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Red Wave Leaves Dems Reeling Search For Significance

By Arnold Hamilton

And yea, darkness settled over the land. And a red tide lifted the corporatists' yachts. And a plutocratic plague tormented the middle class and the poor.

For Oklahoma Democrats, the 2010 election was an apocalypse of Old Testament proportions – the nadir for a party that dominated the 20th Century, but now wanders in the political wilderness.

Democrats enter 2011 without control of a single statewide elected office. Republicans expanded their majorities in the state House and Senate. And a "Blue Dog" has the only "D" behind his name in the state's congressional delegation.

Worst of all: Republicans now control all the redistricting power levers – meaning Democrats could be gerrymandered to the remotest margins for a generation.

Mid-term elections are rarely heart-warming for the party of the president, but Oklahoma's anti-Obama bloodlust – part ideology, part racism, part ignorance – yielded a wipeout for Democrats already bucking a four-decade slide into Republicanism.

Sooner voters registered their antipathy for Obama two years ago by voting against him in all 77 counties, even traditionally Democratic strongholds in Little Dixie. They engaged in the political equivalent of self-mutilation this time by carving up almost anyone affiliated with Obama's party.

Two old sayings come to mind – "cutting off your nose to spite your face" and "throwing the baby out with the bathwater." Oklahoma voters did both, turning over state government lock, stock and barrel to a party of



corporatists, by corporatists and for corporatists.

What's particularly sad: Many Okies don't even know they were played – whipped into a fury by secretive, deep-pocketed corporate cabal [led by Wichita's Koch Brothers] that created and financed a supposedly grassroots, anti-Washington revolt that blossomed most infamously into the Tea Party. [See "Caught Lying," Page 14.]

It shouldn't be long before voters begin to understand what they've done to themselves. Oklahoma is 49th in what it spends on public education, its bridges are rated worst in the na-

tion and its prisons are dangerously overcrowded. None of these crises can be solved with a \$500 million to \$1 billion budget hole, a Constitution that makes it all but impossible to raise taxes and a majority party that doesn't believe in government as a problem-solver.

What's going to happen, for example, if the GOP Legislature in concert with a GOP governor – all under the direction of a greedy, elitist state Chamber – moves forward with their dream of eliminating the state income tax, 40% of the state's budget? It will be balanced on the backs of the middle class and the poor – beware skyrocketing sales and property taxes.

And when the carnage becomes obvious ... when, for example, Republican disdain for public education in general and the teachers' unions in particular becomes more real ... and when much-cherished local schools are teetering on the brink of collapse, Oklahoma Democrats had better be positioned to offer concrete alternatives to an electorate searching for plausible answers.

You see, as bad as the results were,

the 2010 elections create opportunities for Democrats – yes, even liberals and progressives – in a state that traces a deeply-rooted suspicion of corporate, big-moneyed interests to statehood.

First, it won't be easy for the corporatists that currently lead the Oklahoma GOP to control a mushrooming legislative fringe that doesn't play by the old party rules in which disputes are supposed to be resolved in private, never in public.

It will be difficult enough to govern a state facing fiscal crisis into the foreseeable future – it will be especially challenging to do so with the Ritzes, Reynolds and others who fancy themselves as members of the self-styled Liberty Caucus on the loose.

They're not keen on all the corporate welfare that keeps the GOP leadership in good stead with their financial backers – \$5.8 billion in tax breaks, credits, exemptions, including \$2 billion that never created a single job.

This could be an early flashpoint – an opening for Democrats to regain traction with voters.

Second, Republicans are swaggering like never before. Hubris often leads to over-reach. Over-reach often leads to an electoral backlash. It may be two years or four, but Democrats must be ready to seize the moment with a rational agenda that focuses on the interests of all Oklahomans – not just the privileged few.

Oklahoma Democrats aren't the first to experience such electoral disaster, of course.

A quarter century ago, Texas Democrats ruled the Lone Star State, controlling not only the governor's mansion and statewide offices, but also dominating both houses of the Legislature and owning a solid majority in a congressional delegation that once featured the likes of LBJ.

By the late-1990s, Democrats were all but irrelevant. Republicans not only seized the governorship and statewide offices, but also the Legislature, enabling venal Tom DeLay to monkey with congressional redistricting, dooming Democrats to oblivion

See BLOWOUT Page 19

Observations

Blaming Teachers

Conventional wisdom, writes the Economic Policy Institute's Richard Rothstein, is that "the single most important factor determining whether students succeed in school is not the color of their skin or their ZIP code or even their parents' income – it is the quality of their teacher."

In reality, Rothstein reports, decades of social science research have demonstrated that school quality can explain only one-third of the variation in student achievement.

Focusing solely on teacher quality distracts from other equally and plausibly more important school elements like leadership, curriculum, and practices of collaboration.

Blaming teachers is easy, Rothstein writes, while improving the other areas is more difficult. More importantly, focusing just on teacher quality "distracts us from the biggest threat to student achievement in the current age: our unprecedented economic catastrophe and its effect on parents and their children's ability to gain from higher-quality schools."

Over half of all black children have a parent who has either been unemployed or underemployed during the past year, and 36% of black children now live in poverty.

The consequences of unacceptably high unemployment rates for disadvantaged parents depress the achievement of their children.

It is fanciful for national policymakers to pick this moment to raise their expectations for academic achievement from children of families in such stress, Rothstein writes, and to single out teacher quality as the culprit most deserving of their public attention.

It's the parent[s], stupid.

Teen Pregnancy

Oklahoma is guilty of a preventable horror – teen pregnancy rates here are the fifth highest in the nation.

The number of teen girls giving birth in Oklahoma in 2008 was more

than double the number of female freshmen entering the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University that fall semester, according to a recent data analysis.

Oklahoma's teen birth rates rose between 2005 and 2008, moving up a notch to the fifth highest in the country, according to the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy.

It began when then-Gov. Frank Keating latched on to \$10 million from the federal government if the state would teach "abstinence only." We have paid a dear price for withholding the whole truth about human sexuality from our children.

This is 100% preventable. Oklahoma is not doing much at all to address teen pregnancy.

The largest increase is among Oklahoma's 18- to 19-year-olds, which jumped from the sixth-highest pregnancy rate for that age group to second, behind Mississippi. Oklahoma's rate is 111.5 births per 1,000 in that age range, compared with the national rate of 73.9. The birth rate for 15- to 17-year-olds remains the sixth-highest in the country at 30.4 births per 1,000. The national rate is 22.1.

State, rate (per 1,000):

Mississippi, 71

New Mexico, 66.1

Texas, 64.2

Arkansas, 61.7

Oklahoma, 61.5

Arizona, 61.2

Tennessee, 56.2

Louisiana, 55.9

Nevada, 55.3

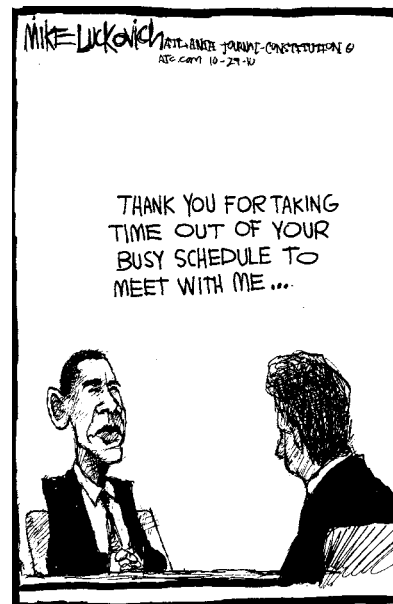
Kentucky 55.11

National average: 42.5

– Source: Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy

The Gap Remains

A new report from Education Testing Services takes a long look at the achievement gap between black and white students, starting with its first narrowing at the turn of the last cen-



tury and continuing to the first decade of the present century.

The authors take special note of the era in the 1970s and '80s that inaugurated the NAEP and provided the first data on national trends, which they say is important because it witnessed a "substantial narrowing of the gap in the subjects of reading and mathematics."

But in the decades since the late '80s, the authors found "no clear trend in the gap, or sustained period of change in the gap in one way or another" – in other words, stagnation.

During this time, there was little analysis of the gap while attention was directed to the vicissitudes of small gains and declines.

Anyone looking for a smoking gun as to why progress halted, establishing dead certainty, will not find it in this ETS report.

Having posed the question of why progress halted, we hope to urge the research and policy communities to put this question high on the list of priorities, and encourage funders to make the resources available.

Asinine Rules

The renowned economist Peter Diamond won the Nobel Prize for economics, sharing it with two colleagues "for their analysis of markets with search frictions."

But there is one thing Diamond has been unable to achieve – overcoming the Senate's arcane rules to win confirmation to the Federal Reserve's board of governors.

President Obama appointed Diamond to the Fed's governing body nearly seven months ago, but his nomination is blocked by a single senator – Alabama Republican Richard Shelby.

Shelby's reason for blocking Diamond? He believes the Nobel laureate is "unqualified" for the job. It would be funny if it were not so tragic.

Shelby exploited the Senate rules to place a "hold" on Diamond, preventing his nomination from moving forward, despite the fact that the Senate Banking Committee approved him for the post in July.

Today, there are at least 205 Obama appointees awaiting confirmation, some of whom have been waiting for months, or even over a year, to start their jobs. The absence of these would-be ambassadors, judges, administrators, and national security officials hinder the government's ability to function properly at a critical time for the country.

The problem stems from the Sen-

ate's absurd rules. There are so many ways to shut down business in the Senate – many of which can be implemented by one lone senator, usually Republican Sen. Tom Coburn, the Oklahoma jackass.

Hypocrite

In Lou Dobbs's heyday at CNN, when he commanded more than 800,000 viewers and a reported \$6 million a year for "his fearless reporting and commentary" he became notorious for his angry rants against "illegal aliens."

Dobbs reserved a special venom for the employers who hire them, railing against "the employer who is so shamelessly exploiting the illegal alien and so shamelessly flouting U.S. law" and even proposing, on one April 2006 show, that "illegal employers who hire illegal aliens" should face felony charges.

Based on a yearlong investigation, including interviews with five immigrants who worked without papers on his properties, The Nation and the Investigative Fund at The Nation Institute have found that Dobbs has relied for years on undocumented labor for the upkeep of his multimillion-dollar estates and the horses he keeps for his 22-year-old daughter, Hillary, a champion show jumper.

He joins other hypocrites on the far right, including "family values" Rush Limbaugh, now in his fourth marriage.

Stiffer Law

In 2009, 5,474 people were killed on U.S. roadways and an estimated 448,000 more were injured in motor vehicle crashes that were reported to have involved distracted driving.

Of those people killed in distracted-driving-related crashes, 995 involved reports of a cell phone as a distraction [18% of fatalities in distraction-related crashes].

The age group with the greatest proportion of distracted drivers was the under-20 age group – 16% of all drivers younger than 20 involved in fatal crashes were reported to have been distracted while driving.

Of those drivers involved in fatal crashes who were reportedly distracted, the 30- to 39-year-olds had the highest proportion of cell phone involvement.

The next session of the Legislature should provide much harsher penalties for distracted driving. A slap on the wrist won't save a single life.

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

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

– Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

Observerscope

Dart: To the OKC Museum of Art for a stacked panel against public education, including homeschooler Brandon Dutcher, nitwit mouthpiece for the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs.

George W. Bush has completed his autobiography, *Decision Points*. It would have been finished earlier but he ran out of crayons.

Dart: To the continuing Republican criticism of the stimulus. A New York Post survey showed that it saved 58,000 teachers nationwide, 1,900 in Oklahoma.

A new PEW Poll showed only 50% of Americans could name the first book in the Bible [Genesis]. Americans need to learn about all religions – but especially the Bible.

Laurel: To OU graduate Neile Jones-Batie for her new book *Look Again Because You Can* on her struggle with domestic abuse. More spouses should speak out.

We were bitterly disappointed when OCU Regents bypassed Vince Orza for president in favor of Robert Henry. Orza did a splendid job as head of the Meinders School of Business. Few blame him for leaving.

Dart: To the Daily Disappointment for refusing to print a Tulsa World story [they're exchanging copy] showing tax exemptions have soared to \$5.85 billion – including \$30 million to a Gaylord family member.

“Religion is far more of a choice than homosexuality. And the protection we give religion – we protect religion – and talk about lifestyle choice! That is absolutely a choice. Gay people don't choose to be gay.” – Jon Stewart on the Daily Show, thumping homophobe Mike Huckabee.

Laurel: To Indian farmers – especially the Choctaws – for their years long battle with the U.S. Ag Department. A \$680 million settlement has been negotiated, subject to federal court approval.

The loss in productivity and health care attributed to obesity among full-time American employees is \$73 billion a year. [Time magazine]

Dart: To author Sean Gregory for his tell-all biography of Mickey Mantle. How many authors will dredge up his alcohol problems that ended in his tragic death of liver cancer?

Little wonder that new teachers are teaching for five years and out, given the hateful blame for failing students when in fact it all begins in the home – or the lack thereof.

Laurel: To OKC's KFOR-TV Channel 4 for the prime time gubernatorial debate. It brings back memories of TV news when there was TV news.

The Tenth Circuit has upheld a \$14.5 million judgment against Arkansas' O.K. Industries for cheating 300 southeastern Oklahoma poultry growers in 2002.

Dart: To those who text and drive. Talk to the family of plastic surgeon Mike Fumentro, texting while driving, missing a curve, plunging to his death. His last text – “border collie jill surveying the view ...”

One in five Americans think President Obama is a Muslim, despite the fact that he is a Christian. Some speak from ignorance, some from pure bigotry. [Pew Poll]

Laurel: To Corrections Department workers for going public with their furloughs and lack of prison staffing. The sorry Republican Legislature left corrections \$38 million in the hole.

The first-year college dropout rate costs Oklahoma taxpayers \$132 million, according to a survey by the American Institute of Research. Nationally, the bill was \$6.2 billion.

Dart: To legislative politicians talking about raising sin taxes on booze and tobacco to plug a minimum \$450 million budget hole next fiscal year. Had they not cut taxes for the rich, no tax hikes would be necessary.



Another black eye for Oklahoma – teen pregnancy stats show Oklahoma has risen to the fifth highest – 61.5 per 1,000 births.

Laurel: To Rep. Dave Dank, R-OKC, who said he will press in the next session for a review of Oklahoma's tax credits – an unholy mess if there ever was one.

Outgoing Attorney General Drew Edmondson will join the OKC law firm of Gable Gotwals. He has been a superb nonpartisan AG who will be sorely missed.

Dart: To OKC District Judge Bryan Dixon for a half-assed opinion on closing state employee birth dates unless the agency approves, closing all legislative employee records. The Supreme Court should act on this one.

In George W. Bush's new book, *Decision Points*, he bemoans that he was unable to privatize Social Security – proving that he is easily the dumbest president in history.

Laurel: To the Pew Public Forum for exposing politicking from the pulpit: 16% of Protestant churches, 14% of Catholic churches and 36% of all black churches.

The figure is stunning: 245,000 Oklahomans abuse or are dependent on alcohol or illicit drugs. Thanks to GOP tax cuts 70% of Oklahomans with mental illness are without treatment.

