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## A Family's Adoption Journey

# Brianna's Baby

By Karlie Tipton

It wasn't the alarm clock on my cell phone that had so cruelly jarred me from a peaceful slumber that September morning. It was a text message alert.

"I have to tell you something," my 14-year-old sister, Brianna, wrote.

I had a strong feeling I knew what would come next, even before I began to reply.

My little sister was blessed with piercing blue-gray eyes, blond hair [although she often dyes it darker] and an appealing, slim figure, much more suited to a young woman of 18 or 19 than a high school freshman.

But she was not blessed with self-confidence.

I knew the way she allowed her friends, particularly boys, to take advantage of her need for belonging, so what she was about to tell me came as no surprise.

"What's up?" I asked reluctantly, in the most non-judgmental tone a text message can conjure.

I held my phone to my chest as I lay in bed, eyes unfocused, gazing up at a sky of speckled white plaster, waiting for the response.

"I'm pregnant. What should I do?"

I knew that day, even before Brianna's text-messaged response, the next nine months of her life would impact her and so many others in ways none could imagine.

My sister would gain an extra 20, 30 or more pounds. She would face ridicule from her friends, family and society.

But most painfully, she would have to make one of the most heart-wrenching decisions she will ever have to



face: to keep her baby and sacrifice her chance at freedom, success and a childhood, or to give up her child and live with the haunting decision for the rest of her days.

And she would do it all before getting her driver's license.

Although Brianna would often say she felt completely alone in her pain, both physically and emotionally, during her pregnancy, she never was.

Thirty-five percent of teenage girls in the United States become pregnant before the age of 20, according to the Oklahoma Department of Health Services.

Many of those teenage girls will be from our home state. In the most recent data provided by the National Center for Health Statistics, Oklahoma ranks fifth in the nation for the rate of teen births.

In 2007 alone, more than 7,500 Oklahoma girls' lives would be changed forever by the birth of their first child when they could still be considered children themselves.

I knew Brianna's situation was not unique. But how could I tell her without sounding like her counselor?

The bright, cheery waiting room at Integris Hospital in Oklahoma City was drowning in blossoming flowers. Red roses and pink lilies welcomed women experiencing the first of the happiest moments of their lives.

But not us.

"You're Brianna, right?" the receptionist asked with the kind of smile that could have belonged to a beauty queen.

"Yeah," Brianna replied, her tone erasing the glee from the receptionist's face. "You can have a seat over there," she said less cheerily, point-

ing to an overstuffed maroon seat.

I seemed woefully out of place in the waiting room. I imagined the receptionists' quandaries. Isn't she too young to be that pregnant girl's mom? She must have had her when she was 15, too.

I wanted to justify myself to them.

"Listen," I would say. "I'm only here because our mom is too busy playing tennis, our dad is working, our brother is at school and Brianna's baby daddy is a 19-year-old who's locked up for robbery and statutory rape, so I was the only one left to take my little sister to her first ultrasound."

But I knew that would only hurt Brianna.

Once seated, Brianna dropped her head into her hands. There was silence between us as I sat next to my sister, who still easily fitted into ripped jeans and a small t-shirt, even though she was well into her third trimester.

Moments later, a doctor who seemed so happy she might have been dipping into her own medical supply bounced into the waiting room.

"Brianna!" she squealed. "I'm Dr. Carla. So good to see you!"

The woman appeared to be in her mid-50s and a little out of shape, but it was as if pure energy oozed out of her from the top of her brunette quaff to her modest white sneakers.

"Let's take a look at that baby!" she continued.

With a violent roll of her eyes, Brianna followed her into the darkened room where, for the first time, she would see that the child growing inside her was beginning to look like a human.

"See, that's the little foot, and that strand along there, that's his spine," Dr. Carla said, pointing and making notes.

"Is that his face?" Brianna asked. "He looks like a monster. Or an alien."

"Yep!" Dr. Carla replied excitedly. "So, have we picked out a name for this little guy?"

Brianna was silent.

See ADOPTION Page 17

# Observations

## Kids Suffer

So who suffers when the economy is in the dumps? States are cutting hundreds of millions from their pre-kindergarten budgets, the Associated Press reports.

States will slash nearly \$350 million from their pre-K programs by next year, with more cuts likely once federal stimulus money ends, according to Rutgers University's National Institute for Early Education Research.

The reductions mean fewer slots, teacher layoffs, and fewer services for needy families who can't afford private preschool programs.

Thus far Oklahoma is hanging on by a thread, facing a \$500 million budget hole courtesy of the Republican Legislature and Democratic Gov. Brad Henry.

The overall impact is less access to a quality education in the early years, at a time when parents have reduced capability to purchase that on their own.

Families are getting hit from both sides. Four states made cuts last year, but the number jumped to 14 this year, and will likely add another 14 next year.

The cuts come when the demand for quality pre-K is at an all-time high, and states struggle to improve test scores in early grades and help students earn a high school diploma.

As of last year, 38 states had pre-K programs serving more than 1.2 million 3- and 4-year-olds.

## College Prep

As America's aging and highly-educated workforce moves into retirement, the nation must rely on young Americans. A report from the College Board finds that among developed countries, the U.S. ranks 12th in college completion for citizens aged 25 to 34, where once we ranked first.

For this key demographic, Canada, Korea, the Russian Federation, Japan, New Zealand, Ireland, Norway, Israel, France, Belgium, and Australia sur-

pass us. To achieve the goal of 55% college attainment by 2025, growth in degree attainment must increase significantly over the next 15 years.

Toward achieving this, the Commission on Access, Admissions and Success in Higher Education recommends a 10-part action agenda.

First, provide a program of preschool education universally available to children from low-income families.

Second, improve middle and high school counseling.

Third, identify students at risk of dropping out early and provide a safety net.

Fourth, align K-12 with international standards and college admission expectations.

Fifth, improve teacher quality, focusing on recruitment and retention.

Sixth, clarify and simplify the college admission process to encourage first-generation students.

Seventh, provide more need-based grant aid while simplifying financial aid processes.

