

Observations

Obama Did What?

The U.S. Supreme Court refused to reinstate a challenge to the sorry No Child Left Behind law, rejecting an appeal that claimed it imposes an impermissible financial burden on local school districts.

The case, *School District of the City of Pontiac v. Duncan*, was pressed by nine districts in Michigan, Texas, and Vermont, and aimed to enforce a provision in the 2001 measure stipulating that states and school districts can't be forced to spend their own money implementing the law's testing requirements and other rules.

The districts argued that Congress under-funded the law by more than \$30 billion from 2002 to 2006.

The Obama Administration defended the law, enacted under President George W. Bush, and the U.S. Solicitor General argued that other provisions make it clear that states and school districts must meet the law's requirements as a condition of receiving federal funds.

Under the measure, states must decide on an annual basis whether to accept allocated money, which every state has opted to do since the law's enactment.

This isn't what candidate Obama campaigned for – a real disappointment to public educators who voted for him.

Sea Change?

As part of The Atlantic Monthly's annual "15 Biggest Ideas of the Year" the past few years have seen an absolute change in attitudes regarding public school teachers.

Previously, a few policy wonks would write essays assailing union rules that protected mediocre teachers; these pronouncements were greeted with skepticism in the media and produced no political movement.

Now powerful political players, including President Obama, are pressing the issue, and the unions feel the

sand eroding under their feet, their moral authority slipping away.

A new cadre of so-called reformers has propelled the shift, people-stubborn, data-driven types with a low tolerance for unions

They put big emphasis on the teaching relationship, but are absolutely Patton-esque when it comes to dismantling anything that interferes with that relationship.

An ed reformer recently e-mailed the Observer to say he had never been so optimistic about the state of education reform – and yet never so pessimistic about the government's ability to solve fundamental problems.

The battle is not over as long as state and federal governments continue to interfere with teachers who are trying to do their job under the most difficult circumstances since the Great Depression.

Robbing Kids

Legislation directing more money into school classrooms during this budget shortfall is law.

Legislation provides the following:

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



7. Allows for districts to spend any carryover money from the current fiscal year for purposes related to the support and maintenance of schools.

In other words, a district can buy a school activity bus instead of \$33 million worth of library books.

Few, of course, have bothered to point out that the problem was created by Gov. Brad Henry and the Republican legislative leadership that not only cut taxes by more than \$771 million, they cut rates.

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

Fake Degrees

Across the country, mass layoffs of teachers, counselors, and other staff are leading to larger classes and reductions in all but core subjects.

Look for cuts leading to higher dropout rates and lower college attendance as students receive less guidance and become less engaged in school.

Young people are easy prey for the for-profit "business" colleges, promising empty degrees and MBAs. Congress is holding hearings on the subject and the testimony is ugly.

Unsuspecting students are stung by thousands of dollars for a worthless piece of paper. Unfortunately, under George W. Bush such programs became eligible for federal student loans.

The lies students are told are endless. In fact, a sting reported hundreds of calls to a single student who had merely called the number on TV to see what the program was all about.

Lost Race

The Obama Administration named 18 states and the District of Columbia as finalists in the federal Race to the Top competition. Oklahoma was not among them.

Thirty-five states and the District of Columbia applied for a piece of the \$3.4 billion still available. Since its roll-out last year, the competition has won praise from some reformers and enjoyed bipartisan support, but more recently has fallen under greater scrutiny.

tiny.

The U.S. House of Representatives voted to cut \$800 million from the program but the Senate rejected those cuts, and a group of civil-rights leaders met with Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to express displeasure over aspects of the initiative, which they say leaves low-income and minority schools wanting for resources.

Some observers are disappointed with the large number of finalists, arguing that various states did not adopt dramatic enough changes. Kentucky, for example, doesn't allow charter schools, a centerpiece of the administration's education agenda.

If you give money to states that have not really embraced reform, then you can kiss reform goodbye. The first reform possible for Oklahoma is a decent teacher wage and moving out of 49th place on what we spend on a child's public school education.

Any genuine plan to improve Oklahoma public schools will require more than just funding for teachers. Students need social and health services, engaged parents, and activities outside the classroom as much as improved teachers, textbooks, and test scores.

Go, Steve, Go!

Let's hear it for State Auditor Steve Burrage for confronting that mindless moron, Rep. Mike Reynolds, R-OKC, accused of lying through his teeth.

Reynolds, who can't stay out of the limelight, called a Capitol news conference to harangue the ongoing state audit of Broken Arrow schools which he said was taking too long and he hinted of some nefarious actions by unnamed people.

Is it possible the crap being fed to Reynolds is from his fellow moron, Rep. Mike Ritze, R-Broken Arrow?

What he didn't expect was Burrage showing up. In mid-harangue, Burrage came to the podium and called Reynolds a liar and said he was defaming the best audit team in the state.

Burrage later pointed out that the BA school board asked for the audit, in the midst of a lawsuit, making it even more difficult. But the audit will be forthcoming and Reynolds apparently doesn't know the law – Burrage has to present it to the board first, then they have 10 days to reply.

We have a new hero!

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

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

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

Observerscope

Dart: To Oklahoma's Devon Energy, putting \$250,000 in serial adulterer Newt Gingrich's mother lode, American Solutions.

President Obama's latest initiative saves up to 1,900 Oklahoma public school teaching jobs. Of course our sorry Republican delegation voted against it despite the fact that it didn't add a dime to the national debt but was fully funded.

Laurel: To the Inasmuch Foundation, filling the financial void when it looked as though students would no longer be able to tour the Oklahoma History Center for lack of school funds.

Guess who has the highest favorability rating among all possible Republican candidates for president? Sarah Palin at 76%. Mike Huckabee is second with 65% and Newt Gingrich third at 64%. Democrats should pray that any one of them is the nominee – especially Palin.

Dart: To Rep. Jason Nelson, R-OKC, for the new law to provide backdoor vouchers, this time for kids with special needs. Only problem is that only affluent families will be able to take advantage of the system. Democrat Dana Orwig is challenging Nelson.

When the U.S. House took up the bill to provide the disabled access to telecommunications and video, only Rep. Frank Lucas, R-OK, was present and voted for it. The rest of our gang didn't vote.

Laurel: To the Tulsa World for polling on the Tea Party movement in Oklahoma. Now we know 32% strongly favor the movement, 34% are somewhat favorable. Only 18% view it as strongly unfavorable.

The National Education Association dropped a cool \$3 million into the campaign for passage of State Question 744, which, if approved, would bring Oklahoma school funding to the per-pupil regional average. Arguments from both sides are being featured in The Observer.

Dart: To the turgid Twins, Sens. Tom Coburn and Jim Inhofe, for voting against extension of unemployment benefits. In the House only Rep. John Sullivan, R-Tulsa, voted no.

The print media are hardly at death's door. According to a new national poll, 1,052,883 books were published last year, compared to 282,242 the previous year.

Laurel: To Emily Call, chosen to head the Bartlesville Regional Chamber of Commerce – another Oklahoma woman on the move! The new Sally's List plans to fight for Oklahoma women. Contact them at www.sallylist.com

Republican Mary Fallin had a 22-point lead over both Democrats Drew Edmondson and Jari Atkins going into the primary election. Now she's down to half that and fading. How can Republicans vote for someone for governor who voted to bail out Wall Street?

Dart: To the Oklahoma Democratic Party Central Committee for not at least sending out background on candidates running for U.S. senator. The party is stuck with Jim Rogers, a total loon, while superbly qualified Mark Myles remains an unknown – except in The Observer.

The new law to deport incarcerated people in the state illegally [Mexicans] has paid off thus far, sending 185 back. We still have 560 in our prisons and there is no assurance that those deported won't be back.

Laurel: To the Obama Administration, going after widespread fraud in the Medicare program. If Obama can get it down to the private sector rate of 1.5% it would save taxpayers \$40 billion a year.

We're sick of hearing some Oklahomans praising U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn's show-boating anti-waste fight. He is also on record favoring privatizing Social Security, co-sponsored a school prayer amendment and strongly favors vouchers.



Dart: To Oklahomans for just sitting there while thousands of mentally ill fellow citizens go untreated. Thanks to the 2010 Republican Legislature, patient beds at Norman's Griffin Memorial Hospital were capped at 120 patients.

We have preached for years about the sorry state of Oklahoma's Teachers Retirement System – deliberately underfunded by the Legislature and now it hits rock bottom, 50th worst with an actuarial soundness below 50%.

Laurel: To Oklahoman Washington Correspondent Chris Casteel for outing U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe, who constantly rails against spending in Washington. Casteel tallied up Inhofe's wish list: over \$600 million!

Principal funder of the Tea Party movement is Americans for Prosperity – a front name for an outfit funded by David Koch, one of the owners of Koch Industries and as politically loopy as they come. He inherited his fortune.

Dart: To Rep. Carolyn McCarthy, D-NY, for a bill to make it a federal offense to use corporal punishment in all schools. Regardless of your personal views, hasn't Congress got enough on its plate?

Will a new governor and state auditor take the lead in cracking down on unwarranted tax breaks doled out by the Republican Legislature? In the latest year checked, 2008, the cost rocketed to more than \$2.7 billion for favored firms but no checking to see if they created new jobs.

Oklahoma law enforcement is going after the most popular narcotics problems among the young today – pill parties. The Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs said a recent drop-off campaign picked up more than 70,000 pain killers, antidepressants and antibiotics.

Laurel: To Time Magazine for putting a poll question as bluntly as possible. Who do you blame for today's horrendous economic problems? Sixty-one percent said G.W. Bush, 27% said Barack Obama. [That's probably the 27% racist population.]

The new Gallup Poll lists Oklahoma as the 8th most conservative state. Liberals who claim that title have fallen from 18% to 15.3%; 35.5% call themselves as moderate. They're known as road kill.

Dart: To America's lock 'em up mentality, now housing 5.3 million felons – 60% for non-violent crimes. We incarcerate a higher percentage of our population than any other nation. In Oklahoma it's an astonishing 25,000.

Oklahoma's best kept secret is the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation, doing internationally acclaimed research, including pioneering work in human genetics. They are adding 30 new principal scientists.

Laurel: To the University of Oklahoma, named by Princeton Review as one of the Top 10 in the nation in terms of academic excellence and cost to students.

The head of the Tulsa Metropolitan Library Commission, Carolyn Wilson, has stepped down for medical reasons. She has helped guide Tulsa to one of the finest library systems in America.

Dart: To Oklahoma for continuing to be embarrassed by entering the lousy Race to the Top for education dollars – not even in the running but still running. Why?

You've said all you have to say about Oklahoma when the State Department of Education reports that the state has 12,139 homeless youth, including 672 ages 3 to 5, 1,222 in kindergarten and more than 2,000 in the first and second grades. Are you fighting mad yet?

Laurel: To Oklahoma Public School Standards, given a B+ by the Fordham Institute. Now if we would put the money where standards are we might move out of America's educational cellar.

Half of Oklahoma's counties now are 10% Hispanic, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Counties exceeding 10% grew from 27 to 37 counties in the latest count. Oklahoma County is home to 14,949 Hispanics and in Tulsa the count is 9,797.

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

We all know that Kevin Calvey won the Bronze Star in Iraq but why do we have to be constantly reminded? Whenever you see or hear of him, in commercials, debates, interviews or the fawning Daily Disappointment articles, he never misses a chance to mention his decoration. As a Vietnam-era Marine, I certainly have no problem with the fact of his commendation. But, really, the medal was not won in combat but was for his meritorious service as a lawyer/prosecutor in the Green Zone in Iraq. And I understand he is proud of his service and other military members who served right alongside him without being decorated. But for political ambition, I am sure that he wouldn't make a point of it constantly, incessantly, wherever you look, in pursuit of votes.

As Joe Biden might say, whenever Calvey speaks, it is "a noun, a verb and Bronze Star!" Enough is enough already!

Steve Ditto
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Re: What Does Tom Coburn Really Want?, 8.10.10 Observer:

This is a very timely and important discussion, however, Sharon Martin undercuts her article by citing things that are not true. She misunderstands the original meaning aspect as to only cover the Constitution as adopted. This is so because the Founders wrote a mechanism into the Constitution to modify it. The women, white and three-fifths parts have been changed by amendment and are hence parts of the Constitution.

I agree with her that it is a living, breathing document but that can be overused. I strongly support balanced budget and line-item veto to be the law of the land but this can only be done by amendment.

There are several points where current problems can be addressed without amendment. The core American value is the right to be left alone but this is a double-edged sword; it means things like DOMA, ENDA and DADT are already in the Constitution. However, it also means that you cannot require a person to buy health insurance.

Legal precedent is a slippery slope; the history of separate but equal is one good example. It was legal precedent in 1954 and, following Martin, the Supreme Court's revolutionary decision is dicey.

Henry Roberson
Norman

Editor, The Observer:

"Don't take my guns" ... "don't tax me" ... "throw Congress out" ...

Aren't we beginning to sound like nations in the Middle East? And we're only a little more than 200 years old. Why can't we have some sort of civil conversation between opposing views without threats, attacks and obscene posters suggesting lies?

We've been trying to show the world that we're a model country, but are we?

Have we ever been asked to help pay for these "undeclared wars" since 9/11, as we were for World War II - such as sale of war bonds, luxury taxes, rationing.

Let's give our President and Congress some time to help solve some problems. A little patience, instead of whining, might serve a better purpose.

Remember: our deficit is enormous because of our "war" debt; a tea bag might give you instant refreshment, but it loses its effect in a hurry; not only are our soldiers being killed, but many soldiers from friendly nations have also lost lives and they, too, are getting tired of this whole mess; and why can't we have a WPA [Works Progress Administration] program put in place to give work to some of our jobless workers? This might help with some of the anger our there.

What about our Founding Fathers who debated long and hard that we might be a united nation? Let's not tear it apart.

Lucille Stone
Colorado Springs

Editor, The Observer:

Tears make it hard to see what I am typing.

My friends, human life is sacred. I know this for certain and, truly, I know nothing else with that certainty. May we, therefore, beg forgiveness for the great evil we have allowed, permitted, suborned, or, some of us, actively participated in - the untimely death of Peter DuBois! This is an unrecoverable loss for the human race; as such things always are even when we are too stupid and brutal to see.

It is too late for Peter DuBois in this life. Is it too late for us? What do his last events tell us about us, our behavior, our thoughts, and even our souls?

It is sort of obvious - societies succeed as long as their members get along with each other pretty well. What does that say about Stillwater, Payne County, USA in 2010, and the USA in general? This hideous event is



but one example of a nationwide pattern of local law enforcement agencies ignoring the medical needs - unto death - of those over whom they enforce control, claim responsibility for, and assert the power of life and death over.

Let us not hide from the truth. Mr. DuBois was a victim of official state violence - the drug war. This war is a trick by America's unjust and unelected, in any meaningful way, rulers 1] for private profit and 2] to create yet another class of scapegoats for demonization as convenient.

For the rest of us, let us turn from the poison of "our" rulers towards the sunshine of solidarity and love for each other; heal our culture and develop the strength, knowledge and courage required for clear-headed sailing through the terrible storms America is and will be facing.

This will not affect Mr. DuBois' tragedy, but it will help the rest of us.