Dart: To those criticizing school districts for refusing to honor a new law using public education funds to educate private school students. Let the attorney general or the courts sort it out.

Think jobs aren't hard to come by in this George W. Bush recession? Oklahoma college enrollment hits an all-time high of 193,462 students, up 3.3%.

Laurel: To Oklahoma's sweetheart, Reba McEntire, who donated \$60,000 to Spavinaw school in rural Mayes County when she learned it was closing due to lack of funding.

Thanks to Republican tax cuts, 40 mental health beds for children have been cut and more than 100 employees laid off. It's cruelty personified.

Dart: To Rep. Sally Kern, R-OKC, for proposing legislation to prevent retired teachers who work for a union or association work to keep paying into the system. She's a nut case. It's one of the poorest pensions in America.

More than \$25,000 has poured in to rebuild Tulsa's Admiral Twin outdoor theater – some from out of state. When it went up in flames there was no insurance.

Laurel: To Gov. Brad Henry for naming Don Davis, former Cameron University president, to the State Regents for Higher Education.

Madaleine Pickens, wife of T. Boone, has ponied up money for a sprawling Nevada ranch to serve as a wild horse sanctuary. Bless her heart.

Dart: To our turgid twins, U.S. Sens. Jim Inhofe and Tom Coburn, featured in a long Mother Jones magazine article as members of The Family, a Washington, DC cult. They caught Coburn in a flat lie.

Better late than never? Gov. Brad Henry and the First Lady endorsed Jari Askins on Oct. 22.

Laurel: To the new governor for pledging to support legislation that would include the Legislature in the Open Records Act.

Oklahoma's lone Democratic [?] congressman, Dan Boren, paid off by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce with \$67,195 for his TV ads.

Dart: To Congress for ignoring the need to address comprehensive immigration reform. More than four million children were born to illegal immigrants in 2008. [Pew Poll]

Over the next decade spending on Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid is projected to rise 70%, 79% and 99%, respectively. [Congressional Budget Office]

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

In the next general election we need to pass a bill that will regulate the income of Oklahoma politicians. It would be very easy to write. Take the wording of SQ 744 and substitute the term "Oklahoma Politicians" where we now have "Education" and instead of "minimum" we could use the term "a maximum of."

I wonder how difficult it would be to get enough signatures to get this on the ballot?

Chris Bolton
Eucha

Editor, The Observer:

I just received my notice from my health care provider to re-certify my dependents as is the case every year. This year was special. I had an application to add my 20-year-old son as a dependent. He has not had health insurance for nearly two years. Then I read further that there was no cap on lifetime limits on our benefits. To say I was elated upon seeing these two items in black and white goes without saying.

I cannot understand why the right-wingers in this country could not feel the same while continuing to trash health care. I can sleep much better at night.

Jim Nugen
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Oklahomans have decided going cheap over and over is the answer to improving our schools and healthcare systems in this state. Maybe we can rename all the schools, hospitals, bridges, and roads for either Boone Pickens or the Gaylord Family and get some adequate funding for the children of Oklahoma.

I wonder if Einstein was right about insanity being where we do the same things over and over and expect different results.

Max Edgar
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Now circulating on the 'net is a statement that the Congressional Budget Office estimates it will take 100% of next year's tax revenues to pay entitlements. Everything. Nothing left for anything else.

I don't know if that's something you guys think needs to be addressed as the Righties spew forth many untruths and all can't be refuted. That one is vicious, though, because we

oldsters are becoming the villains in all this.

I fear a backlash aimed at seniors may be brewing.

Mike Rogers
Moore

Editor, The Observer:

I love the letters in The Observer. It is probably my favorite part of the paper. One letter in the last issue caught my attention.

The next time someone tells you, "they just don't like Obama," ask them if they'd feel differently if he were white. They will deny it to the death and insist they are not racist, but we all know the truth. Of course, being a Democrat doesn't help him much, either.

Look at the way the Republicans went on the attack when Bill Clinton was elected. That weasel, Tom DeLay, even set up a "war room" in his office to seek out and publicize anything negative they could find about President Clinton. And they did not stop until they impeached him.

Do not underestimate the Republicans. They go ballistic when they don't get their way. And they definitely did not get their way in the 2008 election. They would prefer an elderly career politician and his loony running mate than an intelligent, black man. Mainly because they cannot admit that a black man could be intelligent and they cannot tolerate the fact that he is in the White House. As someone said recently, they will not be satisfied until President Obama is mowing the lawn at the White House and the First Lady is cooking the State Dinners and serving them herself.

The tea baggers have taken over the Republican Party and the tea baggers are nothing but a modern day Klan. They are old, angry, white, racist McCain/Palin leftovers. And they hate our president. Because he is black.

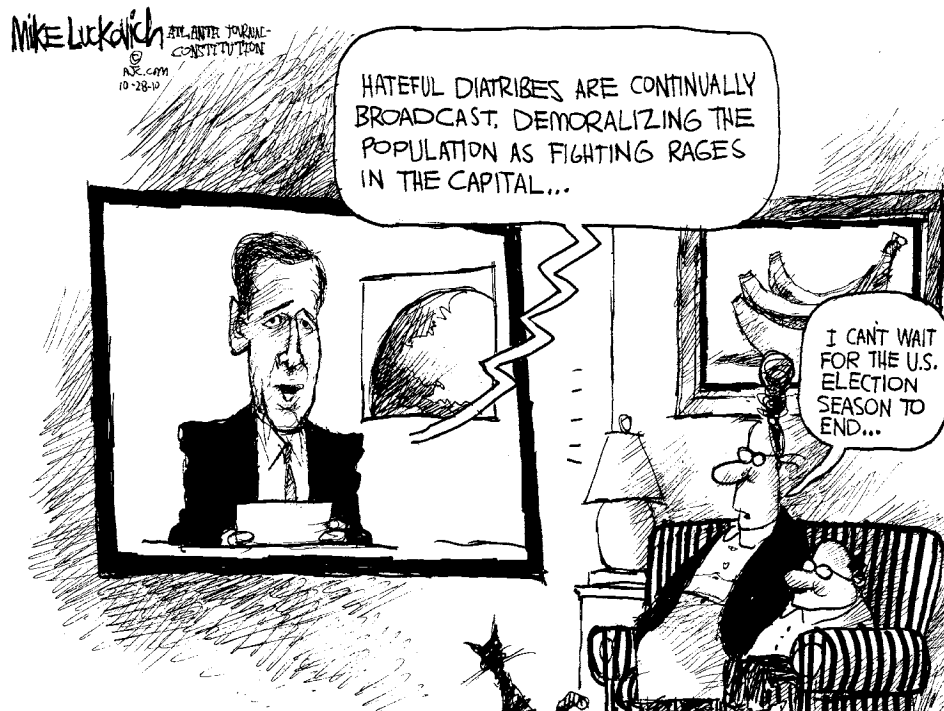
They never had a problem with the deficit or unprovoked wars or TARP when they were done by a white president, but now, suddenly, they are outraged. Give me a break.

Deborah Lewis
Garland, TX

Editor, The Observer:

The Obama stimulus package, which has been so maligned and voted against by Oklahoma Republicans in Washington, has brought millions of dollars into the state.

Those same Republicans have no problem hypocritically standing in



front of the cameras back home with a large over-sized check for a prop, claiming credit for the Obama windfall, as if they are personally responsible for it. The Oklahoma media never writes a headline to show that these huge projects are paid for by Obama's stimulus money. He went against all odds to get that bill passed and every Republican voted against it, yet he gets no credit or thanks from Oklahomans.

Current political candidates, like Mary Fallin, pride themselves in saying they will "fight the Obama Administration." Apparently, it doesn't matter to her what the issue is, she is for the downfall of our president! How patriotic! I challenge the Tulsa World and other Oklahoma media to make a list of all of the projects and millions that have come to Oklahoma from the stimulus package, and headline it, "Obama's Stimulus Package Pays Off."

Yeah, and there's a tooth fairy.

Barbara Santee
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

We all know that some people have a socio-pathic personality that allows them to commit crimes; and know that some people are lazy and will avoid work whenever possible. But when "good" people cannot find jobs, the structure of society is at stake. The famous novel *Les Miserables* by Victor Hugo illustrates the point. The hero, Jean Valjean, steals bread to feed his family.

The political situation is on the verge of creating that dilemma in America right now. Poverty is now, slowly, creeping into the suburbs. The Republican Party of years gone by no longer exists. It has been taken over by a meld of basically three groups: [1] fat cat billionaires who have no sense of social responsibility; [2] Tea Party types who are as weird as Sarah Palin, Sharron Angle and Christine O'Donnell; and [3] religious fundamentalists who wish to drag us back to the middle ages. As a result, this year's elections are more important than most people realize; in fact, it is critical that Democrats win.

And when I say Democrats, I mean real Democrats, not Democrats In Name Only [DINO]. My definition of real Democrats would include such people as the former Sen. Paul Well-

stone of Minnesota or the current representative from Florida, Alan Grayson.

Pseudo-Democrat Max Baucus engineered the health bill to satisfy the health insurance industry. Pseudo-Democrat Chris Dodd engineered the financial bill to satisfy Wall Street.

In the future, all Democrats must be vetted to determine their true feelings - this goes for seated Democrats with high seniority, as well as wannabes.

Some people say that this is impossible to accomplish in a Red State such as Oklahoma - that we are lucky to have even a pseudo-Democrat such as Rep. Dan Boren. Remember Mike Synar? He was a real Democrat; it can be done!

J.A. Gowman
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Virginia Thomas needs to put her big girl panties on and deal with it. The "it" is the reality that she is married to a male chauvinist, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas.

Instead, she has chosen to live in a dream world which is evidenced by her recent phone call to former University of Oklahoma Law Professor Anita Hill. She asked Hill to apologize for her 19-year-old sexual harassment accusation that nearly kept Thomas off the court.

Hill is sticking by her guns and says she is not retracting her charge. At Thomas' confirmation hearings, she said that Thomas asked her for dates and made sexual comments to her when she worked for him at two government agencies.

She owes Thomas no apology for the following reasons:

1. Testimony by a "second woman," Angela Wright, who also worked for Thomas and was harassed, was held back by key senators at the hearings.

2. No one where Hill has taught, at Oral Roberts University, OU, the University of California at Berkeley or her present employer, Brandeis University, has challenged her credibility.

3. She grew up here in Oklahoma where your word is your bond.

4. Those of us who have walked a mile in Hill's moccasins know it is not unusual for the boss to try to hit on you if you are an attractive female employee.

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner
Wagoner

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.

Frosty Troy's Notebook

Poverty



FROSTY TROY
Founding Editor

Fact: One in five Oklahoma children goes to bed hungry.

Fact: Oklahoma is the fifth poorest state, with a poor family of four existing on \$22,500 a year. We're the sixth hungriest state in the country.

I mention this because Oklahoma's sorry Republican legislative leadership delayed until after the elections an interim study of so-called tax incentives – \$5.9 billion, with \$2 billion not having creating a single job.

On Oct. 25 the Daily Disappointment's front page headline said: State Tax Credits Draw Scrutiny. It obviously terrified the Republican leadership – the last thing they wanted the public to know.

Weyerhaeuser Co. tops the list of firms granted \$54 million of your money since 2004. Santa isn't dead, he's masquerading as Republican legislative leaders and Democratic [?]

Gov. Brad Henry.

Of course Democratic [?] State Treasurer Scott Meacham trotted out the Republican alibi that it takes time for a firm granted a tax credit to get the jobs rolling. That's a flat lie.

Meacham has been the governor in fact, if not in title, while the governor has been busy watching movies in the Mansion basement.

Henry emerges long enough to sign another tax cut – \$771 million on his watch. He's leaving the next governor with a budget hole of at least \$500 million.

Oklahoma has the fifth lowest tax burden in America, according to the nonpartisan Tax Foundation. We have the third lowest property tax.

As a result of Republican tax cuts, jails and prisons are today's mental hospitals.

For the first time, County Health Departments are charging for a flu shot. Child mental health centers have been closed across the state.

The corrections Department is so badly underfunded, guards are being furloughed and it will take \$35 million to finish the fiscal year. A single guard is on the yard with more than 100 violent felons.

Oklahoma is part of the national trend toward the takeover of America by corporations – especially since the sorry Roberts Supreme Court ruled that corporations are persons and can give unlimited amounts to political campaigns.

Income disparity in the U.S. is now as bad as it was before the Great Depression at the end of the 1920s. From 1979 to 2006, the richest 1% more than doubled their share of the total U.S. income, from 10% to 23%.

The richest 1% now have an average annual income of more than \$1.3 million. For the last 25 years, over 90% of the total growth in income in the U.S. went to the top 10% earners – leaving 9% of all income to be shared by the bottom 90%.

In 1973, the average U.S. CEO was paid \$27 for every dollar paid to a typical worker; by 2007 that ratio had grown to \$275 to \$1.

Since 1992, the average tax rate on the richest 400 taxpayers in the U.S. dropped from 26.8% to 16.62%.

The U.S. has the greatest inequality between rich and poor among all Western industrialized nations and it has been getting worse for 40 years. The World Factbook, published by the CIA, includes an international ranking of the inequality among families inside of each country, called the Gini Index.

The U.S. ranking of 45th in 2007 is the same as Argentina, Cameroon, and Cote d'Ivoire. The highest inequality can be found in countries like Namibia, South Africa, Haiti and Guatemala.



The U.S. ranking of 45th compares poorly to Japan [38], India [36], New Zealand, UK [34], Greece [33], Spain [32], Canada [32], France [32], South Korea [31], Netherlands [30], Ireland [30], Australia [30], Germany [27], Norway [25], and Sweden [23].

Why is ObamaCare the Republicans' favorite whipping boy? Rich people live an average of about five years longer than poor people in the U.S. Naturally, gross inequality has consequences in terms of health, exposure to unhealthy working conditions, nutrition and lifestyle.

Not only does ObamaCare include a Patients Bill of Rights and covers an additional 33,000 Oklahomans, it gives the bird to a Republican Legislature that refused to cover autism.

In 1980, the most well off in the U.S. had a life expectancy of 2.8 years over the least well-off. As the inequality gap widens, so does the life expectancy gap.

In 1990, the gap was a little less than four years. In 2000, the least well-off could expect to live to age of 74.7 years while the most well-off had a life expectancy of 79.2 years.

These are extremely troubling facts for anyone concerned about economic fairness, equality of opportunity, and justice.

Thomas Jefferson observed that the systematic restructuring of society to benefit the rich over the poor and middle class is a natural appetite of the rich.

"Experience declares that man is the only animal which devours his own kind, for I can apply no milder term to ... the general prey of the rich on the poor."

But Jefferson also knew that justice can only be delayed so long: "I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, that His justice cannot sleep forever."

The rich talk about the rise of socialism to divert attention from the fact that they are devouring the basics of the poor and everyone else. Many of those crying socialism the loudest are doing it to enrich or empower themselves.

A classic example is Republican U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn of Oklahoma, darling of the rich and super rich, bemoaning ObamaCare and the Obama Administration's stimulus – \$37.5 billion in Oklahoma last year. Without it, half the state would be on food stamps.

