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## Misusing The Referendum The Ballot Bulge

By Arnold Hamilton

Forget TV attack ads, Tweets, robo calls, push polls and blogosphere smears.

The campaign weapon of the year in Oklahoma may well turn out to be the Nov. 2 ballot itself.

In a political power grab breathtaking in its venality, Republican legislative majorities perverted the people's constitutional voice – initiative/referendum – by cynically loading the ballot with high-octane wedge issues aimed at energizing their most radical voting blocs.

Then, for good measure, they sprinkled in schemes aimed at expanding their legislative power and securing a corporatist grip on state government for generations – effectively spraying Roundup on Oklahoma's populist roots.

In less than six weeks, voters not only will be confronted with a laundry list of races for state office – from governor to state representative, district attorney to judgeships – but also 11 state questions that would change the Oklahoma Constitution.

Once upon a time, we elected lawmakers as our agents to go to the Capitol, study the issues in-depth [because we didn't have time to] and make decisions.

Once upon a time, legislators themselves put only the most serious, contentious public policy questions to a statewide vote of the people.

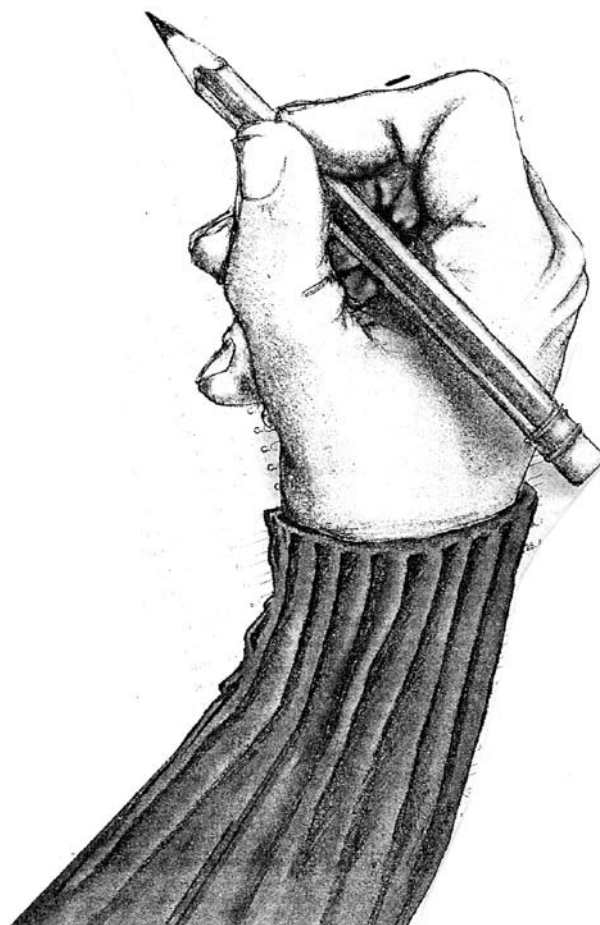
Once upon a time, the initiative-referendum system was almost exclusively the purview of rank-and-file citizens – a court of last resort if regular folk couldn't get the Legislature to act.

This year, all but one of the 11 state

questions [SQ 744, the education funding measure] were ordered to the ballot by a GOP legislative majority that couldn't bend a Democratic governor to its will.

Truth be told, many Republicans didn't want Gov. Brad Henry to sign off on all the proposals – they preferred taking them to a statewide vote.

Why? "It all boils down to politics – that's what these questions are all



about," says state Rep. Richard Morrisette, D-OKC. "We're taking politics and sticking it into our fundamental law called the Constitution.

"And, of course, once you get something in the Constitution, you can't get it out. It's there."

Five of the ballot measures are clearly designed to fire up constituencies likely to vote Republican in November: anti-government zealots, xenophobes, Birthers, Tenters, Birchers, theocrats, tea partiers and Beckers, just to name a few.

Nationally, it's Democrats most worried about voter turnout in the mid-terms – polls suggest many who helped propel Barack Obama to victory and bolster Democratic congressional majorities aren't as motivated to cast ballots this year.

In Oklahoma, it's Republicans who fear apathy: Off-year elections almost always are terrible for the president's

party, the state ranks in the Top 10 nationally in percentage of those who describe themselves as politically conservative and most polls suggest a GOP sweep in statewide races is possible.

What better way to ensure the various elements of the base are energized to vote than to attempt to make the 2010 election about "them"?

- SQ 746 would mandate that voters present a document "proving their identity." What's the big deal – you have to show your driver's license to write a check, right? It could be an insurmountable hurdle, however, for some Oklahomans – the elderly, the disabled, the poor, any without the means to easily get such an ID.

This is about fear, a fear that "they" [can you spell A-c-o-r-n?] are attempting to steal our elections. Of course, there's no evidence of such a problem in Oklahoma, where our voting system consistently rates among the nation's best. But you can't be too careful, can you?

Some argue that even one illegally cast vote is too many. True enough. But there are criminal laws already in place to address such mischief. A more compelling argument: one disenfranchised voter is too many.

- SQ 747 would extend term limits to all statewide elected officers, not just governor. We already have term limits, of course – they're called elections. If we don't like what our elected officials do, we give them an earful and demand they get it right – or send someone else in their place.

This is about fear, a fear that special interests in concert with career politicians are routinely corrupting our system. Of course, we've jettisoned our fair share of corrupt elected officials – sent more than a few to prison, too. But you can't be too careful, can you?

- SQ 751 would establish English as the state's official language. Three guesses who this is aimed at – and the first two don't count.

This is about fear, a fear that "they" are taking over our country. Of course, the cost to taxpayers of printing a few  
See BALLOT Page 19

# Observations

## Quit Whining

Oklahoma Democrats are so gloomy about November as though it was already over. One poll [GOP to the hilt] said the November election will be the death knell for the Democratic Party in Oklahoma.

Frankly, we are sickened by the loser mentality that has captured rank and file Democrats. Has Oklahoma ever had a better slate of candidates – from Jari Askins, Kenneth Corn, Jim Priest, Steve Burrage, and Susan Paddock statewide to candidates for the Legislature?

All are conservative or moderate Democrats as compared to their opponents – some of the most reckless, far right folk ever to file for office.

GOP gubernatorial hopeful Mary Fallin has already declared she wants to rid the state of the income tax – nearly 40% of the funding for state government! She hasn't mentioned how to replace it.

Democrats need to quit whining and go to work. Spread the word about the integrity and grit of every single Democrat for major office. Compare that to their opponents and it's a win-win for Democrats. Check the voting record of legislative Republicans – sickening anti-education, anti-mental health midgets.

Volunteer. Ring doorbells. Make phone calls. Tell your friends and neighbors what happens if Chamber of Commerce robot Mary Fallin is elected. At the least, as Harry Truman said, go down swinging! And he won!

## Please Help

Since mental illness affects one in four individuals in their lifetime you would think it was a priority for the Oklahoma Legislature. Think again.

For four years mental health has been under-funded by the GOP Legislature, bringing unprecedented suffering to thousands of Oklahomans.

Some blame the pervasive stigma that prevents people from seeking help or speaking out. Those stricken

by mental illness wait an average of 10 years before crying out for help. Will you speak for them?

It is the leading cause of disability in the U.S. for ages 15-44. Adults with mental illness die 25 years younger than their peers.

Sad to say, 51% of unemployed adults have mental health problems, yet the overwhelming majority can function in the workplace.

We know that people silently suffer alone. We know that hope and recovery is possible with medical treatment and family and peer support.

If you would like to help contact NAMI Oklahoma, 405.230.1900, 1920 N. Drexel Blvd., Oklahoma City, OK 73107.

## Pass This Bill

State Rep. Anastasia Pittman is on the right track, calling for tougher school policies against bullying to protect kids like Ty Fields, a young man who committed suicide after being bullied. He was 11.

According to Pittman, there have been a number of bullying incidents in her local school district. She believes that it is a very serious problem.

Pittman plans to develop and re-introduce HB 1636 in the upcoming session. The bill would allow administrators to document the first, second and third bullying offenses and require teachers to do a follow-up in 30 days in addition to making that information available for inclusion in transfers.

Pittman reports that she received several calls at the start of the school year about children who do not want to return because of bullying problems.

Currently, the Oklahoma City school district's bullying policy is for each school to create their own. The individual school policies often lack teeth and there are problems associated with transfers from one school to another.



Pittman expressed concern that too often teachers and principals are not adequately notified of the type of student they are receiving. Some teachers and school administrators may be unaware of a bully with prior incidents being transferred to their school.

Pittman said she knew of a girl who had been transferred to a high school in her district and then harassed another young girl at the school, sending as many as 43 threatening text messages in one day. The student had reported the problem to school staff, but nothing was done.

School districts statewide reported 259 cases of bullying of students that resulted in physical injury and 10,537 incidents without injury. Districts also reported 1,431 cases of bullying teachers or staff.

Even one case of bullying is one too many.

## Hypocrites

The Department of Health and Human Services announced the "first round of applicants accepted into the Early Retiree Reinsurance Program," a \$5 billion program established by the new health care law to help employers and states "maintain coverage for early retirees age 55 and older who are not yet eligible for Medicare."

Guess who was among the first in line? The Koch brothers, who fought passage of the law.

According to HHS, nearly 2,000 employers, representing large and small businesses, state and local governments, educational institutions, non-profits, and unions applied and have been accepted into the program and "will begin to receive reimbursements for employee claims this fall."

Ironically, one of those employers is the oil, chemicals, and manufacturing conglomerate Koch Industries, which spent millions of dollars opposing reform.

The contradictory practice of opposing the health care law while applying for its funding has been a common practice among states.

For instance, at least 19 of the 22 states that are suing the federal government over health care reform have applied for the law's rate review grants and some – like Utah – are actively working with HHS to ensure that the law meets their needs.

Still, Koch's efforts to cash in from a law they're so vehemently opposing

may be the most stark example thus far.

Only the word hypocrite fits.

## Taxes Wasted

After Defense Secretary Robert Gates denounced an incredibly high military budget, wasting billions of dollars on duplicate services, reporters finally started nosing around other agencies.

Those investigations revealed the fact that 1,271 government organizations and 1,931 private companies work on programs related to counter-terrorism, homeland security and intelligence in more than 10,000 locations across the U.S.

An estimated 854,000 individuals hold Top Secret clearance! No wonder our government leaks like a sieve. Fifty-one federal organizations and military commands operating in 15 U.S. cities, track the flow of money to and from terrorist networks.

More than 50,000 intelligence reports are made each year, which means any one of those 854,000 persons cleared for top secret could leak any or all of the reports. Investigative reporters learned that most of the reports are routinely ignored.

So much money is spent in intelligence, it's nearly impossible to know how much is spent or whether America is safer.

A 2008 study from the Office of Director of National Intelligence found that contractors make up 29% of the workforce of intelligence agencies but cost the equivalent of 49% of their personnel budgets. Federal employees cost 25% less.

Little wonder that the Tea Party types keep multiplying and people are generally disgusted with Washington, from the Executive Branch to Congress. November brings it all to a head – we just hope those elected get the message.

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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

President Obama appointed ex-Oklahoman Elizabeth Warren to unofficially lead the new U.S. Consumer Protection Agency. She alone blew the whistle on Wall Street corruption. Obama wanted to avoid a confirmation battle led by fat cat pals of Wall Street corruption – mainly Sen. Chris Dodd, D-CT.

**Dart:** To Dumb Okies who, by 77%, tell the Sooner Poll they are for term limits for secondary officeholders [SQ 747]. At least 15.5% are intelligent enough to admit they don't know enough about it.

Where were all those cry babies wailing about SQ 744 when the Republican Legislature promised teachers the regional average salary but instead cut taxes \$771 million – most of it to the rich and super rich?

**Laurel:** To the Daily Disappointment for finally acknowledging that ObamaCare is a good law. They were the first Oklahoma company to sign up for the early retirement insurance program created by the new law!

The Daily Disappointment has been talking to God. In an editorial commenting on SQ 744 to bring per pupil spending to the regional average, the paper editorialized that "approving it would be a sin."

**Dart:** To physicians too hastily prescribing sedatives, tranquilizers and opioids. More than eight million hospital admissions last year resulted from overdoses of these drugs – a 65% increase over 1999. [West Virginia University national study]

A drive to create a tax credit to recruit and maintain aerospace engineers failed in the Legislature – the first time they've turned a collective back on a tax credit. They now number \$5.6 billion on the tax rolls.

**Laurel:** The OEA and AFT, in collaboration with the Council of Chiefs of State Schools Officers, agreed that new bargaining contracts should include high quality professional staff development programs.

Oklahoma's junior U.S. senator, Tom Coburn, said failure of the Republican Party to define its goals and actions prevents him from predicting the November outcome. Privatizing Social Security is his major goal.

**Dart:** To those even considering closing the Southern Oklahoma Resource Center in Pauls Valley. It serves 135 developmental disabilities patients. It is their last refuge. More than 5,700 are on the disability waiting list thanks to mindless GOP tax cuts.

**SQ 751** on the November ballot would declare English the official Oklahoma language but would allow Oklahoma's Indian tribes to continue using their languages. Does that include speaking Okie?

**Laurel:** To new House Speaker Kris Steele for making it clear that the looming redistricting of Oklahoma will serve people, not politics. Now if he could just convince the state Senate.

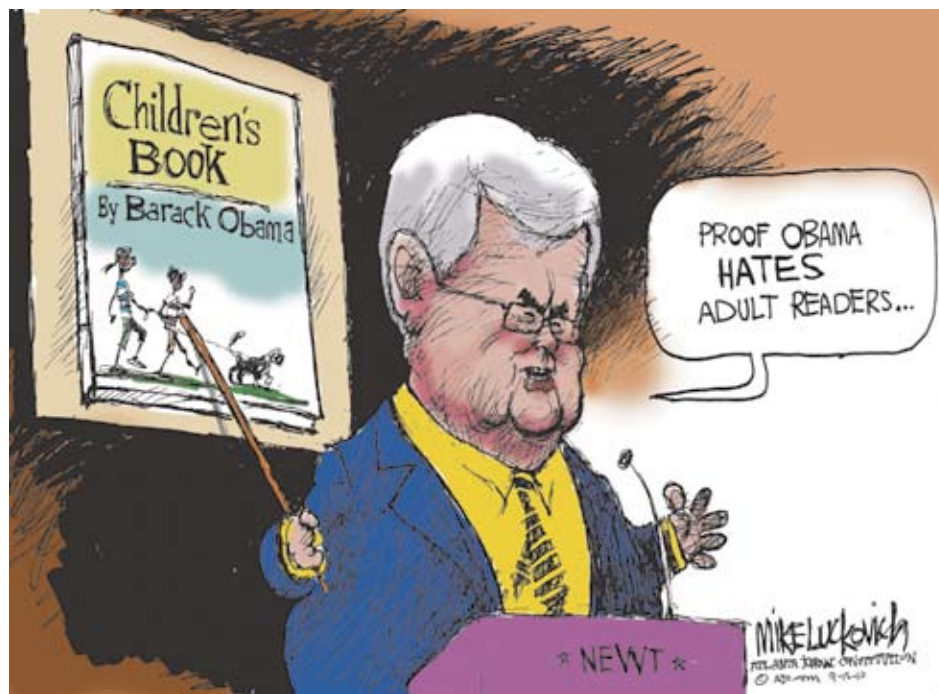
More than 60,000 illegal immigrants call Oklahoma home, 1.7% of the population, up a third over the past 10 years. [Pew Hispanic Center report]

**Dart:** To the Republican Legislature for reducing public school funding \$200 million. Thankfully, the big bad feds came thru with funding to save 1,900 teaching jobs.

Hearing loss among teens has grown from 14.9% to 19.5% – loud music and personal stereo devices are the culprits. [Journal of the American Medical Association]

**Laurel:** To private and public agencies for spending more than \$28 million on services to the Oklahoma City homeless – 1,128 people, including 79 families with 41 children.

Wonder why the State Chamber calls most of the shots in the Republican Legislature? Money. The new president, Fred Morgan, said he deploys 10 lobbyists in the next legislative session.



**Dart:** To Congress, granting itself a \$3,000 cost of living hike but Social Security recipients won't get a dime. The Kaiser Family Foundation predicts no Social Security COLAs over the next three years.

Let's hope we've seen the last of Kevin Calvey, thumped in the GOP race for Congress. Not only did he author a tax cut while the mentally ill were left untreated for lack of state funding, he is a raging homophobe.