Morton S. Skorodin
Stillwater

Editor's Note: Peter DuBois died July 23 after falling 12-feet inside the Payne County Jail, where he was being held after authorities revoked his suspended sentence on a 2009 conviction for attempting to obtain a controlled and dangerous substance by fraud. His father, our friend Ron DuBois, is a regular contributor to The Oklahoma Observer.

Editor, The Observer:

I'm really annoyed when I hear someone say, "Liberals are trying to take god out of the government." Our Founders tried very hard to keep religious conflict out of the business of politics.

It wasn't until the 1950's [Flag Day, June 14, 1954] that the Pledge of Allegiance got modified to add the words "under god." [World War II was won without god in the pledge.]

Not only does the mention of god in our pledge border on violating the Constitution, it is completely unnecessary for the purpose of a pledge of allegiance to the nation.

Here are three examples from most of our parents' childhoods where the pledge was recited as a confirmation of citizenship and loyalty to this country:

- Porky Pig War Propaganda 1939.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DI6C5JtoKms>. Complete cartoon <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=utkBu-mqi-c>
- Information Reel from the War De-

partment 1945

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BpScApJXoyk>

• The Red Pony movie from 1949

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VA0A0ymd0CM>

Liberals are not trying to TAKE god out of government, but rather we are trying to KEEP god out of government. If I wanted to be told which god to pray to and when, I would move to Iran or Afghanistan where the Taliban will kill you if you don't pray at the right time of the day. We simply do not want state sponsored religion.

That's why groups like Sally Kern's "Reclaiming Oklahoma for Christ," supporters of Sharon Angle and other "Right-Wing Crazies" should be kept in check.

In reality, the ones who are using religion as a way to gain power and demonize their opponents aren't really practicing the teachings of said religion anyway. They are whipping people into a fearful frenzy, and sadly many people fall for it.

Let's remember our Founders' wish to escape tyrannical theocracy and keep religion in the church and out of the courts.

Russ Butler
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Many readers of The Observer are aware that full copies of the state questions that will appear on the ballot in November are available for download and review at <http://www.ok.gov/elections>.

Some of the questions are certainly, well, interesting. For example, SQ 755 would modify the State Constitution to forbid courts from considering or using any international law or Sharia law.

Perhaps the legislators who want State Question 755 approved are not aware that many of the Sharia laws from Koran are the same laws as those in the Bible, including the Ten Commandments. How interesting that these same august legislators recently passed a law that places the Ten Commandments on the state Capitol lawn.

As many of our legislators seem to think they are in the business of religion, it might be interesting to hear these xenophobic, Bible thumpin' legislators explain why no court can follow many of the laws they themselves created.

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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.

Pink Slip



FROSTY TROY
Founding Editor

I know exactly how author Anne Rice feels as she clings to Jesus but abandons organized religion. She just gave Christianity the pink slip.

In 1998, the legendary author had returned to her childhood faith of Catholicism, announcing she would no longer write vampire novels but instead "write to glorify God." Now she announced she had "quit Christianity."

She said: "I remain committed to Christ as always but not to being 'Christian' or to being part of Christianity. It's simply impossible for me to 'belong' to this quarrelsome, hostile, disputatious, and deservedly infamous group.

"I refuse to be anti-gay. I refuse to be anti-feminist. I refuse to be anti-artificial birth control. I refuse to be anti-Democrat. I refuse to be anti-secular humanism. I refuse to be anti-science. I refuse to be anti-life. In the name of Christ, I quit Christianity and being Christian. Amen."

I know how she feels. I sat in a pew in St. Joseph's Old Cathedral in downtown Oklahoma City when Father Bruce, the pastor, began a rant against "the media," accusing it of defaming and attempting to destroy the Pope.

Hello! What planet is he living on? It was all I could do to keep from walking out. Not that I mind other people's opinions, but there is a difference between opinions and outright lying.

Father Bruce's attack is fatally flawed. The media should have been much more relentless in the coverage of rampant pedophilia in the Catholic Church – especially in Ireland.

Yes, he's right in saying it involves only a fraction of the priesthood. That's like saying "the Jews killed Jesus" when in fact it was a few Romans.

Even then, too many good people stood aside, watching as He was crucified.

The same has happened over the years in the Catholic Church as too many bishops and even cardinals initiated cover-ups. More often than not, they settled with money when the real crime was the abuse of innocent children for which any perp should have paid the criminal price, not simply being transferred.

When The Observer broke the story of a case in Oklahoma involving a Duncan priest, we were showered with abuse and several priests angrily canceled their subscriptions.

The present Pope was as guilty as sin of cover-ups when he was the Pope's No. 2 man. He has since apologized, ordering swift reporting of any hint of child abuse.

All Catholic churches now must carry an item in the Sunday bulletin that includes mandatory reporting of any suspected case of abuse.

Anne Rice's story is all too familiar to me, and I suspect many other Christians. Too many American churches are hotbeds of politics, intolerance and cruel condemnation.

We have spent lots of ink over the years against the bigotry and hatred spewed by the Jerry Falwell-Pat Robertson ilk, especially today's televangelists such as Billy Graham's son.

A few pastors in organized religion by no means speak for the majority when they spew hate from the pulpit. Most Christians are decent, devout folk but they put up with too much anti-intellectual bigotry.

Before I met her, my late wife Helen was dating a fine young man. She made the mistake of taking him to a Sunday evening service at the First Baptist Church in McAlester.

As a Catholic, he had to sit there and listen to the pastor spew vitriol against the Catholic Church. She said he didn't ask her out again.

When Helen and I were married, my mother-in-law was sure that as a Catholic I was taking Helen straight to hell. She was later to claim me as her favorite son-in-law. She had believed the hate spewing from the pulpit.

Although Anne Rice hasn't abandoned religion, Rice herself says that other Christians have told her that she isn't a real Catholic; that she isn't really saved; that she is going to Hell; and that she should stop misleading people and leave the church.

Whatever happened to "judge not lest ye be judged?" I defend anyone's right to believe or not believe. I am not anti-gay, anti-birth control, anti-abortion. I know the Church's teachings – I keep up.

One of the finest priests I have ever known was gay. I saw an anti-abortion cousin give birth to a horribly damaged fetus which ended up destroying her marriage rather than abort it.

As for birth control – the Guttmacher survey and others through the years show that American Catholics have no problem with birth control and they don't consider it a sin.

My Baptist mother, a good Catholic convert, gave birth to 11 children – losing only twins at birth. She sought to sincerely practice her faith, using the rhythm system.

"I won't tell you which ones," she would laugh, "but five of you were rhythm babies."

Why do I stick around? Because I love the Mass. For me it has been the supreme form of worship from my earliest childhood. I even served daily Mass dur-



ing summer vacation – winning an occasional pat on the head from Monsignor Higgins.

I believe in a just war but I am appalled that the Church and all Catholics don't rise up against the Afghan tragedy that has already claimed more than 1,100 American lives and thousands of Afghans.

This is reminiscent of what Mahatma Gandhi once said: "I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."

Or, in the words of another famous Christian, U2 frontman Bono, who said: "Religion can be the enemy of God. It's often what happens when God, like Elvis, has left the building. A list of instructions where there was once conviction; dogma where once people just did it; a congregation led by a man where once they were led by the Holy Spirit."

If you are a believer and find intolerance where you attend church, shop around. There are plenty of houses of worship that are not judgmental but preach the gentle life of Jesus.

One of the most appalling anti-Christian acts today is mixing partisan politics with religion. "God, Guns & Gays" is the credo of those who would destroy the wall between Church and state that has made this country great.

Check cable televangelists any Sunday, or check the AM radio dial, and you will hear the "gospel" that America was launched as a Christian nation and we're going straight to hell for denying it.

One of the cable columnists refers to an emerging leader, Jonathan Merritt, a Southern Baptist pastor, who grew up in the bosom of conservative Christianity. His father was the president of the Southern Baptist Convention and Merritt graduated from Jerry Falwell's Liberty University.

"I am finding disillusionment with Christianity in America," said Merritt, who just released a book, *Green Like God: Unlocking the Divine Plan for Our Planet*.

He wrote: "Christianity has become so bogged down with cultural baggage that it has marginalized its followers. I know exactly how Anne feels: that Christianity has been hijacked."

Rice is actually in line with those decades younger than she. Author Gabe Lyons cited research that shows young people between the ages of 16 and 29 see Christianity as "anti-homosexual, judgmental, hypocritical, and too political in alarming numbers."

African Americans have been replaced by Muslims as the object of religious hatred. I have read the Koran and I advise those who haven't to take a peek. It's tough sledding but guess what? It boils down to "do unto others."

I just downloaded the adjacent bumper sticker: I've got nothing against God, it's his Fan Club I can't stand. Unlike Anne Rice, I'm not going to quit, I'm going to continue the fight.

LEARN FROM YOUR ELDERS

A lawyer and a senior citizen are sitting next to each other on a long flight. The lawyer is thinking that seniors are so dumb that he could get one over on them easy. So the lawyer asks if the senior would like to play a fun game.

The senior is tired and just wants to take a nap, so he politely declines and tries to catch a few winks. The lawyer persists, saying that the game is a lot of fun. I ask you a question, and if you don't know the answer, you pay me only \$5. Then you ask me one, and if I don't know the answer, I will pay you \$500, he says.

This catches the senior's attention and to keep the lawyer quiet, he agrees to play the game.

The lawyer asks the first question. "What's the distance from the Earth to the Moon?" The senior doesn't say a word, but reaches into his pocket, pulls out a five-dollar bill, and hands it to the lawyer.

Now it's the senior's turn. He asks the lawyer, "What goes up a hill with three legs, and comes down with four?"

The lawyer uses his laptop and searches all references he could find on the 'Net. He sends e-mails to all the smart friends he knows; all to no avail. After an hour of searching, he finally gives up.

He wakes the senior and hands him \$500. The senior pockets the \$500 and goes right back to sleep. The lawyer is going nuts not knowing the answer. He wakes the senior up and asks, "Well, so what goes up a hill with three legs and comes down with four?"

The senior reaches into his pocket, hands the lawyer \$5 and goes back to sleep.
– Thanks to Darla Reynolds Sparks for this gem

The Special Interest Gift Game



ARNOLD HAMILTON
Editor

Sad, but true: More than two months after Common Cause Oklahoma established its new No Gifts List, only two state lawmakers have signed up, publicly vowing they won't accept anything of value from lobbyists or others seeking to influence legislative decision-making.

Rep. Jason Murphey, who always has refused such favors, was the first to affix his name to the list at www.commoncause.org/OK/NoGifts. He was later joined by incoming Senate Minority Floor Leader Andrew Rice, D-OKC.

Where is everybody else?

The truth is, the No Gifts List doesn't set well with many legislators who don't want attention drawn to the fact they enjoy being wined, dined and otherwise feted by state government's army of special interest professionals.

Some – not all – lobbyists don't like the list, either. They prefer the system just the way it is – showering meals, golf outings, ballgames and

trinkets on elected officials as a means to ensure access to key decision-makers.

It gives lobbyists who all but live in the Capitol rotunda during the February-May legislative sessions [and at frequent election-year fundraisers, as well] a decided advantage in the legislative give-and-take over rank-and-file Oklahomans who might show up for an hour, once in their lives, with a problem they want their elected representative to help solve.

There is no excuse for Oklahoma lawmakers – among the highest paid in the nation [around \$50,000 in salary and benefits annually] – to accept anything from anyone. If they want to dine or attend an NBA game with a lobbyist, it should be Dutch treat. Period.

State Ethics Commission rules prohibit each lobbyist from giving more than \$100 a year in gifts to each legislator. It might not seem like much, at first blush, but do the math: There are 101 state House members and 48 state senators. There are about 400 lobbyists and 700 lobbyist-employers [companies, groups, etc. that hire lobbyists] registered with the state.

With thousands of special interest dollars greasing the wheels of the legislative process, it's easy to see why many Oklahomans are so cynical about government in general and the Legislature specifically – convinced that lawmakers and

Three-Day 'Oklahoma Laborfest' Set For OKC

The Central Oklahoma Labor Federation, the state's largest coalition of labor unions and labor activists, is hosting its first Oklahoma Laborfest Aug. 26-28 in OKC.

"The purpose of this festival is to create greater awareness of Oklahoma's working class culture and to build pride in the state's rich labor history through music, the arts, and community," said COLF President Tim O'Connor.

"Our youth should know about Oklahoma labor heroes like Kate Barnard and Pete Hanraty. They should know our state motto 'Labor Omnia Vincit' which means 'Labor Conquers All.' We should appreciate Oklahoma's history of fighting for workers' rights since the beginning of statehood."

O'Connor continued, "Unfortunately this history is not being taught to our children today and we run the risk of it being forgotten. With this festival we intend to promote labor literacy among the general public in order to preserve this history and strengthen labor solidarity in the state of Oklahoma."

The festival, set for OKC's Plaza District, located on NW 16th between Indiana and Blackwelder, will include activities for all ages.

It kicks off with a labor poetry reading at Coffy's Café at 7 p.m. on Aug. 26 and features a screening of the Oklahoma environmental documentary *Tar Creek* at Convergence at 8 p.m. on Aug. 27. Among the events Aug. 28 are a panel discussion, performance poetry, a live labor mural paint, an open circle musicians' jam, performances by MoonSue, Dead Man's Bluff, Green Corn Revival, Buffalo Fitz, and J.C. High Eagle, a children's theatre and other kids' activities, booths and vendors. The AFL-CIO Oklahoma Labor History Exhibit will also be on display.

Oklahoma Laborfest wraps up with "Oklahoma Speaks," an event at 7 p.m. Aug. 28 at the Lyric Theatre featuring dramatic readings of selected historical texts from Oklahoma's labor and civil rights movement as well as musical performances of songs connected to these movements.

Mary Catherine Reynolds, Louise Goldberg, and the Red Dirt Rangers will be the featured musical guests for this event. Readers include Stewart Acuff, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Davis Joyce, and other friends of labor.

Tickets for "Oklahoma Speaks" are free to the public and can be reserved by calling the Central Oklahoma Labor Federation at 405.634.4030. Tickets also will be available Saturday morning at the Laborfest Headquarters Table in the Entry Hall of the Lyric Theatre. All reserved tickets must be picked up before 6 p.m. the evening of the event.

For more information, including the schedule of events, please visit www.oklahomarevelator.com/laborfest.

special interests all-too-often conspire on cozy deals that benefit the rich and powerful at the expense of the Average Joe.

The \$100 annual cap took effect in July 2008 after state ethics commissioners voted to reduce the previous \$300 limit, despite the objections of some lobbyists who contend full disclosure of gifts is sufficient to protect the public's interest.

The new limit reduced overall gift giving the first year, but the numbers are climbing again – up more than \$12,000 in the first six months this year [about \$85,000], when compared to the same period in 2009 [more than \$72,000].


What hasn't been noted, however, is that 31 legislators received gifts exceeding the \$100 limit last year [visit www.okobserver.net for a complete list]. In some cases, it appears the rules were broken when lobbyists took advantage of what they thought was a loophole – that they could spend up to \$100 on a spouse or family member, as well, without it counting against a legislator's limit. They can't.

In the semi-annual lobbying reports filed last month, no one appears to have exceeded the limit in 2010 – so far. But as well-heeled special interests work overtime to protect their share of limited state funds, it's never been more important to watch who's getting what from whom.