Fact: It saved 1,900 teaching jobs.

We think we can't lose this country but we can and we will once corporate America completes its takeover, aided and abetted by a venal Supreme Court majority and the Republican Party.

Goodbye democracy. Hello plutocracy.

Senator Teams Up To Help Poor Children

Sen. Constance N. Johnson partnered with the Office Depot Foundation recently to deliver backpacks to Positive Tomorrows, a private Oklahoma City school that provides free education to homeless children, K-5th grade.

The backpacks contained essential school supplies and were donated as part of the Foundation's 2010 National Backpack Program in partnership with the National Foundation for Women Legislators [NFWL].

"This is a wonderful program and I was honored to have the opportunity to present these backpacks to the students at Positive Tomorrows. As the economy has fluctuated over the last year, many parents have struggled to figure out how they will be able to purchase supplies for their children," said Johnson, D-OKC.

"For the parents of these students, however, school supplies aren't even a consideration as they are living in homeless shelters and worrying about where they'll get their next meal, so this program is truly a blessing for them."

Positive Tomorrows is a private, nonprofit elementary school serving the special needs of homeless children in OKC. Its mission is to be "A Sanctuary of Hope; educating homeless children and their families for life."

The NFWL chooses one woman from each state legislature to receive the backpack donation. This year, Johnson was selected, having been active with NFWL for many years and even serving in a leadership role at one time.

Johnson, along with local Office Depot Store Manager Kathy Moore, presented the backpacks to the school's Executive Director Susan Agel following a tour of

the facility, which currently serves nearly 40 students.

"When a child, who learned not to expect things like new school supplies, not only gets supplies but also receives a brand-new backpack, their faces light up," said Agel. "We're so grateful to Sen. Johnson, Office Depot, the NFWL and all those who partner with us in making school a good experience for homeless children."

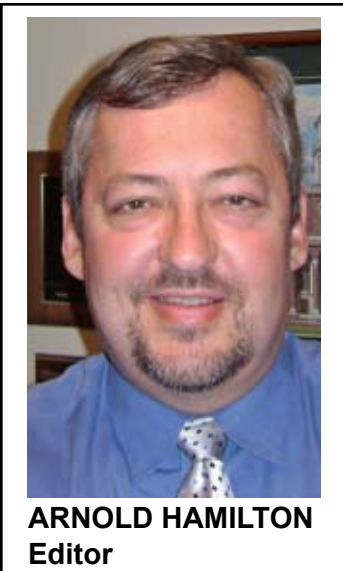
The Office Depot Foundation is celebrating the 10th anniversary of its National Backpack Program this year. By the end of this year, Office Depot and the Office Depot Foundation will have donated more than 2.3 million backpacks since this program began in 2001.

NFWL has been partnering with the backpack program for five years and, this year, the Office Depot Foundation will provide the NFWL with nearly 18,000 backpacks for distribution by women elected officials in all 50 states.

The Office Depot Foundation will also donate backpacks to children in partnership with the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America, the National Court Appointed Special Advocates Association [CASA], the Kids In Need Foundation, Nourish America, Feed The Children, the Little Red Wagon Foundation and the Tony Stewart Foundation.

These organizations focus on education, domestic abuse, national disaster relief and other vital issues and will assist in distributing backpacks to children across the country and internationally.

Henry's Final Act: Choosing New Justices?



ARNOLD HAMILTON
Editor

Gov. Brad Henry doesn't have much time left in office. But that doesn't mean his agenda is blank.

If he chooses, the governor could fill two vacancies on the state Supreme Court – Justice Rudolph Hargrave, 85, announced he will retire at year's end and Justice Marian Opala died Oct. 11 at age 89.

Henry already has appointed more Supreme Court justices – four – than any governor in state history, eclipsing Gov. George Nigh's previous record [three].

Two more and Henry will have selected two-thirds of the current court – remarkable.

Republicans, no doubt, would prefer the governor punt, leaving the appointments to Gov.-elect Mary Fallin, who takes office in January. But Henry is a lawyer with many friends in the trial bar who are keenly interested in the high court openings.

What's a lame duck governor to do?

At press time, Henry hadn't tipped his hand, but it's worth noting that he adhered closely to a bipartisan playbook during his two terms – all-too-often asserting it was his job to build a state, not a party.

That didn't set well with yellow dog Democrats, but it won rave reviews with the great unwashed, an approval rating that rarely dipped as low as the upper 50s.

Henry's legal friends no doubt will want him to make the appointments, not leaving them to a Republican administration that undoubtedly would look for jurists most inclined toward a corporatist approach to governing.

But the governor has another consideration – his future.

At 47, he is a young man with an impressive resume and career or two ahead of him. What's he going to do next? Could his future employment options be affected by whether or not he makes the Supreme Court appointments?

You think that won't have a bearing? More than a few Democrats have complained to me that Henry – widely hailed as “the education governor” – signed on as co-chairman of the anti-SQ 744 campaign in part because failure to do so would have negatively impacted his potential career options.

The state's powers-that-be – from the state Chamber to corporate chiefs, state employees union to higher education leaders – united against the plan that would have required the Legislature to fund public education at the per-pupil regional average.

They feared it would siphon away so much of the state budget to education that it would force deep across-the-board cuts, crippling other essential state services.

Or so they said. Actually, they were afraid it would curtail their feasting at the taxpayers' trough.

Here's how the Supreme Court appointment process works: The state's Judicial Nominating Commission submits a list of finalists to the governor for consideration. It's unclear how quickly the names could be submitted, but it's not hard to imagine that Henry will get them – if he wants them – before he leaves office.

The governor's selection is final – no legislative confirmation required.

Henry doesn't ask me for advice, but that doesn't keep me from giving it: Now that Fallin, a corporatist to the core, is the governor-elect, Henry should do all he can to make the appointments.

The reason: Republicans have worked overtime since taking control of the Legislature to meddle in judicial affairs. In fact, some GOP lawmakers clearly don't understand an important concept known as separation of powers.

Just last session, Reps. Mike Ritze, R-Broken Arrow, and Mike Reynolds, R-OKC, pressed for a new law that would have given the Legislature greater authority to remove judges and require strict adherence to jury sentences.

We already have the means to get rid of lousy or corrupt judges – such as voting them out in the next election. Can you imagine giving partisan legislators influence over judicial decisions? What a nightmare.

That idea didn't go anywhere, but it didn't keep legislative leaders from scheming to influence the courts: Look no further than SQ 752. It expands the membership of the Judicial Nominating Commission from 13 to 15 with two new at-large members who are not attorneys.

The Senate president pro tem and the House speaker, both Republicans, have been given the authority to each appoint one of the new members. You can just imagine the ideological and political bent of their appointees.

Question: If it's not broke, why fix it? Oklahoma's judicial nominating system, put into place in the wake of a Supreme Court scandal, has worked splendidly for four decades.

The only reason to change is politics – more specifically, political power. If we're not careful, we could end up in a mess like Texas and other states, where judges run on partisan slates and money flows freely into campaigns. Look at West Virginia and the impact on big coal's campaign contributions on judicial outcomes.

We let the professionals sift through the candidates, then present a short list to the governor. It doesn't take politics completely out of the process, but it's about as close as you can get.

Then, if Oklahomans don't like the court's decisions, or if they think a justice is corrupt, they can vote them out of office the next time the justices appear on the statewide retention ballot.

I want the best legal minds available to decide these kinds of issues – not the best justice system that money can buy.

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New Progressive Group To Meet In Edmond

The Brennan Society, a new progressive group in Oklahoma, is in its formative stages. A meeting is set for 2 p.m. Nov. 14 in Edmond.

If you are interested in learning more about the Brennan Society or joining the group, please contact Professor Tom Guild by e-mail at tomguild@sbcglobal.net.

The founders of the organization voted in October to focus on six issues:

- Government funding of stem cell research
- Gay rights/Equal rights for GLBT/Gay marriage
- Protecting Social Security
- The Health Care Reform Law of 2010
- Providing affordable and quality education for all people to compete with other developed and emerging economies
- Promoting tolerance, peace, and social harmony among all people.

No. 1 Goal In 2011 Must Be Tax Reform

In Oklahoma, the first \$600 won in a competitive livestock show is tax deductible. In Hawaii, residents can deduct up to \$3,000 on their state income taxes to care for a tree that a certified arborist has deemed to be "exceptional."

In Louisiana, you can buy binoculars tax free during the "Second Amendment Sales Tax Holiday," but only if you plan to use them for hunting – not bird-watching.

In South Carolina, your home is exempt from property tax if you received the Medal of Honor, or if you were captured by the enemy in World War I, World War II, the Korean War, or the Vietnam War.

And in Arkansas, you can buy an automobile tax free every two years if you are a blind veteran – regardless of which war you fought in and whether or not you were ever captured by the enemy.

None of these provisions may be that significant. But surely, none of them belong in any state's tax code. In fact, their mere existence indicates that the bar for enacting and perpetuating spending programs styled as "tax expenditures" has been set far too low. It's time to raise the bar.

Oklahoma is a perfect example of tax credits or exemptions gone wild – \$5.8 billion on the books, granted on the pretext of creating jobs. More than \$2 billion have yet to create a single job. [Source: Oklahoma Tax Commission]

TAX EXPENDITURE BIASES

State codes are increasingly being riddled with special breaks because of two advantages enjoyed by lawmakers seeking to enact or expand tax expenditures: political biases and procedural biases.

Political biases include the ability of lawmakers to claim that a tax expenditure both cuts taxes and addresses some important policy issue.

For instance, although a tuition grant program and an identically designed tuition tax credit can both be defended as ways of improving access to education, only the tax credit can be touted as a way of cutting taxes.

Usually, enacting a new program involves a trade-off related to the public's view of the appropriate size of government. Tax expenditures, however, are rarely discussed in these terms, and as a result they are able to garner support from lawmakers across the political spectrum with undeserved ease.

Procedural biases include the permanent duration and unlimited size of most tax expenditures. Unlike a tuition grant program, a tuition tax credit is usually allowed to continue indefinitely and to grow without limitation.

THEY FAVOR HIGHER TAXES

Similarly, opponents of a tax expenditure can be labeled as supporting higher taxes and neglecting the issue addressed by the tax expenditure written to prevent these outcomes.

The disproportionate power given to tax-writing committees and, in many states, the supermajority requirement needed to eliminate a tax expenditure are procedural biases as well.

Other examples include the general assumption of confidentiality when it comes to the identity of tax expenditure beneficiaries, the exclusion of tax expenditures from budget presentations, and the fact that tax expenditures are typically exempt from government performance reviews.

These last three factors each provide automatic protections from future scrutiny if lawmakers decide to pursue their favored goals through tax expenditures.

These biases have led not only to complicated and unfair state tax codes, but



also to a reduction in overall government efficiency. This is because tax expenditure biases have created an unwarranted preference for forgoing traditional spending programs in favor of tax expenditures.

Opportunities for bringing about more rational state tax codes and more sensible state policy debates in general could be increased by enacting reforms aimed at addressing these biases.

MAKING REFORM STICK

Political and procedural biases have resulted in strong incentives for lawmakers to repeatedly rely on state tax codes as tools for passing legislation. Regardless of whether a lawmaker is most passionate about renewable energy, homeownership or economic growth, a tax break is usually the easiest way to gather support for the cause. The result has been an unmistakable long-term trend toward more tax expenditures – a phenomenon sometimes referred to as "tax deform."

Undoing the damage done by this trend is the job of tax reform. At the federal level, reforms designed to prune out the special interest goodies buried in Internal Revenue Code have been enacted roughly once every 20 years. Many states have also enacted tax reforms for the same reason.

But as odd as it may sound, even the most comprehensive tax reform is nothing more than a Band-Aid on a system that heavily favors tax deform. Systematic changes are needed if future tax reforms are to have any chance of lasting more than a fleeting moment.

Feds To Help State Hold Down Risk Costs

Oklahoma will receive \$1 million to help crack down on unreasonable health insurance premium hikes. HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius recently announced the award.

Oklahoma will use this Affordable Care Act funding to help improve the oversight of proposed health insurance premium increases, take action against insurers seeking unreasonable rate hikes, and ensure Oklahomans receive value for their premium dollars.

The Affordable Care Act puts in place critical market reforms to improve quality and reduce the cost of health care for employers and individuals.

REDUCING PREMIUMS

Increased competition, lower insurance overhead, and better risk pooling in health insurance exchanges in 2014 are expected to reduce premiums in the individual market by anywhere from 14% to 20%, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

"Between now and then, we will continue to work with states to ensure consumers are receiving value for their premium dollars and to avoid the kind of double-digit premium increases seen recently," Sebelius said.

"The state proposals approved [recently] demonstrate the need and desire for new resources and tools to help them protect against unjustifiable premium increases."

A MORE LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

The Affordable Care Act provides states with \$250 million in Health Insurance Premium Review Grants over five years to help create a more level playing field by improving how states review proposed health insurance premium increases and holding insurance companies accountable for unjustified premium increases.

Applications for the first round of Health Insurance Premium Review Grants were made available on June 7.

The grants build on the Obama Administration's work with states to implement the Affordable Care Act. Earlier this year, Sebelius called on certain insurance companies to justify large premium increases and encouraged state and local officials to obtain stronger health insurance premium review authorities under state laws.

This increased scrutiny by the administration and by several states has led to the withdrawal or reduction of several proposed health insurance premium increases that in some cases turned out to be based on faulty assumptions and data.

HOW STATE WILL USE FUNDS

This grant will be used for the purposes detailed in the approved application. The following is a general summary of how Oklahoma intends to use its funding:

- **Improve the Review Process:** The state conducts limited rate review activities. HMOs and small group filings are required, however individual and large group products are not required, to file. Oklahoma has the authority to require all rates to be filed. The state will use funds to expand activities to align with the existing authority for rate review in the state, improve processes, systems and pursue additional authority if determined necessary.

- **Increase Transparency and Accessibility:** Oklahoma currently provides consumers access to health insurance premium filings upon request via mail or by allowing viewing at the department's office. The state intends to create a consumer website to post the information on health insurance premium review. In addition, Oklahoma plans to create consumer education materials including a report on the health insurance market in the state for consumers and is considering a consumer ombudsman program.

See COSTS Page 8

Oklahoma's Coal Mines Among The Deadliest

By Edwin E. Vineyard

As we observed the plight of the Chilean miners trapped far beneath the earth for weeks, we recall from Oklahoma history and family lore the historical vicissitudes of miners in our own state.

Fortunately, those Chilean miners had a safe haven, communications were soon established, and supplies were funneled to them. Happily, all were eventually extracted and brought safely up from the depths into the waiting arms of their families.

Oklahoma's historical experience with mining disasters, while replete with a few miraculous escapes and a couple of instances of heroic rescues, has not been nearly so positive.