Eighth, keep college affordable by controlling costs and insisting that state governments meet funding obligations.

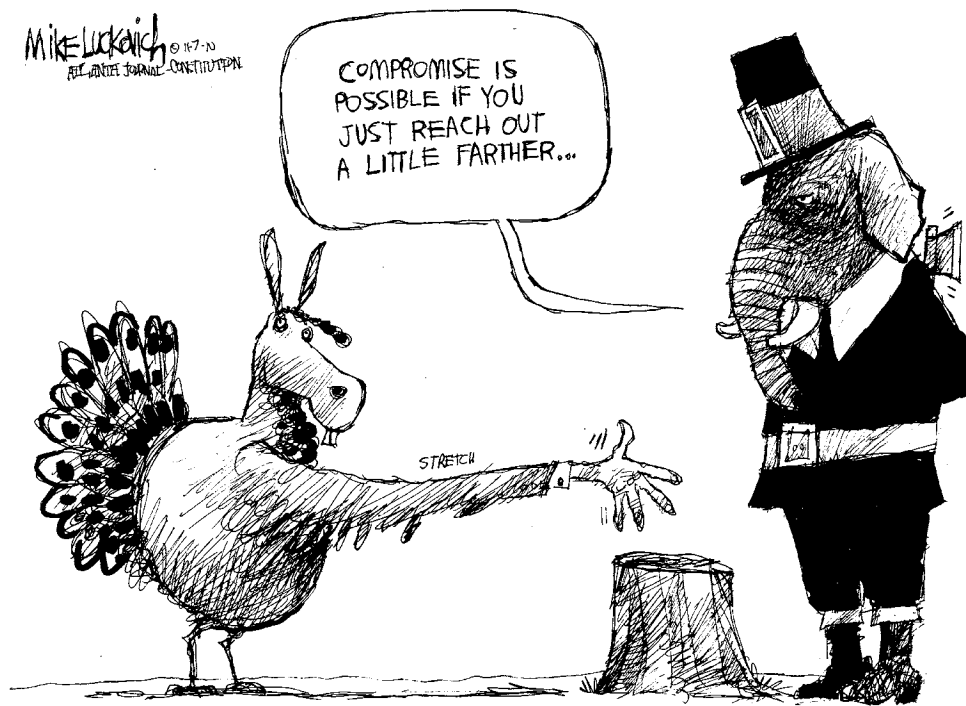
Ninth, increase college completion rates by reducing dropouts, easing transfer processes, and using data-based approaches to improve completion rates at both two- and four-year institutions.

And finally, provide postsecondary opportunities as an essential element of adult education programs, supplementing basic skills training with a new "honors GED" and with better coordination of adult education, veterans' benefits, outreach programs, and student aid.

## School Shopping

Parents, teachers and superintendents always pay close attention to Advanced Placement Index test scores. Scores are also driving real estate prices for prospective homebuy-

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ers, sellers, and real estate agents.

They make it possible to compare schools within the same district. Score shopping is more important to some than commute times, lot size or granite countertops.

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

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

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

So what else is new?

## Obama Polling

A CNN poll has 48% of Americans approving of how President Barack Obama is handling his job as president, while 45% disapprove of his job performance.

Sounds really bad, doesn't it? A CNN Poll of Polls suggests that for the first time this year, more Americans approve of how Obama is managing his duties in the White House.

This newest edition of the CNN Poll of Polls is an average of four national polls conducted from mid-to-late October: Gallup tracking [Oct. 25-27], Newsweek [Oct. 20-21], CBS/New York Times [Oct. 22-26], and McClatchy-Marist [Oct. 22-25].

On Oct. 21, when Obama's approval hit a low of 44.7% in its poll, Gallup noted that his approval numbers were still superior to both Clinton [41.4%] and Reagan [41.7%] in the 7th quarters of their first terms in office.

Always read the fine print.

## Education Flops

Ballot measures involving education were largely defeated in the Nov. 2 elections, notably Florida's initiative that would have loosened a 2002 constitutional amendment dictating class size.

In Oklahoma voters defeated two opposing initiatives, one that would have required per-pupil funding to match the average of neighboring states, and another that would have amended the state Constitution to exempt the Legislature from such mandates.

Florida's outcome in particular forces difficult choices for local districts, where tight budgets have left superintendents struggling to keep class sizes within limits. Supporters had argued the initiative would provide flexibility to avoid drastic measures like busing students to other schools and combining two grades in a single classroom.

In Colorado, voters rejected three measures that would have dramatically reduced the state's ability to collect revenue for a range of services that included education.

Arizona voters struck down an initiative that would have shifted tobacco-tax revenue currently directed at early-childhood education and health services to the state's general fund.

In Hawaii, voters elected four new members to the state school board and re-elected two others, but also approved a measure that alters the state Constitution so the governor has authority to appoint the board's members in the future.

## Merit Pay?

The claim that merit pay will improve student performance has been disproved again and again. Whenever businessmen decide to "reform" education, they insist on merit pay. But it doesn't work.

The latest study, released only a week ago by the National Center on Performance Incentives, was the most rigorous evaluation of merit pay ever conducted.

One group of teachers in Nashville was offered bonuses up to \$15,000 if they raised students' math scores; another, the control group, was offered nothing.

The average teacher pay is about \$50,000, so this was a significant incentive to get higher scores. Over the three years of the study, both groups produced the same results.

The economists, who were scrupulously nonpartisan, concluded that performance pay had no effect on student performance. It turns out that teachers were working as hard as they knew how, with or without the bonus.

The claim that teachers can be accurately evaluated by student test scores has been refuted again and again by scholars. The Economic Policy Institute released a statement by many of the nation's leading testing experts warning that this method was riddled with error and instability.

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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

If you read no other book this year, make it *Death Of The Liberal Class* by Chris Hedges, winner of the Pulitzer Prize. You will finally understand what's happening to this country and why.

**Dart:** To ex-President George W. Bush for his new book *Decision Points* wherein he tells lie after lie and blames his staff for the two wars we should never have been in.