What would be best, of course, is to end the wining and dining altogether. The Ethics Commission, though, doesn't seem inclined to tackle the issue again. And the Legislature doesn't reconvene until next year.

In the meantime, ask your senator and representative – as well as candidates for legislative offices in your districts – to add their names to the Common Cause list.

It's an important step toward leveling the playing field.



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Congress OK's Funds For Sooner Teachers

It's like the ultimate back-to-school gift card: \$10 billion for cash-strapped school districts to recall laid-off teachers and keep thousands of K-12 jobs.

Supporters of the extra funding say it will keep about 140,000 educators working – including 1,990 Oklahoma teachers. The money for teachers, which is part of an aviation safety bill, was approved by Congress.

You get an idea of where Mary Fallin's priorities are. The Republican congresswoman is running for governor and, at first, declined to fly back to Washington to cast her ballot on the bill.

She later changed her mind – ostensibly to vote on an immigration measure – but she voted against saving education jobs. In fact, all Republicans in the Oklahoma Congressional delegation opposed the effort. Only Democrat Dan Boren did right by Oklahoma's teachers and supported it.

Truth is, it's hard to find a Republican elected official who likes public schools.

MEDICAID GETS A BOOST

The vote also included \$193.6 million for Oklahoma Medicaid, a medical program for the poorest of the poor. It's hard to find a Republican officeholder who gives a damn about the poor – except for occasional lip service.

The infusion of cash saves half the jobs that school districts were expected to have to trim, according to a June survey by the American Association of School Administrators [AASA]. Seven out of 10 jobs saved are expected to be teaching positions.

It is "a welcome infusion of money when people are in pretty desperate financial shape," says Jeff Simering, legislative director for the Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of 66 large urban districts.

Some districts will be able to find out how much money should be coming their way before the school year starts, he says, while others could use the funds to adjust class sizes during the early weeks when enrollment numbers at each school typically become clear.

Oklahoma is slated to lose more than 4,500 teachers next year – a fact that leaves Mary Fallin cold. She never failed to vote with G.W. Bush on billions for the bailout of Wall Street, but she's offended by saving teachers' jobs and helping the poor sick.

HELP FOR MEDICAID

Along with money for education, the amendment that's attached to the aviation bill would also channel \$16 billion to states to help pay for Medicaid, an expense that often prompts budget cuts in other areas.

In the original stimulus package, education received more than \$100 billion to

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Sooner Public Schools Get Good Report Card

Oklahoma's English and math standards received high marks in the Thomas B. Fordham Institute's highly-anticipated report comparing the 50 states and the District of Columbia to one another and against the Common Core State Standards Initiative.

The report, "The State of Standards and the Common Core, 2010," graded Oklahoma B+ on both its English and math standards, giving higher marks to only six states in English and eight states in math.

Fordham found Oklahoma's standards were of such high content, rigor and clarity that it was "too close to call" whether they were superior to the Common Core but indicated that they were without a doubt in the same league as the Common Core.

GARRETT PROUD OF REPORT

"We are very pleased with the findings of this report," said State Superintendent Sandy Garrett. "They affirm our belief that Oklahoma's implementation of the Common Core will have minimal disruption to the classroom and that, because of the few areas where the Common Core may be stronger, Oklahoma will benefit from being a Common Core state."

She added: "Curriculum staff at the State Department of Education and I have worked with educators and many stakeholders across the state to ensure Oklahoma's academic standards are clear, relevant and rigorous and competitive with other states.

"This report tells us our efforts have resulted in us accomplishing that goal and that only Oklahoma and a few other states are already prepared for the Common Core."

Another highlight in the report is that Oklahoma earned higher marks for English and math than it did in the organization's 2005 report, where Oklahoma received Cs for both English and math.

On average, progress in both areas from 2005 to 2010 didn't occur among the states, Fordham notes in the report, because states collectively did not make significant progress in English.

ADVANCING EDUCATION REFORM

The Fordham Institute is a Washington, DC-based think tank dedicated to ad-

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*If we get Education right,
everything else will fall in place*

For the first time in 20 years, Sandy Garrett will not be on the ballot for State Superintendent of Public Instruction. In January 2011, Oklahoma will have a new State Superintendent.

This position is critical to the future of our children and our state.

There is a clear difference between me and my opponent. I am a former science teacher, a former adjunct professor in the education department at East Central University, the former Outreach Director for David Boren's Foundation for Excellence, and a current State Senator. My opponent is a former dentist whose only experience of public education is through charter schools.

Unlike my opponent, I cannot afford to put thousands of dollars of my own money into my campaign. I am relying on friends and supporters like you with your generous contributions of \$25, \$50, \$100 and more. I am honored to have more than 1,000 contributors to date, many of whom are teachers, farmers, small business owners, doctors, and even students!

As a reader of the *Observer* you know how important education is to Oklahoma and our future. I invite and encourage you to join our campaign. Not only do we need financial support, but also we need volunteers to wear T-shirts in parades and at county fairs, we need bumper stickers on cars and signs in yards, we need letters-to-the-editor of your local newspapers, and we need neighbors talking to neighbors, friends talking to friends, parents talking to parents.

The most important thing we need you to do is go to the polls and vote in large numbers. Tell your family and friends too. With your help we can win in November. Your vote will ensure a brighter future for Oklahoma's children.

Susan Paddack

Susan
PADDACK
State Superintendent of Public Instruction
www.VotePaddack.com

State's Kids Deserve Better Leadership

In light of the release of the 2010 Kids Count Data Book report and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's "Vital Signs" report, state Rep. Richard Morrisette is calling upon his colleagues to prepare to reprioritize their legislative agendas for the coming session.

"I want them to prepare to take on poor child health in Oklahoma, treating it as the emergency that it has been left to become," Morrisette, D-OKC, said. "In ranking our 'Top 8' bills in order of importance, nutrition must supplant even education for the sake of education."

Oklahoma children cannot be properly educated when recent studies indicate that Oklahoma has the second-worst rate of child-brain development in the U.S., Morrisette said. That poor rate is due in part to the negligible intake of essential foods necessary to grow a healthy human brain.

Oklahoma continues to rank 50th in fruit and vegetable consumption.

BETTER STANDARDS

First Lady Michelle Obama appealed to Congress for new and improved school lunch nutrition standards and Congress agreed.

In Oklahoma and Tulsa counties, 90% of students partake of free or reduced lunch programs as their only meal of the day, according to applications that also reveal a startling increase in child poverty within the state's two most heavily populated areas.

Nearly 40% of all Oklahoma children are now obese, a form of malnutrition, with a greater percentage symptomatic of conditions related to nutrition deprivation, according to health agency accounts.

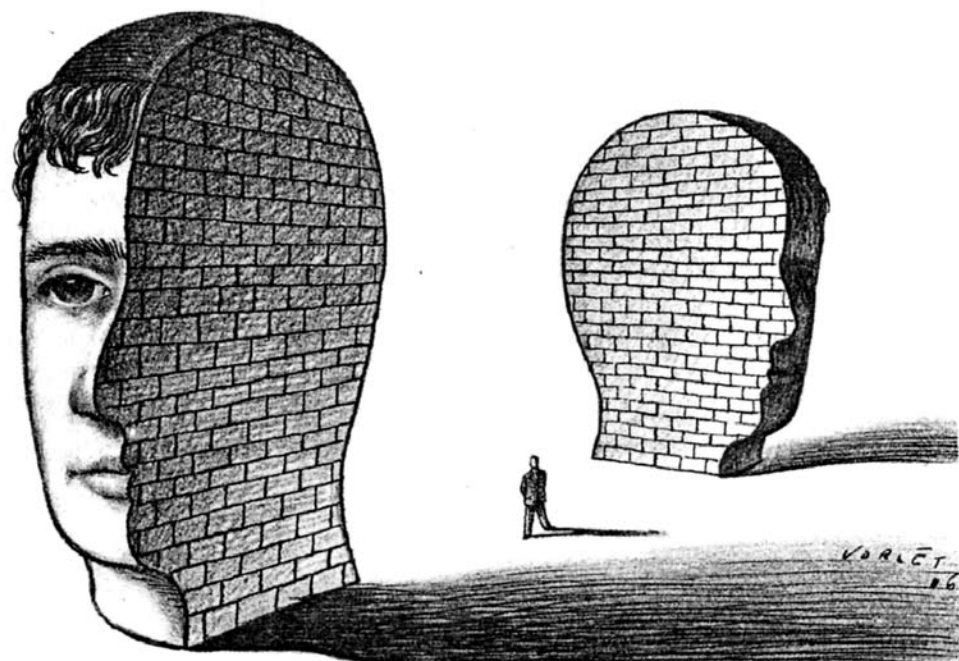
On July 21, the Oklahoman reported that Oklahoma City public elementary schools are the beneficiary of a \$1 million federal grant to provide students with a healthy afternoon snack consisting of fresh fruits and vegetables.

"Being second highest in poor brain development is a stat we must conquer," Morrisette said. "Until we can get the standards for lunches raised, this is good news in that direction."

A BETTER OPTION?

"I recently heard Dr. Susan Shepherd of Doctors Without Borders speak of how poor nutrition robs kids from around the world of a productive future. She spoke of how much of the food that agencies provide the poor has an inadequate processed corn or soy base and that their group has developed a better supplement - in snack form - that has spared thousands poor brain development and chronic physical health problems," he said.

"I intend to look into this product and to access what we need for Oklahoma



children in poverty."

Morrisette said he is appreciative of every federal tax dollar donated to feed our kids, but he doesn't like the idea that citizens from other states are continually called upon for a rescue.

"At the national level, Oklahoma's U.S. delegation has done little to guide our state away from this shameful and inhumane reality, scoring another voting zero for child health legislation this session.

"With passive approval, we have set the next generation of Oklahomans up to not develop an ability to depend upon themselves but rather an unhealthy expectation of state and federal entitlement," he said.

"Next session, I plan to bring a House Resolution encouraging local businesses to develop alliances with schools to create healthy ways for kids who want to help others despite their own lack of resources. To receive help and then to be able to give help in return redeems the spirit and restores self respect.

"The latest CDC report indicates that nine states have obesity rates greater than 30% and Oklahoma is one of the nine. Oklahoma places no importance on health, and Oklahoma kids are allowed to be considered collateral damage, as state leaders abdicate their responsibility for them to others.

"A new and improved future begins not with education but with adequate nutrition, the foundation for learning capability."

Putting A Face On Homelessness

By Wallace Collins

Last week I came home from a trip to a local merchant, to buy a new cook stove, and found a constituent on my front porch. The constituent was waving wildly, and began telling me that I needed to help this desperate family of homeless people. I listened intently, as he described the couple, the young woman pregnant, with two young children, living in a tent near a Norman park. My friend insisted that I go with him immediately to meet this family and get them some help.

I tried to put him off, saying I needed to make some phone calls first, but he practically dragged me to the car. I did take the time to first call the Salvation Army to inquire about availability of beds for the night, and to call Sandy Duncan at Mission Norman to see about food and some meals for this family. I then called Ginny Corson at East Main Place to see about getting this family into a safe, long-term facility and out of the Oklahoma heat. We just thought it was hot that day, only in the 90s, but the real heat was on its way.

My friend and I did go to the place where the family was staying and I met with them. Shortly after we arrived, so did Corson and Dianna Hinshaw from East Main Place. Both of them are experienced social workers, and knew what questions to ask, and what items were required for help.

A REAL 'EYE OPENER'

For those of us that have never experienced this kind of life, it was an eye opener. A homeless person needs two forms of identification, a test for Tuberculosis, and questions about addictions, abuse, police records and all manner of things that the majority of us never consider.

Fortunately, we were able to get the woman and the kids into the Salvation Army shelter for five nights, just as the daytime temperatures shot up over 100. I remember thinking about them that first night, when the news reported that the heat index at 10:30 p.m. was still 100 degrees. I felt good knowing that they would be able to sleep comfortably in a real bed with air conditioning, and not have to worry about varmints, mosquitoes, fleas, ticks, snakes or any other dangers.

Before taking them to the Salvation Army, we first went to visit Mission Norman, a well-kept secret in east Norman. At Mission Norman, they were fed by Sandy Duncan, and given food to take with them for later. Gene Barnes and his staff do a great job of helping the homeless around Norman, and this was no exception.

Meanwhile, Ginny, Dianna and the East Main staff were working wonders to come up with out of state identification and other things necessary for admittance to East Main Place. For those of you unfamiliar with that facility, it is

one of the buildings in the 1100 block of east Main Street that used to house nurses for then Central State [now Griffin] Hospital. East Main Place is able to furnish housing for certain homeless people, while helping them to regain their dignity, self respect, get their life together through counseling and such and become a contributing member of society.

SAFE FROM 103-DEGREE HEAT

There was a two-day gap in coverage from the stay at the Salvation Army, and the time when the family room was to be available at East Main Place. Thanks to the generosity of local churches and the St. Vincent DePaul Society, the young family was put up in a local motel for two nights while waiting on their new home to be ready. Again, I was comforted with the knowledge that they were safe from the searing heat that reached 103, with a heat index of even more.

The sad part of this story is that while we were able to save one family, I know there are several others in just as bad a need for help. When I first inquired of Ginny for some help, she asked me questions about the family, as she said it sounded like a family they were already trying to help. Turns out, this was a family that no one was aware of, so it pointed out to me that while we helped one family, we only saw the "tip of the iceberg," as others are still waiting.

OTHERS NEED HELP, TOO

When I transported the family from the motel to their new "home," I saw other people that are probably also in need of help. I worry about whether or not enough help is available.

I hope this story helps the public realize that even in Norman, a city with both affluent, gated communities and Section 8 housing, we have homeless people and real needs for help. Thanks to the great work of people like Ginny Corson, Dianna Hinshaw and staff at East Main Place; Gene Barnes, Sandy Duncan, Joan Barker, and staff at Mission Norman; The Salvation Army; the St. Vincent DePaul Society; local churches; plus many individual volunteers and donors, miracles still do happen.

Through the combined efforts of these different entities, no telling how many lives are saved each year.

It is my hope that this story might inspire the good people of Norman to donate their time, money, or goods to these organizations to truly work wonders everyday.

- The author, D-Norman, represents District 45 in the state House of Representatives. This essay first appeared in the Norman Transcript.

Happiness Is Oklahoma In Rearview Mirror?

By Dan Barry

You can never come back, ever. If you plead guilty to that long-ago murder in Oklahoma City, you will be released from prison, where you have spent most of the last 27 years on death row. But once free, you will be banished from Oklahoma. OK?

OK, said James Fisher, trading his black-and-white-striped prison top for a blue-and-white-striped dress shirt. Then, without shackles or escort, he stepped into the late afternoon of a state that once wanted him dead and now just wanted him gone.

First, though, Fisher's lawyers and supporters thought that the end to his Hitchcockian case, a study in the cost of appalling legal representation, warranted at least dinner. So they took him to Earl's Rib Palace for the celebratory opposite of a last meal.

With brown eyes wide behind large glasses and incarceration-gray hair cut close to the scalp, the ex-inmate dined on ribs, coleslaw, fried okra, and root beer. While he ate, a gospel singer from Georgia introduced herself, sang out a song of redemption, and handed him a \$100 bill.

When dinner was over, he ordered a coffee, to go.