**Laurel:** To Rep. Joe Dorman, D-Rush Springs, for his suggested legislation requiring backup power generators in all assisted living centers. Only a third have them.

The Oklahoma Education Association had no crystal ball telling them the economy would collapse when they were circulating the SQ 744 petition to bring per pupil spending to the regional average.

**Dart:** To the Obama Administration for not using a rifle instead of a shotgun in addressing public education problems. They should begin by concentrating on the dismal fact that only 47% of black males complete high school. Drop the Race to the Top PR.

**Quote of the Month:** "Poor Barack Obama, who steps up to the plate and gets handed a foam bat!" – Columnist Barbara Ehrenreich

**Laurel:** To ex-Tulsa District Judge Clancy Smith, newest member of the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals.

It is not President Barack Obama's fault that the economic collapse cost America \$17 trillion, a quarter of our wealth. He is desperately trying to deal with the horrible mess George W. Bush left in his wake.

**Dart:** To those Tea Party folk who were all for \$1 trillion to bail out banks but are having a heart attack over \$26 billion to save 300,000 teaching jobs, 150,000 police jobs. Hang tough, Mr. President – you're right, they're wrong.

Oklahoma's overall health statistics ranks 49th – leading in cardiovascular disease, the bottom five for primary care physicians and 50th in physical activity. [Oklahoma Health Department]

**Laurel:** To Service Employees International Union [SEIU], bucking the collapse of unions worldwide, doubling its size to 1.2 million.

The Oklahoma State Department of Education will appeal a judge's ruling that it must provide an online charter school minus a sponsor. District Judge Patricia Parrish apparently can't read the plain language of the law.

**Dart:** To the enormous waste and theft of more than \$5 billion in Iraq as private contractors such as Blackwater and its spawn continue to lap up multiplied millions of dollars. Why is the U.S. Justice Department not prosecuting the thieves?

PBS would go cable under a plan proposed by Jack Shakely, president emeritus of California Community Foundation. In an LA Times article, he said endless pleas for money would be unnecessary if states didn't operate independent PBS stations that are gradually going bankrupt.

**Laurel:** To 45% of Oklahomans who don't want to change the 14th Amendment to exclude children born in the USA of illegal aliens. [Oklahoma Poll] PR.

**Egad!** Walid In Talal, Ground Zero mosque promoter, owns 7% of News Corp., owner of Fox News – principal basher of the proposed mosque.

**Dart:** To critics of Attorney General Drew Edmondson's wording on SQ 756, opting out of federal health care. Authors tried to pull a fast one but Edmondson caught them and used proper wording.

The Department of Corrections budget is \$462 million, down from \$503 million. It will take a supplemental appropriation of \$40 million just to break even while carrying a heavier load.

**Laurel:** To the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce, named the nation's best local chamber for the third time in five years. Now if we could get them to take over that soap opera at City Hall.

Sarah Palin drew nearly 1,000 wing-nuts to Tulsa, earning her hefty speaking fee from the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs. She completed several sentences.

**THE OKLAHOMA Observer**

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# Letters

Editor, The Observer:

I'm sure I am deep in the line of defensive men to point out that the use of the first helmet was not 100 years behind the use of the first testicular guard [Observerscope, Sept. 10, 2010]. Instead, it took men only slightly more than two decades, as opposed to 100 years, to determine that they might want to protect both their heads [first helmet designed in 1896, not 1974].

Mike Williams  
Grand Lake

Editor, The Observer:

When we get some control over the ownerships of some of our media, we may get a bit more balanced reporting. Why would an Aussie care about balanced reporting of events in America? Rupert Murdoch just loves American money not our Constitution or a balanced reporting of news in the U.S.

Mergers of all corporations, not just the media companies, into larger and larger and fewer and fewer entities have resulted in outsiders buying up and consolidating too much in America. Once upon a time eons ago, mergers had to adhere to United States laws – laws which have been totally thrown out of present day governing by our government. Guess under which political party those laws were deleted?

Isn't it time we reinstated some controls over corporations before they buy up our entire political process?

Darla Reynolds-Sparks  
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

Passing SQ 744 would increase funding for public education by an estimated \$1.7 billion over a three-year phase-in period. If we don't bring in more state revenues through substantial tax increases, SQ 744 will force deep spending cuts to other critical areas of state government, including public safety, social services, health care and higher education.

Are we sure education is always more important than funding for senior meals, Medicaid [that brings in federal match dollars], jobs for people with disabilities or recovery after a natural disaster? Oklahoma must also replace over \$1 billion in its regular budget by somehow cutting services because revenues are down. Oklahoma legislators are supposed to review and make hard choices on the state budget – not abdicate this responsibility to a binding vote of the people.

Passing SQ 744 would take these decisions out of the hands of the

people who are represented by their legislators, thus forcing priority funding for a single area of state service without even knowing what budgetary challenges lie ahead. Sorry but I am opposed – not to education – but to SQ 744.

Jackie Gaston  
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

Henry – that would be Sleepy Brad – “honored for education accomplishments?”

Did that include being the only governor in memory to reappoint the previous, Republican governor's ODOT leadership – a bunch of spendthrift hacks taking their orders directly from the highway contractors? Did it include the phenomenal feat of naming Gary Ridley – a “Professional Engineer” who would not meet today's test to call himself that because the man doesn't have a college degree of any kind – not just ODOT director, but “Transportation Czar” – serving simultaneously as Secretary of Transportation, ODOT director and director of the Turnpike Authority?

This is a man who has taken the “New I-40 Crosstown” project from its claimed cost of \$236 million to something reportedly now in excess of \$855 million – still not finished, still not fully funded. And that number does not include the expense of replacing the magnificent eight-block-long, 12-track-wide OKC Union Station rail yard, capital city confluence of many of the state's rail lines, which could have been the basis for the best and least-expensive statewide rail transit network in the West.

Union Station yard's actual monetary value was never considered prior to its destruction – although ACOG is now spending something in excess of \$400,000 to “study developing a new rail hub.” [Union Station yard will have to be replaced only because that's where the rocket scientists at ODOT decided to move the “New Crosstown,” with the blessing of our hyper-intelligent, hyper-educated, but sadly invisible governor.

That's right, kiddies – go to school and study hard. Just don't expect to work in a key position for the state of Oklahoma when you graduate – because those spots are “all taken.”

What a nasty, ugly joke the Henry Administration has been – just when it seemed that nobody could impoverish or debauch the state more than Frank Keating and Tom Cole and their slimy bunch of thugs and thieves did.

Staggering. Disgusting. Dishearten-



ing. God had better help Oklahoma. It's very plain no help of any kind will be available from either the Democratic or Republican parties!

Tom Elmore  
Moore

Editor, The Observer:

I found it ironic that a religious body that refers to itself with the dove metaphor, Dove World Outreach Center in Florida, was gleeful about plans to desecrate the Muslim Holy Book, but at the same time desecrating the image of the dove, a profound religious symbol of peace and goodwill! Denigrating the Muslim community is just the opposite of the dove's symbolism.

Perhaps their symbol should be the hawk.

Jeff Hamilton  
Midwest City

Editor, The Observer:

I had to laugh at Glenn Beck supporters Ron Tanner and Bob Morrison who claimed there were 500,000 people who attended Beck's rally at the Lincoln Memorial. They obviously were parroting Beck's own estimates made to bloat his delusions of grandeur and to magnify the significance of his rally.

On the contrary, scientists who are trained in the profession of doing such estimates say there were only 80,000 to 87,000. Beck and his followers are deliberately distorting the figure in order to magnify the number and political strength of his followers. As with most things Beck, this is a joke.

In 1994 there really was a huge rally at the mall with a crowd of 1.2 million people. And this is not an estimate. Every person who entered the mall was given a special tag and counted so there could be no political manipulation of the numbers. I know because I was one of those people.

What could bring out a crowd that huge, estimated to be the largest on the mall since Martin Luther King's historic speech? It was a pro-choice rally supporting a woman's right to a safe, legal abortion. And it was organized strictly by word of mouth and e-mail. The organizers did not have the luxury of pre-event publicity supported by a national TV show that touted this rally day after day for months. Nor did they have the benefit of mas-

sive post-event publicity in every media outlet in the United States. In fact, the pro-choice rally barely received any publicity at all. As far as the mainstream media was concerned, the event didn't happen.

The truth is Beck's rally did not show the strength of his Tea Party followers. Rather it showed their impotence. With all of the hype, buildup, PR blitz by Fox, right-wing religious shows, extremist talk radio, Beck beating the drum for months on his own show, and the appearance of HRH Sarah Palin, all they could muster was 80,000 to 87,000 followers. That's only 7% of the supporters that the pro-choice organizers were able to amass with little or no publicity. Instead of strutting and claiming they have political power, Beck's followers had better understand that there are an estimated 40 million women in this country who have gone through the abortion experience, and they are a sleeping giant politically compared to Beck's motley crew of followers.

Barbara Santee  
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Recently I heard an excellent NPR summary of the arguments for and against the construction of the proposed Islamic Community Center near Ground Zero. They correctly pointed out that the area where the center is being built houses an adult video store, an off-track betting parlor, and other businesses that fall short of being sacred. Also mentioned was a mosque just two blocks away that is frequently filled to overflowing, and the community center would have a room for prayer for those who are now praying on the sidewalk. NPR also reported that some family members of those killed in the 9/11 attack believe the mosque is an insult to the memory of those who worked in the Trade Towers.

Not mentioned are the 7 million innocent Americans who have been and are being vilified because of their religion. A few have stood up and correctly reminded people that, in this country, we embrace freedom of religion but no one has publicly recognized the distrust and subsequent suffering the actions of 17 Saudi citizen has caused.

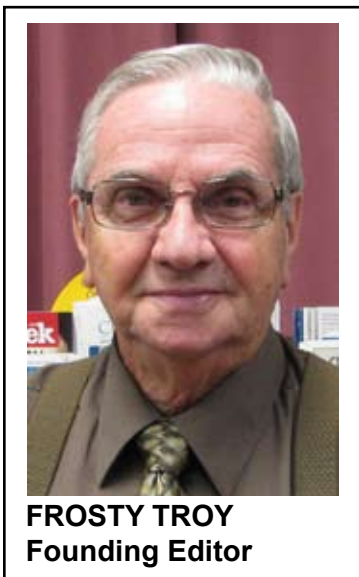
Missing from the dialogue is a  
See LETTERS Page 18

## 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.**

## School 'Reform'



FROSTY TROY  
Founding Editor

More than 56 million public school kids answered the back to school bell at 133,000 schools, and once again the buzzword is "reform."

A new Gallup Poll reveals that Americans are losing faith in President Obama's vaunted education reforms. Only 34% give the President an A or B. A majority [54%] are against his school closing policy – they believe a failing school should be strengthened. More than 60% favor tying a teacher's salary to his or her students' academic achievement.

The U.S. Department of Education said \$4 billion in Race to the Top grants are available to states whose proposals demonstrate, according to Education Secretary Arne Duncan, "a bold commitment to education reform" and "creativity and innovation that is breathtaking."

Give me a break. The chronic call for "reform" of public education is one of the most egregious problems public education faces. Every form of gimmick has been used since the bogus 1983 A Nation At Risk – written in the White House basement by non-educators, subsequently discredited by the facts.

What, pray tell, is the problem of education? It can't be the need for more teachers because the number of teachers increased by an amazing 61% between 1970 and 2008.

Can it be crowded classrooms? During the same time period the number of students increased a mere 8%. [The student /teacher ratio was 27 in 1955. Today it is one teacher per 15 students.]

It must be because teachers are underpaid. That is true in Oklahoma, which ranks 49th. But nationally the average teacher salary is \$53,230. As one columnist noted, if you have a married couple teaching, their combined salary places them in the Top 20 household earners in America. Last year that was \$100,250.

Maybe the kids aren't getting an early start. No, the share of 3- and 4-year-olds in preschool has rocketed from 11% in 1965 to 52% in 2008.

I was in another state, addressing a group of public school administrators when I asked – why all the criticism, what was the biggest problem the schools face?

One spoke up without hesitation: "We're living during the sorriest parenting in my 26 years in public education."

Of course schools could use more funding, especially during these dire economic times. I have talked to many teachers, administrators and even a few critics. They all agree that the thing most lacking in school today is student motivation.

Where is today's student motivation; curiosity and ambition; parental expectations; making it into a good college; inspiring or intimidating teachers; peer pressure?

The unstated assumption of much school "reform" is that if students aren't motivated, it's mainly the fault of schools and teachers. The reality is that, as high schools have become more inclusive [in 1950, 40% of 17-year-olds had dropped out], adolescent culture has strengthened while authority of teachers and schools has eroded.

Add to the problem that 25% of students 6-17 deal with hunger issues. In a number of national polls the student boredom issue takes center stage – kids who are whizzes at action-packed video games find the traditional classroom model boring.

## Father Foken, RIP

I saw in the Sooner Catholic where Father Herman J. Foken, 93, died at the Franciscan Villa in Broken Arrow.

Therein lies a tale. His death brought back a fond memory of my late wife Helen. When I proposed I was 20 and she was 21. You had to be 21 to marry in those days and my parents refused to sign an underage declaration because I was Catholic and she was Baptist.

With a flood of tears I begged my mother to sign and she finally agreed – as long as I didn't marry in the Catholic Church so if the marriage went awry I could still marry in the church!

Those were convoluted religious times, but Helen knew what being a Catholic meant to me. I was working as a police reporter for the Muskogee Daily Phoenix and I had to be at work after lunch and didn't get off until 1 a.m.

We were married by a justice of the peace on the steps of the Pittsburg County Courthouse, with friends Mary Ann and Roy Price as witnesses.

We rushed our goodbyes and headed for Muskogee. When we arrived in town, Helen whipped out a piece of paper and started giving me directions. I was puzzled when we pulled up in front of the Catholic Church.

I followed her to the rectory front door where she knocked. Father Foken answered the door and Helen explained our presence. He invited us in to his study and I went into detail about my parents' refusal.

Father Foken listened patiently, then explained that lacking pre-marital instructions and the legal paperwork he could not marry us.



A Stanford University survey estimates that 60% of incoming community college students and 30% of freshmen at four-year colleges need remedial reading and math courses. It was taught; it wasn't learned.

Waves of so-called school "reform" range from new math to online learning. Arne Duncan urges "a great teacher" in every classroom. This is the fellow who headed Chicago public schools, which to this day are an educational disaster. Why not guarantee every high school graduate a slot at Harvard – that makes about as much sense.

No Child Left Behind has provided some important data, but beyond that it is another "reform" that guarantees many public schools will fail. Presto! Charter schools. How many know that a third of charter schools score below public school averages?

When yet another "reform" steamrolls toward public education, bet your last dollar it will be "accountability" – another buzzword. It won't change a thing until students are motivated to learn – and no teacher can instill that in all students – only parents can.

Remember the good old days when you caught hell at school you caught it at home? Remember the PTA when hundreds of thousands of parents were deeply involved in their students' education? Remember homeroom mothers? Dads holding hamburger fries to raise funds for school library books?

Oklahoma public schools face 32 funded or unfunded mandates emanating from the feds or the Legislature. Little wonder that there are so many administrators – somebody has to oversee new programs.

Don't put this down as just another old guy yearning for the good old days. The day when parents are once again invested in their children's education is the day that genuine reform will take place in your neighborhood public school.

"The best I can do is bless you," he said. We knelt and he put his hands on our heads. I don't remember his words but he made the sign of the cross and we thanked him and left.

One of my older brothers was so angry at me for marrying out of the church, he quit speaking to me. Funny thing – Helen and I were wed for 54 years while he ended up alone after three failed marriages. [He was very fond of Helen after he got to know her.]

I was stunned at Helen's thoughtfulness. It was to mark 54 years of kindness that you seldom witness in those closest to you. It's why the most repeated note on the more than 300 cards and letters after her death was "kindness."

Needless to say we took instructions and were wed in a Catholic ceremony. It's true what they say about converts. Even when I didn't feel like going to mass, she would gently nudge me and I went.

If it wasn't for guilt, there would be no Catholic Church. [Please, that's a joke so spare me your wrath.]

When we moved to Lawton for a better newspaper job, I worked nights and she was gone every Wednesday, playing bridge – one of her great passions.

Once again I was in for a surprise. She wasn't playing bridge. She was taking instructions at Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church. Her sponsor was her boss, Helen Pettit, at Charley Wade Oldsmobile where Helen worked as a bookkeeper.

I not only lost a wife, I lost my best friend – the kindest person I've ever known.