We have had terrible tragedies. Witness the once-popular ballad of the plaintive coal miner's daughter, the lyrics of which are shown as follows:

MINER'S CHILD'S DREAM

A miner was leaving his home for his work
When he heard his little child scream;
He ran to the side of the little girl's bed
She said, "Daddy, I have had such a dream."
Chorus: "Oh, Daddy, don't go to the mines today,
For dreams have so often come true.
Oh Daddy, oh Daddy, please don't go away,
For I never could live without you."
I dreamed that the mine was all covered with fire,
The men all fought for their lives;
Then the scene changed, and the mouth of the mine
Was covered with sweethearts and wives.
The miner was stroking his little girl's face,
And was turning away from her side,
When she threw her small arms around her daddy's neck,
She gave him a kiss and she cried ... [chorus]
"Go down to the village and tell your dear friends
That as sure as the bright stars do shine,
There is something that's going to happen today;
Oh, Daddy, don't go to the mine." ... [chorus]

ADAPTED FROM FOLK SONG

Thought by some to have been written in commemoration of the Wilburton mine explosion in 1926, the year of this writer's birth, this tune is actually a folk song adapted from Victorian England.

It was sung to him often as a child by his mother, usually producing tears. After a time in the midst of the rural coal fields of western Arkansas, the site of that horrible tragedy would ultimately become his own hometown in early 1939.

Perhaps the worst of Oklahoma coal mine disasters, the Wilburton explosion entombed 105 men forever in the bowels of the earth.

It may be surprising to some that in eastern Oklahoma, formerly the Indian Territory, there have been some 500 men lost in coal mine disasters. It is no surprise to our friend and former governor, George Nigh, who grew up in McAlester, taught history there, and represented that area in the Oklahoma Legislature.

He tells me of his surprise at encountering in an unexpected place a picture of his own mother serving meals to distressed miner families. Neither have any of these incidents escaped the attention of our friend and celebrated Oklahoma journalist, Frosty Troy, also of McAlester.

EXPLOSIONS TAKE TOLL

Explosions around McAlester include: 2 killed in 1905; 30 lost in 1908; and 30 killed in 1930. Nearby in Krebs 100 were killed or entombed in 1892 when a mine exploded with 400 miners working underground, a rival for the worst such disaster.

Close by in Alderson 12 died in 1919, and 10 at Dow in 1902. In 1908 Haileyville lost 29 miners, with newspapers noting that some were "foreigners."

Wilburton had lost 13 miners earlier in 1905, and a nearby Lutie mine lost 13 killed and 17 trapped in 1930. In all, 17 coal mine accidents have been docu-



mented for the eastern Oklahoma fields. Numbers cited here are mostly from contemporaneous newspapers, hence may not be official or final.

While these are mere statistics to most, they are family lore to others. Before I was born, my father spent short stints in the Arkansas coal fields and at Picher, OK. My father-in-law spent time in the mines.

FATHERS COMING HOME

I attended school with miners' children, and spent time in their homes. We played with carbide miners' cap lights. We saw fathers come home with blackened bodies and dark, gritty overalls. It was always easy to recognize a miner, even on Sunday.

A few schoolmates were orphans from mining accidents, and some had relatives killed or injured. A number of my classmates were the sons and daughters of immigrants who came there to work in the coal mines. Most were Italian, but there were some from Poland, Lithuania, Russia, Germany, Slavic region, or elsewhere.

In the '30s it seemed that there were three main causes of disabled and maimed men - World War I, farming accidents, and mining injuries. When miners worked free of injury, there might later be "black lung" - not properly recognized or understood.

Of course, there was neither workers compensation nor Social Security disability provisions in those times. Men and their families had to live with the personal consequences of their work injuries. Survival was made even more difficult by the dark times of the Great Depression.

No one rejoices more at the good fortune of those who escape from traps in the dark depths of the mines of doom than do those who grew up in communities in a culture shared with mining and its concomitants.

- The author, AKA *The Militant Moderate*, lives in Enid. More of his essays appear at www.okobserver.net.

COSTS

From Page 7

• Develop and Upgrade Technology: Oklahoma will support data collection and reporting and establish a data center to compile and publish fee schedule information.

MAKING THE MOST SENSE

"States will use these grant dollars in the way that makes the most sense for their insurance consumers," said Jay Angoff, director of the Office of Consumer Information and Insurance Oversight.

"As we continue to implement the new health insurance reform law, we will continue to work with states to ensure they have the tools they need to ensure the stability of the marketplace, keep costs low and provide consumers with increased transparency, choice and quality they need to make the best health care decisions for their businesses and families."

The Health Insurance Premium Review Grants are one element of a broad effort under the Affordable Care Act to reduce the unreasonable premium increases proposed by some insurers today.

Additional resources from this \$250 million program will be available in subsequent years to further strengthen state health insurance premium review procedures.

Other statutory provisions designed to improve affordability include:

• In 2011, the Affordable Care Act allows the secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to review justifications for unreasonable increases in premiums and make them public;

• In 2011, insurers will generally be required to spend at least 80% of premium dollars on medical care services and quality-improvement activities and limit their spending on overhead, marketing, CEO salaries, and profits; and

• In 2014, the Affordable Care Act empowers states to exclude health plans that show a pattern of excessive or unjustified premium increases from the new health insurance exchanges.

The Affordable Care Act includes a wide variety of provisions designed to promote a high-quality, high-value, health care system for all Americans and to make the health insurance market more consumer-friendly and transparent.

Some of the provisions that take effect by the end of next year, or are already in effect, include prohibitions on pre-existing condition exclusions for children; prohibition on lifetime dollar limits in all health plans; extended access to insurance for many young adults; and an unprecedented level of transparency about health insurance through www.HealthCare.gov.

Oklahoma's Shame: Jail, Prison Suicide

By Ron du Bois

"Addiction is the only disease that you get yelled at for having," said an Oklahoma licensed and certified mental health and drug/alcohol counselor.

By this she meant that substance use disorder [commonly called addiction] is the only disease that elicits outrage and full emotional opposition from community and nation.

It is virulent and intractable in Oklahoma, and across the nation.

Experts at the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse and the Department of Health try to explain to Oklahoma legislators that for every dollar spent for treatment, the public saves seven or more dollars.

They explain that treatment costs far less than punishment and incarceration. They explain that all diseases are health, not criminal issues.

'LIBERAL NONSENSE'

But legislators see and hear what is already in their own minds. To their ears, this kind of talk is "liberal" nonsense.

They prefer to believe substance use disorder, unlike any other disease, is a criminal issue. They prefer to bankrupt the state paying for expensive incarceration.

They prefer to ruin the lives of non-violent people and their families because of a disease that no one asked for and did not want – a disease that strikes without mercy at all levels of society. They prefer to be tough rather than smart on a treatable brain disease.

No one asks for cancer or schizophrenia and no one asks for substance use disorder, yet emotion and intractable stigma rule in regards to the latter.

It is a stigma as strong as any regardless of historical era, and one we participate in blindly.

Sympathy may abound for victims of this disorder, especially for those who are well liked and known in the community, yet sympathy appears strangely co-joined with condemnation.

"Put 'em in a cell with the key thrown away." Or, "Put 'em on an island to fend for themselves."

Those who would gallantly save a stranger from drowning prefer to let someone with a brain disorder drown.

STIGMA HURTS IN STRUGGLE

Community stigma is complicit in hurting rather than helping non-violent and even saintly individuals who struggle with this disease.

The alcohol/drug counselor continued, "Addicts are not bad people who need to get good, they are sick people needing to get well. Years of using alcohol and drugs cause the brain to become inflamed. You will not get well or good behavior from an inflamed brain."

By definition a disease is chronic, progressive, fatal and can lead to relapse. It all begins innocently enough. Patients say they started through social or peer pressure, to fit in, to ease tension, or stress, to numb the emotional pain of past trauma, to enhance life and be able to increase productivity.

What they didn't realize was that their bodies would begin to change on a cellular level. They didn't know that once a cucumber becomes a pickle, it can never be a cucumber again – that "you can't un-pickle a pickle." As in alcoholism, "one drink is too many and a thousand is not enough." Victims don't know that once the line is crossed on a cellular level, the brain can never be the same as it was – that it is a lifetime condition that can be controlled through medication and treatment.

RETHINKING CURRENT POLICIES

The counselor continued, "Addiction is actually a dis-regulation of the pleasure center or primitive [reptilian] brain, the part of the brain deals with survival. Is it any wonder that addictive processes are so strong? The American Medical Association endorses the proposition that drug dependencies, including alcoholism, are diseases and that their treatment is a legitimate part of medical practice."

We need to rethink the current policies of punishment and incarceration, of drug prohibition and the drug war. They compound the problem. As family and friends of those with a substance use disorder become sick, so does the nation.

According to a study in the American Journal of Psychiatry [Sept. 15, 2010], even among those who thought substance use disorder was a disease, stigma did not decrease. The authors wrote, "The effect was to increase, not decrease, community rejection."

The research team recommended that advocates and treatment providers rethink stigma.



Editor's Note: Author Ron du Bois' son, Peter, died July 23 after falling 12-feet inside the Payne County Jail [above] in Stillwater, OK. Authorities had revoked Peter du Bois' suspended sentence on a 2009 conviction for attempting to obtain a controlled and dangerous substance by fraud. Ron du Bois, a frequent contributor to The Oklahoma Observer, writes that Peter, "his system in pain from withdrawal, edged his body over the top railing until he fell to the cement floor below. He was severely injured with brain and liver damage." He died at the University of Oklahoma Medical Center in OKC, Ron du Bois reports, "after massive surgery and efforts to save his life. The taxpayers paid for all this plus the salary of a police officer to 'guard' him day and night. They treated someone with a substance use disorder as a dangerous criminal." Photo by Michelle Charles/Stillwater Journal

To reduce stigma Bernice Pescosolido, the Indiana University sociologist who led the research, said that future efforts should emphasize the person and his or her abilities instead of the disease.

HEALTH, NOT CRIMINAL ISSUE

Judges and drug courts who consign someone with a treatable organic brain disorder to long years of incarceration participate in the mad perception that substance use disorder should be treated as a criminal rather than a health issue.

Stigma remains a more damaging issue than recovery. With stigma, addicts are forever marginalized economically, socially and politically. In despair over entrenched community stigma, incarcerated inmates with this disease contemplate suicide as the only solution.

Can stigma be why Oklahoma has the highest rate of jail and prison suicide in the nation?

As Michael Moore would ask, "What kind of people are we?" Congruity is destroyed as we claim to be Christian.

'IGNORANCE ... KILLS COUNTLESS IDEAS'

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Germany's greatest literary figure, wrote, "Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back – concerning all acts of initiative [and creation], there is one elementary truth that ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too."

"All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamed would have come his way.

"Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now."

New legislation begins with an idea. Explain what you want to your legislators. Encourage them to write and introduce new legislation to mandate low-cost productive treatment rather than high-cost senseless incarceration for non-violent persons with a substance use disorder.

Let Providence move!

– The author lives in Stillwater

BOOKS

Obama's 'Unhappy Conclusion' About Wars

By Con Coughlin

OBAMA'S WARS

By Bob Woodward
Simon & Schuster
441 pages, \$30

Barack Obama did not go into politics to make his name as a war leader. Reforming health care, challenging Washington's political establishment and repositioning America as a positive force in world affairs were the issues that inspired the young Illinois senator to launch his audacious bid for the White House.

Since taking office he has tried hard to stick to this Messianic script. But try as he might, Obama can't shake off the fact that he's the leader of a nation that is involved in a bitter war in a faraway place; a war, furthermore, that America stands a fair chance of losing, particularly if the President persists with the indecisive approach that has characterised his first year and a half in office.

One of the reasons often cited for Obama's success in the 2008 presidential election campaign was his long-standing opposition to the Iraq war. And, as President, he has moved quickly to withdraw U.S. combat troops and draw a line under one of the more contentious episodes in recent American history.

But as Bob Woodward details in *Obama's Wars*, the President's instinct to apply the same cut-and-run approach to America's military involvement in Afghanistan has been the cause of arguably the most vituperative policy turf war of his presidency.

Woodward has come a long way since those heady days in the '70s when he broke the Watergate story that brought Richard Nixon's presidency to a humiliating end. His books on the Bush Administration's response to the Sept. 11 attacks and the Iraq war have been definitive, and now he has provided a similar account of the bitter feuds that have affected the Obama Administration's handling of the war in Afghanistan.

As Woodward points out early in the book, for a politician like Obama with pronounced anti-war sympathies, it was almost inevitable that he would have a difficult relationship with America's top brass.

But who would have expected that, in the course of just one year, he would have dismissed not one but two of the generals responsible for the success of the Afghan mission?

And to judge by Woodward's account of the acrimonious exchanges that took place between the White House and the Pentagon during the long, drawn-out review of U.S. policy in Afghanistan, General David Petraeus, the current American commander of the NATO mission, can count himself lucky not to have suffered a similar fate.

Incensed by an article planted in the Washington Post by Obama's White House staffers that questioned the need for a military "surge" strategy to defeat the Taliban, Petraeus planted his own story arguing for a fully resourced, counter-insurgency strategy.

It is hard to believe a British general would have got away with such an open act of insubordination.

But then, Petraeus might have resisted the temptation to lobby the media if he had felt more involved in the President's decision-making process and not, as he confides to Woodward, relegated to the bench.

For one of the more divisive aspects of the Obama presidency to date is the "them and us" attitude that has defined relations between the President's White House staffers and the rest of his administration.

For example, Woodward reveals that Gen. James L. Jones, Obama's National Security Adviser, describes aides such as Rahm Emanuel, who resigned recently as Obama's chief of staff, as "water bugs" who flit around the president but have no firm grasp of foreign policy or security issues.

Add to these tensions the president's own inability to make up his mind and you have a recipe for potential disaster.

Woodward writes that Obama was left in no doubt about the serious and active threat Islamist terrorists posed to America's national security, the majority of them based in the lawless tribal territories between Afghanistan and Pakistan, during the intelligence briefings he received soon after he won the presidency.

But this did not prevent him from sticking to his view that the Afghan war was an unwelcome distraction from his domestic policy agenda and a dreadful waste of money to boot.

Woodward has provided a detailed, if somewhat worthy [do we really need to know the height and weight of every official that enters the Oval Office?] account of the bitter policy disputes between Obama and his generals that led to this unhappy conclusion.

Persuaded by his generals that America would lose in Afghanistan if he did not send more troops, the president reluctantly acceded to their request, while at the same time insisting that they must be withdrawn at the earliest opportunity.

Obama's strategy of announcing you are withdrawing from a conflict before you have won it is certainly novel, but it is not one that is likely to achieve success.

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THEN THE FIGHT STARTED ...

My wife and I were watching *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire* while we were in bed.

I turned to her and said, "Do you want to have sex?"

"No," she answered.

I then said, "Is that your final answer?"

She didn't even look at me this time, simply saying, "Yes."

"Then I'd like to phone a friend," I said.

And that's when the fight started ...

Saturday morning I got up early, quietly dressed, made my lunch and slipped quietly into the garage. I hooked the boat up to the van, and proceeded to back out in a torrential downpour.

The wind was blowing 50 mph so I pulled back into the garage, turned on the radio and discovered that the weather would be bad all day.

I went back into the house, quietly undressed and slipped back into bed. I cuddled up to my wife's back, now with a different anticipation, and whispered, "The weather out there is terrible."