A DIFFERENT WORLD

A trip to Wal-Mart for the incidentals needed on the outside was aborted when word came that the district attorney expected Fisher to be already gone. His lawyers promised an early start the next day, and he went to sleep in a hotel at the city's edge.

In the morning, his latest defense lawyer, Perry Hudson, gave him a farewell gift, a portable MP3 player. Fisher had wanted a Walkman, a hot item back when he was last free, but Hudson explained that this was better.

Then Fisher got into the passenger seat of a small red rental car that soon blended into the southward flow of Interstate 35. As the radio played hip-hop, the exhausted, exhilarated man gazed through the car window at a different country from the one he remembered.

"It looked like the society outside had become cleaner, shinier," he said.

What Fisher, 46, remembered included this: abandoned as a small child, fobbed off to relatives, returned to an abusive father and dumped at 13 on the doorstep of the New York State child-welfare system, which cut him loose at 16. In and out of the Navy in seven months, he bobbed through the drugs and street life of the South, until he found a bus ticket to Tulsa and drifted, finally, into Oklahoma City.

BROKEN WINE BOTTLE

There, on Dec. 12, 1982, a white man named Terry Neal was stabbed to death in his apartment with the broken neck of a wine bottle. A juvenile known to solicit on the streets was charged with the murder, but that changed when he named Fisher as the assailant. He said that Neal had picked the two of them up for sex, but that things had gone wrong.

Fisher, who is African-American, was arrested in upstate New York and returned to Oklahoma, where he pleaded not guilty to first-degree murder. He faced execution if convicted, a prospect that, records show, his well-respected lawyer did little to avoid.

The lawyer, E. Melvin Porter, a civil rights advocate and the first African-American elected to the Oklahoma State Senate, later said that at the time he considered homosexuals to be "among the worst people in the world," and Fisher to be a "very hostile client."

Porter was shockingly ill-prepared for trial – "unwilling or unable to reveal evident holes in the state's case," a federal appellate court later noted, yet "remarkably successful in undermining his own client's testimony." He exhibited "actual doubt and hostility" about his client's defense, the court said, and failed to present a closing argument, even though the state's case "was hardly overwhelming."

JUST NINE WORDS

When the time came at sentencing to plead for mercy, the court said, Porter uttered just nine words. Four were judicial pleasantries; the remaining five formed a lame objection to the prosecution's closing argument.

With that, James Fisher, 20, was sentenced to death.

Years passed and appeals were denied. He lived in the cave-like setting of the death-row unit, spending 23 hours a day in his cell, and was frequently relegated to one of the special disciplinary isolation cells. As his various emotional problems went largely untreated, he grew increasingly self-destructive, accord-



ing to a comprehensive psychological assessment.

He became a notoriously difficult inmate, often disciplined for refusing to remove his hands from the cell-door slot through which his food trays were passed. With these hand gestures, Fisher shouted his frustration.

Finally, after 19 years, the federal Court of Appeals for the 10th Circuit overturned Fisher's conviction on the grounds of "ineffective assistance of counsel." In 2005 he was tried again, only to relive his courtroom betrayal.

MORE TRIAL WOES

This time his lawyer was Johnny Albert, also well-regarded, who later admitted that at the time of the trial, he was drinking heavily, abusing cocaine and neglecting cases. The two men fought so much that Albert once physically threatened Fisher, who then refused to attend his own trial.

According to court records, Albert all but ignored the many boxes of defense material concerning Fisher's case. The various other examples of his inept counsel included the failure to sufficiently challenge in the testimony of the state's central witness, the juvenile, now a man with a violent criminal record.

Fisher was convicted and sentenced to death, again. And, again, his conviction was overturned on grounds of ineffective counsel – faster this time, and by the Court of Criminal Appeals of Oklahoma.

His new lawyer, Hudson, succeeded in finally gaining Fisher's trust, but it was not easy. As the prospect of a third trial drew nearer, Fisher instructed his lawyer to seek a plea deal.

Last month the two sides ended the 28-year-old case. In addition to

pleading guilty to first-degree murder, Fisher agreed to complete a comprehensive re-entry program in Montgomery, AL, overseen by the Equal Justice Initiative, which helps indigent defendants and inmates who have been mistreated by the legal system. This nonprofit organization had long been familiar with Fisher's case.

NO LONGER WELCOME

One other thing: Fisher also agreed to get the hell out of Oklahoma forever.

The small red car, driven by Sophia Bernhardt, a lawyer for the Equal Justice Initiative, continued south on the interstate. Packed inside were several goodbye gifts, including a set of inexpensive luggage from Janet Davis, a lawyer with the Oklahoma Indigent Defense System, who had worked for Fisher's freedom for many years.

"He has certainly done his time," she said later. "He deserves to be free in the world."

Just short of the Texas border, Fisher and Ms. Bernhardt, who, at 31, was 5 when Fisher was first sentenced to death, stopped to eat at a Braum's Ice Cream store, where two men stared and talked loudly about his release. They drove on. And when they finally left Oklahoma, Fisher had this thought: "The past is over with."

At Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, Ms. Bernhardt, who had to rush off to another case, entrusted Fisher and the car to her colleague Stanley Washington. The two men bought some takeout at a diner, spent the night at a budget hotel and, at 6:45 the next morning began the 16-hour drive to Montgomery.

JOY OF FRESH AIR

Early in the ride, Washington rolled down the car windows to allow the hot Texas air to rush in. "Here's freedom blowing on you," he said, and he knew what he was talking about.

Washington, 60, was once sentenced to life without parole for various non-violent drug-related crimes; he served 14 years in the Alabama prison system before being released in January 2009. Now, gently, he began to suggest ways for Fisher to make the best of what was before him: small goals, a day at a time; it will be all right.

They stopped for food at gas stations along the way. Fisher savored the various brands of root beer. He talked about the pet he had on death row, a mouse called Jasper. He noticed how lush the landscape became once they hit Louisiana, and how there were so many cars on the road at night, all of them so sleek, and forming uniform lines that said America never sleeps.

Fisher vented for a while about his banishment from Oklahoma. He asked Washington why they would do that, but seemed satisfied by Washington's answer of: Who cares?

It was 10:30 at night by the time the small red car pulled up to the Montgomery apartment where Fisher would start again. Home, Washington said, to which his passenger said something along the lines of, OK.

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BOOKS

7 Skills Schools Should Be Teaching Students

By Tony Wagner

THE GLOBAL ACHIEVEMENT GAP

Why Even Our Best Schools Don't Teach The New Survival Skills Our Children Need – And What We Can Do About It

By Tony Wagner
Basic Books

344 pages, \$16.95

I've spent the last two years researching and writing a new book, *The Global Achievement Gap: Why Even Our Best Schools Don't Teach The New Survival Skills Our Children Need – and What We Can Do About It*.

I began with several questions: First, in the new global economy, where any job that can be turned into a routine is being either automated or "off-shored," what skills will our students need to get – and keep – a good job. And what skills are needed for citizenship today? Are these education goals in conflict, I wondered.

With a clearer picture of the skills young people will need, I then set out to learn to what extent we are teaching and testing the skills that matter most. And because we already know that many of our nation's urban schools are failing, I chose to observe classrooms in some of our most highly regarded suburban schools in order to understand whether our "best" was, in fact, good enough for our children's future. What I discovered in this journey may come as a surprise to many.

There are, I discovered, Seven Survival Skills that all of our students will need to master in order to get a good job in the new "flat" world of work. I also came to see how these are the same skills young people need in order to understand and discuss some of the most pressing issues we face as a democracy in the 21st Century.

1. CRITICAL THINKING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING

In order for companies to compete in the new global economy, they need every worker to be a "knowledge worker" – and to think about how to continuously improve their products, processes, or services. Over and over again, executives told me that the heart of critical thinking and problem-solving skills is the ability to ask the right questions. As one senior executive from Dell Computer said,

"Yesterday's answers won't solve today's problems."

Ellen Kumata, who is managing partner at Cambria Associates, consults to senior executives at Fortune 200 companies. She explained to me the extraordinary pressures on all leaders today, regardless of their product or service. "When I talk to my clients, the challenge is this: how do you do things that haven't been done before, where you have to re-think or think anew, or break set in a fundamental way – it's not incremental improvement anymore. That just won't cut it. The markets are changing too fast, the environments are changing too fast."

2. COLLABORATION ACROSS NETWORKS AND LEADING BY INFLUENCE

Teamwork, it seems, is no longer just about working with others in your building. And traditional top-down accountability structures are rapidly being replaced by horizontal networks. My conversation with CEO Christie Pedra at Siemens first suggested to me that the concept of teamwork today is very different than it was 20 years ago.

"Technology has allowed for virtual teams," she explained. "The way some engineering projects in our company are set up is that you are part of a virtual team. We have teams working on major infrastructure projects that are all over the U.S. On other projects, you're working with people all around the world on solving a software problem. They don't work in the same room, they don't come

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FUNDS

From Page 7

be spent by the end of this coming school year. Oklahoma stimulus money for schools has been spent.

Portions of that money have saved more than 300,000 education jobs, the U.S. Department of Education estimates, based on quarterly reports from the states.

An independent statistical analysis found similar figures: 342,000 jobs, or 5.5% of K-12 employment, were funded by the stimulus, the Center on Reinventing Public Education reported in March.

Democratic lawmakers have been pushing for additional education stimulus dollars since last December, and at one point said \$23 billion was needed to prevent massive layoffs. Earlier versions would have paid for the jobs funding by adding to the deficit, or by trimming from money already promised education-reform initiatives through Race to the Top and other competitive grants.

The latter idea fell apart when President Obama, in defense of such reforms, threatened a veto.

The current bill will be paid for by ending an expansion of food-stamp funding in 2014 and by reducing tax credits for multinational companies.

Republicans Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins of Maine voted with Democrats to end a filibuster and allow the bill to move forward.

SAVE JOBS, HELP SICK POOR

"This investment will save jobs and help prevent districts from shortening the school year, increasing class sizes, and closing libraries in the wake of horrific and damaging budget cuts," said Rep. George Miller, D-CA, chair of the House committee that oversees education.

"While this latest round of funding isn't enough to avert all layoffs, it is a critical investment in our children and in our future."

The education money will be distributed to states and districts based on population figures, the proportion of low-income students, and other existing education funding formulae.

Preliminary estimates by the Department of Education show amounts ranging from \$17.5 million for Wyoming to \$1.2 billion to save 13,500 jobs in California.

REPORT

From Page 7

vancing education reform and its sister organization is the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, which sponsors charter schools in Ohio.

The Institute has been publishing reports on states' standards since 1997, and its 2010 report is the first report on English and math standards since 2005.

The Common Core State Standards Initiative is the result of the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. Its standards are for English/language arts and math only. Per legislative, gubernatorial and state Board of Education support and approval, Oklahoma formally adopted the Common Core with a multi-year implementation plan in June.

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Apply Best Practices To Authentic Issues

By Wilson Myers

When I was working as a teacher, I loved the phrase “best practices.” It suggested pooled wisdom, a collective weeding out of the more effective from the less effective, a distillation of the authentic out of a world of potential baloney.

It implied disinterested cooperation to figure out what really does work when we’re trying to help children learn. Any collection of best practices would synergize with each other in a perfect storm of competency.

I heard the phrase again during the extended health care reform debate, in one of the most sensible discussions of the issues broadcast on the radio.

SHORTSIGHTED INTERESTS OF POWERFUL

A gentleman named T.R. Reid had gone to four countries and picked out sensible options that could work well here in the U.S. For example, French citizens have an electronic card that has their entire medical record on it.

When they visit a clinic, the doctor gets the needed data off the card. What a great idea! But of course in “real life,” the corrupt processes of our politics boil most suggestions for best practices away; what remains is a residue composed of the shortsighted interests of the powerful.

As we have learned from watching contemporary institutions like our own Supreme Court at work, apparent disinterestedness can often mask a latent political bias.

I know that Washington and other capitals of the world are dotted with think tanks that aspire to disinterested best practices. But there is something about the distance between the pace of the challenges we face as a planet and the molasses-like speed of elite research and legislative change that seems not only grossly inadequate but also intolerable.

GULF IS GOOD EXAMPLE

The oil disaster in the Gulf is one good example. There is the black goo that coats the wings of pelicans, and the thicker, blacker political goo that paralyzes the thinking processes of our lawmakers and bureaucrats.

The mainstream media, gigantic corporate interests often owned by even bigger gigantic corporate interests, are not in a position to lead on this proactively. Maybe what we need is a People’s Manhattan Project of Best Practices.

The Internet makes it possible! Wikipedia, while not perfect, is one possible model. Offer a site with a series of issues, and open it to disinterested creative ideas about all our challenges – nuclear weapons, global climate change, pollution, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, how to accelerate positive social change.

Arrange a voting system where people can see the raw contributions, make comments, and move the best ideas to the forefront without erasing those wild



and crazy contributions that might just turn out to be valuable in the long run.

THE POWER OF IDEAS

Ideas are powerful, especially when they bubble up from “ordinary” people all around the world. When they do come from global sources, they also represent a meta-idea, which is that posing enemies is obsolete.

As the oil spreads into the entire single ocean system on complex currents, once more we are reminded that we are all in this together.

It is really dysfunctional to blame and demonize others in this oil-spill crisis. My own demand for inexpensive gasoline fueled it. The same is true for many other crises, even big ones like war. War depends on the ability of one group to dehumanize another group to the point where the necessary violence and killing can be rationalized.

But if we open the prevention of war itself to a disinterested worldwide forum, there are no enemies, there are only members of the human species sharing ideas about alternatives to war, resurrecting that old 1960s bumper-sticker possibility: what if they gave a war and [because everyone knew the best practices for resolving conflict without violence] nobody came?

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SKILLS

From Page 10

to the same office, but every week they’re on a variety of conference calls; they’re doing web casts; they’re doing net meetings.”

Mike Summers, who is Vice President for Global Talent Management at Dell Computers, said that his greatest concern was young people’s lack of leadership skills. “Kids just out of school have an amazing lack of preparedness in general leadership skills and collaborative skills,” he explained, “They lack the ability to influence versus direct and command.”

3. AGILITY AND ADAPTABILITY

Clay Parker, the president of the Chemical Management Division of BOC Edwards, explained that anyone who comes to work at BOC Edwards today “has to think, be flexible, change, and be adaptive, and use a variety of tools to solve new problems. We change what we do all the time. I’ve been here four years, and we’ve done fundamental re-organization every year because of changes in the business. People have to learn to adapt. I can guarantee the job I hire someone to do will change or may not exist in the future, so this is why adaptability and learning skills are more important than technical skills.”

4. INITIATIVE AND ENTREPRENEURISM

Mark Chandler, the Senior Vice President and General Counsel at Cisco, was one of the strongest proponents of these traits. “Leadership is the capacity to take initiative and trust yourself to be creative,” he told me. “I say to my employees if you try five things and get all five of them right, you may be failing. If you try 10 things, and get eight of them right, you’re a hero. If you set stretch goals, you’ll never be blamed for failing to reach a stretch goal, but you will be blamed for not trying. One of the problems of a large company is risk aversion. Our challenge is how to create an entrepreneurial culture in a larger organization.”