# Is Nader's Ballot Crusade Taking Root?



ARNOLD HAMILTON  
Editor

The latest voter registration numbers show the divide between Democrats and Republicans continuing to narrow – just 8.1 percentage points now separate the two, reflecting Oklahoma's long, steady march toward the Red Zone.

What's also revealing in the latest state Election Board statistics, however, is the consistent uptick in the numbers not identifying with either of the major parties – those declaring themselves to be independent.

In the last 30 years, the percentage of Oklahomans registered as Democrats declined from more than 75% to just under 50%, while the percentage of Republicans jumped from less than one-fourth to just over 40%.

Only 1.4% of Oklahomans were registered as independents in 1980. Now it's 11.3% – more than a quarter of a million Sooner voters.

What this portends for both major parties is fodder for another day, but it's fair to say it reflects some degree of disgust with the current

state of American politics.

I came across another barometer recently: More than 400 people – of widely varying ages, races and socioeconomic status – braved a driving rain in Oklahoma City to hear Ralph Nader rail against an election system that makes it all but impossible for third party candidates to compete effectively.

You can't get 400-plus people off their iPhones, iPads or iMacs long enough to show up to almost anything these days, except a big-time football game, a tax-free sales holiday or a Chick-fil-A grand opening.

Yet, here they were, in a Marriott Hotel ballroom, on a dreary night courtesy of Tropical Storm Hermine, cheering an old lion of American politics as he described a "two-party tyranny that has imposed a dictatorship on the potential competition by excluding them."

If that isn't evidence that American voters – or at least some Oklahomans – are pining for major change, I don't know what is.

Nader, 76, has fought to open up the nation's electoral process for more than half a century, a crusade that mostly fell on deaf ears – but one that now makes him a pariah among those who would be his natural allies.

Many Democrats still blame Nader for George W. Bush's election, seething that had the famed consumer advocate not succumbed to ego and entered the race as a Green Party candidate, he would not have siphoned away about 90,000 Florida votes that almost certainly would have gone to Democratic nominee Al Gore.

That would have been more than enough votes to propel Gore to the presidency – without the need for a recount, a cram session in hanging chads or a Supreme Court intervention.

Nader remains unrepentant. More importantly, his belief in a more-merrier electoral system may be gaining traction among an increasing number of voters distressed by the state of American politics.

"This is a very serious issue for our democratic pretensions," Nader said, "and we better pay attention to it."

"What's most dismaying is the liberals and progressives who are Democratic registered voters and are Democratic Party loyalists suddenly suspend their concern for civil liberties and civil rights for third party candidates and the right of voters to have a choice.

"It's OK if Pat Buchanan runs for president against George W. Bush but not if Ralph Nader runs against Al Gore or against George W. Bush. It's a double standard and we should drop all this siphoning votes, spoiling this and that, and just let people get on the ballot with minimum number of signatures and let the debate begin and let the best ideas prevail."

Some Oklahomans are clearly receptive to the notion. A bill that would have made it easier for third party candidates to secure positions on the state ballot nearly made it into law this year – even though neither of the major parties has much incentive to open up the process.

Recent state polls indicate upwards of seven in 10 Oklahomans want to reduce ballot access barriers.

And, of course, 400-plus showed up to hear Nader at an event attended by Democrats, Republicans, independents, Greens, Libertarians, even Pirate Party wannabes – an indication something revolutionary could be brewing among the Sooner electorate.

Here's my problem with it: The current system leaves third party candidates with little hope of being much more than spoilers, swiping votes from major party candidates and tilting the elections.

Think two recent Oklahoma gubernatorial elections: Republican Frank Keating slipped into office in 1994 because Democrat-turned-independent Wes Watkins siphoned votes away from the Democratic nominee, Lt. Gov. Jack Mildren. Eight years later, Democrat Brad Henry was helped when independent Gary Richardson corralled votes that almost certainly would have gone to GOP nominee Steve Largent.

Since our electoral system is winner-take-all, many voters won't seriously consider casting their ballots for independent or third party candidates – regarding it as throwing away their votes because such candidates aren't likely to garner the 50 percent-plus-one necessary to actually win election.


Without a system of proportional representation – employed by many other countries and even in some U.S. municipalities – third party candidates and independents are all but shut out of the governing process where their ideas could be fully debated and tested.

As it is, third party and independent candidacies all-too-often are the stuff of cynical political hijinks. This year in Arizona, for example, a Republican operative and legislative aspirant acknowledged he recruited three street people to run as Green Party candidates in hopes they will siphon away potential Democratic votes.

The Arizona case highlights an underlying problem in American politics: Many simply aren't paying attention. They vote for Republicans or Democrats because their parents did. They vote for the least worst. Or they don't vote at all, feeling their lone voice won't matter or be heard. The apathy and indifference breed cynicism and Arizona-like gamesmanship.



What if voters were as sharply focused on their political candidates and elected leaders as they are on the football depth charts?

"If the American voters were as smart as sports fans," said Nader, "we'd have a raging democracy."



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## THE MOUTHS OF BABES

Three-year-old Stevie: "Our Father, Who does art in heaven, Harold is His name. Amen."

After the christening of his baby brother in church, Jason sobbed all the way home in the back seat of the car. His father asked him three times what was wrong. Finally, the boy replied, "That preacher said he wanted us brought up in a Christian home, and I wanted to stay with you guys."

Mom had been teaching her three-year old daughter the Lord's Prayer for several evenings at bedtime. She would repeat after her the lines from the prayer. Finally, she decided to go solo. Mom listened with pride as she carefully enunciated each word right up to the end of the prayer: "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us some e-mail. Amen."

One particular four-year-old prayed, "And forgive us our trash baskets as we forgive those who put trash in our baskets."

# Going Dirty: Murdoch's Million Makes Mischief

By Edwin E. Vineyard

It was just a matter of time. All free-thinking observers of Oklahoma politics knew that it was just a matter of time until the Republican machine went dirty in this general election, as has been their custom.

Dirty campaigning has always been around on all sides. Lee Atwater, Nixon's campaign architect and advisor to the first Bush, brought a science to "dirty tricks," as it was then called. Karl Rove was an understudy of Atwater and brought practices into the modern era with "swift-boating" tactics. Not that they are the only party to do dirty campaigning, but their national organizations have brought it to a new low across the country.

Of all things, the Oklahoma Democratic candidate is being accused of being a "liberal." And, she is accused of being soft on immigration – just like the president. Being liberal and being soft on anything is declared not to be the Oklahoma way. Now, who in the world would have thought that?

Jari Askins is capable of defending herself, but we might make a few clarifying observations. First, Jari is not a liberal. She has never been as liberal as Mr. Obama, although the president himself can no longer be classified a true liberal either. Real liberals think that the president has gone way too far toward the center, and they are unhappy about that.

Ms. Askins is a centrist. She is too conservative to be a liberal. But, of course, she is not conservative enough to be acceptable to the right wing-nuts. As a general thing, a relatively small proportion of the people either classify themselves as



liberal, or could properly be classified as such. Mainstream Democrats are now broad center, and not the extreme.

On the other hand, the Republican Party has been moving more and more to the right. However, they have not moved fast enough to suit the extremists in their midst who now give themselves a new name of Tea Party. Actually, these are just extreme Republicans, and with the help of Fox News and Rush Limbaugh they are pulling that entire party to the extreme.

These ultra-conservatives have been aided in their progress by money from billionaires. The two Koch brothers, multi-billionaires in the energy industry, have been



– Steve Hill

backing the group called "Americans for Prosperity," led by Dick Armey, which in turn has been financing, staffing, and organizing the Tea Party movement.

They have successfully exploited the dissatisfaction of citizens with the economic and social conditions of the country, and of those who feel threatened by a new black president with a people's agenda. But they are not a grassroots movement in a true sense, because the yeast behind their rising has been billionaire money. That money is trained on the corporate agenda, and they are being manipulated for that agenda.

Moving our attention back to the dirty ad directed at Jari Askins, one will notice that nowhere in that does

the voice of Mary Fallin appear saying, "I am Mary Fallin, and I approve this ad." On all advertisements sponsored by the Fallin campaign there must be this statement accepting responsibility. So then, that ad must NOT be sponsored by Fallin's office.

One must look at the faint print in the dirty ad mentioned above to distinguish that the commercial is really sponsored by the Republican Governor's Association. Now does anyone recall who has been giving money to that association to distribute into Republican campaigns across the land? We could begin with Rupert Murdoch, the Australian transplant and owner of Fox channels, who recently gave \$1 million to the Republican governors to lead the pack of big money doing the same.

With the 5 to 4 decision by the Republican Supreme Court to allow unlimited private and corporate donations to political support groups, billionaire money has been turned loose to buy elections. We can expect more of this now.

And, we can expect not only more corruption of the election process of democracy, but also more corruption of government itself.

Anyone who does not see the connection between the Republican Party, and its Tea Party wing, with billionaire money would have to be daft. Anyone who still believes that the Fox channel is really a legitimate, ethical news organization has to be a bit daft. And, anyone who really believes these dirty commercials paid for by tainted, undercover money must be more than a wee bit daft.

– The author, AKA The Militant Moderate, lives in Enid

## OPUBCO Lines Up For Program It Fought

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recently announced the first round of applicants accepted into the Early Retiree Reinsurance Program.

Nearly 2,000 employers, representing large and small businesses, state and local governments, educational institutions, non-profits, and unions have been accepted into the program and will begin to receive reimbursements for employee claims this fall.

In Oklahoma, these organizations were approved in the first round:

- The Oklahoma Publishing Company
- Advantage Health Plans Trust
- ConocoPhillips Company
- Indian Electric Cooperative Inc.

- OGE Energy Corp
- ONEOK Inc.
- Pipeline Industry Benefit Fund
- The Williams Companies Inc.

You mean the Daily Disappointment – which has crusaded against ObamaCare for the outset – is the first in line to take advantage of it?

Created by the Affordable Care Act to help serve as a bridge to the new health insurance exchanges in 2014, the Early Retiree Reinsurance Program provides \$5 billion in financial assistance to employers and unions to help them maintain coverage for early retirees age 55 and older who are not yet eligible for Medicare.

## John Wolf Celebrates Half Century Mark

The Rev. John Wolf spoke at a Tulsa school board meeting in March 1968 after then-Superintendent Charles Mason said he did not know what the word integration meant.

Wolf, minister emeritus at All Souls Unitarian Church, was recently recognized for serving as a minister at the church for 50 years.

The Rev. John Wolf doesn't define a church by the building, the denomination or the name on the front door.

"My definition of a church, it's not a matter of what you believe, or your creed, it's the people and what you mean to each other," Wolf said, sitting in the quiet sanctuary of All Souls Unitarian Church where he has been on the staff as a minister for 50 years.

Wolf, who retired from full-time ministry more than 15 years ago, is now minister emeritus at the 90-year-old church which was founded by the Jones Family – owners of the Tulsa Tribune.

Wolf came to Tulsa in 1960 and soon became a well-known voice amid the furor of the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War.

Wolf won national attention in 1968 when he responded to Mason's comments aimed at thwarting integration in Tulsa public schools.

From the pulpit, Wolf said any superintendent who didn't know what the word integration meant was ignorant and shouldn't hold the position. He gave a similar message at a school board meeting, and several weeks later, Mason resigned.

During that time Wolf also helped organize an interdenominational and interracial service at All Souls with 50 clergy members from different religions and denominations participating.

"Tulsa's clergy really took leadership in the '60s. Tulsa should be really proud," he said.

Wolf said the church is still seeking equality and peace today. In the 1980s, Wolf started broadcasting his sermons on television and helped All Souls grow from about 450 members in 1960 to close to 2,000 today.

"This is a good church; maybe a great church," Wolf told the Tulsa World. "This is probably the most spiritual place you can imagine. You walk in here, and it just hits you."

## Oklahoma Heroes

# Rescuing The Abandoned, One By One

By Norm Rourke

It was a nasty unwanted guest that started Mike and Kathy Nobles of Tulsa on a new and desperately needed venture. Katrina slammed into New Orleans with a vengeance. Thousands of residents were made homeless and in need. Pictures of the devastation and helplessness of the people of New Orleans became daily reminders of how this horrific hurricane changed lives.

There was another equally serious need with equally heartbreaking pictures: Animals separated from their owners or lost and afraid in conditions they didn't understand. Like the residents, the animals struggled to hang on rooftops or whatever they could find to keep them from being washed away in flood waters.

The Nobles quickly volunteered with hundreds of other animal lovers to go to New Orleans helping rescue lost and abandoned animals. From this began a dedication to seek loving homes for dogs and cats to be rescued.

### DRIVING 50K MILES

Since that time, Mike and Kathy have driven thousands of miles transporting animals from Oklahoma and other animal shelters to adoptive facilities throughout the Midwest. They've driven more than 50,000 miles saving animals from overcrowded shelters to waiting homes.

These adoption facilities are located in areas that have workable spay/neuter laws and a strict enforcement policy that results in a shortage of adoptable pets.

They've driven through snow storms, spring storms, flooded roads and city traffic in donated vehicles and their own vehicles taking loads of dogs and cats to the safety of new homes.

From their experience and awareness of a need, they recently formed Going Home Animal Rescue & Transport [GHART]. The 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization relies on volunteers and donations to operate. Mike and Kathy also continue to transport animals to adoption sites.

A web site is under construction. More information about GHART can be found by Googling Going Home Animal Rescue & Transport.

Like any venture of this type, the needs are varied: Transportation vehicles,

fuel, bedding material, supplies, food for the animals. There is always a need for animal loving volunteers.

### EXPENSES ADD UP QUICKLY

At a cost of \$30 per animal or \$500 per van load, expenses for the trips that can range from a half day to three days add up quickly. Money is always needed for fuel, turnpike fees, meals and lodging for overnight trips.

Their efforts help prevent more than 30,000 animals from being put to death in Oklahoma each year because they have no homes and shelters are overcrowded.

A few years back, I went with Mike Nobles taking a group of dogs and cats to a facility in Boulder, CO where they would be made available to waiting adoptive "parents." It was a nonstop drive [with a rest stop to feed and water and clean their pens] to get the scared and anxious animals into loving homes. Starting our long drive it was noisy for a while as we listened to barking, howling and meowing until the evening closed in on us and the tired and frightened passengers just wore themselves out.

### SMILING DOGS, PURRING CATS

Arriving in Boulder, staff members at the shelter quickly took charge. I never saw so much tail wagging, broad smiles [yes, dogs do smile] and purring as loving hands took them to be examined, fed, cleaned and provided roomy temporary kennels and pens where they awaited their new owners. The adoptive parents were just as anxious to claim their pets.

It was an experience I have long remembered.

Thanks to folks like Mike and Kathy Nobles, those of us who love animals and have pets [we have four adopted cats ... the last two adopted us after being abandoned along the roadway and wandered out of the woods to us] lost and abandoned animals are finding new homes.

Going Home Animal Rescue & Transport can use help. You can e-mail Mike and Kathy Nobles at [nwanc@att.net](mailto:nwanc@att.net). Their phone number is 918.747.4177.

- The author lives in Beggs

## The Lack Of Adult Literacy Hurts State

Sandy Garrett, state Superintendent of Public Instruction, points to vital series of facts Oklahomans need to know.

The National Coalition for Literacy shows why adult literacy is important to all of us:

When adults can read, their health and that of their families and communities is improved, while poverty, crime and incarceration are reduced.

Each year, American businesses lose more than \$60 billion in productivity because of employees' basic skill deficits.

When adults can get and keep good jobs to support their families, our economic development is furthered and the need for public assistance reduced.

Research shows children's literacy levels are strongly linked to that of their parents - especially their mothers.

Adult education programs help parents in their role as children's first and most important teachers.

The American Medical Association is concerned that 46% of adults cannot read and follow medical instructions adequately.

Eleven million [of the 227 million adult Americans] cannot communicate in English.

### HELP IS AVAILABLE

Help is available for Oklahoma adults who want it. Thousands of Oklahomans are learning to read and improving their writing and math skills with the help of tutors and adult education instructors across our state.

More than 23,900 Oklahomans were helped by 700 full- and part-time adult education teachers last year. The SDE's Lifelong Learning Office has 34 Adult Learning Centers and 18 Department of Corrections Centers statewide to help adults meet personal, academic and career goals.

Adult Learning Centers provide classes to help Oklahomans master skills in math, writing, and reading as well as job readiness, life skills and to prepare for the General Educational Development [GED].

Adults who pass all of the GED subject area tests are awarded a diploma equivalent to high school graduation.

More than 6,700 Oklahomans earned their GED diploma last year.