My loving wife of five years replied, "And can you believe my stupid husband is out fishing in that?"

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Signs Pointing To U.S. War With Iran?

By Sheila Samples

"History will repeat itself - only if we let it" - Mike Malloy

Hardly a day goes by that we are not inundated with demands to attack Iran. Our media, our Congress - packs of neo-conservatives - have been howling for war on Iran for years. And years.

This reckless axis has been relentless in its orchestrated effort to manipulate and influence public opinion. And, if we are to believe the myriad of polls, it's working. According to investigative journalist Gareth Porter, who wrote on July 30 that "polling data for 2010 show a majority of Americans have been manipulated into supporting war against Iran - in large part because more than two-thirds of those polled have gotten the impression that Iran already has nuclear weapons."

HORROR TENT REVIVAL

Is it possible that a majority of Americans can be lured again into the tent of horror to support yet another bloody war? Have we learned nothing from history - the blatant lies that catapulted us into Iraq, Afghanistan, and now Pakistan? It's amazing how easily our handlers control us; enrage us; shape our beliefs, our opinions.

As George Orwell wrote in 1948 about those controlled by Big Brother: "A hideous ecstasy of fear and vindictiveness, a desire to kill, to torture, to smash faces in with a sledge hammer, seemed to flow through the whole group of people like an electric current, turning one even against one's will into a grimacing, screaming lunatic. And yet the rage that one felt was an abstract, undirected emotion which could be switched from one object to another like the flame of a blowlamp."

For centuries, those in power have known that fear is the easiest of emotions to work with. As with Iraq, and now Iran, we are paralyzed with fear; fear of "known unknowns" - of factually unsubstantiated threats about Iran's lust for Israeli blood.

ABILITY TO REASON

Many of us have been ducking and covering for so long that we have lost the ability to reason; even to think beyond the "truth" that is hammered into our national consciousness with blow after blow of an Orwellian sledge hammer - we must support, and protect, Israel, no matter the cost.

It's tempting to pretend that we believe Iran's refusal to give up its nuclear energy program - which it has every right to pursue as a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty - is proof that it is an "evil Islamic regime" whose maniacal leaders are feverishly working to wipe Israel off the map.

Tempting to take at face value the sinister warnings of those like Reuel Marc Gerecht, a resident fellow at AEI and Weekly Standard contributing editor, who warned in his April 2006 article, *To Bomb, or Not to Bomb* - That is the Iran Question:

"Given the Islamic Republic's dark



history, the burden of proof ought to be on those who favor accommodating a nuclear Iran. Those who are unwilling to accommodate it, however, need to be honest and admit that diplomacy and sanctions and covert operations probably won't succeed, and that we may have to fight a war - perhaps sooner rather than later - to stop such evil men from obtaining the worst weapons we know."

FEAR AND MISINFORMATION

Gerecht, a former consular officer for the State Department and CIA Mid-East specialist, is, like most of his neoconservative peers, pathologically obsessed with Iran's destruction, and is as good as it gets when using fear and misinformation to justify that destruction.

Porter also wrote in his July article that "the aim of Gerecht and of the right-wing government of Benjamin Netanyahu is to support an attack by Israel so that the United States can be drawn into direct, full-scale war with Iran." Porter pointed out that Gerecht first revealed his "Israeli-neocon fantasy as early as 2000, before the Iranian nuclear program was even taken seriously, in an essay written for a book published by the Project for a New American Century." Gerecht argued that, if Iran could be caught in a "terrorist act," the U.S. Navy should "retaliate with fury."

Now, a decade later, that appears to still be Gerecht's position. In his ponderous July 26 Weekly Standard piece, he writes:

"... If nuclear weapons in the hands of Khamenei and the Revolutionary Guards are an existential threat to the Jewish state - and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, like his predecessors, has said that they are - Jerusalem has little choice. Bombing is the only option that could

likely alter the nuclear equation in Iran before Khamenei produces a weapon. The Obama Administration might fume, but it is hard to imagine the president, given what he has said about the unacceptability of Iranian nukes, scolding Jerusalem long. [...] The left wing of the Democratic Party has been going south on the Jewish state for 30 years, but congressional Democrats, who've been pushing for new sanctions against Iran more aggressively than the White House, are not that far gone. By and large, the Republican Party would hold behind the Israelis."

HOW NETANYAHU SEES US

Here, Gerecht is echoing the belief blurted out by Netanyahu in 2001 when talking about a broad attack on Palestine and undermining the Oslo Accords - "I know what America is," Netanyahu said. "America is a thing you can move very easily, move it in the right direction. They won't get in the way."

Sadly, there are many more like Gerecht - Dick Cheney and his efforts to do an "end run" around a balking George W. Bush to force an attack on Iran; Norman Podhoretz with his constant refrain "bomb Iran before Iran bombs us;" National Review's Larry Kudlow who says if Israel furiously attacks Iran, it will be "doing the Lord's work;" the Weekly Standard's Bill Kristol and Daniel Pipes with their confident forecast that Bush would attack Iran before leaving office if Obama won the election.

Then, there's the U.S. Congress, whose members can agree on absolutely nothing to ease the suffering of their own citizens, but stand shoulder-to-shoulder in passing resolution after shameful resolution for Israel's right to defend itself and against Iran's right to do the same.

If Sen. Joe Lieberman's mouth is moving, you can bet he is demanding an attack on Iran - and he was joined by his cohort, Sen. Lindsey Graham, who said recently we must sic our military on Iran, "with the goal of overthrowing Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad."

BOLTON'S MADNESS

But by far the most strident is the wild and woolly former UN ambassador John Bolton. He runs at top speed from one media outlet to another, calling for Iran's destruction - just as he did for Iraq. I can't help it. This guy is grotesquely fascinating. As I wrote in September 2008 about this issue:

It's no laughing matter, but the sight of this tousel-headed, "got milk?" maniac running in circles, warning of - demanding - a nuclear holocaust is good for a grin, albeit a grim one. Even as he was being forced onto the United Nations over national and international objections, Bolton was hot on Iran's trail. He insisted that Iran is the most dangerous critter out there - harboring terrorists, arming terrorists, training terrorists - sending bombs, IEDs, weapons to Iraq to kill Americans. If it weren't for Iran, there would have been no 9/11 attack because Iran provided safe haven for the box-cutting killers headed our way. Bolton warned if Iran managed to produce a single nuclear weapon, Israel, the United States - the world - was toast. He promised that Iran will come after us. "That's the threat," Bolton barked, "that's the reality whether you like it or not. And it will be just like Sept. 11, only with nuclear weapons this time."

TIME FOR A TIME OUT

Considering the consequences of history repeating itself, perhaps we should call a "time out" and take a closer look at Iran. We didn't bother to check out the accusations made by these same bloodthirsty warmongers against Iraq - false cries of weapons of mass destruction, lies about Saddam Hussein aiding and harboring Al Qaeda terrorists - we had but a scant 45 minutes to dive under our duct-taped plastic or we would surely die.

Now, after hundreds of thousands of innocent human beings have been destroyed - millions displaced - trillions of dollars wasted, far too many of us say we were not to blame. Hey - we were lied to. Besides, that was years ago. It's all history now.

Iran, as a major civilization, dates back to 4000 BC and, although it has been invaded by Greeks, Arabs, Turks, even Mongols, it has no modern history of attacking or occupying other nations. However, unlike other areas that continue to be devastated by U.S. and Israeli assaults, history shows that Iran is capable of defending itself. Both its Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and frisky little president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad have promised to do exactly that if attacked.

See WAR Page 13

Veteran Suicides Top Wars' Loss Of Life

By Nadia Prupis

More than 1,000 veterans in California under 35 died after returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan between 2005 and 2008 – three times as many California service members who were killed in conflict overseas, according to a recently published Bay Citizen report.

Investigative journalist Aaron Glantz studied the cases of Reuben Paul Santos, Alex Lowenstein and Elijah Warren to shed light on a growing trend among Afghanistan and Iraq veterans who have died through high-risk behavior and suicide after being discharged.

In particular, veterans who returned home to California died through motorcycle and motor vehicle accidents and unintentional poisoning; in addition, veterans were 2½ times as likely to commit suicide as Californians of the same age who had not served in the military.

SILENT EPIDEMIC

Glantz, who has reported on the Iraq and Afghanistan wars since 2005, decided to focus on veterans in California because “it’s important to look at our own community. [Santos] was this young man that was from a community that was literally right down the street. That’s how silent this epidemic is.”

Santos returned from the military to his home in Daly City in 2003. He attempted to battle depression with a variety of treatments, from poetry to video games and, eventually, turned to psychiatric treatment.

According to Glantz, a number of bureaucratic obstacles prevented Santos from receiving adequate treatment once he recognized that he needed health care for psychiatric trauma.

Currently, veterans receive five years of free health care following their discharge; when Santos left the military in 2003, veterans were only eligible for two years of free health care – and Santos did not begin to experience symptoms until three years at home.

SYMPTOMS SLOW TO EMERGE

Post-traumatic stress disorder [PTSD] and depression symptoms “don’t emerge right away,” Glantz said. When Santos did apply for treatment at the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs [VA], Glantz said, he “got the run-around,” often being transferred among therapists and having to retell his experiences in the war over and over.

According to the report, Santos enrolled in a study treating veterans with PTSD six months before his death; after nine weeks with the same therapist, Santos left the study, while his doctor rated him as having “no clinical anxiety at that time.”

Santos hung himself three months later. “He finally got treatment, but it was too late,” Glantz said. “Reuben’s death was preventable. He passed away six years after his return, so there were opportunities for the story to have had a different ending.”

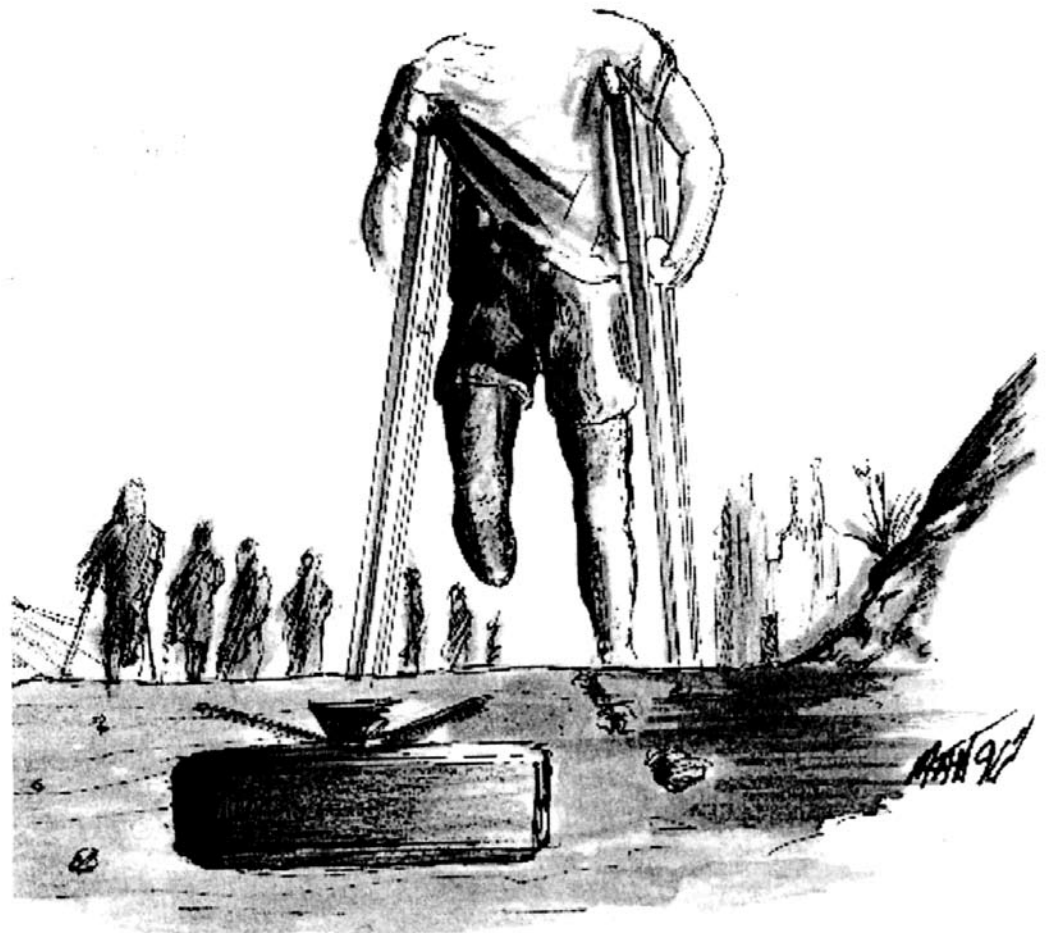
NEITHER SOUGHT HELP

Lowenstein and Warren never attempted to receive mental health before committing suicide in 2010 and 2008, respectively. According to the report, less than half of returning veterans register at VA facilities for mental health treatment.

A 2008 Rand Corporation study found that only half of veterans who need care seek it, as many traumatized soldiers remain silent to conform to a longstanding Army taboo against mental health care.

“VA and DOD [Department of Defense] appear to have a policy for veterans called ‘Don’t look, don’t find,’” said Paul Sullivan, a Gulf War veteran and executive director of Veterans for Common Sense.

Since 2008, Glantz said, policies have slowly shifted in a positive direction for veterans. “Under President Obama, the amount of money spent on veterans has



increased dramatically,” Glantz said.

BUSH REGIME SLOW TO ACT

“Under President Bush, there was a real head-in-the-sand attitude. That’s begun to change.”

But the VA has a lot of ground to cover to make up for lost time, he said. “We started so late in the game.”

Specifically, Glantz recommends that veterans receive automatic registration with the VA, rather than having to seek it out on their own after their mental health begins to deteriorate.

“Santos, Warren and Lowenstein should all have been automatically enrolled in the VA when they left the military. They should not have to fight a bureaucracy to get in the system.”

Overall, Glantz said, it is the VA and not the veterans that should uphold a standard of proactive behavior.

“The VA needs to make themselves more friendly to these young men and help them come forward if they need help,” Glantz said. “Out of one million veterans, only half are turning up at the VA, which means the VA needs to do a better job of reaching out to them.”

WAR

From Page 11

In August, Khamenei said “the consequences of a U.S. attack would be grave ... not merely regional, but will cover a vaster scene.” If our war-mongering babblers took a closer look at that “scene,” they would see the destruction of the 32 U.S. bases in the region as well as the shutdown of the Strait of Hormuz – the gateway to the world’s oil.

Regarding Iran’s nuclear ambitions, both Khamenei and Ahmadinejad have said over and over [and over] that Iran seeks nuclear power for generating electricity for medical purposes and for its growing population. In 2005, Khamenei issued a Fatwa that “the production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons are forbidden under Islam and that Iran shall never acquire these weapons.” And, in spite of blatant lies and dis-

tortions to the contrary, the International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA] continues to verify Iran’s pursuit of peaceful nuclear energy.

The timeline of Iran’s nuclear program from the 1950s shows that Iran has never sought nuclear energy for anything other than peaceful purposes. In 1957, the Shah opened the American Atoms for Peace in Tehran, and signed an agreement with the U.S. for cooperation in research on peaceful uses of nuclear technology. And, in 1968, Iran signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty on the first day it opened for signature.