Newsweek reports that Rush Limbaugh's hate peddling earned him \$58.7 million last year – more than the combined salaries of the U.S. Senate.

**Laurel:** To Vince Orza, named president and CEO of OKC TV station KSBI. Jerry Hart was named VP and operations manager. Both worked at KOCO Channel 5 in the '80s.

Thanks to a venal U.S. Supreme Court majority, corporations and their anonymous cash cows poured \$4.14 billion into one of the most shrill, fabricated campaigns in history.

**Dart:** To those continuing to lie about the new health care law. AARP has demystified the reform law – visit <http://www.aarp.org/health/health-care-reform/info-04-2010/healthreformfs.html> for a thorough vetting.

Given the lack of mental health resources in Oklahoma, the state ranks 13th in suicides, 531 last year – 14.7 per 100,000.

**Dart:** To the Tulsa Metro Chamber, deliberately trying to politicize the selection of appellate judges. Those who pay dues to this organization ought to cease and desist.

We're saddened by the death of our colleague, Father David Monahan, founding editor of the *Sooner Catholic* and one of the wittiest people we've known.

**Laurel:** To Forbes Magazine, choosing Oklahoma City as the most affordable city in America thanks to a solid job market, low cost housing and low unemployment.

It wasn't just Oklahoma hit by that political holocaust – Republicans took control of more legislatures since 1928, elected 650 GOP legislators, and picked up nine governors.

**Dart:** To the biggest liar during a lying campaign season, State Chamber CEO Fred Morgan, who spent thousands telling voters that lawyers control the selection of appellate judges. It's seven lay persons, only six picked by lawyers.

Did James Lankford ever attend as much as a precinct meeting before dumb Okies voted to send him to Congress? His qualifications? He ran the Southern Baptists' Falls Creek camp for boys and girls.

**Laurel:** To the handful of Oklahoma voters who supported SQ 744. If you doubt that opposition was designed to protect the greedy we advise you to check the tax exemptions at [www.tax.ok.gov/TEreports.html](http://www.tax.ok.gov/TEreports.html).

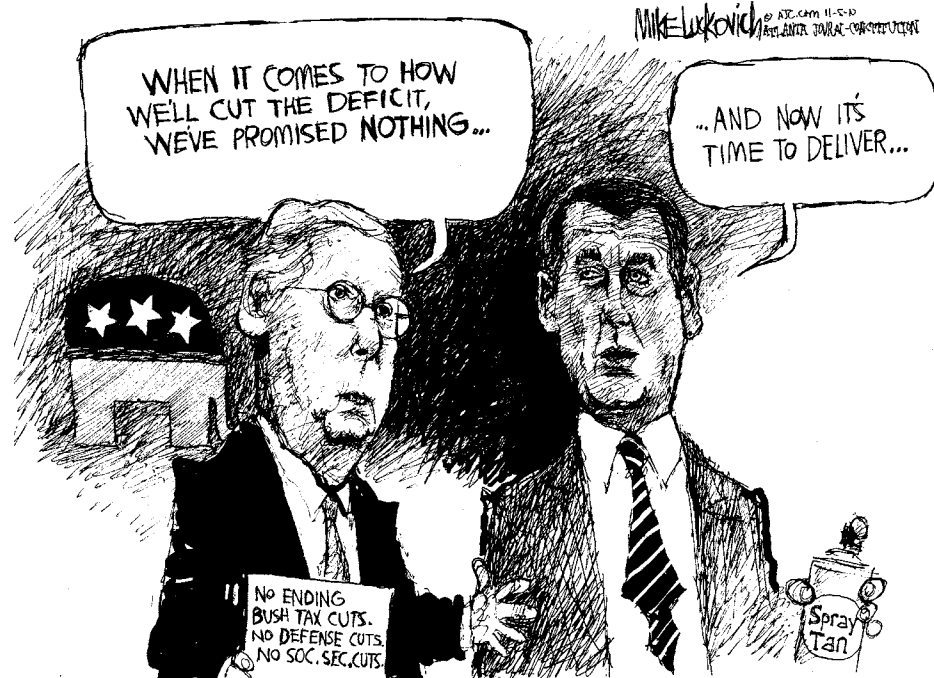
Oops! Look for the Republican governor and Republican Legislature to have second thoughts on that voter-approved two-term limit on statewide offices now that they hold all 11.

**Dart:** To America, falling to 11th place in college graduates [40.4%]. Canada tops the list at 66.8%, South Korea 55.5%, Japan 53.7%, and New Zealand 43.9%. We also trail Ireland, Norway, Israel, France, Belgium and Australia.

Thank goodness Oklahoma authorities looked into the sale of Four Loko – 12% alcohol drink. Oklahoma college campuses are awash in it, sending several to the hospital. It has been banned effective Dec. 3.

**Laurel:** To Journal-Record Reporter Scott Carter for a terrific article detailing the abuse and ridicule of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Oklahomans [GLBT].

Jennifer Cline wrote President Obama, telling him to fix the economy because she had lost her job and had cancer. Obama replied in a handwritten note. She sold it for \$7,000.



**Dart:** To the Tea Party types who continue their blather about Muslims. More than 60 Muslims were killed when the world Trade Center was hit on 9/11.

Anybody surprised by the fact that Republican Attorney General-elect Scott Pruitt will review AG Drew Edmondson's lawsuit against the poultry industry? Guess who took \$15,000 for his campaign from the poultry industry?

**Laurel:** To the Tulsa World for an excellent expose of hate-filled Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, KS. They carry signs saying Jews killed Jesus. It was Romans, but you don't confuse the nuts with facts.

Funny that Republicans are bragging about passage of SQ 756, opting out of ObamaCare. The Republican Daily Disappointment was the first to sign up for one of its benefits.

**Dart:** To the so-called legislative fiscal conservatives, increasing by 28 tax breaks since 2008. They now number 473, for a total of \$5.87 billion – \$2 billion of which have failed to create a single job.

