to thrive, to counteract money's pretense, acting as if its value alone never deteriorates. To compensate for hedge-fund managers siphoning trillions for themselves, we should reverse-siphon some to all the rest of us.

Treasury should send adult citizens [not the 11 million illegals] \$500 a month until employment rises to normal, which will probably take about six months.

Why? Because deliberate inflation will "weaken" the dollar, strengthen exports, reduce imports, and restore American jobs while housing values go back up



again for those "underwater" with their mortgages. Don't let the word "weaken" fool you! Our high unemployment is a direct result of keeping our currency too strong.

In a flash, the Great Recession will end by putting people back to work.

What's stopping us? Overly hesitant attitudes that never trust our hidden strength. We are the world's economic engine and once we get going again, all the rest of the world, "globalized" to the standards we set, will be just fine, too.

Have confidence in the USA. The strategy I propose is not long term, it is short term. As soon as things are back to normal, inflation can be ended by raising interest rates from their present record lows. That will make it worthwhile for savers to put money on deposit once again.

It's easy because we are strong. We are Americans. We can take our money back from Wall Street's cynical smarty-pants thieves.

Is Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner listening?

– The author lives in Bartlesville

Charter-Based Ed Is A Corporate Takeover

By Henry Giroux

"The best thing that happened to the education system in New Orleans was Hurricane Katrina." – Arne Duncan

"Visions have nowadays fallen into disrepute and we tend to be proud of what we should be ashamed of." – Zygmunt Bauman

In Arne Duncan's world, the language of educational reform is defined primarily through the modalities of competition, measurement and quantification.

Competition is now one of the most important registers organizing and defining schools and classroom pedagogical practices – no doubt made obvious by the name of Obama's educational reform policy "Race to the Top," with its allusion to Wall Street values and casino capitalism.

Within this discourse, there seems to be little understanding, as Stuart Hall has argued, "that there is a limit to the good that can be produced by individual competitiveness."

Of course, competition itself is not the problem since competition can be healthy in a number of areas. The real issue is when competition becomes, as Christopher Newfield points out, "the sole organizing principle of society."

When that happens in educational policies such as those pushed by the Obama

Administration, one consequence is that the ultimate agent of schooling is modeled after the unattached individual competing for financial rewards, status and a job in the workforce.

But there is more at work here than the vulgar instrumentalization of the curriculum, homage to an unchecked mode of market competition and the crude reduction of teacher work to thoughtless methodologies and techniques.

There is also a neo-liberal agenda in which public money is channeled into the hands of wealthy individuals and corporations.

In addition, there is the ongoing infatuation with privatization and the push for charter schools, largely used to siphon off and privilege middle-class students, while promoting forms of tracking and social dumping that often mark underfunded public schools.

There is also the push for governance structures shaped in the image of a largely disgraced business culture, whose aim is to restructure the administrative apparatus in public schools as part of a broader political project to weaken the power of faculty and unions, while placing unaccountable power in the hands of corporate elites.

KBR Gets No-Bid Pact As Kickbacks Alleged

By Tony Capaccio

KBR Inc. was selected for a no-bid contract worth as much as \$568 million through 2011 for Army support services in Iraq only hours after the Justice Department said it will pursue a lawsuit accusing the Houston-based company of taking kickbacks from two subcontractors on Iraq-related work.

The Army also awarded the work to KBR, an ex-Halliburton company, over objections from members of Congress, who have pushed the Pentagon to seek bids for further logistics contracts.

"Defense contractors cannot take advantage of the ongoing war effort by accepting unlawful kickbacks," Assistant Attorney General Tony West said in a statement.

KBR will continue to provide services in Iraq such as housing, meals, laundry, showers, water purification and bathroom cleaning under the new order, which was placed under a military contract KBR won in late 2001, shortly after the U.S. invaded Afghanistan.