Before we buy into railings from those like Gerech about evil Iran’s “dark history” in pursuing nuclear weapons, perhaps we should study the dark history of two other nations – one that obliterated the populations

of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in mere moments just 65 years ago ... that used napalm, chemical weapons, and deadly toxins against the Vietnamese ... that uses deadly depleted uranium to wipe out entire generations and to deform future generations ... or perhaps the other one that takes great delight in dropping white phosphorus bombs on a trapped civilian population with nowhere to run ...

If our evil axis succeeds in its lust for war on Iran, yet another March 19, 2003 “Shock and Awe” will come roaring through. We can choose to sit, once again transfixed by sounds of explosions, gunfire, sirens, screams – and once again listen to Mike Malloy say in a dead voice stripped of all emotion:

“This is a dark day.
This is a filthy day.

This is a day for shame ...

Or we can rise up and stand firm. As Malloy also says, over and over [and over] – “We know the truth. We no longer have an excuse for remaining silent.”

History is replete with examples of citizens uniting and changing the course of history. When that happens, empires – even a shining empire on a hill – must change ... or fall.

History. Round and round it goes. Will the U.S. and Israel attack Iran? Will history repeat itself?

Yes, but only if we let it. The choice is ours.

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

Caught Lying

Koch Brothers Are Behind U.S. Coup d'Etat

By George Monbiot

The Tea Party movement is remarkable in two respects. It is one of the biggest exercises in false consciousness the world has seen – and the biggest Astroturf operation in history. These accomplishments are closely related.

An Astroturf campaign is a fake grassroots movement: it purports to be a spontaneous uprising of concerned citizens, but in reality it is founded and funded by elite interests.

Some Astroturf campaigns have no grassroots component at all. Others catalyze and direct real mobilizations. The Tea Party belongs in the second category.

It is mostly composed of passionate, well-meaning people who think they are fighting elite power, unaware that they have been organized by the very interests they believe they are confronting. We now have powerful evidence that the movement was established and has been guided with the help of money from billionaires and big business.

SECRECY IS OVER

Much of this money, as well as much of the strategy and staffing, were provided by two brothers who run what they call “the biggest company you’ve never heard of.”

Charles and David Koch own 84% of Koch Industries, the second-largest private company in the United States. It runs oil refineries, coal suppliers, chemical plants and logging firms, and turns over roughly \$100 billion a year; the brothers are each worth \$21.5 billion.

The company has had to pay tens of millions of dollars in fines and settlements for oil and chemical spills and other industrial accidents.

The Kochs want to pay less tax, keep more profits and be restrained by less regulation. Their challenge has been to persuade the people harmed by this agenda that it’s good for them.

In July 2010, David Koch told New York magazine: “I’ve never been to a Tea Party event. No one representing the Tea Party has ever even approached me.”

CAUGHT LYING ON FILM

But a fascinating new film – [Astro]Turf Wars, by Taki Oldham – tells a fuller story. Oldham infiltrated some of the movement’s key organizing events, including the 2009 Defending the American Dream summit, convened by a group called Americans for Prosperity [AFP]. The film shows David Koch addressing the summit.

“Five years ago,” he explains, “my brother Charles and I provided the funds to start Americans for Prosperity. It’s beyond my wildest dreams how AFP has grown into this enormous organization.”

A convener tells the crowd how AFP mobilized opposition to Barack Obama’s healthcare reforms.

“We hit the button and we started doing the Twittering and Facebook and the phone calls and the emails, and you turned up!”

FUNDING DOZENS OF TEA PARTIES

Then a series of AFP organizers tell Koch how they have set up dozens of Tea Party events in their home states. He nods and beams from the podium like a chief executive receiving rosy reports from his regional sales directors. Afterwards, the delegates crowd into AFP workshops, where they are told how to run further Tea Party events.

Americans for Prosperity is one of several groups set up by the Kochs to promote their politics. We know their foundations have given it at least \$5 million, but few such records are in the public domain and the total could be much higher.

It has toured the country organizing rallies against healthcare reform and the Democrats’ attempts to tackle climate change. It provided the key organizing tools that set the Tea Party running.

The movement began when CNBC’s Rick Santelli called from the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange for a bankers’ revolt against the undeserving poor.

He proposed that the traders should hold a tea party to dump derivative securities in Lake Michigan to prevent Obama’s plan to “subsidize the losers” – by which he meant people whose mortgages had fallen into arrears.

ORGANIZING EVENTS

On the same day, Americans for Prosperity set up a Tea Party Facebook page and started organizing Tea Party events.

Oldham’s film shows how AFP crafted the movement’s messages and drafted its talking points. The New Yorker magazine, in the course of a remarkable exposure of the Koch brothers’ funding networks, interviewed some of their former consultants.

“The Koch brothers gave the money that founded [the Tea Party],” one of them explained. “It’s like they put the seeds in the ground. Then the rainstorm comes, and the frogs come out of the mud – and they’re our candidates!”

Another observed that the Kochs are smart. “This rightwing, redneck stuff works for them. They see this as a way to get things done without getting dirty themselves.”

AFP is one of several groups established by the Koch brothers. They set up the Cato Institute, the first free-market think tank in the United States.

WHAT THEY FUNDED

They also founded the Mercatus Centre at George Mason University, which now fills the role once played by the economics department at Chicago University as the originator of extreme neoliberal ideas.

PARTY INSANITY

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Fourteen of the 23 regulations that George W. Bush put on his hit list were, according to the Wall Street Journal, first suggested by academics working at the Mercatus Centre.

The Kochs have lavished money on more than 30 other advocacy groups, including the Heritage Foundation, the Manhattan Institute, the George C. Marshall Institute, the Reason Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute.

These bodies have been instrumental in turning politicians away from environmental laws, social spending, taxing the rich and distributing wealth. They have shaped the widespread demand for small government. The Kochs ensure that their money works for them.

MUST MEET THEIR APPROVAL

“If we’re going to give a lot of money,” David Koch explained to a libertarian journalist, “we’ll make darn sure they spend it in a way that goes along with our intent. And if they make a wrong turn and start doing things we don’t agree with, we withdraw funding.”

Most of these bodies call themselves “free-market think tanks,” but their trick – as [Astro]Turf Wars points out – is to conflate crony capitalism with free enterprise, and free enterprise with personal liberty.

Between them they have constructed the philosophy that informs the Tea Party movement: its members mobilize for freedom, unaware that the freedom they demand is freedom for corporations to trample them into the dirt.

The think tanks that the Kochs have funded devise the game and the rules by which it is played; Americans for Prosperity coaches and motivates the team.

Astroturfing is now taking off in the United Kingdom. Earlier Spinwatch showed how a fake grassroots group set up by health insurers helped shape the Tories’ NHS reforms.

Billionaires and corporations are capturing the political process everywhere; anyone with an interest in democracy should be thinking about how to resist them. Nothing is real any more. Nothing is as it seems.

– George Monbiot is the author of Heat: How to Stop the Planet from Burning
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Thomas' Ex-Lover Is Proof For Anita Hill

By Adele M. Stan

Well, Ginni Thomas – how's that apology demand workin' for ya?

You may recall that recently, the wife of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas called Anita Hill, demanding an apology for accusations of sexual harassment that Hill made against Thomas at his nomination hearing for this seat on the high court.

Talk about a strategic blunder. The controversy, long consigned to the history books, is now re-ignited, thanks to the decision of Thomas's former lover, Lillian McEwen, to come forward with her recollections of Thomas's behavior toward women in the workplace, and his purported "obsession" with porn – accusations that echo what Hill told the Senate Judiciary Committee in 1991.

When Anita Hill made her decision to speak truth to power at Thomas's nomination hearing, she was rewarded the way in which victims of sexual abuse and assault ordinarily are: she was dragged through the mud, smeared with lies about her own supposed predilections and vilified by the senators – all white men [including David Boren] – who then sat on the committee.

SHE REMAINED SILENT

Through it all, Lillian McEwen remained silent, even though she knew better. "I don't look good in this," she tells the Washington Post's Michael A. Fletcher.

But Ginni Thomas's demand for an apology from Anita Hill for the accusations of sexual harassment she made about Clarence Thomas – claims of Thomas's references to pornography in a meeting he had with Hill, his subordinate at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and more – apparently pushed McEwen to air her own experience with Thomas. [Or maybe it was the opportunity to push her memoir manuscript into the hands of a publisher.]

"He was obsessed with porn," she said of Thomas, who is now 63. "He would talk about what he had seen in magazines and films, if there was something worth noting."

According to McEwen, Thomas would also tell her about women he encountered at work. He was partial to women with large breasts, she said. In an instance at work, Thomas was so impressed that he asked one woman her bra size, McEwen recalled him telling her.

A TRUE SPECTACLE

Back in the day, it was quite something to have these kinds of accusations swirling around a Supreme Court nominee, and a true spectacle in 1991, when the rightwing Thomas appeared before the committee as only the second African-American to win nomination to the highest court in the land – a distinction he still holds.

Through the testimony of Hill and Thomas, I wrote in *Debating Sexual Correctness* [Dell, 1995], the dominant culture got to see a fundamental dynamic of its own society acted out by players from an oppressed minority culture.

Given the way in which sexualized depictions of African-Americans have been part and parcel of their oppression for centuries, Thomas explosively called his hearings "a high-tech lynching," playing the race card at the expense of all women – but African-American women, in particular.

Ginni Thomas' Stunt Serves Civic Culture

By Froma Harrop

I'm not going to waste everyone's time treating Virginia Thomas' message on Anita Hill's office voice mail as a genuine request for an apology. Hill had famously accused Ginni's husband, Clarence Thomas, of sexual harassment at his confirmation hearing for Supreme Court justice. That was 19 years ago.

No, Ginni Thomas has bigger fish to fry than to rehash her grievances with Anita Hill. She's raised hundreds of thousands for her lucrative political brainchild, Liberty Central. The group's mission is to co-opt Tea Party types and deliver them to the Republican establishment. What better way for Ginni to profit from right-wing anger than to portray herself as the victim of a left-wing smear campaign?

By all means, let's keep the spotlight on her and follow it to Liberty Central. You think that big money has already taken over Washington? You have no idea how much worse it could get. The Thomases' activities provide a number of scary potential scenarios.

But before going there, let's dispose of the phone-call stunt. The Amy Vanderbilt Complete Book of Etiquette says, "If you have something important or special to say to a friend, don't leave it on an answering machine."

Had Ginni really wanted a woman-to-woman chat with Anita Hill, she would have said in her message: "Anita, we need to talk. Could you ring me Thursday between 3 and 5?" Instead, she left the message at 7:30 a.m., when Anita would surely not be in her office.

It was perfectly composed for public consumption, complete with a call to prayer.

Left out of Ginni's equation was the sudden appearance of Lillian McEwen, one of Clarence's old girlfriends. A former Securities and Exchange Commission lawyer, McEwen confirms Anita's charges – that Clarence was indeed a porn-freak, who hit on women at work with sexy remarks. Clarence had denied it all.

Let's make my position clear. Although no admirer of Clarence



As wild as the Thomas confirmation hearings were, McEwen's accusations are something entirely new, even if they sound familiar. Clarence Thomas is now a sitting Supreme Court justice of long tenure; never in my lifetime have such incendiary claims been made against a sitting member of the court.

Perhaps the greatest irony in all of this is Clarence Thomas' alignment with the religious right. Thomas was one of three justices to dissent from the court's decision to strike down a state's right to pass laws outlawing gay sex between consenting adults in *Lawrence v. Texas*; he joined the dissent penned by Antonin Scalia that declared the court's decision in *Lawrence* an indication of its having "largely signed on to the so-called homosexual agenda."

Behold Clarence Thomas, an arbiter of the sex lives of Americans.

SULLIED REPUTATION

Weirder still is the way in which his wife's actions of late are serving to further sully his reputation. Ginni Thomas now leads a Tea Party-affiliated think tank, Liberty Central, which, AlterNet reported, touts its relationship with Gun Owners of America, whose president, Larry Pratt, once spoke before a gathering of white supremacists; as well as its alliance with the Missouri Sovereignty Project, which recently featured a short film on its site in which states' rights advocates threaten an armed insurrection against the government.

At this year's Taxpayer March on Washington, a Tea Party gathering sponsored by FreedomWorks, hundreds of marchers wore Statue of Liberty crowns made of foam, and inscribed with the Liberty Central's logo. Addressing the crowd, Ginni Thomas herself donned a foam crown.

FreedomWorks is chaired by former House Majority Leader Dick Armey, R-TX, on whose staff Ginni Thomas used to work. Thomas also worked at the Chamber of Commerce, a pro-business organization with Matt Kibbe, who is now the president of FreedomWorks.

– The author is AlterNet's Washington bureau chief

Thomas, I did find the 11th-hour accusations an act of grave unfairness. You'd think that if Hill had been that offended, she would have sued him for sexual harassment. Furthermore, watching pornography is legal.

Clarence Thomas' more serious brush with indecency involved his role last January in the obscene Citizens United ruling. Joining the conservative majority, he helped open the stable doors for 501(c)(4) groups, like Ginni's Liberty Central, to collect millions from unidentified donors, then use the money to run political ads.

Now, Ginni is a private citizen who has every right to be politically active. Liberals can play the same game. But here's the problem – and it goes way beyond possibly compromising the electoral process.

Clarence rules on cases that affect powerful economic interests. We have no idea whether those interests are simultaneously enriching Ginni's political group and, by extension, the Thomas household. But Ginni knows.

What's to stop her from saying over breakfast: "Honey, Megamogul Hedge Fund Partners has just given Liberty Central \$500,000. They need your help at court today."

Or to better protect her husband from possible conflict-of-interest charges, she could take an indirect approach: "Honey, I don't care for the plaintiff's argument in today's case," followed by a wink.

Perhaps the Thomases are sterling servants of the public good. Still, how can we assess whether a justice has a conflict of interest without knowing where the family's money comes from?

The classic conservative cure for keeping elections honest while allowing unlimited campaign spending was to disclose the names of the spenders. Now we can't even tell who may be paying people off.

Thank you, Ginni Thomas, for keeping us focused on these dangers to the democracy. You may have done our civic culture a great service even if you had no intention of doing it.

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Are Charter Schools Really Innovative?

By Marion Brady

Peter Ruddy Wallace was the speaker of Florida's House of Representatives years ago when charter-school legislation was adopted. He saw charters as incubators of innovation and experimentation.

So did I. Indeed, not long thereafter, I accepted an invitation to serve on the board of governors of a new charter school serving a built-from-scratch new town in a neighboring county. And, partly to enhance my board member-related knowledge and skills, and partly to gather material for Knight-Ridder/Tribune columns on the subject of charters, I visited those within reasonable driving distance.

I believe America's broad-based system of public schools is a bedrock of the Republic, and that the country has gotten a better return on its investment than it deserves. But I also believe that major changes are long overdue, that fresh thinking is essential, and that serious problems are being made worse by simplistic reforms being pushed by self-serving corporate interests working through politicians.