Slightly more than half the eligible voters turned out in the U.S. general election. Compare that to Iraq where 62% voted in democratic elections, with 38 killed while trying to vote.

**Laurel:** To the Council of State Governments for a blistering report showing America spent \$52 billion on prisons last year – up \$12 billion. More than 60% were non-violent offenders.

Sixty-one percent of Americans blame talk radio and TV [especially Glenn Beck] for killing civility. Jimmy Carter said America is more divided than any time since the Civil War.

**Dart:** To Oklahoma U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn for blocking aid for Haiti but he votes for all the killing in Iraq and Afghanistan. His shoe size exceeds his social IQ.

Anybody who thinks Republican U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn isn't an extremist should check his donations of more than \$1 million to the likes of Christine O'Donnell and Joe Miller.

**Laurel:** To Karen Youngblood, vice-president of the Yukon School Board, for an op-ed telling the truth – until Oklahoma reduces its asinine 539 school districts, public education will continue to struggle.

Wonder why people voted the economy this year? A survey of college graduates revealed that 85% are moving back home with their parents. No jobs available.

**Dart:** To half-assed Democratic state Treasurer Scott Meacham, signing on as chairman of the State Chamber's 2011 agenda committee. He should resign first.

Why did President Obama make health care a priority by 2014? Because it topped \$2.3 trillion in 2008 – \$7,681 per person, tripling since 2005. It's now 17% of the GDP.

**Laurel:** To state Rep. Paul Wesselhoff, R-Moore, likely to run for Sen. Jim Reynolds' vacant seat. He is one of the sane Republicans.

The Tulsa of yesteryear would never have tolerated Peoria Avenue – probably the worst municipal street in Oklahoma.

**Dart:** To what passes for a Oklahoma Medical Examiners office. It is incredible that the tragic soap opera now includes issuing questionable death certificates.

No House Speaker in modern times has done a finer job than Nancy Pelosi, pushing through President Obama's agenda. Her flaw? She's a woman – too much for the good ol' boys.

**Laurel:** To Oklahoma City Community College President Paul Secrist, named chairman of the prestigious College Board of Trustees.

Thanks to the sorry Republican Legislature, taxpayers will be picking up a bundle of costs due to lawsuits on state questions that should never have been submitted.

Another reason why ObamaCare is important: The number of uninsured has risen to 59 million, including millions in the middle class for the first time.

## THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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# Letters

Editor, The Observer:

I will put my "liberal" credentials up against those of almost anyone but there are limits. A fair chunk of the last edition of the Observer rehashed the old Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill debacle. Forget it folks. We lost.

Not because Thomas is a disaster as a Supreme Court Justice [which he is] but because all we could come up with to stop him was the possibility that he told some dirty jokes and clumsily asked a woman for dates. Out of that we made a production while ignoring what "our guy" had done before and during the time he was in the White House. That's pretty much the definition of hypocrisy.

I don't know whether Anita Hill told the truth or not. I don't really care. I know that Bill Clinton did not tell the truth. About that, I did care and do care. He was supposed to be my guy. People like us put him in the best job in the world and he couldn't keep his pants zipped and lied about it. Not a big deal?

That's what got us George W. Bush. That was a big deal and a bad deal. Let's move on, but from now on, let's hold our guys to the same standards as the bad guys.

Darrell Barton  
Edmond

Editor, The Observer:

I have a friend who went to college on the GI Bill, bought a home with an FHA loan, started his company making parts for the Air Force with an SBA loan, had full VA health benefits until now when he signed up for Social Security and Medicare. He's joined the Tea Party pledging to get government off his back.

Jerry Sokolosky  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Maybe I'm being overly pessimistic [Capricorn - we're all pessimistic], but I worry about state social services under an entire Republican rule in Oklahoma. My son was disabled in a freak accident over 1½ years ago - after three major surgeries, he's 35% titanium and 5% cadaver. No health insurance, but after we paid for the surgery needed on his arm [he broke his forearm in two places], we were lucky enough to get him on vocational rehabilitation.

Besides breaking his arm, which is put together with pins, metal plates and c-clamps, he's had two major surgeries on his leg [all tendons, liga-

ments and nerves were torn from his knee to his foot]. Basically, the doctor had to drill a rod through the bone in his leg, make an ankle out of curved titanium and place a metal plate in his foot. While he does have movement in his knee thanks to the cadavers, they basically had to make a prosthesis out of his leg and foot. I think the bill from vocational rehab is close to \$400,000 now.

It's been a heartbreaking, agonizing in and out of hospitals for over a year, but he's finally beginning to heal from the last surgery, which was the worst.

Needless to say, without that program, my husband and I would have long ago been bankrupt. The idea is that the rehab folks help with medical bills and then, after healing, help them find a job. When he's finally able to find a job, the taxes he will pay will help pay them back.

What an idea!

I foresee with the new Republican administration next year, the programs that have helped so many people in need [including my son] getting the axe. I foresee state employees losing their jobs because of downsizing [many probably voted straight Republican]. I foresee Meals on Wheels funding completely gone [thank you Sen. Tom Ivester for your help in that regard].

I foresee WIC programs slashed. I foresee county jobs in smaller counties [like the one I live in] consolidated and many jobs lost, in the name of cutting taxes. I foresee big oil companies continuing to receive billions of dollars in tax credits - I foresee the middle class taking up the slack and becoming poorer because of the cuts in important programs the middle class and poor desperately need.

In one hand, I want to see the Republican masses in control of our state and U.S. House of Representatives crash and burn, but on the other hand, I know that it will only hurt the folks I consider in my same predicament and the folks I consider the most worthy of these services and who desperately need the jobs.

Anybody have an answer?

Sherri Goodwin  
Cheyenne

Editor, The Observer:

Anyone please feel free to correct me if I'm wrong. I am not very on top of this subject. But two adjectives come to mind on the subject of consideration of Muslim laws in our laws:



hype and moot.

Also, could the tide against consideration of outside laws have anything to do with possibilities of executing women who have affairs with their bodyguards?