### IT HELPS PARENTS

English as a Second Language/English Literacy Civics classes help many adults in Oklahoma learn to speak, read and write English. Plus, family literacy

programs focus on effective parenting practices, and strategies designed to break the cycle of low literacy and poverty.

Helping adults reach their potential in education and chosen career is important and contributes to the economic development of the state and communities.

For more information on the state's Adult Learning Centers, visit the state Department of Education's Web site: [www.sde.state.ok.us](http://www.sde.state.ok.us). Or call 405.521.3321 or toll-free at 800.405.0355.

## Oklahoma County Democrats

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[www.okcountymocrats.org](http://www.okcountymocrats.org)

# Coburn's Curious Constitutional Claims

By Danny M. Adkison

It is that time of year in which we commemorate the writing of the U.S. Constitution. The delegates finished their work on Sept. 17, 1787. Then they began a campaign to explain to the public what they had done. Unfortunately, some leading Oklahomans are still confused about this.

Recently Sen. Tom Coburn spoke in Tulsa. Just as many in the United States continue to revisit the Darwinian drama of the Scopes Monkey Trial in the 1920s, some are constantly revisiting the arguments of those opposed to the Constitution of 1787.

Actually, revisiting is one thing, misrepresenting is something else.

The truth is that most of those in 1787 who argued against the proposed Constitution understood it better than Sen. Coburn does over 200 years later.

There is, to be fair, room for disagreement over what some parts of the Constitution mean or what the Framers intended when they included certain provisions. Still, most of the disagreements today center on the Bill of Rights or the Fourteenth Amendment [neither of which was written by the Framers].

## QUASI-CONSTITUTIONAL EXPERT

Sen. Coburn, who was a physician before becoming a professional politician, now frequently speaks as a quasi-constitutional expert. In his recent Tulsa speech he commented that what divides us today is not so much partisan differences but "core philosophical differences."

It is at this point in his debate that a hush comes over the crowd and everyone leans in to be sure to hear what words the senator will next impart. Here they are: "Where our country goes, whether the federal government mandates, directs and controls our lives or whether we, as free people, with our freedom not given to us by the government, make decisions about things that impact us."

Sounds serious. For anyone who has studied the writing and meaning of the Constitution, it also sounds wrong.

The senator was quoted as getting more specific. He went on to assert, "Much of what we're doing today in government is treating the symptoms. We're treating everything except the underlying causes."

## ROLE OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

When asked about Oklahoma using federal money for state projects, Coburn responded, "Is it, in fact, the role of the federal government to take money from here, send it back to Oklahoma for an economic development program here? Find that in the Constitution for me."

We here in America are proud of our Constitution. It is now treated as a kind of "natural law" by both judges and our citizenry. For the latter, that statement has to be qualified with, "when they agree with what it is said to mean," but we do come very close to engaging in "constitutional worship."

When our nation was celebrating its centennial the Constitution was described as a "machine that would go of itself."

Politicians know that when all other arguments fail or when they don't have any good arguments for their assertions, they can always assert [typically in broad language involving values] that it is unconstitutional! So, before answering the question Sen. Coburn raised, here is a question for him:

"Where in the Constitution does it say that in the United States, a person ac-



cused of a crime is innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt?" Any eighth grader in America who could not recognize the truth of this assertion should be held back for a repeat of the seventh grade.

## BACKBONE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Yet, it is not in the Constitution. It is the backbone of our criminal jurisprudence system, but those words do not appear in the Constitution. Could any reasonable person assert that it is, therefore, unconstitutional?

Back to Sen. Coburn's question: Implicit in his question is the assumption that the Framers didn't intend for Congress to have much power. This was the same view Sherman, a delegate from Connecticut, expressed in the opening weeks of the Constitutional Convention. He asserted that Congress would be limited to such things as defense and regulating foreign commerce.

Madison, the Father of the Constitution, could leave that point of view unchallenged. He pounced. After announcing that he could agree with Sherman, he proceeded to assert that while defense and regulation of foreign commerce were important, so, too, was "the necessity of providing more effectually for the security of private rights, and the steady dispensation of justice."

This was the Father of the Constitution, early in the Convention, making this assertion [and it went unchallenged].

Too bad Madison won't be in Tulsa giving a speech on constitutional powers. That would be one not to miss.

- The author teaches constitutional law at Oklahoma State University

# Mentally Ill Inmates Finally Getting Help

The Oklahoma seriously mentally ill exiting prison are no longer dumped on the streets to fend for themselves.

A new study by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA] reports that a model program, implemented to ensure that eligible individuals with serious mental illness were enrolled in Medicaid upon discharge from state correctional facilities, increased Medicaid enrollment among this group by 15%.

The effort significantly improved access to mental health treatment and services by reducing barriers to health insurance for eligible individuals leaving state institutions.

"The study underscores the importance of interagency collaboration to help people with serious mental illness and substance abuse disorders obtain access to needed services to sustain their life in the community," said SAMHSA Administrator Pamela S. Hyde, JD.

## BARRIERS REDUCED

"As a result, barriers to health and behavioral health care are reduced and recovery is supported so that people do not find their way back into higher cost systems."

The report is part of SAMHSA's strategic initiative on data, outcomes, and quality - an effort to inform policy makers and service providers on the nature and scope of behavioral health issues.

The model program, implemented in Oklahoma, aims to achieve Medicaid enrollment on the day of discharge for all eligible inmates with mental illness. The areas of focus involved:

- Identifying individuals with severe mental illness who were likely eligible for Medicaid about six to nine months before their release from correctional facilities.

- Helping them apply for federal disability benefits four months before their release.

- Assisting them with subsequent Medicaid applications two months before their release.

## KEYS TO EFFECTIVENESS

The new program significantly improved access to Medicaid for discharged inmates with mental illness due to staff training, interagency agreements, and agency collaboration in program implementation.

Critical to the success of the program was the funding of three managers to improve discharge planning. Overall, the evaluation of Oklahoma's efforts to ensure Medicaid enrollment for eligible individuals leaving state institutions showed the effectiveness of the state's model program for inmates with serious mental illness and the need for community-based programs to help potentially eligible clients discharged from mental health facilities to enroll in Medicaid.

The U.S. Department of Justice estimates that 1.3 million individuals with mental illness were in state or federal prisons or local jails in 2005.

More than half of all prison and jail inmates showed symptoms of a mental disorder, and about a quarter had mental health problems diagnosed within the past 12 months.

## PRIMARY SOURCE OF CARE

For many adults with mental illness, Medicaid is the primary source of health care coverage when they re-enter their communities after a stay in a public institution.

Many states suspend Medicaid eligibility for adults while they reside in public institutions, since Medicaid regulations preclude the use of federal Medicaid dollars to pay for health services for most persons in state institutions.

In addition, applying for federal disability benefits can be complex and requires coordination among local institutions, state agencies and federal agencies.

SAMHSA is a public health agency within the Department of Health and Human Services. Its mission is to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America's communities.

## BOOKS

# American History Isn't Written In Stone

By Eleanor J. Bader

### NOT WRITTEN IN STONE

*Learning and Unlearning American History Through 200 Years of Textbooks*  
By Kyle Ward  
The New Press  
304 pages, \$22.50

It's a hot summer evening and a group of friends and family members are sitting around shooting the breeze. The talk turns reminiscent when someone brings up "the time when ..." Slowly, each person adds a bit to the narrative. "No," one says, "that's not what happened." Others chime in, offering their recollections of the who, what, when and why of the particular incident. Despite lots of laughter and good cheer, an uninvolved observer would be perplexed, confused about what actually transpired.

So it is with history: Tales of what actually happened vary depending on who is doing the telling and why they're talking. What's more, race, class, gender and personal identity impact the thing we call history. In the end, what one person chooses to emphasize will be deemed insignificant, or even irrelevant, by someone else.

Kyle Ward, director of social studies education at Minnesota's St. Cloud University, concludes, "every person involved in a historical event, from the original actors to the historians who have written about it, have been influenced by their own society/culture, no matter what era they wrote and did their research in."

### HISTORY EVER EVOLVING

His latest book looks at the ways historical events have been presented to students over the past 200 years and offers textbook excerpts from multiple eras to illustrate the ways in which emphasis and details have changed over time. In 29 chapters, he elucidates the portrayal of everything from Native Americans to women alleged to be witches to Revolutionary and Civil War battles. He also examines Reconstruction, slavery, 19th Century immigration and the early years of U.S. industry.

It's a fascinating read, made particularly startling because Ward adds almost no commentary to the segments he includes. He simply lets each excerpt stand alone, forcing the reader to acknowledge that our understanding of events and actions is completely reliant on the "facts" a particular historian chooses to present.

The book's release is also extremely well timed. The Religious Right's current fight against liberalism and science – evidenced in the Texas school board's removal of the age of the universe from science textbooks, deletion of Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta from social studies books and whitewashing of Joseph McCarthy's anti-Communist antics from history texts – has brought the reality of educational manipulation into sharp focus.

### NO SINGLE EXPLANATION

Although Ward does not address this recent brouhaha, he believes that history is so complex that no single account can fully explain events either cataclysmic or small. Instead, he presents history as the slow unfolding of everyday life, a process that requires sifting through articles, books, original documents and eyewitness accounts to arrive at an understanding of what might have occurred.

*Not Written in Stone* opens with a chapter called "Images of Native Americans." He begins with a selection from a book penned by Noah Webster in 1831: "In general, a savage is governed by his passions ... He is remarkably hospitable to strangers, offering them the best accommodation he has and always serving them first ... Their religion was idolatry, for they worshipped the sun, the moon, the earth, fire, images and the like."

Eighty-one years later, cultural differences are played up even further: "The squaw's first duty was to care for the children. She had a queer-looking cradle, or cradleboard, for her papoose, as she called her child," Wilbur F. Gordy wrote in 1913. "Before the white man came, the Indian had never seen a sword, a gun, an iron axe, nor a knife made of metal ... They made life easier for him."

### BRUTAL ANTAGONISTS

William Backus Guitteau's 1930 text, *Our United States*, moved the focus from cultural exoticism to present Native Americans as brutal antagonists.

"Their warfare was cruel almost beyond belief," he wrote. "The warrior scalped his dead foe and wore the scalp as a trophy and proof of his prowess. Captives were tortured with every cruelty that human ingenuity could devise."

By 1991, however, Clarence L. Ver Steeg's and Carol Ann Skinner's *Exploring America's Heritage* downplayed violence and instead focused on communal living and nurturance.

"In almost every group," they wrote, "children learned without school buildings, books, or hired teacher. Parents, grandparents and elders were the teachers. The world was the classroom."

The authors also address the longstanding environmental stewardship of native tribes. "They did not believe that people could own land. They felt that people – like air, land and water – were part of nature. The Indians felt that everyone must use these gifts of nature with care and honor."

### GOD SPOKE TO HER

A later section focuses on Anne Hutchinson, a woman who migrated to the British colonies in 1634 and was eventually excommunicated and banished from the community. Her depiction offers another fascinating example of how opin-

ions and ideology are created. Benson J. Lossing's account, written in 1860, reports, "a smart woman, named Anne Hutchinson, offended the ministers greatly and the rulers first put her and her family into prison and then drove them into the wilderness. There, all but one of them were murdered by Indians who hated the white people."

One hundred and seventeen years later, in 1977, JoAnne Buggey had a different explanation for what happened to Hutchinson. "The Puritan officials could not accept Hutchinson's religious views. In addition, some of the men in the colony objected that no woman should 'meddle' in religious affairs," Buggey wrote. "Hutchinson, her husband and her family, along with a band of followers, founded a settlement which they named Portsmouth in an area which became part of Rhode Island."

A decade later, *The American Nation* again renders Hutchinson and kin "killed by Indians," but states that her crime was telling Puritan officials that God had spoken directly to her. "To Puritans this was a terrible error. They believed God spoke only through the Bible, not to individuals," authors James West Davidson and John E. Batchelor wrote.

And then there's slavery. Prior to the Civil War, few texts mentioned that Afri-

See HISTORY Page 18

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# Fewer Students See Themselves As Dems

By Kirk Johnson

The college vote is up for grabs this year – to an extent that would have seemed unlikely two years ago, when a generation of young people seemed to swoon over Barack Obama.

Though many students are liberals on social issues, the economic reality of a weak job market has taken a toll on their loyalties: far fewer 18- to 29-year-olds now identify themselves as Democrats compared with 2008.

“Is the recession, which is hitting young people very hard, doing lasting or permanent damage to what looked like a good Democratic advantage with this age group?” asked Scott Keeter, the director of survey research at the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan group. “The jury is still out.”

## STUDENTS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

How and whether millions of college students vote will help determine if Republicans win enough seats to retake the House or Senate, overturning the balance of power on Capitol Hill, and with it, Obama’s agenda.

If students tune out and stay home it will also carry a profound message for American society about a generation that seemed so ready, so recently, to grab national politics by the lapels and shake.

Many students, especially seniors nearing graduation, said that worries about the economy, and about getting a job after graduation, had filtered through the campus, dampening enthusiasm for Democrats in Congress and President Obama.

The College Republican National Committee, which works with campus groups around the nation, is making economic angst a focus of its vote-hunting efforts – especially over the national debt, and the idea that young people will be saddled with it.

## RESTORING THE LINK

The Democratic National Committee, by contrast, is trying to reinforce, or re-establish, the bond that many students felt in 2008 with Obama, and to use that link to bolster support for Democrats.

A spokesman for the committee, Brad Woodhouse, said he thought the surveys showing the erosion of Americans identifying as Democrats were misleading partly because voters connected differently with politics in 2008 – more through a person, President Obama, than a party.

That makes the task of building party allegiance different from past patterns, he said.

For decades in politics, Republican and Democratic strategists have put their faith in the so-called rule of three, which says that patterns in youth, once established by votes in three consecutive elections, become habit and identity.

Self-identification figures for Democrats – in national polls asking young peo-



ple what party they lean more toward – peaked at 62% in July 2008, according to the Pew Research Center.

## REPUBLICAN GAINS

By late last year, the number had dropped eight percentage points, to 54%, though researchers saw an uptick earlier this year, back to 57%. Republican gains roughly mirrored Democratic losses.

Some academics who study voting patterns say that the rule of three is too simplistic, and that lots of factors combine to determine a person’s place on the political spectrum.

Individual votes, said Donald P. Green, a professor of political science at Yale who studies voter behavior, matter less than the social fabric that people grow into – in jobs, social life, community and values.

In any case, he and others said, there is no doubt that many young people are still finding their way, at a time when everyone agrees that the stakes are enormous.

# Buchanan, King Of Hate Speech, Rips Newt

By Byard Duncan

Pat Buchanan has never been known for his subtlety. He has said integration of blacks and whites is a bad thing because “the incapable are placed ... side by side with the capable.”

He has called AIDS “nature’s retribution for violating the laws of nature.” Most recently, he claimed Judge Vaughn Walker’s Proposition 8 ruling was an example of “judicial tyranny.”

So yeah, the man’s words are about as benign as a hollow point bullet. Which is why this little nugget – a response to Newt Gingrich’s comparison of Cordoba House supporters to Nazis – is totally unexpected.

Buchanan, the MSNBC commentator who’s no stranger to controversial statements, said that he thinks Newt Gingrich went “too far” when he compared the

developers behind the Cordoba House Muslim community center to Nazis.

It’s “absurd,” said Buchanan. “There is no valid comparison there.”

Buchanan also called Gingrich a “political opportunist” who’s trying to be “more controversial than Sarah Palm,” who would be his potential primary challenger in the 2012 presidential election.

This is not to say that Buchanan has anything pertinent to say about Islam. In fact, most of his opinions on the subject are pretty misguided, incendiary, and even steeped in the same bankrupt Nazi rhetoric he’s now critiquing.

What it does point to is the explosive nature of this Cordoba House debate – loaded enough to tangle party allegiances that were once taken for granted.

© Alternet.

# No Whining: It’s Time To Roll Up Sleeves

By Sharon Martin

So, things aren’t peachy-rosy in all parts of the country. We’ve paid for two wars, survived a bubble, and we’ve sent most of our manufacturing jobs overseas. Retirees who live off their investments are looking for part-time jobs and living small. We are reminded about the state of the economy every time we turn on the news.

During another time of economic travail, a brave president told the nation, “We have nothing to fear but fear itself.” He tackled unemployment by creating a public works program. The bridges and buildings built by the young workers are only now in need of repair. The historical archives, photographic collections, and art works survive as a testament

to human will.

The nation didn’t whine; it rolled up its sleeves and went to work.