ASSUMPTION IS WRONG

One of those reforms is driven by an assumption that charter schools are well-springs of new ideas. Unfortunately, with rare exceptions, that's not the case. I've yet to actually see something happening in a charter that couldn't be happening in a traditional public school. If there are exceptions, give credit to a local or state bureaucracy "loose" enough to permit it.

Official policy, not lack of educator imagination, not laziness, not union obstinacy, not anything else, is the main reason schools function very much as they did a century ago. Put the blame where it belongs.

FOUR POINTS

There are several reasons why most charters differ little or not at all from traditional public schools. Here are four:

- Innovation and experimentation aren't what motivate most of the people seeking charter approval.
- Charter schools aren't ordinarily a source of great new ideas [at least in Florida] because most of them have been created not to experiment and innovate, but to sell houses or eventually peddle them to the regular school system [at, of course, a profit].
- In very few states are the entities that grant charters really knowledgeable about education's deep-seated problems.
- Charter schools aren't usually sources of great new ideas, and aren't likely to become such, because of subject-matter standards and high-stakes, standardized tests.

OPENING A SCHOOL

Imagine a close-knit group of experienced educators, unhappy with the status quo, thinking about opening their own school.

They make a list of the kind of people they want their students to be and become. Yes, they want them to be knowledgeable. But they also want them to be curious, creative, self-aware, empathetic, confident, courageous, resourceful, in love with learning, and possessing what Albert Schweitzer called "reverence for

Judging Teachers Is An Inexact Science

A review of technical evidence about value-added assessment of teachers has led researchers at the Economic Policy Institute to conclude that standardized test scores of students can be part of information used to judge teacher effectiveness, but are insufficient for comprehensive evaluation.

Apart from wide score fluctuations year to year for a given teacher, tying evaluation and sanctions to scores can discourage teachers from working in schools with the neediest students, while large, unpredictable variation in results and perceived unfairness can undermine morale.

Individual teacher rewards based on comparative student test results can also create disincentives for collaboration.

WHAT IS THE ANSWER?

"While there are good reasons for concern about the current system of teacher evaluation," the authors write, "there are also good reasons to be concerned about claims that measuring teacher effectiveness largely by student test scores will lead to improved student achievement."

Some advocates argue that flawed value-added measures are better than existing measures for identifying, remediating, or dismissing ineffective teachers, but the authors feel this is a false dichotomy that implies only two options for evaluating teachers.

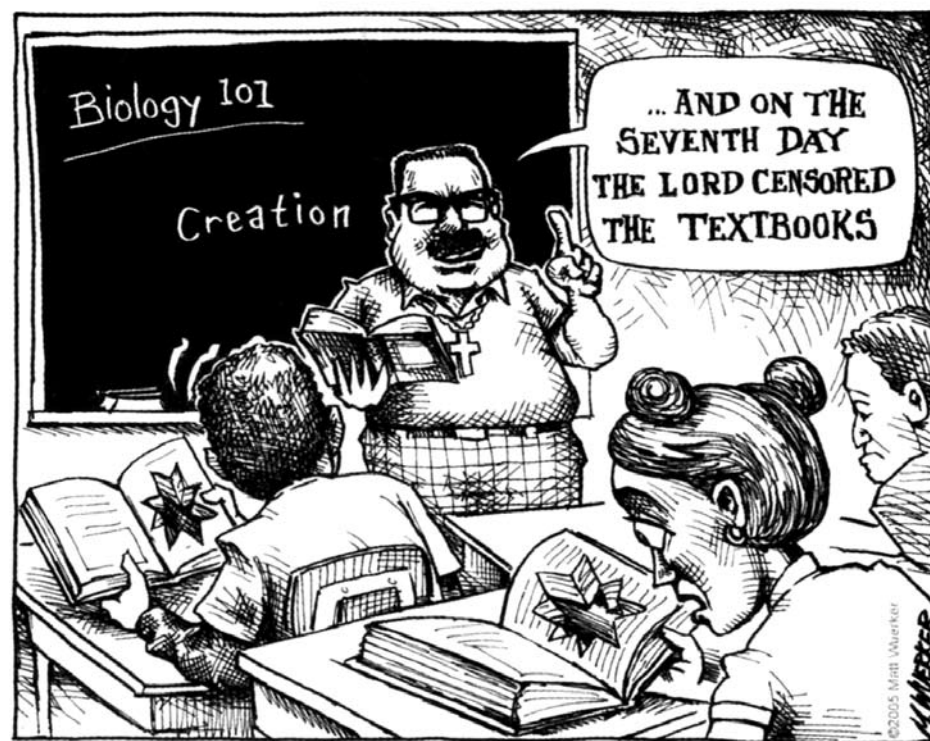
They recommend that the Department of Education actively encourage states to experiment with a range of approaches to evaluating teacher practice and examining teacher contributions to student learning.

A new radio documentary from American Public Media, "Testing Teachers," probes whether good teaching can be taught or is innate. The documentary looks at various measures underway in Washington, DC, and issues these raise about effects of poverty versus effects of instruction.

WHO DEFINES A 'GOOD' TEACHER?

It also asks what makes a teacher "good"? Who defines it? And how can a teacher transition into the category of "good" if he or she is struggling?

Based on years studying teacher impact, economist Eric Hanushek, whose



life."

They devise a curriculum, apply for and are granted a charter. A year or two down the road, there's a collision of aims and priorities.

The state says to the educators, "We're giving you tax money. In return, we're holding you accountable. Your students have to take the state's annual standardized test."

SAME OLD STUFF

And the educators say, "WHAT!? What's your definition of accountable? Didn't you give us a charter to help students become critical thinkers, curious, creative, self-aware, empathetic, confident, courageous, resourceful, in love with learning, and capable of wonder?"

"And now you're telling us that a standardized, one-shot, paper-and-pencil, multiple choice, bubble-in-the-oval, machine-scored test of short-term memory of the contents of a few school subjects - you're telling us that a computer is going to spit out a number that tells us whether or not we're succeeding!? You've gotta be kidding!"

The charter school movement has been billed and sold as a strategy for strengthening public education via experimentation and innovation. What it's done instead is remind us of the ubiquity of the Law of Unintended Consequences.

But that shouldn't surprise anyone. That's because, generally speaking, those most determined and successful in promoting charters rarely know much about educating.

They've just bought the view of the late conservative economist Milton Friedman that privatizing public schools and forcing them to adopt market forces will shape them up.

It doesn't hurt, of course, that a side benefit would be the weakening of unions, and the broadening of corporate access to the half-trillion dollars a year America spends on education.

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1970 study brought focus onto the potential effect of individual teachers, says good teachers are born and not made, and a body of research seems to bear this out.

However, the documentary then turns to the efforts of the Public Education Foundation of Chattanooga, TN, a local education fund that has paired with the Benwood Foundation to help Chattanooga implement a system of professional development for every teacher, built into teachers' work on a daily basis, along with a program of extensive new teacher mentoring.

The initiative is founded on the premise that teaching is not a set of things a teacher does, but as a series of responses a teacher elicits from students. An Education Sector report has found that Chattanooga teachers have become far more effective since the initiative began.

AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

The owner of a several small farms was being investigated for allegedly not paying his workers proper wages.

"I need a list of your employees and how much you pay them," demanded the interviewing agent.

"Well," replied the farmer, "there's my farmhand, who has been with me for three years. I pay him \$200 a week plus free room and board. The cook has been here for 18 months, and I pay her \$150 a week plus free room and board. Then there's the halfwit who works about 18 hours every day and does 90% of all the work around here. He makes about \$10 a week and pays his own room and board, and I buy him a bottle of bourbon every Saturday night. He also sleeps with my wife occasionally."

"That's the guy I want to talk to, the halfwit," said the agent.

"That," the farmer replied, "would be me."

Six Oklahoma Billionaires **Rich Asked To Give Half To Charity**

Billionaires Bill Gates and Warren Buffett are trying to persuade other American billionaires to give at least half their wealth to charity.

A little over a year after Gates and Buffett began hatching a plan over dinner to persuade America's wealthiest people to give most of their fortunes to charity, more than three-dozen individuals and families have agreed to take part, campaign organizers say.

Oklahoma has six billionaires: George Kaiser \$9.4 billion, Harold Hamm \$5.8 billion, David Green \$2.6 billion, Lynn Schusterman \$2 billion, T. Boone Pickens \$1.4 billion and Aubrey McClendon \$1.3 billion.

In addition to Buffett and Gates – America's two wealthiest individuals, with a combined net worth of \$90 billion, according to Forbes – 38 other billionaires have signed The Giving Pledge.

T. BOONE INCLUDED

They include New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, entertainment executive Barry Diller, Oracle co-founder Larry Ellison, energy tycoon Pickens, media mogul Ted Turner, David Rockefeller, film director George Lucas and investor Ronald Perelman.

"We're off to a terrific start," Buffett, co-founder and chairman and CEO of Berkshire Hathaway, said in a conference call also attended by Bloomberg and San Francisco hedge-fund manager Tom Steyer and his wife Kat Taylor, founder of OneCalifornia Bank.

Buffett said he and Gates, the Microsoft co-founder, and Gates' wife Melinda made calls to fellow billionaires on the Forbes 400 list of wealthiest Americans – in many cases, people they had never met – to try to persuade them to join the giving pledge.

KEEP CONTACTING THE RICH

"We contacted between 70 and 80 people to get the 40. A few were unavailable. We don't give up on them. Every saint has a past, every sinner has a future. We'll keep on working," Buffett said.

Bloomberg, who made the bulk of his estimated \$17.5 billion fortune from financial news and information services company Bloomberg L.P., said it didn't make sense to leave everything to his children and have them go through life as members of "the lucky sperm club."

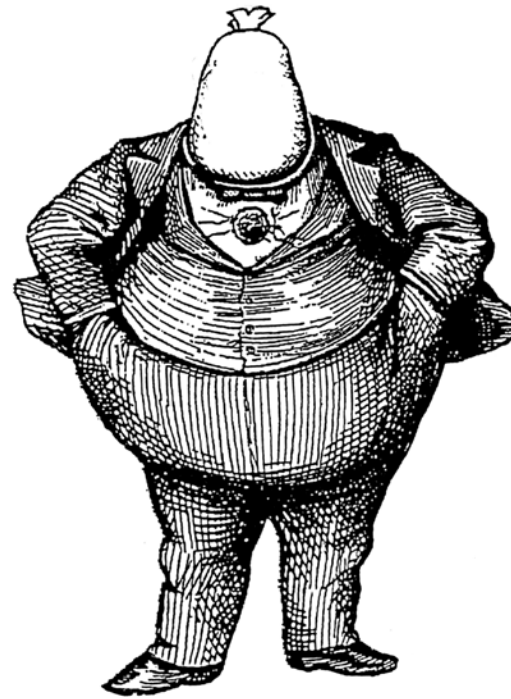
"You don't want to leave them so much money that it ruins their lives," Bloomberg said. "You want kids who can look back and say, 'Yeah my family helped me but I did something on my own.'"

Added Steyer: "We need to support each other. I look at this as replanting your garden so that future generations will have a full bounty of crops."

The United States has roughly 400 billionaires – about 40% of the world's total – with a combined net worth of \$1.2 trillion, according to Forbes. If they all took the pledge, that would amount to at least \$600 billion for charity.

MORE THAN \$230 BILLION PLEDGED

The 40 names that have pledged to date have a combined net worth surpassing \$230 billion, according to Forbes. Several of them have said they plan to give



away much more than 50% of their wealth. Buffett has promised to donate more than 99% of his wealth.

The pledge is a moral commitment to give, not a legal contract. It does not involve pooling money or supporting one cause or organization. It's up to each person who signs the pledge how to divvy up their wealth.

In letters on the givingpledge.org website, the 40 billionaires explain what motivated them to follow in the footsteps of Gates and Buffett.

"I'm particularly thankful for my father's advice to set goals so high that they can't possibly be achieved during a lifetime and to give help where help is needed most," CNN founder Ted Turner said. "That inspiration keeps me energized and eager to keep working hard every day on giving back and making the world a better place for generations to come."

IMPROVING EDUCATION

"My pledge is to the process; as long as I have the resources at my disposal, I will seek to raise the bar for future generations of students of all ages," filmmaker George Lucas said. "I am dedicating the majority of my wealth to improving education."

Gates and Buffett hatched the idea of a giving campaign in mid-2009 at a secret dinner meeting in New York with a few select billionaires. The campaign went public this June.

Buffett acknowledged that some wealthy people may find it beneficial to donate more so they can avoid or write off more taxes. But he said that's not the reason billionaires are taking the pledge.

"Of the 20 or so people that I have talked to that have signed, not one of them has talked to me about taxes," Buffett said.

"It may be a consideration but I think the motivation goes far, far beyond taxes."

And of the billionaires contacted who didn't join the pledge?

"There were a few people who gave answers that indicated their various dissatisfaction with government," Buffett said. "A few had dynastic ideas about wealth ... an intergenerational compact with family to keep that going. And there were others who said, 'I've got a plane to catch and I'll have to hang up.'"

GIVING BANK A DOSE OF OWN MEDICINE

Dear Sir:

I am writing to thank you for bouncing my check with which I endeavored to pay my plumber last month. By my calculations, three nanoseconds must have lapsed between his presenting the check and the arrival in my account of the funds needed to honor it. I refer, of course, to the automatic monthly deposit of my entire pension, an arrangement which, I admit, has been in place for only 18 years.

You are to be commended for seizing that brief window of opportunity, and also for debiting my account \$30 by way of penalty for the inconvenience caused to your bank.

My thankfulness springs from the manner in which this incident has caused me to rethink my errant financial ways. I noticed that whereas I personally attend to your telephone calls and letters, when I try to contact you, I am confronted by the impersonal, overcharging, pre-recorded, faceless entity which your bank has become.

From now on, I, like you, choose only to deal with a flesh-and-blood person. My mortgage and loan repayments will therefore and hereafter no longer be automatic, but will arrive at your bank, by check, addressed personally and confidentially to an employee at your bank whom you must nominate.

Be aware that it is an offense under the Postal Act for any other person to open such an envelope. Please find attached an Application Contact Status which I require your chosen employee to complete. I am sorry it runs to eight pages, but in order that I know as much about him or her as your bank knows about me, there is no alternative.

Please note that all copies of his or her medical history must be countersigned by a Notary Public, and the mandatory details of his/her financial situation [income, debts, assets and liabilities] must be accompanied by documented proof. In due course, I will issue your employee with a PIN

number which he/she must quote in dealings with me. I regret that it cannot be shorter than 28 digits but, again, I have modeled it on the number of button presses required of me to access my account balance on your phone bank service.

As they say, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Let me level the playing field even further. When you call me, press buttons as follows:

1. To make an appointment to see me.
2. To query a missing payment.
3. To transfer the call to my living room in case I am there.
4. To transfer the call to my bedroom in case I am sleeping.
5. To transfer the call to my toilet in case I am attending to nature.
6. To transfer the call to my mobile phone if I am not at home.
7. To leave a message on my computer, a password to access my computer is required. [Password will be communicated to you at a later date to the Authorized Contact.]
8. To return to the main menu and to listen to options 1 through 7.
9. To make a general complaint or inquiry.