Stephanie Hershberger  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Mary Fallin's a real Mama Grizzly unless one of the cubs is Autistic. It was heartbreaking to watch both women try to slide past that one.

Boyd Hickox  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

The Democrats are all down in the dumps now, but come next election cycle, won't it be nice that the Republicans won't have anyone to blame for their screw-ups but themselves?

Linda Swindell  
Luther

Editor, The Observer:

Illegal immigration has been going on for quite a few years now, and it is creating a political problem all over the country - not just the Mexican border states, but everywhere.

I am a liberal, but I am against illegal immigration - and my stand on this issue has nothing to do with racism. I have a daughter-in-law whose maiden name is Ramirez and I do not have a problem with this at all. In fact, the man who is mostly highly regarded by Latinos, the now deceased Cesar Chavez, was against illegal immigration. He was their Ghandi and MLK Jr., all rolled into one.

The problem is that illegals will be taken advantage of by unscrupulous people who will use the illegal status [by definition criminal] as a tool to force them into near slavery conditions. The rich people want their estates manicured, their homes cleaned, meals prepared, etc., for near slavery compensation.

Likewise, many industries want these people to work long, hard hours at below minimum wage, and without fear of union activity. Sure, some of them do prosper here, but far, far too many live under the conditions I have described.

The simple answer is to make it legal. I don't care how it is done - Green Cards, temporary long-term work permits, whatever. It must be legal. Probably some sort of future citizenship

could be involved.

This is up to the politicians in Washington, DC to solve. But we all know that Washington is broken, and has been broken for some time. The pressure from the rich and certain large industries has been strong enough to kill such legalization. They want to keep the status quo for their own selfish needs. This is not a Republican-Democratic issue; both parties are equally involved in maintaining the destructive status quo.

J.A. Gowman  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

In January, our Okie government will lose 56 years of experience.

That is when Drew Edmondson and Jari Askins leave public service due to losing their races for governor.

Both have spent the best years of their lives - 28 years each - as public servants.

Edmondson has been a state representative, Muskogee County district attorney and attorney general.

Askins has been a major player in all three branches of government - a state representative, special district judge, counsel for the governor, chair of the pardon and parole board and lieutenant governor.

How can these splendid state officials be saved from retirement or selling their services to the highest bidder?

Gov. Brad Henry can appoint them to fill the two vacancies on the state Supreme Court.

Both have judicial temperament and are not easily swayed by the cleverest manipulators in the courtrooms.

Both can follow the rules for judges espoused by U.S. District Judge Luther Bohanon:

1. "Determine what the law is and the facts are and act accordingly."
2. "Do not determine what the public says or thinks."
3. "Do right and fear no man."

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner  
Wagoner

*Editor's Note: Edmondson already has agreed to join the law firm Gable-Gotwals in its Oklahoma City office. Askins, however, has expressed interest in serving on the high court. At press time, Henry already had filled one of the vacancies, appointing state District Judge Doug Combs of Shawnee to succeed Justice Rudolph Hargrave who retires at year's end.*

## 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.**

# Toxic Politics



**FROSTY TROY**  
Founding Editor

Tens of millions of American voters got duped badly in the 2010 election, none more than in Oklahoma which is now the reddest of red states.

The Oklahoma Bible-thumping white underclass thought they hit back at what they regarded as a Muslim president, nefariously trying to "take our country away."

Travel with me across Oklahoma and you will hear the accuracy of the polls - 28% of Oklahoma Democrats despise the president. That's why 100,000 more Republicans voted than did Democrats. [48% of voters are registered Democrats, 40% Republicans, 11% Independents.]

It was their way of showing disdain for the party's leaders. Add in the Tea Party loons and you have a salad of slander, a mixture of racism and just plain stupidity.

Of course any sane person worries about the debt. But guess who brought us to this

point? Bible-thumping G.W. Bush, easily the most ignorant president in history. If you doubt it, read his book, *Decision Points*.

I highly recommend to the few remaining liberals in Oklahoma [18% of the electorate at last count] that they read *Death Of The Liberal Class* by Chris Hedges.

He cogently wraps up today's America - who we were, who we are and what we are becoming. It's not for the faint of heart but he was rewarded for his effort by winning the Pulitzer Prize for non-fiction.

You will recognize the descent of Oklahoma Democrats who ruled the roost for 80 years, then left it by not voting.

A lady from Yukon won't be attending her Southern Baptist church because during the campaign it featured a large sign: VOTE CONSERVATIVE.

The Republicans who swept all 11 statewide offices and the governorship are bought, paid for, sold, traded and manipulated by the most powerful special interests in Oklahoma - oil and gas, insurance and banking.

If you doubt it, check and see where their money came from. Even the U.S. Chamber, a din of pure greed, tossed lots of money into Republican coffers.

Some say the takeover was the result of the Koch brothers and their ilk, overflowing with corporate cash thanks to a venal U.S. Supreme Court.

If you traveled the state you would pick up on the agenda of fear the Republican Party preached - robo calls, paid ads and plenty of campaign cash used to trash Democrats.

We're the laughingstock of the nation as the result of the passage of the anti-Sharia law question by a whopping 70%. At most there are 20,000 Muslims in Oklahoma, and Sharia law applies only to their religion not the courthouse.