Then, as now, there were people afraid of bold steps. The nation took them anyway. Then, as now, there were voices of doom. Our voices of doom are a political party and the national media.

Enough already!

We have a 90% employment rate in the United States. We can improve on that. We have depressed housing markets, but we also have areas of boom, including new construction. In Oklahoma, prices and sales have remained steady. Let’s hear it for steady.

A character in Ingrid Law’s new novel, *Scumble*, says, “Doubt hit me

like confidence kryptonite.”

News reporters are becoming newsmakers. They paste on their somber faces and intone the bad news, creating fear. The fear slows progress by sowing doubt, hitting workers and employers with confidence kryptonite.

But kryptonite has its lead. Let’s build a wall of can-do around our fear and dig ourselves out of the mess we dug ourselves into. Let’s start by

reporting the good stuff.

Shovel-ready. It’s a lovely term that means there are workers ready to dig, ready to build roads and schools, ready to re-sod the National Mall. Let’s invest in the future by putting even more people to work. Reporters should be on hand for every ribbon cutting. Instead of somber, let’s see some joy in the numbers. Let’s make it happen.

– The author lives in Oilton

## DUST-UP

My wife sat down next to me as I was flipping channels. She asked, “What’s on TV?” I said, “Dust.” And then the fight started ...

# Political Money Flows, Election Sets Record

Turns out politics, for all its focus on the gloomy economy, is a recession-proof industry, according to the Associated Press. This year's volatile election is bursting with money, setting fundraising and spending records in a high-stakes struggle for control of Congress amid looser but still fuzzy campaign finance rules.

Based on the latest financial reports, House and Senate candidates in this election cycle raised nearly \$1.2 billion, well ahead of the pace for contests in 2008, 2006 and 2004.

Races for governor in 37 states – more than half of those for open seats – are also setting fundraising records. Billionaire Republican Meg Whitman leads the way, pumping \$104 million of her own money into her campaign for California governor.

"We may be on track for the most expensive cycle ever, even more than '08, which is really hard to believe," said Michael Toner, a campaign finance lawyer at Bryan Cave and a former Federal Election Commission chairman.

Bitter intra-party fights, up to 100 competitive House races, a large number of open seats and early partisan attacks have created a growing demand for cash. The national parties are competing for dollars with outside groups and their often-anonymous contributors. And while Democrats have an advantage at the national party level, Republican-leaning groups seem to have more than filled the void.

The money has been flowing into political battlegrounds since early this year, from a special Senate election in Massachusetts to a Democratic primary fight for a Senate seat in Arkansas, from the race for Florida governor to the gubernatorial and Senate contests in California. The spending will now shift to the general election. Millions of dollars are pouring into campaigns that have been dominated by discussions about the government's fiscal prudence. There's no such thing as restraint when it comes to getting elected.

## COURT DECISIONS

The Supreme Court earlier this year freed corporations and unions to spend their money on ads targeting candidates for president and Congress. A subsequent lower court ruling said individuals are also free to spend unlimited amounts on independent election ads.

So far, however, corporations have generally avoided overt politicking. "The whole notion of 'Vote against Snodgrass by Gillette shaving cream' – it's just not going to happen," said Kenneth Goldstein, a University of Wisconsin-Madison political scientist who specializes in political media.

Instead, corporations are tunneling their money to trade associations such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce or other groups that can air election ads, often without having to disclose their donors.

The desire for anonymity may have gotten an extra push when Target Corp. faced a backlash for its \$150,000 donation to a Minnesota political group that was running ads in support of conservative Republican gubernatorial candidate Tom Emmer.

"What we will see is corporations not wanting to anger their shareholders, not wanting to anger their retail customer by getting involved in partisan elections," said Paul Ryan, a senior lawyer at the Campaign Legal Center.

"Instead they will employ strategies to obscure the fact, or hide completely the fact that they are dumping money into politics by routing their money through groups like the Chamber of Commerce."

## CHAMBER IS MAJOR PLAYER

The Chamber plans to spend \$70 million in elections this year. It has already devoted more than \$5 million to advertising campaigns helping Republicans in Senate races in Massachusetts, Colorado, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio and New Hampshire, and for Democratic Sen. Blanche Lincoln in Arkansas.

Recently, an anti-abortion group aired among the first ads to specifically call for the defeat of candidates. The radio ads were broadcast in Ohio, Indiana and Pennsylvania and targeted three Democratic House incumbents.

The Federal Election Commission has yet to write rules on how to apply the Supreme Court's ruling. Democrats in Congress have tried to pass legislation that would require groups that run ads to reveal their donors.

The legislation has stalled in the Senate, but strategists in both parties and campaign finance lawyers say the effort may have given some potential corporate donors second thoughts.

Still, Larry Noble, former general counsel at the FEC and a lawyer at Skadden Arps, said more corporations are seeking advice on how and when to donate.

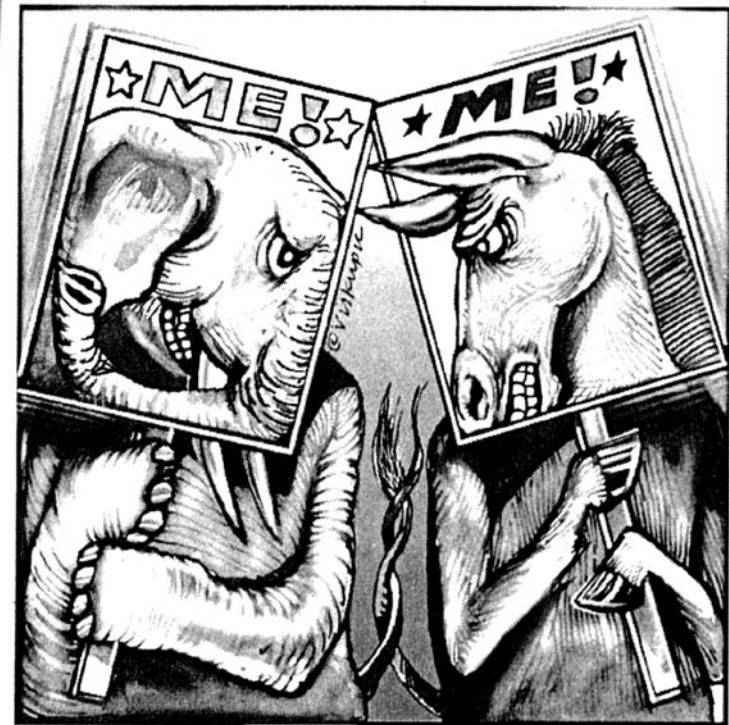
"My guess is we're going to see more corporate money spent on elections," he said. "If it's successful and you don't see a lot of real pushback, then in 2012 you'll see even more of it. So this is a test election."

## OUTSIDE GROUPS

Since 2000, Republicans had relied on President George W. Bush's prodigious fundraising to keep the party well supplied with money. Now, however, the GOP lags behind the Democratic Party. That has created a web of outside groups, a shadow party of sorts weighing in with millions of dollars to help Republican candidates.

Among the most prominent is American Crossroads and its allied groups. It was created under the direction of former Bush political strategist Karl Rove and former Republican National Committee Chairman Ed Gillespie. The operation is run out of offices two blocks from the White House.

"We wanted to create a group that was monolithically focused on helping get Republicans elected," said Steve Law, the president and CEO of American Cross-



roads and a former U.S. Chamber of Commerce lawyer.

Politicians often point to their small-dollar donations as evidence of broad appeal. But American Crossroads and its affiliates are relying on large corporate and individual donors, the fastest and most efficient way to build their budgets.

Law said he has seen some increase in small-dollar giving to his groups, but added, "We haven't spent a lot of time cultivating that."

While American Crossroads and groups like it represent the mainstream of the Republican Party, the Tea Party Express is the party's occasional ally but more regularly a thorn in its side. Its Our Country Deserves Better PAC spent nearly \$600,000 to help Republican Joe Miller defeat Sen. Lisa Murkowski in the Alaska primary. Murkowski had the GOP's backing.

## TEA PARTY HELPS

The PAC also helped Tea Party favorites Sharon Angle in Nevada over GOP establishment-supported Senate candidates and backed conservative Christine O'Donnell in the Delaware Senate primary over party-backed Rep. Mike Castle.

The Democratic National Committee and its Senate and House party affiliates have the advantage over their GOP counterparts in fundraising and cash on hand. That puts an additional burden on outside Republican groups such as American Crossroads.

Republicans can also look to another quarter for help. The Republican Governors Association, which can raise unlimited sums from corporations, has out-raised its Democratic rival and is prepared to spend \$65 million by Election Day, compared with \$50 million for the Democrats.

While the governors' group cannot use the money to help federal candidates, its get-out-the-vote efforts will inevitably help all Republicans on the ballot. With the mood running against Democrats, that can't hurt.

## THE WORLD ACCORDING TO FIRST GRADERS

A first grade teacher had 26 students in her class. She presented each child the first half of a well-known proverb and asked them to come up with the remainder of the proverb. It's hard to believe these were actually done by first graders. While reading, keep in mind that these are 6-year-olds!

1. Don't change horses ... until they stop running.
2. Strike while the ... bug is close.
3. It's always darkest before ... Daylight Saving Time.
4. Never underestimate the power of ... termites
5. You can lead a horse to water but ... How?
6. Don't bite the hand that ... looks dirty.
7. No news is ... impossible.
8. A miss is as good as a ... Mr.
9. You can't teach an old dog new ... Math.
10. If you lie down with dogs, you'll ... stink in the morning.
11. Love all, trust ... Me.
12. The pen is mightier than the ... pigs.
13. An idle mind is ... the best way to relax.
14. Where there's smoke there's ... pollution.
15. Happy the bride who ... gets all the presents.
16. A penny saved is ... not much.
17. Two's company, three's ... the Musketeers.
18. Don't put off 'til tomorrow what ... you put on to go to bed.
19. Laugh and the whole world laughs with you, cry and ... you have to blow your nose.
20. There are none so blind as ... Stevie Wonder.
21. Children should be seen and not ... spanked or grounded.
22. If at first you don't succeed ... get new batteries.
23. You get out of something only what you ... see in the picture on the box.
24. When the blind lead the blind ... get out of the way.
25. A bird in the hand ... is going to poop on you.
- And the WINNER and last one!
26. Better late than ... pregnant.

# Inexperienced Firms Chase School Funds

By Sam Dillon

With the Obama Administration pouring billions into its nationwide campaign to overhaul failing schools, dozens of companies with little or no experience are portraying themselves as school-turnaround experts as they compete for the money.

A husband-and-wife team that has specialized in teaching communication skills but never led a single school overhaul is seeking contracts in Ohio and Virginia.

Oklahoma is plagued with "online" school promoters, leading to at least one lawsuit.

A corporation that has run into trouble with parents or the authorities in several states in its charter school management business has now opened a school-turnaround subsidiary.

One company that said it had answered Duncan's call was Mosaica Education, which operates charter schools in several states and overseas.

Five of its 10 charter schools in Ohio are in academic emergency, and the company has become embroiled in disputes over its management of charters elsewhere. Its chief executive, Michael J. Connelly, said Mosaica had built a solid record of raising achievement.

## EX-OKC SUPERINTENDENT

In March, the company hired John G. Porter, a former schools superintendent in Oklahoma City, to lead a new subsidiary, Mosaica Turnaround Partners.

Porter said he attended a vendor fair at Ohio State University in June that had been organized to introduce dozens of new companies and nonprofits to districts preparing school turnarounds.

"It was like a cattle call," Porter said. "No, actually it was more like speed dating."

Other companies seeking federal money include offshoots of textbook conglomerates and classroom technology vendors.

Many of the new companies seem unprepared for the challenge of making over a public school, yet neither the federal government nor many state governments are organized to offer effective oversight, said Jack Jennings, president of the Center on Education Policy, a nonprofit group in Washington.

"Many of these companies clearly just smell the money," Jennings said.

Rudy Crew, a former New York City schools chancellor who has formed his own consulting company, said he was astonished to see so many untested groups peddling strategies to improve schools.

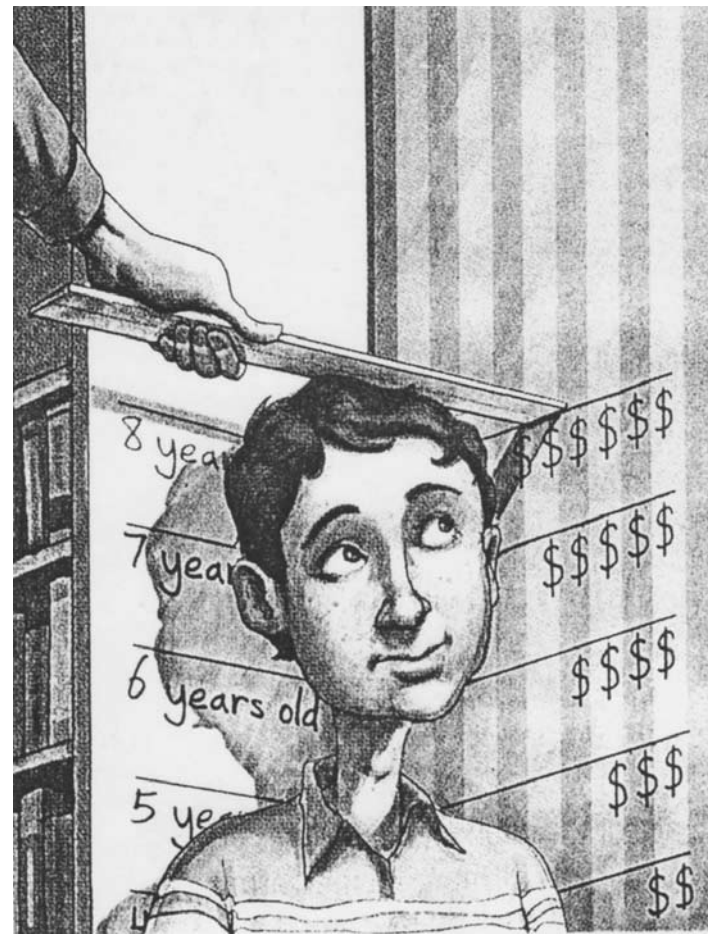
"This is like the aftermath of the Civil War, with all the carpetbaggers and charlatans," Crew said.

## THOUSANDS TO BE OVERHAULED

The Obama Administration has sharply increased federal financing for school turnarounds, to \$3.5 billion this year, about 28 times as much as in 2007. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan is pushing to overhaul 5,000 of the nation's 100,000 public schools in the next few years.

New York is to receive more than \$300 million, and New Jersey about \$67 million. Expenditures on each failing school are capped at \$6 million over three years.

Under federal rules, school districts can hire companies or non-profits to help,



and experts said a significant percentage, perhaps a majority, were likely to hire at least one outside contractor.

Sandra Abrevaya, a spokeswoman for the Department of Education, said the department did not yet know exactly how many districts would do so.

"The department is in daily contact with states and districts to provide technical assistance so they can make smart decisions and select high-quality partners," Abrevaya said.

## CHALLENGING WORK

Overhauling schools is challenging work, and experts say few efforts succeed. Breaking the cycle of failure in a school that has become a drop-out factory requires an "extreme reset," said Tim Cawley, a managing director at the Academy for Urban School Leadership, a non-profit group leading several turnaround efforts in Chicago.

Usually that means installing a new principal and a newly committed teaching staff, invigorating the school's culture with high expectations and a no-nonsense discipline, adopting a rigorous curriculum, and carrying out regular testing to determine what has been learned and what needs to be re-taught, Cawley said.

In contrast, many new groups seeking contracts are hoping merely to bring in a new curriculum or retrain some teachers, he said, adding, "We call that turnaround lite."

Bob and Megan Tschannen-Moran run one of the new groups. Their company, LifeTrek Inc., based in their home in Virginia, markets life and career coaching sessions to companies, churches and schools.

## NO EXPERIENCE

Tschannen-Moran is an education professor at the College of William & Mary, but the couple have never led a school overhaul – although LifeTrek has been

See **TURNAROUND** Page 14

# Why Some Kids Feel Unsafe At School

In a finding that surprised the research team, more than 20% of fifth-graders say they sometimes or always feel unsafe at school.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Nursing study of Midwestern fifth-graders also found that more than 40% of children surveyed said they feel unsafe going to or from school.

The study surveyed 243 fifth-graders in two large Midwestern school districts as part of the Parent-Child Communication and Health Risk Behavior study. The study examined how 10-year-old children articulate their experiences of feeling unsafe at school.