The Army has "reviewed the government's notice to intervene" in the whistleblower lawsuit, Army spokesman Dan Carlson said. "We feel we have appropriate safeguards in place" to protect the government's interests.

The no-bid work order is unusual because the Army, at the insistence of Congress, has since April 2008 put all logistics orders to bid, pitting KBR against Virginia-based DynCorp International Inc. and Texas-based Fluor Corp.

The Army didn't put this work out for bids because U.S. commanders in Iraq advised against it, saying that enlisting a new company would be too disruptive as the U.S. withdraws, Army program director Lee Thompson said in an interview before the Justice Department action was announced.

The view of General Ray Odierno, the U.S. military commander in Iraq, was crucial to the decision, Army Chief of Staff General George Casey told reporters.

Odierno said, I've got three million pieces of equipment I've got to get out of Iraq, I've got 100 or so bases to close, I've got to move 80,000-plus people out of here and you want me to change horses in the middle of the stream?" Casey said.

The U.S. force in Iraq is scheduled to shrink from 94,000 troops today to 50,000 by the end of August, with a complete withdrawal by December 2011.

The Army said putting to bid an order for 18 months' work and making the transition to a new contractor would cost at least \$77 million. The KBR work order will be awarded by Aug. 31, said Mike Hutchison, deputy director of Army logistics contracting.

The lawsuit is the second government action this year against KBR. The U.S. sued the company on April 1, alleging that it used private armed security guards in Iraq between 2003 and 2006 in violation of its Army contract and then improperly billed for their services.

EDUCATION

From Page 7

underfunding of all other areas of state government.

For FY '11, Common Education is slated to receive state appropriations of \$2.376 billion out of a total state budget of \$6.714 billion, which amounts to just over one-third – 35.4%. While Common Education is by far the single largest recipient of state appropriated dollars, 65% of the state budget currently goes to other functions of government, including higher education, health care, social services, transportation, public safety, economic development, consumer protection, natural resources, and the three branches of government.

Without a new revenue stream to pay for it, SQ 744 sets up a zero-sum game where the additional dollars earmarked for common education are unavailable for the rest of the state budget. This might not be an insurmountable problem if other functions of government were already especially well funded, or if the cost of providing services for the rest of government were not expected to rise in coming years, or if state revenues were projected to rise at such a pace as to be able to meet the funding obligations of SQ 744 while also meeting the core costs of other public services. However, none of these situations apply.

2. *Budgets should not be determined by constitutional formula.*

If SQ 744 passes, annual appropriations for Common Education would be determined not by Oklahoma's legislators and governor but by a rigid constitutional formula. Our popularly elected officeholders in the Legislature and Governor's Office would have no authority to weigh funding decisions about common education against other obligations of state government based on their understanding of the needs and priorities of the state at given times, or make adjustments based on emergencies or exceptional circumstances.

Ultimately, not just the Legislature and governor but the citizens of Oklahoma will lose influence once the authority to make appropriations decisions is invested in a constitutional formula. Furthermore, SQ 744 would bind funding levels in Oklahoma to the decisions and priorities of legislators, voters, and judges outside our borders, in Texas, Arkansas and the other neighboring states.

Experiences in other states reveal that budgeting by constitutional amendment creates a slippery slope that can throw the entire political process into turmoil.

In Colorado, passage of the TABOR initiative, which tied overall budget

growth to a formula, led to subsequent passage of a second constitutional amendment exempting common education funding from the main TABOR limits. This left all other government functions competing for even tighter resources.

3. *The language in SQ 744 is unclear and does not reflect the reality of how we fund education.*

Even if one puts aside objections to determining funding levels by constitutional formula as a matter of principle, the actual language of SQ 744 raises a host of questions, concerns and problems that would ensure that implementation of the law would be beset by uncertainty and confusion and likely lead to litigation. The questions raised by the measure's language include:

What numbers will be used to calculate what surrounding states spend?

Does SQ 744 move all control of education funding to the state level?

Will school districts still be required – or allowed – to share some funding responsibility for local schools?