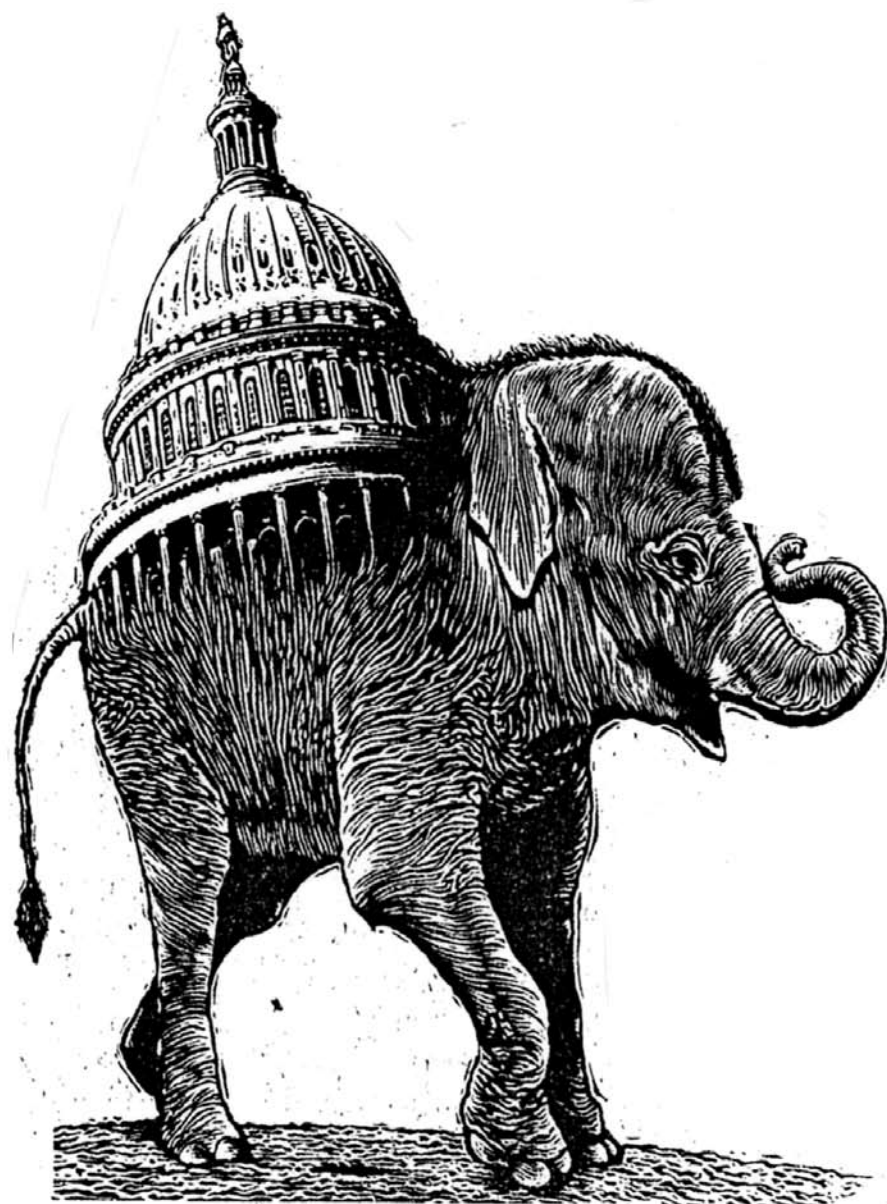
Boy did they peddle fear of illegal aliens, when in fact an earlier Rep. Randy Terrill anti-immigrant law had already sent thousands back to Mexico or to other states.

Fear is a great political weapon. When I was growing up in McAlester the Southern Baptists considered the Pope the devil who would be on the next boat to America if Jack Kennedy were elected president. As it turns out, he missed the boat.

It took forever to free the slaves and even more time to give women the vote. Black unemployment today doubles that of whites, and women are still paid less for doing the same job a man does.

I faintly know how it feels to be shunned. I remember asking a girl for a date to Teen Town where we danced to a jukebox under parental supervision. She turned me down because her mother said a Rainbow girl should never date a Catholic.

I remember one preacher who demonized Catholics in the pulpit and on the



local radio station. When I enrolled at OU in the fall of 1952, his daughter was apparently making out in any available back seat on campus.

Most Mexicans come to America to help their families back home. I had a roof replaced by a company that sent out a half dozen Hispanics who didn't speak a word of English - but how they worked!

The company owner said he was asked repeatedly if it was safe to send money by Western Union to their families in Mexico.

"Secure the border!" rightwingers demand. It will never be secure as long as Mexico feeds American drug habits. America's legal and illegal drug addiction leads every country in the world.

What still shocks me is the venom that some "Christians" spew at the Muslims, the Mexicans and "liberals." Why are a handful of Muslim fanatics representative of 1.5 billion Muslims in the world? Does the KKK represent Christianity? Does that Topeka church abomination represent Christians?

Each of us is on a journey, mapping our own direction, believing or not believing, secure in the fact that America is a bastion of political and religious freedom.

Let's hope the hysteria fades. History will point with pride to a president who inherited an ungodly mess but did his best to get the country back on track.

His health care law is not perfect but it addresses the 59 million Americans without health insurance, including, for the first time, millions in the middle class.

Harry Truman also inherited a bitterly partisan Republican Congress. He said it made no difference - he would do what was right. They called him "Give 'em Hell Harry" but he said he told the truth and they thought it was hell.

I plan on continuing to give them hell.

## Snarling Blue Dog DINO On The Attack

By Karen Webb

An open letter to U.S. Rep. Dan Boren, Oklahoma Democrat [?]:

Git 'er, Danny. Attack her while she's down.

Dan, you have to be kidding. You say you supported Nancy Pelosi for speaker, but she will not get your support for minority leader and you expect the President, not your favorite President, to punish Pelosi for pushing his own agenda.

Danny, she didn't get your support as speaker and he got even less of your support as president.

Dan, you sleep with the enemy and expect us to fix you breakfast. Yes, Dan, we know you won, but it wasn't exactly a surprise. You are so right of center I can't believe you didn't get a Tea Party endorsement.

Yes, Dan, we know a lot of your Dixiecrat friends didn't survive and you'll have a blue Christmas and session without them, but take your poor me, pity party somewhere else.

Obviously, there are those, not in Oklahoma's 2nd Congressional District, who prefer to vote for someone who actually admits to being a Republican.

Poor Danny, divides his votes almost 50-50 and doesn't understand why he

can't get any respect from either side. Voting for a woman once is about all an anti-choice fellow like you can muster.

Danny, it's lonely in the center and getting lonelier.

I detest my part of the Oklahoma congressional delegation, but I prefer the enemy I know to the "friend" I will never trust.