The contact will then be put on hold, pending the attention of my automated answering service. While this may, on occasion, involve a lengthy wait, uplifting music will play for the duration of the call.

Regrettably, but again following your example, I must also levy an establishment fee to cover the setting up of this new arrangement.

May I wish you a happy, if ever so slightly less prosperous New Year.

Your Humble Client

– According to Snopes.com, this letter was written by Peter Wear, a columnist for the Courier Mail in Brisbane, Australia. It was not actually sent to a bank, but was inspired by the author's having had one of his checks bounce.

Janitors With PhDs Spending Too Much?

For politicians, boosting college graduation rates has always been a fairly uncontroversial goal to support. The Obama Administration is doing so, rather relentlessly, through a number of initiatives designed to better prepare students for college and support them once they get there.

The assumptions are 1) that students who graduate from college have increased potential for economic mobility, and 2) the more students who earn college degrees, the more our economy will grow.

But are either of those assumptions still true, in light of our new economic reality? Or are we wasting money investing in a sector that's producing thousands of janitors with PhDs?

OKLAHOMA BUCKING TREND

Oklahoma is bucking the national trend – at least at the four-year graduate level. The Oklahoma Regents for Higher education report that 90% are finding jobs.

One thing's for sure: Nationally, our higher education system has produced thousands of janitors with PhDs or other professional degrees – about 5,057 of them, in fact, plus more than 8,000 waiters and waitresses.

When you look at all college degrees, there are more than 317,000 over-educated Americans serving us our meals, more than 80,000 shaking our martinis and some 62,000 mowing our lawns.

In all, about 17 million people in this country have completed college only to end up working jobs that require a skill level below that of a bachelor's degree, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

CRIPPLING UNEMPLOYMENT

You can be sure that many college-educated McDonald's workers have career goals that they've been unable to achieve because of the nation's crippling 22.5% underemployment rate; some of them will, theoretically [and hopefully], move into their intended career one day.

But what of the millions of people who don't switch over to careers that require a degree, either by choice or because of circumstance? Richard Vedder of the Chronicle of Higher Education argues that this is one sign the U.S. has over-invested in higher education.

He points to a new National Bureau of Economic Research report written by three acclaimed economists, which concludes, "In general, marginal and average returns to college are not the same." In layman's terms, that means that even if our investment in higher education is yielding a decent return on average, efforts to build on that investment might yield a less-good return.

Or, even more simply put, there is a point of diminishing returns in higher education. And, according to these indicators at least, we appear to have reached it.

NO GUARANTEE TODAY

Over at the blog for the Center for College Affordability and Productivity, Christopher Matgouranis makes a similar argument, noting that the 4.4% unemployment rate for college grads may be better than the abysmal national rate [9.6%],



but still suggests that a bachelor's degree is no longer "a guaranteed path to a cushy middle class lifestyle."

When considering public policy aimed at increasing the percentage of college graduates in the labor force, it must be an imperative to consider what these people will be doing after graduation. Is it socially responsible for us to encourage individuals to enroll in college and accumulate massive debt when the benefits are becoming increasingly uncertain?

An increase in the overall percentage of college graduates will just see that more will end up underemployed [or unemployed altogether].

Encouraging students to go to college regardless of their skill level or inclination and with dwindling potential for economic benefit can lead to "credential inflation" – the phenomenon whereby college degrees are "watered down" and employers start requiring a degree for jobs that do not warrant one.

Despite what some employment ads suggest, you probably do not need a college degree to answer a phone, or to build cabinets.

CAREERTECH WAY TO GO

An obvious solution is to invest a greater percentage of our resources in vocational and other professional certification programs, which would cost less for both students and the government and could produce people who are more appropriately trained for the careers they want to and/or will pursue.

On the other hand, it could be that there's nothing wrong with encouraging young Americans to pursue degrees as long as we can ensure that they'll receive a high-quality education.

After all, students go to college for more than just career training – they also go to expand their minds, find their place in the world, meet new people and, quite often, to grow up a bit before entering the workforce.

There's nothing wrong with that, per se. But either way, the blind assumption that dumping more money into the higher education sector will lead to certain economic gains is naive, if not irresponsible, and requires a deeper look.

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Constitutional Mysteries? Paging Mr. Holmes

By Danny M. Adkison

We recently observed Constitution Day [formerly Citizenship Day]. You may have been lucky enough [like me] to hear a great presentation on our Constitution, its meaning and importance. Maybe you heard the bells in your town ringing about three o'clock in the afternoon. That was to encourage us to reflect on the oldest governing document on Earth.

One reflection I was reminded of was a question: Why isn't the Constitution dead?

The longevity of our Constitution is a whodunit in reverse. Typically, the detective is called in to answer the question, who committed the murder?

In the case of our nation's Constitution, it should [as the age of constitutions' go] be dead but isn't. What explains that?

WHICH HOLMES?

We need a detective. Holmes should do. Not Sherlock, but Oliver Wendell.

There are two types of logic: inductive and deductive. One is philosophical [deductive] while the other is practical [inductive].

Which method did each Sherlock Holmes use? Sherlock claimed to use deductive logic [The Sign of Four], even though it is not unusual to find authors stating he was actually using inductive logic. [I had a textbook in graduate school that made that assertion]. Any amateur detective who could solve as many mysteries as Sherlock should have been smart enough to know which type he practiced.

Oliver Wendell Holmes was also smart enough to know which method of logic he preferred when expounding the law. Teddy Roosevelt appointed him to the Court where he served the nation for 30 years. Prior to this he authored what has become a classic, *The Common Law*, asserting, "The life of the law has not been logic: it has been experience."

OLIVER WENDELL'S APPROACH

Oliver Wendell rejected a priori reasoning in deciding law, arguing instead for an inductive approach.

Just as Sherlock is instantly identified by certain references ["the game's afoot," "it's Elementary," and the dog which did not bark in the nighttime], so, too, is Oliver Wendell ["clear and present danger," and "falsely yelling fire in a crowded theater"].

Bernard Schwartz, the great Supreme Court scholar, ranked Oliver Wendell Holmes second in his list of the 10 greatest Supreme Court justices. The greatest justice, according to Schwartz, was John Marshall. It just so happens that Marshall was a devotee of logic when interpreting the Constitution.

In the most famous case ever decided by the Court, Marshall used this syllogism to rule on Section 13 of the Judiciary Act of 1789 and decide *Marbury v. Madison*.

Major Premise: Any law repugnant to the Constitution is null and void

Minor Premise: Section 13 is repugnant to the Constitution

Conclusion: Section 13 is null and void.

A BARKING DOG?

"Wait a minute," one can hear Oliver Wendell exclaiming. Your conclusion, Mr. Chief Justice, is logical, but what makes your major premise correct? Logic cannot prove the correctness of that. Is the major premise in the Constitution? The answer to that is easy – no, it isn't. Marshall, however, would say, he got the premise from none other than the Father of the Constitution, James Madison. It's elementary!

What, then, of the minor premise? Logic cannot demonstrate the truth or falsity of it either. In fact, consider this. Interpretation is needed when the exact meaning of a document or law is uncertain.

Yet, how can Marshall assert that Section 13 of the Judiciary Act is repugnant to the constitution unless he knows [1] what Section 13 means and [2] what the Constitution means. And if their meaning is known, why do they need to be interpreted?

I think I just heard a dog bark.

How many mysteries can the Constitution contain? That is what makes the Constitution so interesting.

Would these two, who share a last name [the story goes that Arthur Conan Doyle was so impressed with Oliver Wendell's intellect that he named his character after him], agree on the solution of any of these mysteries? They might, if they presented a clear and present danger.

– The author teaches constitutional law at Oklahoma State University

BLOWOUT

From Page One

for a generation.

Republicans were better organized and better funded. Hungrier, in fact. Democratic leaders were part of a club that didn't easily welcome newcomers or know how to defend against a GOP surge. They seemed all-too-comfortable attending their periodic executive committee meetings, cocktail parties and the national conventions. Winning elections was nice – keeping the club intact was even more important.

Oklahoma Democrats aren't in nearly as bad a shape, despite the Nov. 2 blowout.

• It's certainly true that the state's rural areas are rapidly turning Red. Look no further than Durant Sen. Jay Paul Gumm's defeat – undoubtedly fueled as well because he dared to cross big insurance in the battle to extend coverage to children with autism. Gumm wasn't alone, though. Across once-reliably Democratic eastern, southern and southeastern Oklahoma, Democratic incumbents were knocked off this year.

• It's also true that voter registration figures are misleading. Forty-eight percent are registered as Democrats, but many have been voting Republican for years – they just never bothered to change parties.

Longtime Democratic activist Ben Odom believes the Democratic base in Oklahoma actually is about 35%. If he's right, then Democrats may be better positioned than you might think to be competitive sooner, rather than later.

How so? More than 11% of Oklahoma voters are now registered as independents, unaffiliated with either of

the major parties. Elections increasingly will be decided by that swing group, giving Democrats a shot if they can craft a clear message that resonates with rank-and-file Oklahomans and if they can identify and groom the right candidates.

• Finally, it's true that Oklahoma's long-term demographics favor Democrats. It might not be evident for a generation or more, but Democrats are scoring better in the state's fast-growing urban areas, while Republicans are becoming kings of rural Oklahoma where population overall is in decline [primarily because of agricultural economics].

Democrats were unable to break through, as hoped, in some metropolitan districts that traditionally have been GOP strongholds – but many of the races were competitive, despite the Republican tidal wave.

For example, Democrats failed to hold retiring Rep. Lucky Lamon's west Tulsa district by less than 100 votes – a razor-thin margin that ensures a real battle in two years. Rep. Jason Nelson, R-OKC, needed serious GOP help in the final weeks to stave off Democrat Dana Orwig – another district that could swing into the Democratic column if everything isn't breaking for Republicans, as it did this year. Further, Republican Rep. David Dank won re-election to his northwest OKC seat, but his two challengers – Democrat Gail Vines and Independent [Green Party] Ed Shadid together claimed more than 40% of the vote, a strong showing in the midst of a GOP landslide.

“Democrats should have had a game plan and focused on urban ar-

reas,” former state Democratic Chairman Pat Hall opined, just days before the election.

Democrats did win a huge race in Stillwater, where freshman Rep. Cory Williams won a tight re-election bid to a seat that previously had long been in the hands of Republican Terry Ingmire. In the state's other major college town, Norman, Emily Virgin helped Democrats hang onto term-limited Rep. Bill Nation's seat, but Democratic Rep. Wallace Collins could not withstand the GOP tsunami and lost a seat he has won, lost, won and now lost again.

What's troubling is that Democrats, who needed to circle wagons like never before, lived up to their stereotype as the Hatfields and McCoys of American politics. As Republican pollster Pat McFerron noted just days before the election, it was as if three parties were operating in Oklahoma this year – Republicans, anti-Obama Democrats and pro-Obama Democrats.

In fact, McFerron said his polling showed Oklahoma Democrats almost evenly divided over the President – 27% favorable, 28% unfavorable – a crippling splintering in an already challenging election. One example: Pre-election polls showed 70% of those Democrats with an unfavorable view of Obama were planning to vote for Republican Todd Lamb for lieutenant governor.

The problem now for Oklahoma Republicans is that they can't govern by running against an unpopular president and loathed Congress. Hard choices now replace talking points.

They have the opportunity – unimpeded – to implement their shrink

state government as much as possible and drown the rest in the bathtub philosophy.

What do Republicans in control in Oklahoma City really want? Every government service privatized for profit – private prisons, private mental health facilities, private schools. For profit. Payment guaranteed by the taxpayers.

A rather glum Democrat sat next to me as I finished lunch not too long ago. He talked about what a tough election year it was shaping up to be. And then he waxed philosophical about how maybe it would be best if Republicans did get total control – it would force Oklahomans to face the reality of what they were voting for.

He fretted about those who would be hurt in such a scenario. But sometimes, he mused, you have to hit rock bottom to face reality.

As Winston Churchill put it, “Is it really the case that one always has to have a disaster before anything sensible can be done which would have prevented it?”

Four years ago, Oklahoma Democrats celebrated the re-election of Gov. Brad Henry and Attorney General Drew Edmondson and the election of Lt. Gov. Jari Askins, to name a few.

Two years ago, some Oklahoma Democrats rejoiced in the end of George W. Bush's reign of error and the election of the nation's first African-American president, Democrat Barack Obama.

This year, Oklahoma Democrats felt the sting of defeat.

Two years is a lifetime in politics. The agony today can be replaced with jubilation tomorrow. Will it be?

Roberts Impeachment Looming For Perjury?

Election 2010 was fought on a wave of more than \$4 billion in campaign dollars unleashed on the American people by the Supreme Court in its Citizens United v. FEC decision.

The court, led by a majority of staunch right-wingers, struck down limits on third-party “electioneering” ads based on a tortured interpretation of the First Amendment guarantee of free speech.

Thomas Mann, a Brookings Institution scholar, wrote that the decision “will likely go down in history as one of the Supreme Court's most egregious exercises of judicial activism.”

Rep. Peter Fazio, D-OR, told the Huffington Post that “the Supreme Court has done a tremendous disservice to the United States of America ... They have done more to undermine our democracy with their Citizens United decision than all of the Republican operatives in the world in this campaign.”

Defazio said he is “investigating articles of impeachment” against Chief Justice John Roberts for committing perjury when he promised he wouldn't be a judicial activist during his Senate confirmation hearings.

The floodgates are open, and American democracy is at risk. But the decision didn't emerge out of thin air.

Rather, it was the culmination of the development, over more than a century, of a bizarre theory of jurisprudence that holds that corporations enjoy the same

Constitutional rights as human beings.

For years, it was believed the concept was enshrined in the law by the Supreme Court in 1886, but in his groundbreaking book, *Unequal Protection: How Corporations Became People – And How You Can Fight Back*, historian and radio host Thom Hartmann revealed that the principle was in fact the result of what may be the greatest corporate fraud ever perpetrated on the American people.

Senate Has 54 Millionaires

More than half of U.S. Senators are millionaires – at least 54 members – according to financial disclosure forms reviewed by Roll Call. Four other senators missed the millionaires' club by less than \$100,000.

Most senators also saw their fortunes grow in 2009 – a tumultuous economic year. Sen. John Kerry, Democrat of Massachusetts, is still the richest lawmaker. He's worth \$188.37 million.

But the financial reports can be strange: Sen. Herb Kohl, Democrat of Wisconsin, one of the richest members, comes out as the poorest lawmaker – with net worth listed at negative \$4.64 million – because of liabilities associated with his ownership of an NBA team.



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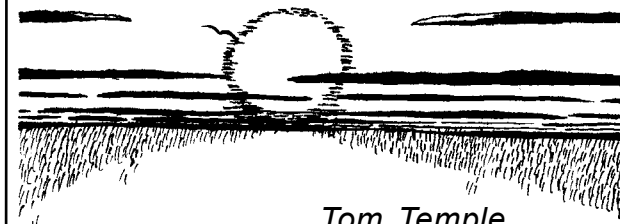
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