4. *SQ 744 is not the best means to achieve the goals of improving educational quality and outcomes.*

SQ 744 is not the first attempt to provide a major increase in funding for common education in Oklahoma. In 1990, the Legislature adopted HB 1017. Over the next five years, the Legislature increased funding for common education by \$540 million, which represented more than a 60% increase – comparable to, if somewhat less than, the increase in state appropriations that SQ 744 would bring about if approved.

But HB 1017 differed from SQ 744 in that it raised taxes to pay for its funding increases so as to protect the budget of other government functions. Just as significantly, increased funding in HB 1017 was tied to a number of specific education reform policies that were spelled out in the law: reduced class sizes; increased minimum teacher salaries; greater funding equity across school districts; early childhood programs for kindergarten and 4-year olds; a fund for school deregulation and consolidation; and the creation of the Office of Accountability.

By the standards of either HB 1017 or recent education initiatives, SQ 744 falls far short. It would provide huge, automatic, and irreversible increases in education funding without goals or mechanisms for improving educational quality. The sole nod to education performance involves the requirement that the Education Oversight Board and Office of Accountability publish

an annual report on expenditures of education funds and another report on student achievement results and the overall performance of common schools.

It provides no guidance on how funds should be allocated; no goals for schools and districts to aim for; no standards for measuring success; no incentives for innovation, and no sanctions or rewards for failure and

success.

Even those Oklahomans most supportive of more money for schools are likely to want much stronger assurances that increased funding will be tied to better educational results.

– *The author is director of the non-partisan Oklahoma Policy Institute. To read the entire report visit www.okpolicy.org.*

MERCURY

From Page One

the element.

Still, Oklahoma can't afford to take chances with the health of its people or its most valuable natural resource – abundant, quality water.

If the Tar Creek debacle taught us anything, it is that the failure to respond swiftly to evidence of a widespread, human-produced health crisis is not an option. The lives of countless adults and children in the northeastern Oklahoma mining territory were destroyed by lead poisoning, at least in part because state and federal leaders refused to take the problem seriously.

So far, there is no evidence, according to southeastern Oklahoma health officials, that elevated mercury levels in fish are yielding increased reports of health problems that could be traced to the toxin.

Even so, the lessons of Tar Creek are important: It took about 15 years from the time polluted, acidic water first burst into Tar Creek before the first health study was completed, revealing that 43% of area children test-

ed had unsafe levels of lead in their bloodstreams. It was another decade before state finally gave up hope of repairing damage and offered to buy out families with children ages six and younger, sealing Picher's and Cardin's fate.

Oklahoma's poor overall health in comparison to most of the other 49 states is substantiated in study after study. Southeastern Oklahoma, in particular, already is beset by one of the highest infant mortality rates in the state.

The state can ill-afford to let the mercury question fester. The plan to study 84 more lakes is a good start, but state experts should expand the analysis to include private soil conservation lakes, stock and fishing ponds, streams and rivers. If evidence suggests the problem is even more widespread, it may be time to test area children for signs of elevated mercury levels.

The next governor and Legislature must make this a priority. The state can't afford another Tar Creek.

HOW THE FIGHT STARTED

One year I decided to buy my mother-in-law a cemetery plot as a Christmas gift.

The next year, I didn't buy her a gift.

When she asked me why, I replied, "Well, you still haven't used the gift I bought you last year!"

And that's how the fight started ...

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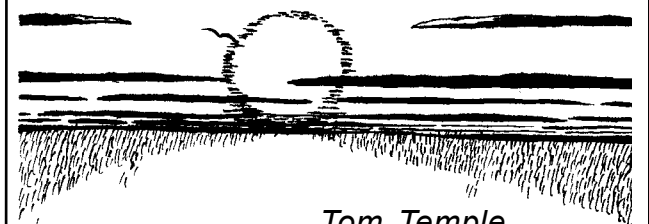
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