5. EFFECTIVE ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Mike Summers, who is vice president for Global Talent Management at Dell Computers, spoke forcefully on this issue: “We are routinely surprised at the difficulty some young people have in communicating: verbal skills, written skills, presentation skills. They have difficulty being clear and concise; it’s hard for them to create focus, energy, and passion around the points they want to make. They are unable to communicate their thoughts effectively. You’re talking to an exec, and the first thing you’ll get asked if you haven’t made it perfectly clear in the first 60 seconds of your presentation is, ‘What do you want me to take away from this meeting?’ They don’t know how to answer that question.”

Listening to Summers’ comments as a former high school English teacher myself, I was surprised by the list of skills he thought important: not only being

able to communicate one’s thoughts clearly and concisely, but also being able to create focus, energy, and passion. Summers and other leaders from various companies were not necessarily complaining about young people’s poor grammar, punctuation, or spelling – the things we spend so much time teaching and testing in our schools. While it’s obviously important to write and speak correctly, the complaints I heard most frequently were more about fuzzy thinking and young people not knowing how to write with a real voice.

6. ACCESSING AND ANALYZING INFORMATION

Employees in the 21st Century have to manage an astronomical amount of information flowing into their work lives on a daily basis. As Mike Summers told me, “There is so much information available that it is almost too much, and if people aren’t prepared to process the information effectively it almost freezes them in their steps.”

It’s not just the sheer quantity of information that represents such a challenge. It is also how rapidly and constantly the information is changing. Quick, how many planets are there? While I was at Harvard in the early 1990’s, I heard then Harvard University President Neil Rudenstine say in a speech that the half-life of knowledge in the humanities is 10 years, and in math and science, it’s only two or three years. And that was 15 years ago! I wonder what he would say it is today.

7. CURIOSITY AND IMAGINATION

Clay Parker stressed the importance of employees whom he hires being more than just smart. “I want people who can think – they’re not just bright – they’re also inquisitive. Are they engaged, are they interested in the world?” And Mark Summers told me: “People who’ve learned to ask great questions and have learned to be inquisitive are the ones who move the fastest in our environment because they solve the biggest problems in ways that have most impact on innovation.”

Daniel Pink, the author of *A Whole New Mind*, observes that with increasing abundance, people want more unique products and services. Plain vanilla won’t cut it any more in today’s crowded marketplace: “For businesses it’s no longer enough to create a product that’s reasonably priced and adequately functional. It must also be beautiful, unique, and meaningful.” Pink notes that developing young people’s capacities for imagination, creativity, and empathy will be increasingly important for maintaining our country’s competitive advantage in the future.

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School Deregulation And Experimentation

By Al Mance

Want deregulation of public education? Look what it did for business. Proponents of deregulated creativity have been pushing hard to bring the questionable wisdom of that philosophy to public education.

No fewer than four bills to expand the number of Tennessee charter schools have been introduced in the 106th General Assembly. If one of the worst passes it is likely to do for public education what deregulation has done for American business. Expansion of charter schools is poor public policy.

Their proponents say charter schools perform better because they are governed by a group of private citizens who are not required to adhere to the regulations that govern the operation of public schools.

EXPERIMENTATION THE GOAL

They theorize that unregulated charter schools will try all kinds of new and different ways of educating children and disseminate these learnings to public schools.

The result will be that at schools will perform better. A look at some independent studies of charter school performance finds that they often perform at a lower level than the schools they are chartered to replace. In addition, the risk of fraud and misuse of funds is also higher in these schools. Often they drain money from public schools without decreasing the cost to the school.

Inevitably, the success of the education experience is determined by what goes on in a classroom between the individual student and a teacher.

The best prepared teachers of any country are found in America's public schools. Education of a diverse student population calls for experimentation and innovation, which requires that professional teachers take risks to improve teaching and learning.

CHILLED TEACHERS

But reliance on standardized tests as the primary metric for measuring teacher and school effectiveness has chilled teachers' willingness to try new approaches.

Students, like adults, have different gifts and respond differently to the same stimuli. America needs all of these diverse gifts. All countries have them, if they are lucky. It does not mean that all students will not learn. It means that some students will learn more rapidly than others and understand the concepts differently. Some will understand certain concepts but they may be unable to retain them long enough to use on a standardized test.

Military-Type Public Schools On The Rise

The U.S. Marine Corps is wooing public school districts across the country, expanding a network of military academies that has grown steadily despite criticism that it's a recruiting ploy.

The Marines are talking with at least six districts – including in suburban Atlanta, New Orleans and Las Vegas – about opening schools where every student wears a uniform, participates in Junior ROTC and takes military classes, said Bill McHenry, who runs the Junior ROTC program for the Marines.

Those schools would be on top of more than a dozen public military academies that have already opened nationwide, a trend that's picking up speed as the U.S. Department of Defense looks for ways to increase the number of units in Junior ROTC, which stands for Reserve Officers Training Corps.

"Many kids in our country don't get a fair shake. Many kids live in war zones. Many kids who are bright and have so much potential and so much to offer, all they need to be given is a chance," McHenry said. "If you look at stats, what we're doing now isn't working."

MORE ROTC UNITS

Last year, Congress passed a defense policy bill that included a call for increasing the number of Junior ROTC units across the country from 3,400 to 3,700 in the next 11 years, an effort that will cost about \$170 million, Defense Department spokeswoman Eileen M. Lainez said. The process will go faster by opening military academies.

Other military branches also are aiming to increase their presence in school hallways, but the Marines are leading the charge.

Between 5% and 10% of graduating seniors from the nation's public military schools end up enlisting, according to an Associated Press review of the majority of the schools' records.

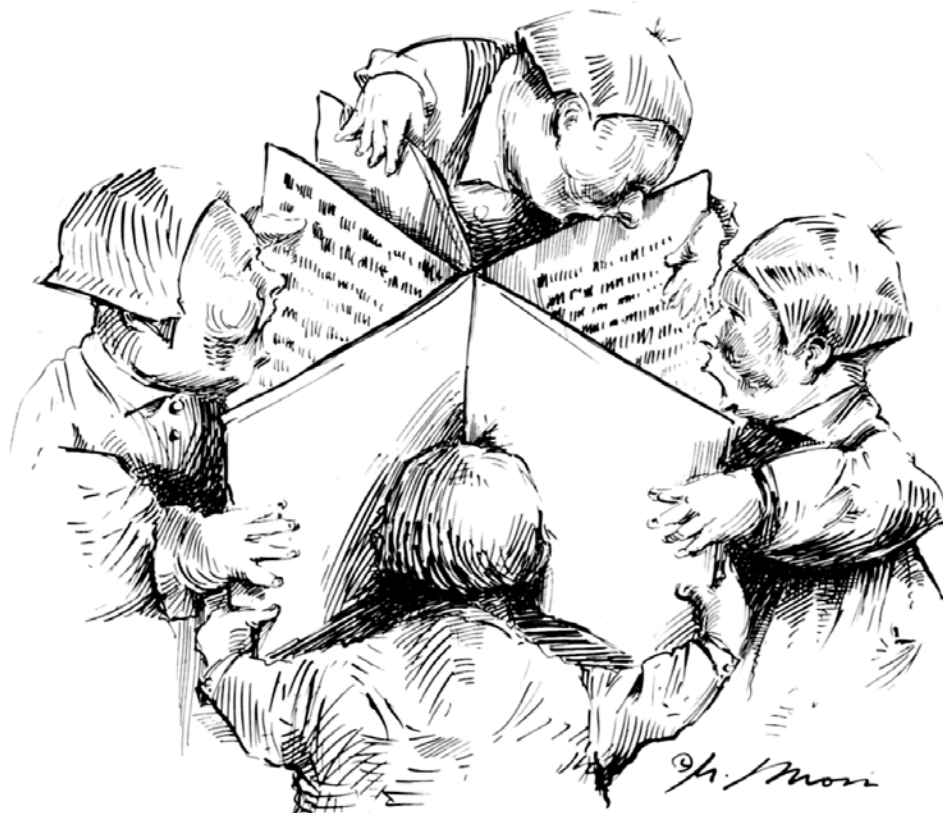
About 3% of new high school graduates join the military, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

Proponents say the academies aren't recruiting tools but focus on discipline, ethics and civics, giving at-risk teens a place where they can flourish to help battle the country's high school dropout rate of one in four kids.

CAN'T LEARN, WON'T LEARN?

"The whole notion behind this is that there is so much literature out there and myth that kids from low socio-economic levels can't learn and won't learn," said DeKalb County, GA, schools Superintendent Crawford Lewis. "We are partnering with the Marines to show if we come together and do this right, we will debunk that whole stereotype."

The military academy would be much like a typical high school, except students would wear ROTC uniforms each day with a military formation and inspec-



Some schools aren't as successful in ensuring that all students achieve to the maximum extent of their readiness and academic capabilities. Too often the gaps between achievement and student capabilities occur in identifiable racial, ethnic and economic groups.

GIFTED LEADERSHIP REQUIRED

Estimating these deficiencies takes gifted leadership, commitment to effective pedagogy, extraordinary resources and consistently focused work. It also takes experimentation without fear of failure.

Public education is arguably America's most regulated public service. The laws, rules and regulations are restrictive to be sure. Still, they ensure some consistency of opportunity for a high quality education for all boys and girls.

Relaxation of regulations is not needed in the fundamental elements of the institution but rather in the grip that is kept on those who are expected to generate its success.

Excellence and stability in any worthwhile pursuit result, at least in part, from consistent adherence to well-tested principles. Excessive deregulation of business violated every principle that kept our economic system fairly stable. It honored irresponsible risk-taking and protected everyone but "we the people."

tion.

For Brenda Hernandez, who was in the first graduating class at Rickover Naval Academy last year, the option let her avoid the gang-ridden schools in her neighborhood.

Her mother, MaryAnn Hernandez, enrolled her daughter because the regular public school in her Chicago neighborhood wasn't as academically challenging.

She said she proudly watched as her daughter took Advanced Placement and honors courses and became a leader on the drill and color guard squads.

"It's been an incredible experience for her and for us," the mother said. "I saw it as an opportunity to get a better education for my daughter."

Punishment Meted To Poor, Minorities

Recently, testimony from three public hearings suggested that excessive disciplinary action for non-violent offenses like tardiness and truancy exacerbated the dropout crisis.

A new Rennie Center review of discipline practices in Massachusetts and nationally looks at these discipline policies, the laws that govern them, and research on the effects of disciplinary removal.

The brief describes overall trends in disciplinary removal [suspensions and expulsions] of Massachusetts students, school year 2005-06 through 2008-09, and findings from a more in-depth analysis of discipline data from the 2007-08 years.

Key findings include that for serious infractions – illegal substances, violence, and criminal activities – the most common reason for disciplinary removal is violence. Out-of-school suspension is the most frequently used form of disciplinary removal, and the number of disciplinary removals peaks at 9th grade and declines in 10th through 12th grade.

Particular segments [low-income, special education, male, black, Hispanic] of the student population are removed at disproportionately high rates.

The brief highlights essential questions that must be answered to fully understand how discipline policies are being carried out, and to tease out the relationship between disciplinary removal, the achievement gap, and dropping out of public schools in Massachusetts.

Teaching Guns But Not Sex Education

By Lisa Russ

Seems to me that simple, clear communication works best, even with young kids. When there is a threat or an opportunity I let my kids know in plain and simple terms.

No running with scissors. Walk carefully near the edge of a pool. Put the matches down. So far this plain-talking strategy has kept ER visits to a minimum and led to a relatively peaceful life with two pre-schoolers.

Judging from the turbulence caused by a sex ed curriculum under consideration by the School Board in Helena, MT, there are people who disagree. According to Fox News, some local parents are in a tizzy about their kindergarteners learning the actual words for their body parts, including those covered by their bathing suits.

When we as parents want to communicate important information to our kids [or hear important information from them], why wouldn't we use the right words? Their objections to the curriculum go on from there, but it seems grounded in the same basic fear of information.

REASONABLE APPROACH

The data, as usual, supports a reasonable approach. Teens who have accurate information, resources and support around their bodies and sexuality are better armed to make the daily decisions that affect their well-being both now and into the future.

According to recent research, the average age for first-time sex for white Evangelical Protestants is 16, among the earliest average age for any group. They are also the least likely of any group of teens to use contraception, and the most likely to have been given abstinence-only sex ed, which I guess avoids using actual names for body parts until pretty late in the game.

This from the Dallas Observer last year:

In "Just Say Don't Know: Sexuality Education in Texas Public Schools," researchers David Wiley and Kelly Wilson of Texas State University took a comprehensive look at how sexuality is taught in Texas public schools. The short answer: It isn't really.

Kids are, however, being taught: A) sex will kill you dead right now; B) only depressive, suicidal, loser slut bunnies ever have sex outside of marriage; and C) condoms kill more people than handguns.

THIRD IN PREGNANCIES

Despite the fact that Texas ranks third in the rate of teen pregnancies and that its students are more sexually active and that they have more sex partners than the average U.S. student, sex ed here is nearly exclusively devoted to abstinence education, often with a religious bent. Information about contraception, disease prevention and STD testing is most often scarce or, worse, wildly inaccurate.

Like Texas, many of the same states that resist comprehensive sex ed are the same places that pride themselves on loose laws for gun ownership. Gun-rights advocates maintain that straight-forward education, not regulation and licensing, is the best way to keep kids safe.

The National Rifle Association leads the way: they have a cool program called

Public See Crisis In Public Education

A new poll released by the Alliance for Excellent Education finds that improving the quality of public high schools through the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act [in its current version, No Child Left Behind] is a voting issue for over eight in 10 voters.

Those polled believe the nation's public high schools are in urgent need of improvement, more so than middle schools or elementary schools. Just one in four give the nation's high schools a good or excellent rating, while 42% give them a "C," and one in five a poor or failing grade.

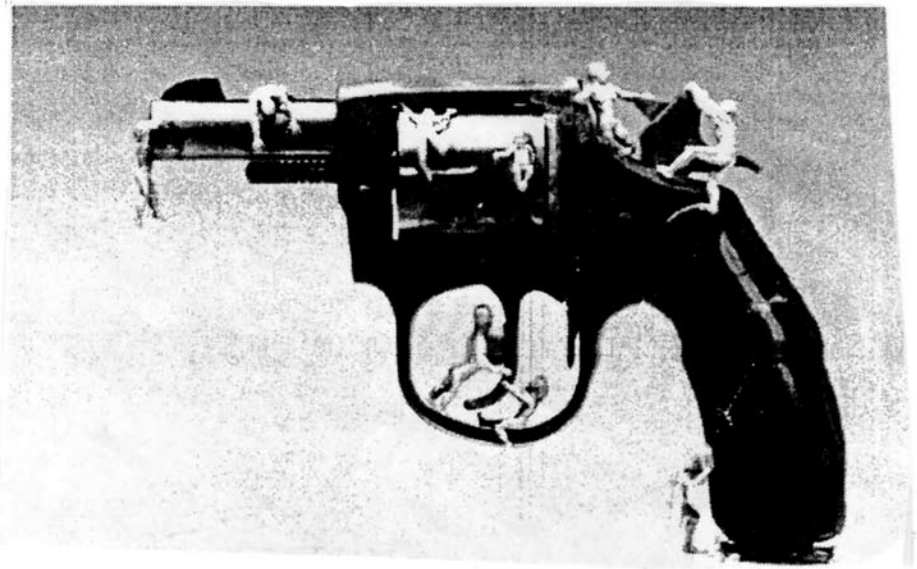
Nearly seven in 10 voters say a high school diploma is inadequate to get a good-paying job in today's world, and nearly as many believe it does not prepare students to succeed in college.