Come on Danny, it's almost Thanksgiving - go hide in your little box and shoot something for dinner. It will make you feel better. Go kiss Boehner's butt again, genuflect in front of your picture with Dubya, kick a homeless person or do the honorable thing and change your registration.

Even armed to the teeth, the darling of the National Rifle Association is still frightened by a strong woman. Dan, my thank you card for Nancy Pelosi is in the mail. She isn't my favorite, but she is way ahead of you.

There will never be a day I support Dan Boren or anyone else just because he or she has a "D" behind their name.

- The author lives in Moore. More of her essays can be found at [www.okobserver.net](http://www.okobserver.net).

# What's To Become Of Poultry Pollution Case?



ARNOLD HAMILTON  
Editor

The vote counting was barely over when Gov.-elect Mary Fallin and incoming Attorney General Scott Pruitt both signaled they may not be keen on continuing the state's pollution lawsuit against the poultry industry.

It's hardly an earth-shattering development – especially given an election in which poultry insiders spread campaign dollars like chicken-litter-turned fertilizer, hoping to curry favor with the incoming powers-to-be.

Further, Republicans don't like to regulate much of anything, anyway, except reproductive freedom, immigrant and gay rights, and the activities of trial lawyers and unions, both of which tend, of course, to support Democrats.

So, surprising? No. Disquieting? Yes.

I'm not here to argue the specifics of the case, but it's worth noting that some who backed the suit now complain the judge already has de-fanged much of Attorney General Drew Edmondson's effort to hold the 11 poultry companies accountable for pollution in eastern Oklahoma.

Even so, Fallin's and Pruitt's public statements about the case suggest they are more acutely aware of, and responsive to, corporate interests, rather than the state's common interest in its most precious natural resource.

And if they're willing to deep-six this lawsuit, after a five-year legal battle that still [at press time] awaits a Tulsa federal judge's final ruling, what does that portend for Oklahoma's long – and so far, successful – federal court battles to keep from being forced to sell or give water to Texas?

The fact is, we don't have enough information to know whether we have surplus water that could be sold to Texas or anyone else.

A comprehensive statewide water plan, scheduled to be completed next year, was supposed to answer the question, but already more than a few who have been following the process closely are expressing doubt it was sufficiently scientific – and politics-free – to be considered reliable.

If it turns out we do have more than enough to meet the state's future needs, the sale of excess water could generate a financial windfall that could be used, for example, to upgrade Oklahoma's abysmal infrastructure or invest in education.

This much is certain: water quantity and quality will be keys to the state's future, especially its economic development.

As Tulsa geologist Robert Jackman put it, "They've re-written the Golden Rule: It used to be he who has the gold rules. Now, it's he who has the water rules."

As the federal court lawsuit against the poultry industry suggests, water quality no longer can be taken for granted in Oklahoma.

Two of the state's aquatic treasures, Lake Tenkiller and the Illinois River, are far from the pristine, see-clear-to-the-bottom wonders they were in the era before chicken ranching exploded in eastern Oklahoma.

Poultry producers, of course, insist they're following state law when they use chicken litter to fertilize in the 1-million-acre Illinois River watershed. And they point the finger at other alleged culprits – farmers, cattle and businesses.

No matter who's ultimately to blame, we can't be too careful about conserving

and protecting what will be to the 21st Century what oil was to the 20th Century.

The best strategy, at least short-term? Let the poultry case play out. Keep the moratorium on out-of-state water sales in place. And complete the statewide water plan.

Then let's dispassionately talk specifics – as far removed from heated election rhetoric and eye-popping campaign contributions [\$15,000 from poultry interests to Pruitt alone] as possible.

On a personal note: We at The Observer rejoiced earlier this month when the American Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma Foundation honored Edwynne and George Krumme with its Angie Debo Civil Libertarians of the Year Award.

The Krummes – she, a longtime University of Tulsa French instructor, and he, a Bristow oil man – have worked tirelessly for decades in defense of civil liberties and to advance progressive thinking in Oklahoma.

They also were honored with a proclamation from Gov. Brad Henry declaring Nov. 14 as Edwynne and George Krumme Day in Oklahoma – read by former Gov. David Walters – and a legislative proclamation read by Rep. Mike Shelton, D-OKC, himself a former Debo Award honoree.

The Krummes' join a distinguished list of deserving recipients that includes last year's honoree, Oklahoma City attorney Robert D. Lemon, and 2006 honoree Dr. Barbara Santee of Tulsa.

At this year's banquet, the ACLU also honored attorneys Martha Hardwick and Anne Zachritz with the Keith B. Smith Advocacy Award for their efforts to protect reproductive rights in Oklahoma.

And the ACLU's executive director, Joann Bell, announced that she is retiring next March, culminating a remarkable career that began as an ACLU plaintiff and led to her becoming the organization's leader in 1987. We wish her the best.

## 'TIS BETTER TO RECEIVE THAN TO GIVE?

The madam opened the brothel door in Winnipeg and saw a rather dignified, well-dressed, good-looking man in his late 40s or early 50s.

"May I help you, sir?" she asked.

"I want to see Valerie," the man replied.

"Sir, Valerie is one of our most expensive ladies. Perhaps you would prefer someone else," said the madam.

"No, I must see Valerie," he replied.

Just then, Valerie appeared and announced to the man that she charged \$5,000 a visit. Without hesitation, the man pulled out \$5,000 and gave it to Valerie, and they went upstairs. After an hour, the man calmly left.

The next night, the man appeared again, once more demanding to see Valerie. Valerie explained that no one had ever come back two nights in a row as she was too expensive. But there were no discounts. The price was still \$5,000.

Again, the man pulled out the money, gave it to Valerie, and they went upstairs. After an hour, he left.

The following night, the man was there yet again. Everyone was astounded that he had come for a third consecutive night, but he paid Valerie and they went upstairs.

After their session, Valerie said to the man, "No one has ever been with me three nights in a row. Where are you from?"

The man replied, "Ontario."

"Really," she said. "I have family in Ontario ..."

"I know," the man said. "Your sister died, and I am her attorney. She asked me to give you your \$15,000 inheritance."