Children in the study defined "unsafe" in terms of direct or observed teasing, threats and bullying and environmental stressors such as weather or intruders.

The study was funded by the National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Nursing Research.

## SURPRISED AT ANXIETY

"We were surprised that children this young would feel unsafe at school," said co-author Dr. Susan Riesch, professor of nursing. "Though there has been much in the press about things that happen at school, this mostly occurs in middle or high school.

"With notable exceptions, I think most adults remember elementary school as a relatively harmless time in our lives and think that kids this young couldn't have serious concerns at school."

Of the 57 students [23% of the total sample] who reported sometimes or always feeling unsafe at school:

## STUDY FUNDINGS

- 24 students [42%] said they sometimes or usually felt unsafe going to or coming home from school.

- 22 students [39%] said they believed that feeling unsafe caused them to have emotional problems.

- 11 students [19%] gave up important activities because they didn't feel safe.
- Seven students [12%] were threatened or hurt because of race or color.
- Five students [9%] missed one or more school days due to feeling unsafe.

Factors such as the race of parent and child, the parents' marital status; family income; and parents' educational level did not seem to affect children's perceptions of safety.

Riesch says a key reason to study children's perceptions is the correlation between children feeling unsafe and risk-taking behaviors.

## DEALING WITH THE FEAR

"Research has shown that seventh and eighth graders who felt unsafe at school attempted to counter that feeling in a lot of different ways: by bringing weapons such as a gun or knife to school, getting into physical fights, using alcohol or other drugs, not getting enough sleep, and missing school due to illness," said Riesch.

"In my opinion, kids are not worrying about the horrific events that make the news," she said. "They're worrying about the daily uncivil behavior, the bullying, and social exclusion that makes their lives less fun.

"Some skip activities or school to avoid what we adults might think of as hassles, but they take them very seriously and emotionally."

So what can be done to make kids feel safer?

"Have a zero tolerance for bullying," she said. "Make sure that an adult presence is obvious in all areas of the school and school grounds. Thoroughly explain the remote possibility of weather and intruders, but accept the necessity of being prepared for either.

"Always include and communicate with parents in planning activities to counter bullying and teasing. School safety is a huge, contemporary issue and the findings of our study just scratch the surface of the potential work to be done in this area," she said.

## Beware Trade Schools

# Scams That Leave You Dumber, Poorer

By Makaiya Brown

If you've spent any length of time in an urban community in the U.S., I'm sure you've seen the ads on public transportation or heard the television commercials from schools where you can train to be a medical assistant or a computer technician.

But before you or someone you know signs up for a "promising career" at one of those for-profit colleges, take heed!

For-profit colleges have been around for years. The University of Phoenix, Sanford Brown, DeVry University, and ITT Technical Institute are just a few of the more popular ones.

It appears that these schools target minorities, low-income individuals and anyone dumb enough to believe their ads. The most memorable are the commercials from ITT Technical Institute: Because you can't get the jobs of tomorrow until you get the skills today. Start by calling ITT Technical Institute.

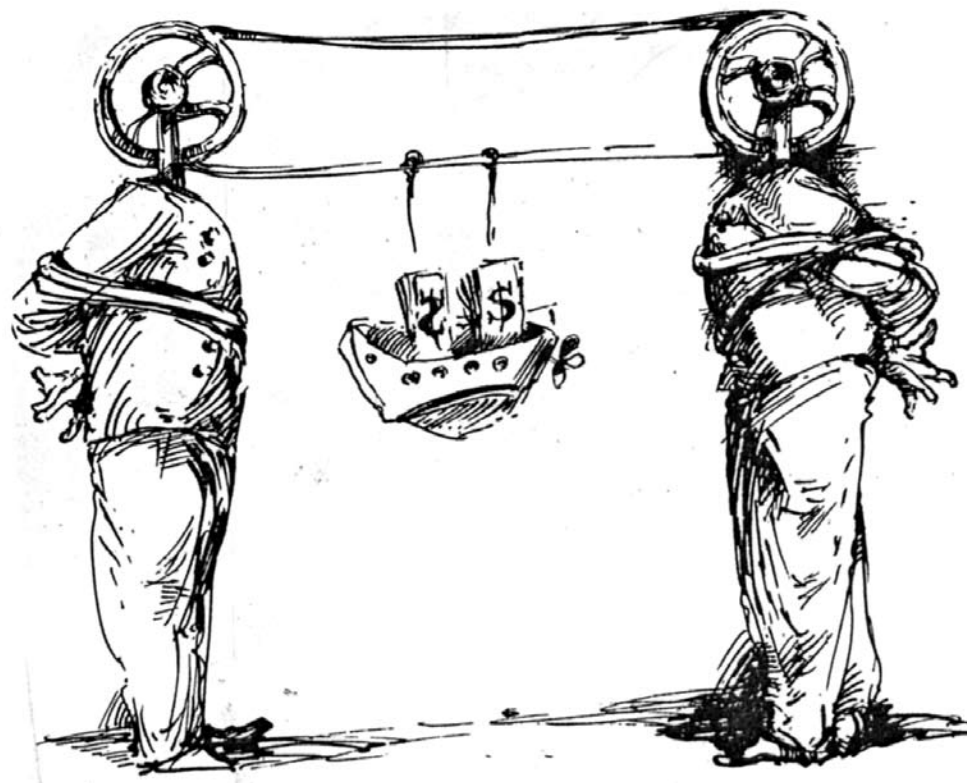
But I'm here to tell you these schools are not the answer to a promising career! I think schools like ITT are a money sucking scam!

With record unemployment in the U.S. and African Americans making up a large percentage of the unemployed, I fear that more African Americans may be lured into the trap of dishonest for-profit schools only to find themselves with a degree or certificate that they cannot use and loads of debt that they cannot pay.

According to data provided by U.S. Department of Education, students who enroll in for-profit colleges end up with debt that far outweighs that of their non-profit and public school peers. The data showed that last year 350,000 University of Phoenix students were responsible for repaying almost \$5 billion in outstanding loans, yet only 44% of them had the financial means to repay their loans.

Don't get me wrong, students who attend public universities can graduate with large amounts of debt as well. However, all of my friends who've gone to four-year accredited public or non-profit universities have gained skills and jobs that have allowed them to pay off their loans. I can't say the same for friends who've enrolled in schools like ITT Technical Institute or the University of Phoenix.

A federal investigation found that several for-profit colleges are involved in fraudulent acts and questionable marketing practices to attract students. The investigation unveiled that many of the colleges harass prospective students with repetitive recruiting phone calls after students request school information



on websites. Several of the schools also encouraged students to falsify financial aid forms in order to get federal funds.

By law up to 90% of the revenue of for-profit colleges can be derived from federal student aid. That's billions of federal dollars that are wasted in some cases by students who either don't finish the programs or default on the loans due to misguidance by representatives from these colleges.

Luckily, the Obama Administration has been gearing up to tackle for-profit school regulation.

In order to qualify for federal aid, for-profit schools must prepare students for gainful employment. The DOE's proposed regulations would cut federal aid to these schools if students don't find gainful employment or if too many of their students default on their loans. The DOE plans to rule on the regulations by November of this year.

In the meantime I urge prospective students to consider traditional four-year universities and reputable community colleges rather than for-profit schools and certificate programs. Do your research and don't sign anything that you don't understand, otherwise you might end up dumb and broke.

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## Teach For America Ticket To Big Time

Employment by Teach for America [TFA] is now as difficult to attain as admission to an Ivy League grad school.

A mere 4,500 applicants were selected by the non-profit to work at high-poverty public schools out of 46,359 applicants this year, up 32% over 2009. [The numbers are undoubtedly fueled by a bad economy.]

On this its 20th anniversary, TFA hired more seniors than any other employer at many prestigious colleges, including Yale, Dartmouth, Duke, Georgetown, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. At Harvard, 293 seniors – or 18% of the class – applied, compared with 100 seniors in 2007.

The New York Times notes that in interviews, two-dozen soon-to-be-TFA-teach-

ers mentioned helping poor children and closing the achievement gap as major reasons for applying.

However, there are also more material incentives. In a bad economy, it's a two-year job guarantee with a good paycheck; members earn a beginning teacher's salary in the districts where they're placed.

Teach for America has also become an elite brand that helps build a resume, whether or not the person stays in teaching.

Research indicates that generally, the more experienced teachers are, the better their students perform, and several studies have criticized Teach for America's turnover rate, its success in recruitment notwithstanding.

## TURNAROUND

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hired by a few school districts for strategic planning.

The couple recently founded a Center for Evocative Coaching, and this spring, Ohio put the center on a list of approved school turnaround specialists.

In July, the couple changed the name of the center's Web site to schooltransformation.com. The center can help schools by "facilitating new conversations through story listening, expressing empathy, appreciative inquiry and design thinking," its Web site says.

Much of the training can be done via conference call, Tschannen-Moran said.

### SET OFF THE STAMPEDE

Duncan helped set off the stampede in a June 2009 speech, saying that only a handful of groups, nationwide, had any experience in school overhauls.

"We need everyone who cares about public education," he said, "to get into the business of turning around our lowest-performing schools. That includes states, districts, non-profits, for-profits, universities, unions and charter organizations."

Pearson, the giant British publisher, also had representatives at the fair. With 36,000 employees worldwide, Pearson is known in education for textbook brands like Scott Foresman and Prentice Hall.

Last year, it formed the K-12 Solutions Group, and it is seeking school-turnaround contracts in at least eight states. Scott Drossos, the group's president, said that in recent years Pearson had bought smaller companies that built Pearson's capacity to train teachers and could draw on its testing, technology and other products to carry out a coherent school-improvement effort.

### HIGH QUALITY GROUPS

In interviews last year, Duncan said he wanted high-quality, non-profit charter

school management groups, like the KIPP network, which operates 99 schools nationwide, to join the school overhaul work.

But Justin Cohen, a turnaround strategist at MassInsight, a Massachusetts non-profit organization, said that most successful non-profit charter operators preferred starting new schools to overhauling failing ones, and that few had accepted Duncan's invitation.

"The vast majority of people getting into the field are not ready to do the work," Cohen said.

Recognizing the risks facing school districts that sign contracts with untested groups, the American Enterprise Institute, a non-profit conservative policy group, issued a report last month urging that districts require performance guarantees, under which contractors failing to meet achievement targets would forfeit payments.

Crew's new company, Global Partnership Schools, which he formed with Manny Rivera, a former Rochester schools superintendent, has signed a contract with the Pueblo, CO, district that is backed by a performance guarantee.

It stipulates that the partnership will be paid its full fee only if it significantly raises student achievement, Rivera said.

The partnership has also been awarded contracts with districts in Baltimore and Bridgeport, CT, he said.

Rivera represented Global Partnership at the June 30 vendor fair in Ohio, tending a booth along with 50 other groups.

"It was just like you were selling pencils," he said. "A lot of these companies don't have a clue about how to change schools."

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# Is Labor Movement Speaking For Women?

By Mike Elk

Karen Nausbamm, the director of the AFL-CIO's Working America, has a penchant for pointing out that the AFL-CIO is the largest women's organization in the country.

In fact, the AFL-CIO comprises about six million dues-paying women, who represent 45% percent of the organization's membership. By 2020, women will constitute the majority of union members.

Why, then, did the AFL-CIO refuse to assume a position on the Stupak amendment to the Affordable Health Care for America Act – the health care reform bill negotiated earlier this year – which restricts women from using health insurance plans toward the cost of abortions?

As my colleague Roger Bybee chronicled last spring, Michigan AFL-CIO President Mark Gaffner refused to put any pressure on strongly labor-supported Bart Stupak to drop the measure.

## 80 PERCENT MALE

For lower-income working women, the ability to pay for an abortion is often a very important issue. Had the issue been banning insurance coverage for colonoscopies, a medical service that affects men directly, the AFL-CIO would have been up in arms. Disproportionate to the high percentage of female members, the executive council of the AFL-CIO is 80% male.

The right to choice frankly tends to be less important to men than it is to women. As a pro-choice male, I remember thinking at the time that the goal of passing any version of health reform trumped the importance of the bill's restrictions on women's right to choice.

For years, my position as a labor activist was that it was fine in socially conservative areas to elect pro-life Democrats as long as they were pro-labor. It was my belief that improvement in economic standards of living would result in women being less likely to have abortions.

## CONTROL IS THE KEY WORD

Then, one day, it hit me: the purpose of the labor movement is to give workers control over their own livelihoods.

The labor movement, at its core, is about class struggle – the working class overcoming the power of the owning class in order to take control over their own lives.

For women, class struggle historically has centered on overcoming the oppression of men who want to have control over their lives. Workers struggle to overcome superiors who want to control their lives.

Both struggles are about power and determination over one's own life. The labor movement cannot advocate for economic self-determination without challenging the status quo for those who cannot determine their own lives due to issues related to gender, race, sexual orientation, disability, etc.

## JUNIOR PARTNERS

When we advocate for workers having control over their lives in the workplace without fighting for women to have control over their personal lives, it can make women feel like junior partners in the labor movement.

Indeed, women are increasingly less attracted to the labor movement and more to movements that speak directly to their issues. An in-depth report by the

Berger-Marks Foundation published last month argues that labor is at "a tipping point" of losing women unless the labor movement becomes more responsive and inclusive to women's needs. The popularity of U.S. unions is at a 70-year low; a Pew survey this year showed that unions had a favorability rating of 41%, down dramatically from 58% in 2007.

## LABOR POPULARITY DECLINING

A must-read report by Karla Walter and David Madland of the Center for American Progress cited opinion polls showing that the popularity of organized labor is declining because the public feels that labor advocates for its members' narrow interests and not those of the larger community.

Imagine had the labor movement, during health care reform negotiations, advocated as strongly for family planning issues as they did on the taxation of "Cadillac" health care plans.

Women may well have rallied to support labor's position on taxing health care plans, instead of remaining largely indifferent.

## WOMEN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Had labor been an equally strong proponent of women's choice, Democrats would have had to face a greater range of issues during health care negotiations, and the movement would have had more leverage to extract better deals.

Instead, the interests of labor were detached from the interests of women, and both groups were defeated. It was the perfect example of how divided we fall.

Many in the labor movement avoid the issue of choice because they see it as a contentious social issue that could potentially divide their male and Catholic members.

By not speaking louder on this right and the issue of power over one's life, we allow choice to continue to be a socially divisive issue.

The labor movement has done an outstanding job swaying demographics that typically support Republicans to vote for Democrats through voter education and outreach.

In 2008, Obama won by 23 points among white, non-college graduates who belong to a union, even as he lost by 18 points among all white, non-college voters.

## IMPORTANCE OF CONTROL

This demographic shift is due to the long-term efforts of the labor movement to educate its members to vote for their class interests first. A similar educational effort could be launched to educate male labor members on the importance of supporting women's control over their own bodies.

An intensive effort to educate male union members on the importance of choice could reduce the number of pro-life voters in this country, thus making choice less of a wedge issue for working class voters.

Unfortunately, the labor movement avoids these issues and has trouble staying relevant to issues at the core of women's lives. If we wish to build a vibrant movement that advocates for workers having control over their own lives, we must advocate for women having control over their lives.

– Special thanks to Christina Anglin for her contributions on this piece.

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# Only In America: Export Jobs, Import Workers

By Jim Hightower

Maybe you're one of the thousands of young lawyers in America working in some low-skill, part-time job because law firms have cut so many of the starting positions you were educated to take. If so, I have good news: Jobs for young lawyers are now mushrooming in companies that provide legal services to U.S. corporations.

Unfortunately, you'll have to move to India to get one. And the pay will be – how shall I put this? – "disappointing."

Lawyering has become the latest category of good jobs disappearing from our Land of the Free, as corporate chieftains continue to offshore the American workplace. The average student loan debt for a recent law school graduate is upward of \$100,000, and now law school grads are finding that jobs are scarce – especially since Wall Street banks, insurance corporations, mining giants and others are shipping more and more of their law business to Pangea3, CPA Global, UnitedLex and other rapidly expanding legal outsourcing outfits in India.

## NUMBER OF FIRMS TRIPLED

In the past five years, the number of these upstart firms has more than tripled, with each one offering from a few dozen to hundreds of young Indian law-school graduates. These eager legal beagles are hunkered down in corporate cubicles, ready to write contracts, review legal documents and – increasingly – to handle the more sophisticated chores of case management and regulatory filings that corporations have been entrusting to more experienced American lawyers.