Two-thirds of voters say the high school dropout rate has a significant impact on the nation's economy and on America's ability to compete globally.

A majority of voters say Congress is not paying enough attention to the state of public high schools, and around half of voters say governors and President Obama are not paying enough attention.

Additionally, over half of voters say that their decision to vote for a current elected official in the 2010 congressional elections will be affected if Congress takes no action to reform NCLB.

The irony is that not one in a million citizens has read the law.



Eddie Eagle, aimed at exactly the same age group whose parents are up in arms about learning about their own bodies.

According to the site, the curriculum is designed to be used in schools. Anyone can use it – you don't need to be an NRA member or certified to teach anything at all. The curriculum is even available in Spanish.

According to the NRA, it doesn't aim to teach kids that guns are either "good or bad," but rather how to stay safe when you see one. "Like swimming pools, electrical outlets, matchbooks and household poison, they're treated simply as a fact of everyday life. With firearms found in about half of all American households, it's a stance that makes sense."

KIDS NEED TO LEARN SAFETY

I don't have a gun in the house, but I can agree with that line of thinking. Like it or not, guns are around, so kids at an early age should learn how to be safe around them.

Now, genitals, at my last count, are in 100% of households. Why not use the same common sense approach that knowledge is power, and give our kids straightforward, age appropriate information?

That is exactly why a new toolkit launched by EMERJ called The New Sex Ed is so important. The New Sex Ed is full of useful community-created and tested strategies to help parents and educators implement useful and effective sex ed programs that are based in real people's experiences.

Given the fight the Right has picked against teaching science, health, and touchy subjects like evolution and global warming, advocates for the truth need great resources like these to support parents, communities and school boards in making informed choices about educating their kids.

I also want to give parents in Texas and Montana credit. The Dallas Observer article also says that polls show that the overwhelming majority of Texans want teens to get accurate, useful information about sexual health, but until this report, "legislators and other policymakers had no idea what sexuality education looked like in the state and neither did parents."

I have a feeling that most parents in Montana want the same thing. Fox News's distortions notwithstanding, parenting young kids is good at teaching us all one thing: Facts Please.

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Homebuyers Look For Good Test Scores

Parents, teachers and superintendents always pay close attention to test scores. But the scores are also driving real estate prices for prospective homebuyers and sellers, real estate agents and educators say, because they make it possible to compare schools to others within the same school district.

All across America, "score shopping" is more important to some than commute times, lot size or granite counter tops.

Critics argue that it only proves how well students take tests, while real learning is influenced by creative teaching, innovative music or arts programs, and classroom culture.

High Advanced Placement scores are overwhelmingly associated with socioeconomic status and the education levels of parents, so some educators grumble that AP stands for "Affluent Parent Index."

Schools with low scores tend to have high concentrations of students living in poverty or learning English for the first time.

One real estate agent plans to include AP scores in an upcoming mailer. Another found clients a townhouse they loved – great neighborhood, right price – but they declined to make an offer because the assigned school had an AP of 810, and they wanted 840 or above.

This is just another way of re-segregating America – one school district at a time.

FOUR GREAT RELIGIOUS TRUTHS

During these serious and trying times, people of all faiths should remember these four great religious truths:

1. Muslims do not recognize Jews as God's chosen people.

2. Jews do not recognize Christ as the Messiah.

3. Protestants do not recognize the Pope as the leader of the Christian world.

4. Baptists do not recognize each other at Hooters or the liquor store.

Myth: Social Security Is Going Bankrupt

By Michael Hiltzik

The annual report of the Social Security Trustees is the sort of rich compendium of facts and analysis that has something for everybody, like the Bible.

The trust fund may not last forever, but reports of its demise are certainly premature. The trustees say it will be drawn down to zero in 2037, at which point the program will only have enough money coming in from taxes to pay 78% of the benefits due under current law.

In recent years, during which conservatives have intensified their efforts to destroy one of the few U.S. government programs that actually works as intended, the report's publication has become an occasion for hand-wringing and crocodile tears over the [supposedly] parlous state of the system's finances.

A BOGUS REACTION

This year's report is no exception. Within minutes of its release, some analysts were claiming that it projected a "shortfall" for Social Security this year of \$41 billion.

Before we get to the bogus math behind that statement – which doesn't actually appear in the report – let's look at the encouraging findings by the agency's trustees, who include the secretaries of Labor, the Treasury, and Health and Human Services.

The trustees indicated that the program has made it through the worst economic downturn in its life span essentially unscathed.

In fact, by at least one measure it's fiscally stronger than a year ago: Its projected actuarial deficit over the next 75 years [a measurement required by law] is smaller now than a year ago.

LOW ADMINISTRATIVE OVERHEAD

The old age and disability trust funds, which hold the system's surplus, grew in 2009 by \$122 billion, to \$2.5 trillion. The program paid out \$675 billion to 53 million beneficiaries – men, women and children – with administrative costs of 0.9% of expenditures.

For all you privatization advocates out there, you'd be lucky to find a retirement and insurance plan of this complexity with an administrative fee less than five or 10 times that ratio.

This year and next, the program's costs will exceed its take from the payroll tax and income tax on benefits. That's an artifact of the recession, and it's expected to reverse from 2012 through 2014.

The difference is covered by the program's other income source – interest on the Treasury bonds in the Social Security trust fund. That brings us back to this supposed \$41 billion "shortfall," which exists only if you decide not to count interest due of about \$118 billion.

BAMBOOZLING AMERICANS

And that, in turn, leads us to the convoluted subject of the trust fund, which for some two decades has been the prime target of the crowd trying to bamboozle Americans into thinking Social Security is insolvent, bankrupt, broke – pick any term you wish, because they're all wrong. The trust fund is the mechanism by which baby boomers have pre-funded their own [OK, our own] retirements. When



tax receipts fall short, its bonds are redeemed by the government to cover the gap.

Despite what Social Security's enemies love to claim, the trust fund is not a myth, it's not mere paper. It's real money, and it represents the savings of every worker paying into the system today.

That 2037 deadline, in truth, is a moving target. It's based on long-term projections, which become more uncertain the further out you look. The estimated date is very sensitive to forecasts of immigration, wage and economic growth, and birth and death rates, all of which are uncertain. Over the last 10 years, it has fluctuated between 2037 and 2042, mostly due to economic factors. It has held steady at 2037 for two years despite the downturn, but that's still better than the projection in 1998, which was for exhaustion in 2032.

In short, if the new trustees report gets examined wisely and responsibly, it should put an end to all the current talk about raising the retirement age or cutting benefits. Social Security doesn't contribute a dime to the federal deficit, and in these days of market stagnation and cutbacks in pensions, it has never been more important to millions of Americans.

© Los Angeles Times

New Outrages Keep Gushing From BP

By Jim Hightower

With BP's well capped and CEO Tony Hayward exiled to Russia, perhaps you thought that surely there will be no additional revelations about BP to enrage you. But now comes this: prison labor.

In its national PR blitz to buff up its image, the oil giant has loudly been boasting that it has hired devastated, out-of-work local people to handle the clean-up. Many have been hired, but the people themselves say not nearly enough. The Nation magazine now reports a big reason for the shortfall – BP has been using inmates to do much of the shoveling and scooping to remove oil from Louisiana beaches.

In the early days of the cleanup, crews suddenly appeared wearing scarlet pants and white t-shirts with bold red letters spelling out, "Inmate Labor." Investigative reporter Abe Louise Young writes that the sight of prison laborers outraged the local community, so they were removed.

Not the inmates, the uniforms. Now they wear BP shirts, jeans and rubber boots with no prison markings, and they are moved to and from the job in unmarked white vans. No officials with BP or the feds could or would tell Young how many inmates are being used or what they're being paid. However, a local sheriff's official told Young, "They're not getting paid – it's part of their sentence."

But guess who is getting paid for this convict labor? BP. It's getting paid by you and me. Under a little-known tax provision passed during the Bush regime, corporations can get a "work opportunity tax credit" of \$2,400 for every work release inmate they hire.

And that's not all we're subsidizing. For example, BP, which rented the drilling rig from Transocean Corp., used a special tax break to write off 70% of the rent it paid. Seventy percent! This added up to a savings of \$225,000 a day for BP.

Also, back in 1999, Transocean deliberately moved its corporate address offshore in order to dodge its tax obligations to our country. It relocated from Houston to the Cayman Islands, then to Switzerland – slick moves that have allowed

the giant corporation to avoid paying \$1.8 billion it owed in U.S. taxes.

No industry gets the absurd array of subsidies that Big Oil now enjoys – subsidies at every stage of its operations, including the ones used by BP and Transocean to search for oil in our public waters. As one political leader put it in 2005, "With \$55 oil, we don't need incentives to the oil and gas companies to explore."

That was George W. Bush talking! Five years later, oil is \$80 a barrel and the industry is pocketing record profits – yet the giveaways continue.

Again and again, BP has promised that it would pay all cleanup costs for the mess it made. Now, however, the British-based oil giant has quietly told investors that it expects to get a \$10-billion subsidy from Uncle Sugar to help cover the costs.

Say what? Not only did the company's top executives assure us that this whole god-awful mess would be on their dime, but so did our top government officials. As President Obama flatly declared in May, "We will demand they pay for every dime they owe for the damage they have done." Even Rep. Joe Barton – the GOP gooberhead who so obsequiously apologized to BP's CEO for America's insistence that he set up a corporate fund to compensate victims – was forced to backtrack and say that, of course, he expects BP to pay the tab.

So what is this \$10 billion hit on us taxpayers? It's another little corporate gotcha that lobbyists quietly got tucked into our tax code, allowing huge firms to grab a credit for up to 35% of their losses. The damages and cleanup being paid by BP, says one tax expert, are "just another cost of doing business," so they qualify for all applicable corporate breaks. After all, says another expert, while BP said it would pay the costs of the cleanup, it "never promised that it would not seek any deductions" to recoup those costs from American taxpayers.

Tricky, huh?

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Gullible Lap Up Coburn's Misinformation

By Ron DuBois

At Sen. Tom Coburn's recent Town Hall meeting in Stillwater, when asked the question so many Canadians ask – "Why don't Americans want what we have?" – he promptly reeled off all the serious problems of Canadian health care. He said the outcomes are worse in Canada for multiple medical procedures compared to the U.S. He even claimed that healthcare in Canada is "rationed." He cited the case of a woman with two medical conditions [breast cancer and a broken hip] who was forced to choose treatment for one at the expense of the other.

Rationing of healthcare in Canada is laughable, a strange delusion, yet most of the gullible audience lapped it up without questioning it.

When it was stated that Canadians live longer and infant mortality is better in Canada, he seemed to agree about infant mortality and blamed it on Medicaid, something that doesn't exist in Canada where the same quality of medical care is available to all regardless of wealth or poverty.

IT'S NOT FREE

In other words, medical health programs for the poor are peculiar to America and not found in other advanced nations where there is equal distribution of quality healthcare to all regardless of ability to pay or station in life.

This doesn't mean it's free. It's paid for through taxation.

An obvious disconnect neither he nor the audience seemed to understand was that if things were really so horrible in Canada why is it that 96% of Canadians "wouldn't have it any other way?" Canadians must be really stupid to like all the horrible things that Sen. Coburn believes are true.

Why is it that only Americans speak loudly about the horrible medical care in Canada – not Canadians themselves? Is it possible that Sen. Coburn is in the pocket of the for-profit medical insurance industry which would do anything to prevent a sensible non-profit single payer system [paid for by public taxation].

It is recommended that all concerned readers go to the website for Manitoba Health, www@gov.mb.ca-health, for facts not fabrications. Or go on-line to the white pages of any Canadian city to pick at random the name and phone number of any Canadian.

'RUINATION OF AMERICA'

He asked me directly, "Do you believe healthcare is a right?" I replied, "Every advanced nation with the sole exception of the U.S. believes healthcare is a basic right."

Sen. Coburn flatly opposed this idea. To him, treating medical health care as a "right" would be the ruination of America.

The Oklahoma audience with few exceptions applauded this. He flatly rejected the enlightened view of other advanced nations that "paying for the healthcare of your neighbor makes for a stronger nation."

An unasked question was, "Do you think you have the right to public education, to a police department, fire department, postal system, a military, public roads, safety and security?"

THE GREATEST CANADIAN

The answer would be "Yes!" to all of this, yet when it comes to healthcare the



senator as so many Americans makes a glaring exception. Could this be a "thinking disorder" of Sen. Coburn and those who applaud him?

Other nations spend 10% of GDP and cover everyone while the U.S. spends 16% and is indifferent to 47 million uninsured. If things are as horrible in Canada as Sen. Coburn claims, why would Canadians elect Tommy Douglas, the founder of public healthcare, as "The Greatest Canadian"?

Again how do we explain the disconnect between what Americans like Sen. Coburn think about Canadian healthcare, and what Canadians themselves think? Why do Americans continue to say what Canadians are not saying? If things are so bad in Canada why don't Canadians speak out against their terrible healthcare system? Why do they support it, put up with it, have good things to say about it, and express gratitude for it? Certainly they never face medical bankruptcy, the leading cause of bankruptcy in the U.S.

Apparently Americans believe it would be illegal to pick up a phone and talk to a real Canadian. If fact-challenged Americans would simply communicate with Canadians they would learn that "the facts" as presented by Sen. Coburn are in fact fabrications put out by the private insurance industry in order to protect their profits. The embarrassing and terrible fact is that Americans are willing to let their sick neighbors who can't afford medical care die [some 40,000 per

year]. That doesn't happen in other advanced, humanistic-based nations like Canada. Unfortunately it happens here big time. Sen. Coburn did not dwell on these unpleasant facts.

DELUSIONAL THINKING

Could it be that Sen. Coburn suffers from delusional thinking, known to psychiatrists as a mental disorder? To those afflicted with this disorder the delusions are so real there's no point in explaining that the delusions exist only in their minds. Isn't this a question we all need to ask about ourselves?

Sen. Coburn is not a listener; rather he is a master of glib rhetoric, a verbally gifted, agile, acrobatic responder. The "facts" are always on the tip of his mobile tongue, yet when he cites how horrible things are in Canada, shouldn't he also cite the horrible facts about medical care in the U.S.?

For starters: The World Health Organization now ranks the U.S. as 37th in the world in quality of healthcare, Canada No. 10 and France No. 1. The latter two both have public health care systems as does every other advanced nation with the sole exception of the U.S. If the definition of a "great nation" includes social contributions, like Medicare, how great is America?

Yet to a mesmerized audience Sen. Coburn is "right on." Is it possible that Americans like him suffer from a thinking disorder that requires treatment and medication, as opposed to the people of other advanced nations who don't suffer from this affliction? Unlike the U.S. these nations were wise enough to opt for universal healthcare some 50 years ago and continue to support and benefit from it.

Why can't our healthcare cover everyone and cost far less – i.e., be as good as theirs?

– The author lives in Stillwater

How About Jim Inhofe For Bedbug Czar?

By Harry T. Cook

Word is that the authorities in one of the most sophisticated urban centers in the world are about to appoint a bedbug czar. The purpose? To coordinate the stamping-out of the Cimex lectularius invasion of Manhattan and its four sister boroughs in which, it is said, the persistent insect that made people as far back as Aristotle's time itch and scratch is still heeding Jehovah's command to be fruitful and multiply.

We speak here of the bedbug, the presence of which carries the same social stigma as the head louse. In antiquity, some people believed a bedbug bite would go a long way toward curing hysteria. Landlords, rooming house proprietors and their tenants alike now believe quite the opposite, and their behavior tends shows it.

Civilization, the quality of which can be seriously diminished by the little blood suckers, is having no luck in turning back those unwanted immigrants. Maybe New York's bedbug czar should sit down with Sheriff Joe Arpaio out there in Arizona to get some ideas.

Bedbugs are survivors of the first chop. No cataclysm has yet rendered them extinct. They seem to be affected neither by the pernicious myth of global warm-

ing nor its reality. No holocaust has consumed them; no possibility of a Republican landslide in November threatens their existence; no papal bull has banished them from Mother Earth or any of its rectories.

Burn them out of one mattress or house, and they turn up in another. Fumigate an entire city, and, lo, they appear in the next one down the road.

While they are content to feast on any mammalian blood, it is the exposed parts of our somnolent bodies that appear to be their preferred entrée – the Chateaubriand of the hungry bedbug's highest hopes.

Thus, as Jonathon Swift, that 17th-18th Century master of satire, might say: Perhaps the most likely key to the elimination of the bedbug is the elimination of ourselves and those other mammals. If the insect's food supply is nonexistent, the insect itself will die off.

New York's bedbug czar is probably apprised of this obvious truth. He will find eager allies for his labors among Republicans and even some Democrats in the U.S. Senate, who managed to kill a climate-energy bill in the waning days of the 111th Congress. These states-folk evidently trust in the sagacity of such solons

See BEDBUG Page 17

Catholic Scandal Personal To Victim

Views on child abuse and child molestation are harsh and unforgiving and forged by the fires of my own childhood. I give no quarter on this issue.

I have no kind words or forgiving thoughts for the Catholic hierarchy or their enablers, which brings me to Bill Donohue's article on the CNN Opinion web site. You can read what he says but I'll give you my version:

"Child abuse and molestation is bad but this stuff happened a long time ago and times were different then and besides everyone does it including churches, schools, businesses and even the Jews. This is all about picking on the Catholic Church for headlines."

CHEAP PARLOR TRICK

Donohue – you are performing a cheap parlor trick of turning the Catholic Church into the victim here and, frankly, it is disgusting. The victims are at the center of this issue, not you and your Catholic ego.

It is about accountability.

This is not an attack on the Catholic Church. It is about holding the men accountable who lead the Church. And that includes the Pope.

In the wonderful novel *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini, Baba tells his son Amir: "There is only one sin and that is theft. Every other sin is a variation of theft ... When you kill a man, you steal a life. When you tell a lie, you steal someone's right to the truth."

Men, not God, not Church, stole innocence and trust, privacy and possession of one's body and spirit. Can there be a more heinous crime?

HOW VICTIMS REACT

While you dress your Cardinals and Pope in fine linens and moral rectitude, the molested cover themselves in revulsion and self-loathing, believing they did something to cause this crime.

While you parade about with burning incense and wafers of contrition the raped and battered wander in doubt and confusion as to how God let this happen.

While you sprinkle the Water of Oblivion and chant sacred liturgies the true victims suffer the holy trinity of abuse, alienation and abandonment.

How dare you cloak the Church in victimhood.

Should the deaf children thank God that they were not able to hear their rapist's grunts and gasps of pleasure at defilement?

Should the molested thank God that they eventually became old enough to no longer be attractive to priests? Or should they have prayed for faster transfers?

Should the abused take comfort in the knowledge that it was only a few "bad apples" in the Church and they were just "unfortunate" to be among the chosen prey?

What you defend is not the Church but the silence of power, the sin of willful ignorance and the sin of omission by those who turned a blind eye to the torture and horror at the hands of God's devoted servants.

What you defend is the murder of the soul.

AN ETERNITY OF PAIN

The first day of abuse becomes an eternity of pain and despair and night becomes a never-ending reel that assaults the senses. The smell and feel of sin forever burned into the brain, haunting the heart and soul.

Corporate America Speaking Out

By Jim Hightower

Congressional Republicans have spent the first two years of the Obama Administration as the rock-solid party of "no," "uh-uh," "no way," "forget about it," "nothing doing," "we're-against-it-and-we'll-kill-it." This is one reason their job approval rating is lower than that of BP executives.

But now, GOP leaders in the House say they are shifting from pure negativity. Instead, they intend to step forward with their own bold policy ideas. Terrific! What are some of those ideas? "Uh ... um ... well," say the leaders, "we don't know yet, but that's why we've launched an exciting new campaign that we call America Speaking Out. We'll go directly to the grassroots people, asking for their ideas, giving them a voice and letting them shape 'the new Republican agenda.'"

Again, terrific! Where are you starting your grassroots campaign? "Uh ... um," stumble the leaders, before mumbling: "Washington, DC."

Indeed, only six weeks after America Speaking Out was introduced as "an unprecedented initiative to listen to the American people," ASO did not rush out to hold open policy-crafting Town Hall forums in places like Fargo, Fresno and Freeport. Instead, they held a closed session in the snug confines of House minority leader John Boehner's Capitol Hill office.

And just who were the plain folks the GOP leader invited? His e-mailed solicitation went to 20 top lobbyists representing big corporations and such business front groups as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers. Apparently, this is the bunch Republican leaders consider to be their real "grassroots" constituency.

Well, sniffed an ASO spokesman, it's important to "receive input" from the nation's largest employers.

Bovine excrement! These corporate lobbyists give their input every day, usually with campaign donations attached. They're the problem, not the solution, and ASO is just more of the same – listening to the money interests at the top rather than the workaday majority of Americans who are barely scraping by.

Speaking of corporate campaign spending, the dam was dynamited back in



I don't know how to explain this horror in a way to make you understand.

I can tell you that abuse smells like Old Spice and Vaseline Hair Tonic wafting in the air with each blow.

I can tell you that abuse tastes like oatmeal on a dishrag in my mouth to keep me from screaming.

I can tell you that abuse burns like a tub of scalding water boiling away my sins and it stings like the slice of a knife to bleed out that evil blood inside of me.

I can tell you that the sound of abuse is an icy echo: I'm only doing this because I love you. If you were good, you wouldn't make me do this.

NO BONFIRE BIG ENOUGH

There is not a bonfire in Hell big enough for the souls of these people to burn in as far as I am concerned. And the statute of limitations should match the term of punishment and damnation – eternity.

The perpetrators stole innocence and purity, trust and love, and beautiful childhood souls like they were nothing more than trinkets of idol pleasure.

But the greatest theft came from the Cardinals and Bishops and authorities. They stole in silence just like a thief in the night. They were soundless accomplices to the murder of souls.

They stole truth from those who needed its protection most. They stole the right to be heard and to be believed. They stole love and hope and the sanctity of the church.

They stole God.

To defend any of this is to steal the last vestige of dignity and honor and justice from those who deserve it most.

There is only one sin and that is theft.

Thou shalt not steal.

– Anonymous

*Editor's Note: The reference in the second paragraph is to Bill Donohue, president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights and author of four books, including *Secular Sabotage: How Liberals are Destroying Religion and Culture in America*. His essay may be read in full at <http://www.cnn.com/2010/OPINION/03/19/donohue.catholic.church/index.html>*

Racism Built Into American Psyche

By Tim Wise

It was summer 2004 when most of us first became familiar with Barack Obama. Then an Illinois state senator, the U.S. Senate candidate delivered the keynote address at the Democratic National Convention in Boston: the first of his many now-famous orations on a national stage.

Therein he delivered several applause lines, but none were as big as when he proclaimed: "There's not a black America and a white America and Latino America and Asian America; there's the United States of America."

Though one might welcome such a statement were it offered in the future and aspirational tense – as a heartfelt plea for true equality – Obama proclaimed it in the descriptive and present tense.

A BAD TRADE

In so doing he traded intellectual honesty for easy and predictable ovation. After all, 2004 was the same year that research from MIT and the University of Chicago found that job applicants with "white" names were 50% more likely to be called back for an interview than those with "black" names, even when all their qualifications were indistinguishable.

And with black and brown unemployment standing at double the white rate, even as the new upstart from Chicago poured forth rhetoric professing national unity [and with the median white family possessing 8-10 times the net worth of the median black or Latino family], it should have been apparent that Obama was engaged in political science fiction rather than the description of sociological truth.

To be fair, of course, the rhetoric of post-racial liberalism wasn't something invented by the current president.

WHERE THE ROOTS WERE

Rather, it has its roots in the period immediately following the passage of civil rights laws in the 1960s.

It was Daniel Patrick Moynihan, for instance – an advisor to President Johnson before becoming a United States Senator – who first suggested that the nation would do well to engage in "benign neglect" when it came to the issue of race.

According to Moynihan, persistent inequities between whites and blacks could best be addressed by the passage of race-neutral, universal programs to help all in need; that, in addition to focusing on presumed cultural defects in the black community, from single parent families to crime to an inadequate attachment to education and the labor market.

When asked about the depression-level job situation in communities of color [in which even blacks with college degrees are nearly twice as likely as their white counterparts to be out of work, and college educated Latinos two-thirds more likely than similar whites to be unemployed], Obama has insisted that a "rising tide lifts all boats," and so the stimulus package and other measures to get the economy "moving again" are the best remedies for the suffering of folks of color.

THEY ARE FLATLY WRONG

But as I show in my new book, *Colorblind: The Rise of Post-Racial Politics and the Retreat from Racial Equity*, President Obama and other adherents to the post-racial liberal philosophy are flatly wrong.

Consider the following:

Black women with college degrees have higher rates of infant mortality for their newborns than white women who dropped out after eighth grade; and chil-

BEDBUG

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as Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma, who continues to trumpet his certitude that global warming is a hoax.

The coal and oil interests, as heavy on the lobbying as they are, will be very helpful to the czar, as they will continue to pressure Congress to believe the Gospel According to Inhofe – or else! A few more years of that, and the pattern will be firmly in place. King Coal and Queen Oil will reign supreme as wind farms and the manufacture of solar panels will be left [along with our IUOs] to the Chinese as we hurtle headlong into planetary götterdämmerung.

"Now, Harry," not a few of my readers will be thinking. "You're too extreme. Look how cold it was last winter. Yes, we know how hot it has been this summer, but you'll complain when the snow flies. And what does Al Gore know, anyway?"

I say preemptively to them that, given the Hades in which we in the eastern half of the United States had our being for much of this summer, I would fall to my knees in abject gratitude at the first sight of a snowflake, would weep copious tears of joy if I were able to make snow angels on my front lawn. Yes, today!

"Sleep tight," Mother and Dad said to me each night of my childhood years as the clock struck eight, "and don't let the bedbugs bite."

I don't know that I have ever suffered such a thing. What's more, I cannot recall ever having seen a bedbug, though I know people who have all but burned their houses down in desperate efforts to evict them.

Which is what we are trying very hard to do on a global scale right now. I fear we may succeed.

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



dren born to black women with college degrees have three times higher infant mortality rates for their children than similar white women.

Black women who received early and consistent prenatal care while pregnant have infant mortality rates for their children that are nearly double the rates for white women who received no prenatal care at all.

Black women and Latinas who come to the nation poor or lower-income actually see their health status decline over time, even as their income status typically improves. And foreign-born black women [including those from the African continent] come to the U.S. with health outcomes comparable to those of white women. But after a generation, their daughters' health status has declined to that of other African Americans.

So what is it about being black or brown in the United States that affects health, independent of economics or health care access?

CUMULATIVE IMPACT

The research says that unequal treatment at the hands of physicians is part of the problem; but even more so, we have to look at the cumulative impact of racism on black and brown bodies over time.

What the research increasingly finds is that racialized stresses, like dealing with discrimination, causes a "weathering" effect on people of color, which has repercussions for blood pressure and affects the proper functioning of the cardiovascular, metabolic and immune systems.

Over 100,000 people of color die each year because of excess mortality rates relative to the rates for whites, and it appears as though a substantial amount of that excess mortality can be laid at the feet of black and brown folks' experiences with racism. Universal, colorblind policy cannot possibly hope to remedy problems such as these.

The research in this area is clear: only by recognizing the extent to which we have been conditioned to internalize racial biases can we hope to check and interrupt discriminatory behaviors.

– Tim Wise is the author of five books on race, including *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*

Peacemaking Workshop Set

Oklahoma City's Peace Education Institute is hosting a three-day workshop "Creating a Culture of Peace: Nonviolence Training for Personal and Social Change" next month at Oklahoma City University.

The workshop, Sept. 17-19, has been offered in communities across the country. Within its first four years, Creating a Culture of Peace [CCP] traveled to 36 states and Palestine, training thousands of participants and developing 300 trainers. It has been adopted for use by national and regional faith groups and by Veterans for Peace.

Two forms of non-violence will be discussed. "Constructive Nonviolence" includes the ways of creating a just and peaceful culture through personal relationships, practices, and institutions. "Nonviolent Resistance" includes tactics such as boycotts, petitions, and rallies to address injustice and oppression. Both forms have historic underpinnings.

The training is highly participatory and does not depend on reading a book or lectures. It draws upon the wisdom, experience and talents of all the participants and upon the materials, skills and knowledge brought by the trainers. Mutual learning occurs through storytelling, meditation, small group sharing, brainstorming, role playing, music and movement exercises.

CCP workshops include discussion of nonviolent principles, social change and community-building analysis, and peace-making skills. Groups in the workshop will choose and plan concrete projects for social change.

The course, offered by the Peace Education Institute, will be guided by three trained and experienced leaders. Cost is \$200 [\$100 for students], although some scholarships are available. For registration and other information, visit www.PeaceEducationInstitute.org or call 405.204.6479.

A Tale Of Two Very Different Lives

Many years ago, Al Capone virtually owned Chicago. Capone wasn't famous for anything heroic. He was notorious for enmeshing the windy city in everything from bootlegged booze and prostitution to murder.

Capone had a lawyer nicknamed "Easy Eddie." He was Capone's lawyer for a good reason. Eddie was very good! In fact, Eddie's skill at legal maneuvering kept Big Al out of jail for a long time.

To show his appreciation, Capone paid him very well. Not only was the money big, but Eddie got special dividends, as well.

For instance, he and his family occupied a fenced-in mansion with live-in help and all of the conveniences of the day. The estate was so large that it filled an entire Chicago city block.

Eddie lived the high life of the Chicago mob and gave little consideration to the atrocity that went on around him.

THE SOFT SPOT IN HIS HEART

Eddie did have one soft spot, however. He had a son that he loved dearly. Eddie saw to it that his young son had clothes, cars, and a good education. Nothing was withheld. Price was no object.

And, despite his involvement with organized crime, Eddie even tried to teach him right from wrong. Eddie wanted his son to be a better man than he was.

Yet, with all his wealth and influence, there were two things he couldn't give his son; he couldn't pass on a good name or a good example.

One day, Easy Eddie reached a difficult decision. Easy Eddie wanted to rectify wrongs he had done. He decided he would go to the authorities and tell the truth about "Scarface" Capone, clean up his tarnished name, and offer his son some semblance of integrity.