Even though U.S. corporations have amassed record levels of profits and cash reserves, they are offshoring their legal work simply because it puts even more money in their pockets. They can pay Indian lawyers as little as a tenth of what they'd pay young American attorneys – and the 90% wage difference goes to the corporation, rather than being spread through our economy as family incomes.

It's another move by the corporate elite to separate their expanding fortunes from the well-being of America's middle class – and from the well being of America itself.

But what about work that needs to be done here? I mean, physically, here, in

the good ol' U.S.A.

At last Obama is getting serious about America's jobs crisis. Last week, he proposed a \$50 billion effort that would put Americans to work repairing our national infrastructure. Of course, congressional Republicans have responded as they always do: petulantly shouting "no" and plopping their fat butts down in the middle of the legislative path to block progress.

## MLK MEMORIAL AND STATUE

But Obama could take one symbolic step on his own that would create jobs for about a dozen American workers. It involves the construction of a memorial and statue of Martin Luther King Jr. on our National Mall. After all, King's historic 1963 march on Washington was about jobs and poverty – so why not have some of our highly skilled bricklayers and stone masons who're now unemployed build this monument in honor of King's legacy?

Seems sensible – but guess what? The quasi-governmental foundation overseeing the King memorial project doesn't seem to have much sense. It is *importing* eight to 12 workers from – believe it or not – China to do this job!

Why don't they just poke every out-of-work American in the eye with a sharp stick? As the Bricklayers union said in exasperation, this is "wrong, wrong, wrong."

Well, sniffed a spokeswoman for the foundation, only the centerpiece of the memorial is outsourced to Chinese craftworkers, so stop your griping. Ironically, that centerpiece is named the "Stone of Hope," but apparently no one at the foundation has any grasp of irony, so they are proceeding to obtain work visas to bring the Chinese into our nation's capital and construct King's monument. Presumably, America's vast pool of jobless workers will be allowed to watch them.

OK, it's only a dozen jobs – but symbolism is important, especially in these hard times. To join the Bricklayers' protest of this insult, call the Martin Luther King Memorial Foundation and tell them to put Americans back to work: 202.737.5420.

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# Eyewear Industry Is An Incredible Ripoff

By Anneli Rufus

Those of us who need prescription eyewear need prescription eyewear. Are you wearing yours to read this? Imagine if you weren't. Imagine life without your glasses for a year, a week, an hour.

Yet many health insurance plans, especially for the unemployed or self-employed, don't cover them. Mine doesn't. Last year, I went shopping for no-line progressive bifocals in small oval metal frames. Name brands mean nothing to me. Price does.

My high astigmatism and need for bifocals disqualify me from those buy-one-get-one-free deals, which almost always involve only single-vision specs.

In store after store, mega-chains and optical boutiques alike, small oval metal frames fitted with lenses matching my prescription started at \$300.

## AMAZING PRICE DIFFERENCE!

One popular shop quoted me \$582 for the lenses alone. I bought a pair of no-line progressive bifocals in small oval metal frames for \$44 online.

I'm wearing them right now. Perhaps because prescription glasses are where medicine meets fashion, they're among the world's most overpriced merchandise.

Imperfect eyesight isn't your fault: You can't make yourself nearsighted by eating too much fudge. Yet if your health plan excludes vision care, you've spent years at the mercy of a \$64 billion industry characterized by 500% markups.

This has begun to change over the last few years. A knowledge-is-power, power-to-the-people, Web-driven do-it-yourself wave is rocking the optical industry's very foundations.

Dozens of companies now sell prescription glasses online, frames and lenses included, for as little as \$7.95. It works like this: Google "cheap glasses" to find a frame you like at a price you like at a site you like. [Among the most popular are 39DollarGlasses, ZenniOptical – where I bought mine – and Goggles4U.]

## PLAYING MONOPOLY

A key to the industry-standard overpricing is the fact that a single corporation – Luxottica, the world's largest eyewear firm – owns many retail eyewear chains and many popular eyewear brands.

Based in Milan, Italy, Luxottica owns and operates LensCrafters, Sears Optical, Target Optical, Pearle Vision, Sunglass Hut, Ilori, and other chains in the United States, along with yet more chains throughout Asia, Europe, Africa, India, the Antipodes and the Middle East.

Luxottica owns Ray-Ban, Oakley, Oliver Peoples, Vogue, and other brands, and makes glasses under license for over a dozen designer labels including Versace, Prada, Bulgari, DKNY, Burberry, Ralph Lauren, Dolce & Gabbana, Donna Karan, Tiffany, and more.

As if that isn't enough, Luxottica is also the parent company of a vision-care benefits program, EyeMed.

Because one company holds a near-monopoly on brick-and-mortar eyewear stores, "pricing models are somewhat static across the lot of them. They also have a knack for using the mattress sale model ... constantly running sales that seem too good to pass up when in reality they're still making enormous profits."

## REAL AND BOGUS FRAMES

While many online outfits sell real and bogus designer frames, the least expensive frames available online are unapologetically nameless generics: current and classic styles, sans logo.



The first online eyeglasses company was Houston-based FramesDirect. In 1992, optometrists David Cooper and Guy Hodgson closed their several Texas brick-and-mortar shops, then pondered their future.

"We knew that we wanted to sell eyewear in all 50 states 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year," Hodgson says. "We had no idea how to do this."

Renting a small office, they installed computers. When you talked about the Internet in those days, no one knew what you meant. Search engines were in their absolute infancy. We thought a 56k modem was blisteringly fast."

## AWARD FOR HELPING THE POOR

Cooper had won a Surgeon General's Commendation Award in his native South Africa for creating a program providing the poor with recycled glasses for free. Hodgson specialized in treating the nearly blind.

Barely fluent in e-mail, the pair created a basic Web site, offering designer glasses at low prices because, unlike brick-and-mortar opticians, they needed to pay neither storefront rent nor employees' salaries, nor did they need to keep large quantities of merchandise in stock.

"Everyone around us thought we were completely mad: Eye doctors, giving up their lucrative practices to go into this weird thing," Hodgson laughs. But once orders started pouring in, "The whole optical industry completely shunned us. They said we were ruining them."

GlassesUnlimited, for instance, can afford to sell hundreds of different stylish frames fitted with prescription lenses for only \$9.99 because its entire operation is based in Thailand.

– Anneli Rufus is the author of several books, most recently *The Scavenger's Manifesto* [Tarcher Press, 2009]. Read more of Anneli's writings on scavenging at [scavenging.wordpress.com](http://scavenging.wordpress.com).

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# 'Mission From God' To Impose His Agenda

By Stephen Beneen

New reports out of Afghanistan point to a province where Taliban followers hope to become judges, so they can apply their religious beliefs to court rulings, rather than the secular tenets of the law.

Wait, did I say the Taliban in Afghanistan? I meant Christian conservatives in California!

A group of conservative attorneys say they are on a mission from God to unseat four California judges in a rare challenge that is turning a traditionally snooze-button election into what both sides call a battle for the integrity of U.S. courts.

Vowing to be God's ambassadors on the bench, the four San Diego Superior Court candidates are backed by pastors, gun enthusiasts, and opponents of abortion and same-sex marriages.

## AMERICA IS UNDER ASSAULT

"We believe our country is under assault and needs Christian values," said Craig Candelore, a family law attorney who is one of the group's candidates. "Unfortunately, God has called upon us to do this only with the judiciary."

I suppose the obvious observation here is that the direct election of judges – the law in 33 states – may not be the best idea.

But there's far more to this particular problem, called the "Better Courts Now" initiative. Here we have a series of far-right attorneys who are running on a fairly specific platform – they promise to be biased, partial jurists, basing their decisions on a religious agenda.

The difference between these kinds of judges and those found in Iran and Saudi Arabia is ... well, there really isn't a difference.

In other words, these judicial candidates want to turn their courtrooms into a position consistent with a theocracy. Indeed, the initiative was launched by two pastors.

## THREATENS INDEPENDENCE

"Any organization that wants judges to subscribe to a certain political party or certain value system or certain way of ruling to me threatens the independence of the judiciary," San Diego County's District Attorney Bonnie Dumanis told the AP.

"Judges should be evaluated based on their qualifications and their duty to follow the law."

Except that is apparently old-school thinking, which some elements of the right have no use for.

Why elect a judge who will provide a legitimate forum for a fair trial when you can elect a right-wing religious activist who believes he's following instructions from above?

And given that voters don't often turn out for down-ballot races like these, and that the candidates themselves are generally not well known to the public, organizers of this effort believe they have a reasonably good chance at pulling it off – and they may very well be right.

# Will Tobacco's Ex-Bag Man Be Next Speaker?

By Joe Conason

With their loud voices and antic style, the "tea party" activists may lead voters to expect something new and different if the Republican Party returns to power. But observing the man who would wield that power if his party wins a midterm majority should swiftly dispel that illusion.

There is nothing fresh or surprising about Rep. John Boehner, R-OH, the would-be speaker, a figure so closely associated with corporate special interests that he looks, sounds and behaves exactly like a lobbyist. He golfs, drinks, smokes and maintains an unusually bronzed complexion thanks to company jets that whisk him away to his favorite Florida resorts. He seems as if he could have stepped straight out of "Thank You for Smoking," Christopher Buckley's classic spoof of Washington's cynical, morally empty K Street.

Smoking and K Street, of course, evoke the memory of Boehner's first big moment in national politics almost 15 years ago, when he performed a cameo as the tobacco industry's bagman. Back then, ascending the leadership ladder as chairman of the House Republican Conference, he was spotted handing out checks from the Brown & Williamson tobacco company on the House floor. This spectacle of corruption was so blatant that even some members of Congress were outraged and demanded that he stop.

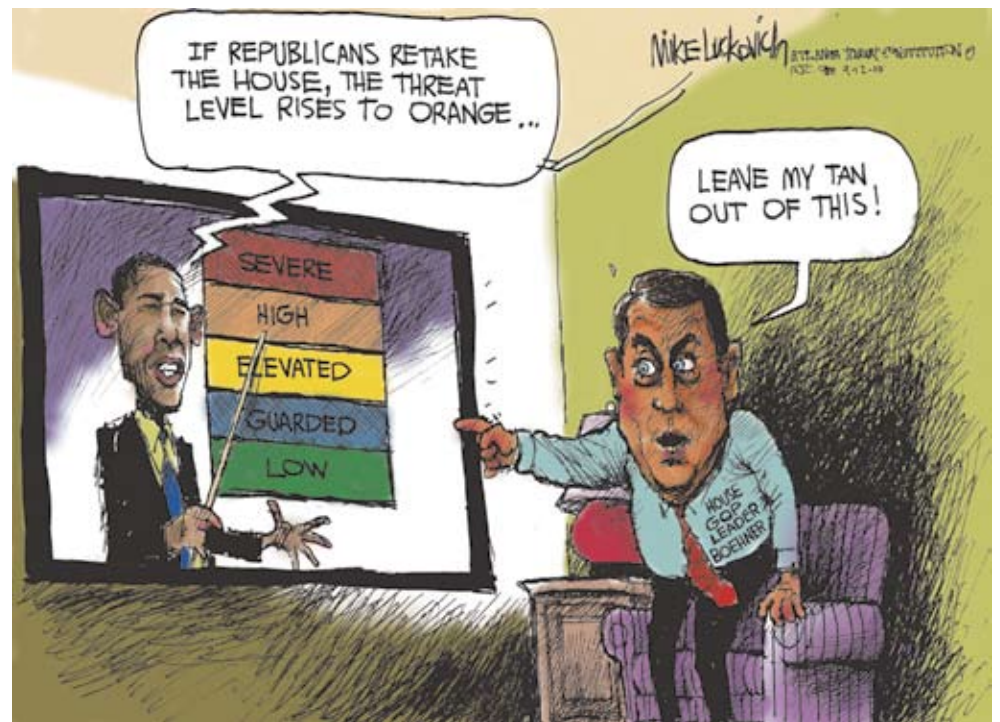
## 'MATTER OF CONVENIENCE'

Following a blast of bad publicity, he apologized, sort of. "I thought: 'Yeah, I can imagine why somebody would be upset. It sure doesn't look good.' It's not an excuse, but the floor is the only place you get to see your colleagues," he told The Associated Press. "It was a matter of convenience. You make a mistake, admit it and go on. I just feel bad about it."

Not bad enough to change his convenient, highly profitable relationships with lobbyists and their clients. Yet while other Republicans became notorious for their political promiscuity – and sometimes paid a heavy price – Boehner somehow escaped censure.

His fellow Ohioan and former House colleague Bob Ney went to prison as a casualty of the corruption scandal that sank super-lobbyist Jack Abramoff, but Boehner actually received more money from the Abramoff operation than Ney. Tom DeLay, the former House majority leader, was renowned for his prowess in squeezing money from lobbyists, but Boehner raised more money than "the Hammer" did during a critical period in 2006.

He even rented a Capitol Hill apartment from a lobbyist who had been hired to



influence him – a blatant conflict of interest that the House Ethics Committee somehow failed to notice under Republican control.

## 'LIKE A COWPIE ATTRACTS FLIES'

When his party held the majority, Boehner chaired the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, which sounds innocuous but attracts lobbyists like a cowpie draws flies.

Overseeing a broad array of issues, from the minimum wage to student loans, he made the most of their interest in his legislation. He achieved a kind of masterpiece with the passage of a bill that favored the private student loan industry over direct government lending – at an estimated cost to taxpayers of 9 cents on the dollar.

Students, families and taxpayers lost in that deal, but Boehner's banker pals made out like ... bankers. Over the past two decades, he has collected more than \$120,000 from Sallie Mae, the mammoth student loan outfit – and enjoyed several trips to Florida golf destinations in the Sallie Mae corporate jet.

Boehner's career is a litany of such pay-for-play scams, which is what pass for achievements in his world. That the Republican caucus would elect him as its leader reveals the stale reality behind the populist rhetoric. Every Republican congressional candidate represents a vote to elect Speaker Boehner – and to restore the same old policies and attitudes led to a ruinous decade of misrule.

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# Democrats Need To Turn Off Fox News

By Froma Harrop

During the 2000 presidential campaign, Democrat Al Gore became captive of the right-wing noise machine. The activists and their media had gone honking nuts over President Clinton's sexual indiscretion. Vice President Gore thought these people mattered and so distanced his campaign from a popular Democratic president.

Never mind that 23 million jobs were added under Clinton's watch. Never mind that Clinton was leaving the budget in surplus. Never mind that in the post-scandal midterm, Democrats actually gained five seats in the House. Never mind that Clinton was leaving office with a huge 66% approval rating, 3% higher than Ronald Reagan's.

Rush Limbaugh was enough to intimidate Al Gore. Not only did Gore keep Clinton off his campaign stages, but he took pot shots at him.

"I keep my commitments, to my wife and to my family and to my job," Gore piously reminded audiences. [How interesting that Gore's marriage is now breaking up, but Clinton's goes on.] Gore lost an election he should have easily won.

## HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

Democrats are at it again. They have more to be depressed about this time, for sure. But their willingness to believe the right's propaganda about leading unstoppable forces – while downplaying their own accomplishments – will make matters only worse.

Even in the most liberal parts of America, right-wing talk dominates the airwaves. The comments on newspaper Websites are weighted with anti-liberal bile. Come an actual election, the Democrat usually wins handily, and if a Republican prevails, it's not one of the hotheads.

But Democrats are the glass-half-empty party. [The other half is Pepto-Bismol.] It's getting late in the game to convince Democrats that the public's angst about the economy and the American future isn't all about them. They still have time to perk up.

Their health care reforms guarantee access to medical care, will slow spending that is bankrupting the nation and should reduce future deficits, to boot. The financial reforms offer some protection against another economic freefall. These shouldn't be hard sells.

## TOOTING OWN HORN

But you do have to sell them when the opposition is blasting these achievements 24/7. Sadly, few Democrats are blowing their horn, especially over health care, and some are actually running against that success. This is self-defeating

behavior.

Back in March, when congressional Republicans denied Democrats an inch of cooperation on health care, their spokesmen inflated some public displeasure into surging waves of voter anger against Democrats. Fine, that's their job.

But Democrats did not have to cower when all of 300 Tea Party people demonstrated in March against their reforms. And so what if some loudmouths made a racket at their Town Hall meetings. The rudeness probably offended many gentle folks at home.

Look at those polls tracking public support for health care reform. The lines closely follow the Democrats' willingness to defend what they've done. After passage, approval for the reforms rose.

## IT ISN'T A FAIT ACCOMPLI

Of course, this support is now inching down. When Democratic candidates back away from their party's legislation, people assume there's something wrong with it.