To do this, he would have to testify against The Mob, and he knew that the cost would be great. So, he testified.

Within the year, Easy Eddie's life ended in a blaze of gunfire on a lonely Chicago Street. But in his eyes, he had given his son the greatest gift he had to offer, at the greatest price he could ever pay.

Police removed from his pockets a rosary, a crucifix, a religious medallion, and a poem clipped from a magazine.

The poem read:

The clock of life is wound but once, and no man has the power to tell just when the hands will stop, at late or early hour.

Now is the only time you own. Live, love, toil with a will. Place no faith in time. For the clock may soon be still.

THE REST OF THE STORY

World War II produced many heroes. One such man was Lt. Cmdr. Butch O'Hare. He was a fighter pilot assigned to the aircraft carrier Lexington in the South Pacific.

One day his entire squadron was sent on a mission. After he was airborne, he looked at his fuel gauge and realized that someone had forgotten to top off his fuel tank.

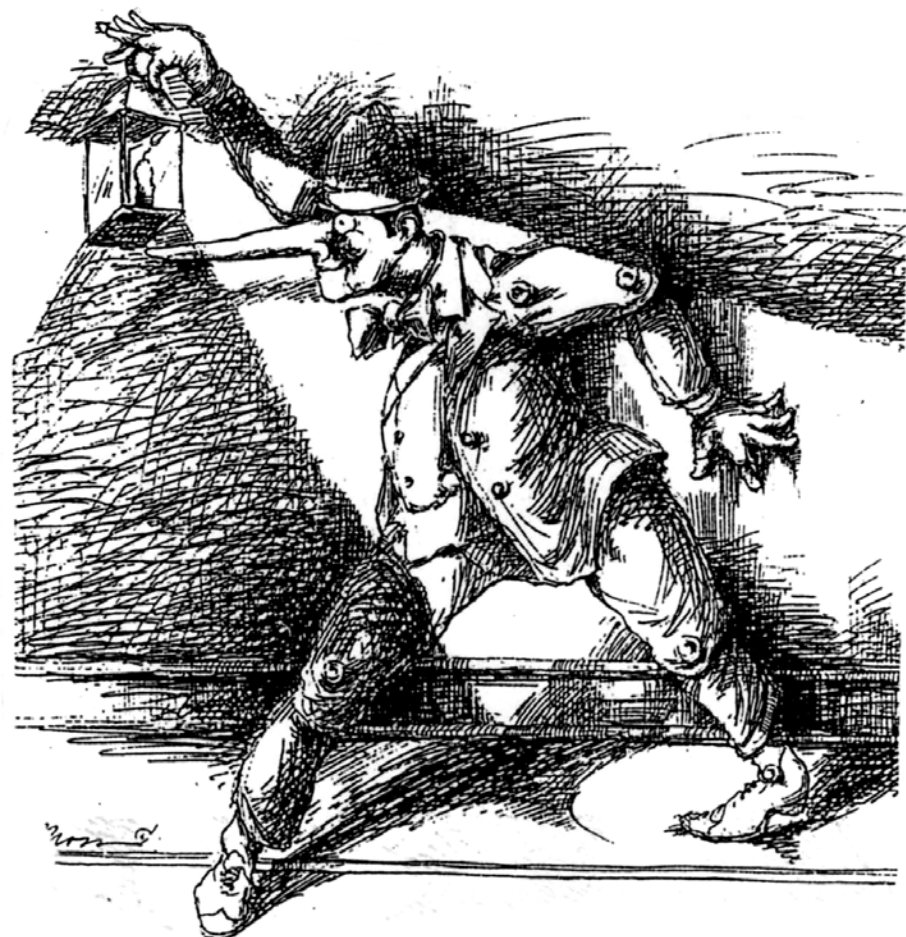
He would not have enough fuel to complete his mission and get back to his ship.

His flight leader told him to return to the carrier. Reluctantly, he dropped out of formation and headed back to the fleet.

As he was returning to the mother ship, he saw something that turned his blood cold; a squadron of Japanese aircraft was speeding its way toward the American fleet.

The American fighters were gone on a sortie, and the fleet was all but defenseless. He couldn't reach his squadron and bring them back in time to save the fleet. Nor could he warn the fleet of the approaching danger.

There was only one thing to do. He must somehow divert them from the fleet.



Laying aside all thoughts of personal safety, he dove into the formation of Japanese planes. Wing-mounted .50 caliber's blazed as he charged in, attacking one surprised enemy plane and then another.

LIMPED BACK TO CARRIER

Butch wove in and out of the now broken formation and fired at as many planes as possible until all his ammunition was finally spent.

Undaunted, he continued the assault. He dove at the planes, trying to clip a wing or tail in hopes of damaging as many enemy planes as possible, rendering them unfit to fly.

Finally, the exasperated Japanese squadron took off in another direction.

Deeply relieved, Butch O'Hare and his tattered fighter limped back to the carrier.

Upon arrival, he reported in and related the event surrounding his return. The film from the gun-camera mounted on his plane told the tale. It showed the extent of Butch's daring attempt to protect his fleet. He had, in fact, destroyed five enemy aircraft.

This took place on Feb. 20, 1942, and for that action Butch became the Navy's first Ace of World War II, and the first Naval Aviator to win the Congressional Medal of Honor.

A year later Butch was killed in aerial combat at the age of 29. His hometown would not allow the memory of this WW II hero be forgotten. O'Hare Airport in Chicago is named in tribute to the courage of this great man.

So, the next time you find yourself at O'Hare International, give some thought to visiting Butch's memorial displaying his statue and his Medal of Honor. It's located between Terminals 1 and 2.

So what do these two stories have to do with each other?

Butch O'Hare was "Easy Eddie's" son.

Editor's Note: Snopes.com reviewed the facts in this story and provided this clarification: "Easy Eddie" O'Hare "was not just a gangster's lawyer, he was also a partner in some of Al Capone's illegal activities." It was more likely O'Hare turned state's evidence because cooperation would keep him out of prison than that he wanted to teach his son the value of integrity or right a wrong. Snopes.com says O'Hare likely was slain on orders from Capone.

THIS GENTLEMAN IS PLAGUED BY HI-TECH

I thought about the 32 years I spent in business, all without a Blackberry that played music, took videos, pictures and communicated with Facebook and Twitter.

I signed up under duress for Twitter and Facebook, so my seven kids, their spouses, 13 grandkids and two great grandkids could communicate with me in the modern way. I figured I could handle something as simple as Twitter with only 140 characters of space.

That was before one of my grandkids hooked me up for Tweeter, Tweetree, Twhirl, Twitterfon, Tweetie, Twiterrific Tweetdeck, Twitpix and something that sends every message to my cell phone and every other program within the texting world.

My phone was beeping every three minutes with the details of everything except the bowel movements of the entire next generation. I am not ready to live like this. I keep my cell phone in the garage in my golf bag.

The kids bought me a GPS for my last birthday because they say I get lost every now and then going over to the grocery store or library. I keep that in a box under my tool bench with the Bluetooth [it's red] phone I am supposed to use when I drive.

I wore it once and was standing in line at Barnes and Noble talking to my wife as everyone in the nearest 50 yards was glaring at me. Seems I have to take my hearing aid out to use it and I got a little loud.

I mean the GPS looked pretty smart on my dashboard, but the lady inside was the most annoying, rudest person I had run into in a long time.

Every 10 minutes, she would sarcastically say, "Re-calc-ul-ating." You would think

that she could be nicer. It was like she could barely tolerate me. She would let go with a deep sigh and then tell me to make a U-turn at the next light. Then when I would make a right turn instead, it was not good.

When I get really lost now, I call my wife and tell her the name of the cross streets and while she is starting to develop the same tone as Gypsy, the GPS lady, at least she loves me.

To be perfectly frank, I am still trying to learn how to use the cordless phones in our house. We have had them for four years, but I still haven't figured out how I can lose three phones all at once and have run around digging under chair cushions and checking bathrooms and the dirty laundry baskets when the phone rings.

The world is just getting too complex for me. They even mess me up every time I go to the grocery store. You would think they could settle on something themselves but this sudden "Paper or Plastic?" every time I check out just knocks me for a loop.

I bought some of those cloth reusable bags to avoid looking confused but I never remember to take them in with me.

Now I toss it back to them. When they ask me, "Paper or Plastic?" I just say, "Doesn't matter to me. I am bi-sacksual."

Then it's their turn to stare at me with a blank look.

I was recently asked if I Tweet.

I answered, "No, but I do toot a lot."

— The author will remain anonymous to prevent being kicked out of his family

TEACHER

From Page One

ing to compromise my students' education because high-ranking officials are making inappropriate cuts.

By February my entire class is out of glue sticks. Since I have already spent the \$74 allotted to me for warehouse supplies, if I don't buy more, we will not have glue for the remainder of the year.

The projects I dream up are limited by the incomprehensible lack of financial support. I am expected to inspire my students to become lifelong learners, and yet we don't have the resources needed to nurture their natural sense of wonder if I don't purchase them myself.

My meager earning is now pathetic after the expenses that come with teaching effectively.

I am a teacher.

The government has scolded me for failing to prepare my students to compete in this technologically driven world. Students in Japan are much more equipped to think progressively

with regards to technology.

Each day, I turn on the two computers afforded me and pray for a miracle. I apply for grants to gain new access to technology and compete with thousands of other teachers who are hoping for the same opportunity. I battle for the right to use the computer lab and feel fortunate if my students get to see it once a week.

Why don't they know how to use technology? The system's budget refuses to include adequate technology in classrooms; instead, we are continually told that dry erase boards and overhead projectors are more than enough.

I am a teacher.

I went to school at one of the best universities in the country and completed undergraduate and graduate programs in education. I am a master of my craft. I know what effective teaching entails, and I know how to manage the curriculum and needs of the diverse learners in my full inclu-

sion classroom.

I graduated at the top of my class and entered my first year of teaching confident and equipped to teach effectively. Sadly, I am now being micro-managed, with my instruction dictated to me.

I am expected to mold "out-of-the-box" thinkers while I am forced to stay within the lines of the instructional plans mandated by policy-makers.

I am told what I am to teach and when, regardless of the makeup of my students, by decision-makers far away from my classroom or even my school.

The message comes in loud and clear that a group of people in business suits can more effectively determine how to provide exemplary instruction than I can.

My expertise is waved away, disregarded, and overlooked. I am treated like a day-laborer, required to follow the steps mapped out for me, rather than blaze a trail that I deem more

appropriate and effective for my students – students these decision-makers have never met.

I am overworked, underpaid, and unappreciated by most. I spend my weekends, my vacations, and my summers preparing for school, and I constantly work to improve my teaching to meet the needs of my students. I am being required to do more and more, and I'm being compensated less and less.

I am a teacher, not for the pay or the hardships, the disregard or the disrespect; I am a teacher because I am given the chance to change lives for the good, to educate and elevate the minds and hearts of my students, and to show them that success comes in all shapes and sizes, both in the classroom and in the community.

I am a teacher, but as I watch many of my incredible, devoted coworkers being forced out of the profession as a matter of survival, I wonder: How long will I be able to remain a teacher?

LETTERS

From Page 4

It seems reasonable to expect these legislators to have some basic understanding of what they're proposing – to at least know what they hate. But this was a question posed by some of our fundamentalist Fox 'news' watching state legislators, so obviously I digress.

Carol Ruth
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

Re: Tulsa World editorial [7.31.10] opposing SQ 744, the education funding initiative:

Where was the public-spirited anguish over "dangerous constitutional experiments" when SQ 640 was enacted?

Where was the concern for the funding of state services when taxes were cut after a budget shortfall was announced? Where was the concern over "outsiders" hijacking our state government when Grover Norquist and the Club for Growth bankrolled SQ 640 and continued to bankroll those who want to decrease state government functions to the point they can "drown them in the bathtub?"

Where was the concern when the Republican-controlled Legislature spent more time on legalizing the carrying of concealed weapons and seven [count them, seven] bills to limit a woman's access to therapeutic abortion than they spent on funding state

government?

I smell the distinct odor of hypocrisy, greed and lies of the Chamber of Commerce, corporations, and the far right fringe.

Republicans remind us nauseatingly often that we are "A Republic, Not a Democracy." But they made raising taxes all but impossible by requiring a 75% super-majority of both houses or a majority vote of the people. If the elected representatives can't raise taxes, where's the Republic? If it requires a majority vote of the people, isn't that Democracy? I think I smell the same odor of lies, greed and hypocrisy.

If matching the regional average for funding education is a desirable goal, and you say it is, why not put it in writing, with teeth in it, so that it becomes more than just words. Put your money where your mouth is, or shut up.

Tom Ikard
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

While I love the Green Party platform, I support two positions that my friends in the Green Party reject:

1. Because the U.S. has a "winner-take-all" electoral system – not a parliamentary system where proportional representation is a possibility – independent party candidates typically serve as "spoilers," taking votes from

major party candidates and tilting the outcome.

2. Any Green candidate could register as a Democrat and run in the Democratic primary ... self-identifying as a "Green Democrat." No reason a truly liberal Green Democrat could not run as such. In the primary, they would face only Democratic voters, where they might actually win, and then truly challenge the Republican in the November elections.

U.S. Rep. Dennis Kucinich is a principled example.

Right-Wing Global Corporate Fascists did not start a RWGCF Party. They started Think Tanks, like the Heritage Foundation, that issue position papers. Their candidates run as Republicans.

If The Greens were a Think Tank instead of a party, they would have the support of a lot of Democrats, like me, who love the politics, but fear Green influence in general elections for tilting outcomes to Republicans.

Visionary Ralph Nader's run for President in 2000 drew 89,000 votes in Florida. Had only 40,000 of those votes gone to Al Gore, Gore would have become President, and it would be a different world ... perhaps with the 9/11 terrorist attack prevented, and no wars in Iraq or Afghanistan. Who knows?

"Voting Your Conscience" is counter-productive if it helps elect can-

didates totally opposed to your politics.

Elections are not opinion surveys, and those who voted Green in 2000 were as shut out as Democrats who lost because a Green got 5% of the vote.

Nathaniel Batchelder
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Glad to see your Mercury Alley story making Page One [8.10.10]. I fully agree with all you wrote. I would like to have seen a mention about how much dentistry contributes to mercury water pollution. Dentistry is a major contributor to mercury water pollution. When a dentist grinds out those mercury fillings, the slurry waste goes into the suction line and eventually into the sewer system and eventually through the wastewater treatment facility and then is discharged into the wastewater and it then goes downstream to the next community ... which might then use it as drinking water.

There are hundreds of thousands of mercury fillings cut out daily. Imagine the quantity of mercury going into the wastewater. I refer you to the web site www.toxicteeth.org for detailed information as to how dentistry contributes to the water contamination.

Jim Maxey
Tulsa



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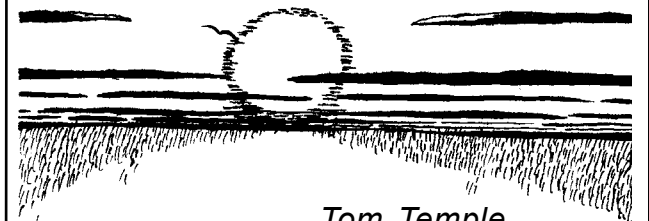
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