Nov. 2 need not be as grim a day for Democrats as they think it will be. In special congressional elections in upstate New York and western Pennsylvania – two blue-collar districts expected to go Republican – Democrats won. These were real elections.

Democrats don't need a more passionate base to win elections. They need more votes. A quiet vote counts as much as a strident one. No doubt the weird Christine O'Donnell will have more enthusiastic backers in the Delaware senatorial race than Democrat Chris Coons. And chances are she'll lose.

Democrats, turn off Fox, turn off Rushbo and put something livelier in your glass. Your funk is your worst enemy.

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## THE AFFAIR

Very quietly I confided to my husband on the eve of our 61st anniversary that I was having an affair.

He turned to me and asked, "Are you having it catered?"

And that, my friend, is the definition of OLD!

– Thanks to Darla Reynolds-Sparks for this gem

# More Wool, Please – We Can Still See a Little

By Harry T. Cook

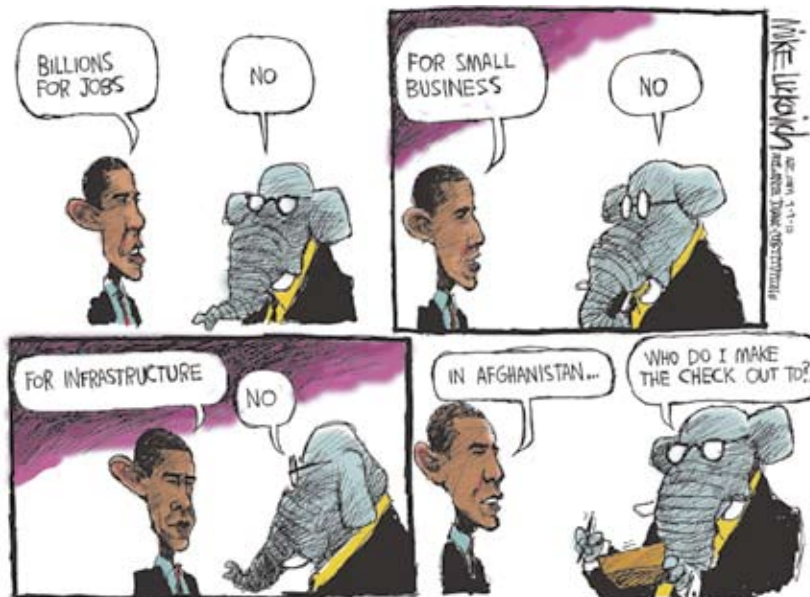
Conservative economist Bruce Bartlett let the proverbial cat out of the bag recently when he said that no matter how the November election turns out – Democrats keep both houses of Congress, lose one or lose both to the Republicans – there will be no further much-needed stimulus money coming. Why?

Because the Republicans want their as yet unchosen presidential candidate to be able to run on a struggling economy and blame it on Barack Obama.

“We’re already in a gridlock situation,” Bartlett said. “Clearly, a weak economy in 2012 will be very good for whoever the Republican presidential candidate is. It’s hard to see how the Republicans lose by blocking stimulus.”

Thus what you heard from the self-appointed “take back America” homilists at the late August Lincoln Memorial rally about the perils of the deficit, socialist spending, etc., etc., is but a prelude to further Republican obstructionism as Congress reconvenes with its two political parties wedded in a mutual bond of implacable hatred.

Crowd figures varied among the rally’s sponsors, District of Columbia police and journalists, but the best



guess is that no fewer than a quarter of a million people – virtually all white, by the way – were in exuberant attendance as Sarah Palin and Glenn Beck called America back to God via sending Obama into exile along with all his tax-and-spend Democrats.

That rally and the fair and balanced entity known as Fox News along with Rush Limbaugh, the aforementioned Beck and his coast-to-coast ilk are purveyors of the wool far too many Americans are allowing, yea inviting

to have pulled over their eyes.

Why do those whom H.L. Mencken aptly called the “booboisie” cheer for the very causes and people who are out to do them in? It’s a question akin to the one asked by Thomas Frank almost a decade ago: “What’s The Matter With Kansas?” Why do voters support candidates whose ideologies run counter to the voters own self-interest?

Frank marveled at how many Kansans fixated on politicians who made a deal of opposing women’s reproductive rights and gay marriage but who at the same time championed legislation and policies that would and did have deleterious economic effects on Kansas and many of its citizens.

In the same way Glenn Beck and Sarah Palin stand for economic and social policies that would punish many of the very people who went to last month’s rally to demonstrate against President Obama for his allegedly wicked programs – specifically the hard-won \$787 billion stimulus that by all intelligent accounts should have been more.

The “let’s-take-America-back” and “return-our-nation-to-God” pother is the audio version of the wool being pulled over the eyes of the suggest-

ible. What’s really true is that the likes of Beck and the big money behind him would do away with Social Security in a hot minute and pull the economic rug out from under the poor and disadvantaged, if only for spite.

One image from the DC rally that is burned into my brain was of a young man carrying a crudely written placard advocating the economic philosophy of Ayn Rand. The youth was wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with the logo of a high-tuition Ivy League university. I wondered about the total of his federally financed loans, which would be verboten under Ms. Rand’s analysis. Or maybe his father is a wealthy Republican who paid his kid’s whole way because his tax obligation had been decreased so dramatically in the great Bush tax-cut derby.

Undoubtedly a couple of layers of wool lay over that boy’s eyes.

The anti-incumbent fever that seems to be on the rise has tended to boost those challengers who, among other things, scorn the idea of global warming. Does this mean that voters who have supported the insurgents like to be told bald untruths about what scientists have come to see as the causes of deleterious climate change? Is the political rhetoric of such candidates meant to encourage both self-serving denial and unbridled consumption? Is such rhetoric scripted, say, by oil industry biggies?

Several months ago, I spotted a large pickup truck bearing several bumper stickers. Two of the insightful messages vouchsafed “to whom it may concern” were: “Obamacare Sucks” and “Global Warming Is A Bulls--- Lie.”

The vehicle was in the parking lot of a restaurant advertising “All You Can Eat: \$4.79.”

If knowing the truth sets one free, what does not knowing it, or not wanting to know it, do?

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

## LETTERS

From Page 4

call for compassion. When I was a boy, compassion and its companion, hospitality, were illustrated in movies and taught in Sunday school. In cowboy movies [which I still love to watch], good guys refused to surrender strangers of all stripes to the bad guys, even under the threat of death and dissent in their own community.

This theme was reinforced in the Sunday school stories about God’s wrath when communities ignored edicts on hospitality. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because two Angels were taken from the sanctuary offered by Lot.

The story of a community’s destruction for its lack of compassion and failure to provide hospitality is as valid today as when it was written. Our country was built on the notion of tolerance and it is a cornerstone of our democracy. We should recognize the dangers posed by this behavior and recognize that those who preach hatred, promote distrust and sow the seeds of intolerance are the enemies of our civilization.

This political posturing is designed as a way to stop us, as a nation, from supporting our Muslim communities as that community reaffirms its American identity. The bad guys are standing in the shadows and demanding that we surrender our core value of religious tolerance. Our answer will define us as heroes or cowards and it will shape our future.

Hal Spake  
Norman

members of the behemoth social media site Digg.com have just been caught red-handed in a widespread campaign of censorship, having multiple accounts, upvote padding, and deliberately trying to ban progressives. An undercover investigation has exposed this effort, which has been in action for more than one year.

The concept behind the site is simple. Submitted webpages [news, videos, or images] can be voted up [digging] or down [burying] by each user, sort of a democracy in the Internet model. If an article gets enough diggs, it leaves the upcoming section and reaches the front page where most users spend their time, and can generate thousands of page views. The inverse of this effect is more devastating however. Bury brigades could effectively remove stories from the upcoming sections by collectively burying them.

One bury brigade in particular is a conservative group – known as the Digg “Patriots” – that has become so organized and influential that they are able to bury over 90% of the articles by certain users and websites submitted within 1-3 hours, regardless of subject material.

The primary function of the Digg Patriots is to censor politically progressive content from the upcoming Political, Political Opinion, World News, and Business sections, so that conservative stories have a better chance to get more traction.

This is censorship and dishonesty at its worst.

Frank P. Belcastro  
Dubuque, IA

## HISTORY

From Page 10

can captives had been brought to the U.S. and enslaved. Post-war, presentation tended to downplay the system’s heinous abuses. Wilbur F. Gordy’s *Stories of Later American History*, published in 1923, is instructive: “It was not unusual for master’s children to gather about when the weather was cold enough for fires to hear the negroes tell quaint tales and sing weird songs. The old colored mamies were very fond of massa’s chillun and liked to pet them and tell stories.”

A 1934 text by Rolla M. Tryon also focuses on slave owner beneficence: “Some white people lived all their lives on plantations without seeing a slave so much as whipped. Some slave owners were almost as fond of their slaves as of their families,” Tryon wrote.

Not surprisingly, after the civil rights movement, the presentation shifted. By this time, historians including Buggery made sure to state, “the law was always on the side of whites.” A 1990 account describes African-American slaves as “chattel” and makes clear that they “had no more legal rights than did livestock or other personal belongings.”

The final segment of *Not Written in Stone* discusses how textbooks presented the 1901 assassination of President William McKinley. Clearly, a second volume, to describe how historians have presented the major events and social movements of the 20th Century, is needed. One can only hope that Ward is hard at work, helping us understand the multiple ways that contemporary social issues have been, and will continue to be, read, written about and understood.

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Editor, The Observer:

A group of influential conserva-

# BALLOT

From Page One

state documents in other languages is minimal and potentially life-saving. [Isn't it better, wiser public policy to ensure that newcomers – who may not yet speak or understand English – be able to take our driver's test and secure a license rather than put them behind the wheel without the proper credentials?] But you can't be too careful, can you?

- SQ 755 would prohibit courts from considering international or Sharia law when deciding cases.

This is about fear, a fear that Islam is threatening what so many revisionist historians view as our legacy as a "Christian nation." Of course, many of the Founders were not Christians in today's sense [they were deists] and Thomas Jefferson promoted the idea of separation of church and state to gird the American ideal: each of us is free to worship [or not] as we see fit – no government-imposed religion.

Moreover, there is no evidence that any judge in Oklahoma or elsewhere in the United States [despite faulty

Fox News reporting] has ever attempted to apply Sharia law. The measure's author, Rep. Rex Duncan, R-Sand Springs, concedes as much, describing the "Save Our State" initiative as a "pre-emptive strike" against out-of-control liberal judges.

Of course, there are only an estimated 30,000 to 50,000 Muslims in Oklahoma [population 3.7 million] and none in the Legislature or on the bench. But you can't be too careful, can you?

- SQ 756 would serve notice that Oklahoma won't comply with the provisions of the new federal health care reform act.

This is about fear, a fear in Wingnut World that an out-of-control federal government is slowly but surely taking away our individual liberties. Never mind that we're already required to purchase insurance to drive an automobile. Or that legally the state can't pick and choose which laws of the land it will or won't abide. Or that 600,000 Oklahomans don't have

health care – most because they can't afford it under the current system that ensures record profits for insurance companies. But you can't be too careful, can you?

Having stoked the most rabid, extreme elements in their base, Republicans then turned their sights to consolidating power, ordering four more state questions to the ballot that would change the way we select judges [SQ 752 and 753], redistricting [SQ 748] and initiative/referendum requirements [SQ 750].

[SQ 750 will be sold as a triumph for the average Oklahoman – reducing the number of signatures required to get a measure on the ballot. The reality is, it will make it easier for deep-pocketed special interests to successfully circulate petitions disguised as grassroots, good-government measures, enabling them to grab even more power. and accomplish at the ballot box what they can't in the Legislature.]

So alarmed by polls showing SQ 744 – which would require the Legislature

to fund the state's public schools at the regional average – is very popular with voters, the GOP majorities also rammed through a ballot measure [SQ 754] that, if approved, would nullify this and future such mandates. If both SQ 744 and SQ 754 are approved, the courts would have to decide which prevails.

Republicans are banking that voters won't read the long list of measures closely. They're hoping instead that anti-government fervor – fueled by hard rightwingers [funded by big money interests] and preachers and mostly aimed at President Obama – will propel the 10 measures they placed on the ballot to victory.

If so, voters unwittingly will have supported five "fear" measures that really don't do much but fuel hate and division.

And they will have embraced four "power" measures that will seal their economic fate – handing more power to corporate interests waging war on the middle class.

## STATE QUESTIONS AT A GLANCE

The following summary of the 11 state questions on the Nov. 2 ballot was prepared by Valorie Rodgers, research and policy director, in the office of House Democratic Leader Danny Morgan.

The Oklahoma Policy Institute also is providing an excellent on-line resource to garner more information about the measures. It can be accessed at <http://okpolicy.org/state-ballot-measures-november-2010>

Finally, the 11 state questions may be read in their entirety at the Secretary of State's website: [https://www.sos.ok.gov/gov/proposed\\_questions.aspx](https://www.sos.ok.gov/gov/proposed_questions.aspx)

- SQ 744 seeks to require that funding for public schools be at least equal to the average of the amount spent per pupil by the states surrounding Oklahoma. SQ 744 does not provide a new funding source or raise taxes. The measure provides the Legislature three years to come up with the increased allocation.

- SQ 746 would require voters to show photo identification issued by a state, federal or tribal government prior to casting a ballot. The voter can provide their voter identification card issued by a county election board. If a voter cannot present proof of identity, he or she would be allowed to vote by provisional ballot after signing a statement under oath swearing to his or her identity.

- SQ 747 seeks to establish term limits for all statewide elected officials. If passed, the measure would limit the Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Treasurer, Labor Commissioner, Superintendent of Public Instruction, and State Auditor to serving no more than two four-year terms in office. Members of the Corporation Commission, who serve six-year terms, would also be limited to two terms.

- SQ 748 seeks to alter the membership of the Apportionment Commission, the state panel that redraws state legislative districts if the Legislature fails to do it. The Apportionment Commission is currently made up of the attorney general, the state school superintendent, and the state treasurer. This measure would instead appoint the lieutenant governor, who acts as the chairman but doesn't get to vote. The President Pro Tempore of the state Senate, the Speaker of the House and the Governor would each appoint one Democrat and one Republican to the commission.

- SQ 750 seeks to change the required amount of signatures necessary for

initiative and referendum petitions, by making the percentage necessary to be based on the most votes cast for a statewide ballot with the Governor on the ballot, i.e. always non-presidential elections.

- SQ 751 seeks to amend the Oklahoma Constitution to make English the official language of state government, and declares that all official actions of the state must be conducted in English. It bars individuals from suing the state to have services provided in languages other than English. The measure allows the "use, study, development, or encouragement" of any Native American language.

- SQ 752 seeks to modify the state's judicial nominating process. It would increase the membership of the Judicial Nominating Commission from 13 to 15 members, with two new, at-large members who are not attorneys. The President Pro Tempore of the Senate and the Speaker of the House would each appoint one member.

- SQ 754 states that the Legislature can't be compelled by a formula to provide funding at a certain level. It contains a provision that once it is adopted, it cannot be amended or repealed. If voters approve both SQ744 and SQ754, the measure that receives the most affirmative votes would prevail.

- SQ 755 seeks to adopt a "Save Our State" amendment to the Oklahoma Constitution and explicitly states that judicial rulings based in or drawn from foreign precedents have no bearing on Oklahoma state court decisions. The amendment declares that courts "shall not consider international law or Sharia Law."

- SQ 756 seeks to amend the Oklahoma Constitution to prohibit the requirement a person or employer participate in a government-mandated health care system.

- SQ 757 amends the Oklahoma Constitution to allow an amount equal to 15% of the previous year's general revenue certification to be deposited into the Constitutional Reserve Fund, also known as the "Rainy Day Fund." Currently, the state Constitution requires any funds in excess of estimates be deposited into the Constitutional Reserve Fund until it reaches 10% of the previous year's general revenue fund collections. Once the fund reaches the maximum amount allowed, additional excess revenue can be used for other purposes.



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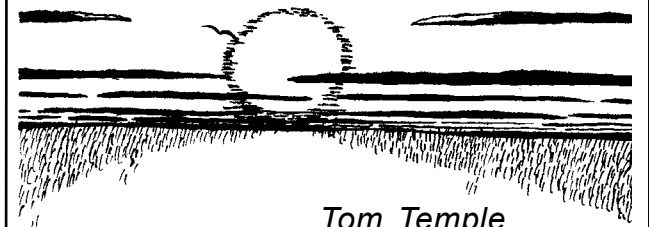
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