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# Health Reform Tax Credits For Small Business

Most people who have been following the Affordable Care Act, the new health care law, know that the law will strengthen the individual market for health insurance coverage by offering subsidized coverage on the new health insurance exchanges, and expand access to public coverage for low-income families through Medicaid.

According to estimates provided in a Families USA study, 50,300 Oklahoma small businesses – or six out of every seven businesses with 25 or fewer employees – are eligible for a premium tax credit in 2010. Of these, some 18,200 are estimated to be eligible for the maximum 35% credit.

What is less well known and understood is that the Affordable Care Act also includes several important mechanisms for strengthening the beleaguered employer-based system of health insurance coverage, especially for small businesses that currently face the greatest challenges in offering coverage to their workers and where the rates of the uninsured are currently the highest.

### SIGNIFICANT HELP

The Families USA report looks at one of the most important provisions of the new law, tax credits for small businesses that will provide significant help with the cost of coverage.

Beginning this year, businesses with fewer than 25 workers and average wages of less than \$50,000 will be eligible to receive a tax credit for the health insurance premiums they provide to their employees.

The smallest firms with the lowest wages will be eligible for the maximum credit, which is 35% of the cost of coverage, or 25% for non-profits. The credit will phase down for businesses with more employees and higher average wages.

Businesses that are already offering coverage, as well as those opting to cover the workers for the first time, will be eligible for the credits. After 2014, when the new health insurance exchanges will be operating, credits will increase to 50% of the cost of coverage, or 35% for non-profits.

### OKLAHOMA PRIORITY

Oklahoma in recent years had already made a priority of assisting small businesses with the cost of health insurance through the creation of Insure Oklahoma. Under this program, the cost of insurance premiums for low-income workers and their spouses is shared between employers [25%], employees [15%] and the state and federal governments [60%].

Just over 18,000 employees of small businesses and their spouses were covered under Insure Oklahoma in August 2010. The new federal tax credits should complement and enhance the state's efforts with Insure Oklahoma. According to Families USA, "small employers are eligible for the [new federal] tax credit even if



they already receive assistance from their state to help them buy coverage from their workers."

The new law includes other measures to help small businesses and their employees in the coming years. Right now, a new government website, [healthcare.gov](http://healthcare.gov), provides a list of all companies offering small business plans in a given zip code.

Even with eligibility for tax credits of up to 35% – or 50% beginning in 2014 – some small business owners will undoubtedly still decide they cannot afford or simply do not wish to offer health insurance to their employees [Unlike businesses with over 50 employees, small businesses will not face any potential penalty for choosing not to provide coverage].

For many small businesses here in Oklahoma and around the nation, the tax credits and market reforms included as an integral part of the new health care law can be expected to make the difference in creating access to quality, affordable care.

# Inhofe Is Compensated For Climate Opposition

U.S. Senate climate change deniers and Tea Party favorites – including Oklahoma's Jim Inhofe – are being funded by BP and other polluters.

An analysis of campaign finance by Climate Action Network Europe [CANE] found nearly 80% of campaign donations from a number of major European firms were directed towards senators who blocked action on climate change.

These included incumbents who have been embraced by the Tea Party such as Jim DeMint, a Republican from South Carolina, and Inhofe, a notorious climate change denier.

The report used information on the OpenSecrets.org database to track what it called a coordinated attempt by some of Europe's biggest polluters to influence the U.S. midterms.

The European companies funded almost exclusively Senate candidates who have been outspoken in their opposition to comprehensive climate policy in the U.S. and candidates who actively deny the scientific consensus that climate

change is happening and is caused by people.

President Obama and Democrats accused corporate interests and anonymous donors of trying to hijack the midterms by funneling money to the Chamber of Commerce and to conservative Tea Party groups.

The Chamber of Commerce reportedly raised \$75 million for pro-business, mainly Republican candidates.

"Oil companies and the other special interests are spending millions on a campaign to gut clean-air standards and clean-energy standards, jeopardizing the health and prosperity of this state," Obama told a rally.

The CANE report said the companies, including BP, BASF, Bayer and Solvay, which are some of Europe's biggest emitters, collectively donated \$240,200 to individual senators who blocked action on global warming – more even than the oil billionaires and Tea Party bankrollers, David and Charles Koch, donated to Senate campaigns.

# Battle Of The Bulge Fought in Oklahoma

Oklahoma is the fifth most obese state in the nation, but at least one program is trying to slim down Oklahomans.

Child and adult care institutions across the state are announcing their participation in the Child and Adult Care Food Program [CACFP], which provides meals to hundreds of thousands of Oklahomans each year.

During the last program year – between July 1, 2009 and June 30, 2010 – nearly 700,000 children and adults were served in Oklahoma through CACFP.

State Superintendent Sandy Garrett reports that, during that time frame, approximately 11 million breakfasts, 12.9 million lunches, 15.8 million snacks and 1.4 million suppers were served through this program, which is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and coordinated in Oklahoma by the Oklahoma State Department of Education.

"The economic downturn in our state and country has resulted in many families having food shortages in the home," Garrett said. "So, more than ever, we appreciate the critical service our partnering child and adult care institutions provide by serving meals. Healthy minds and bodies require regular, healthy meals."

All participants in attendance at CACFP institutions are served meals, at no extra charge to their parents, without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, age or disability, according to federal law and USDA policy.

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410, or call 800.795.3272 or 202.720.6382 [TTY].

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer. For more information about CACFP in Oklahoma, call the Oklahoma Department of Education, Child Nutrition Programs division, 405.521.3327 or a local CACFP institution.

## WINTER DRIVING MADE EASY

One winter morning, a husband and wife in central South Dakota were listening to the radio during breakfast. They heard the announcer say, "We are going to have eight to 10 inches of snow today. You must park your car on the even-numbered side of the street, so the snowplows can get through." So the good wife went out and moved her car.

A week later while they were eating breakfast again, the radio announcer said, "We are expecting 10 to 12 inches of snow today. You must park your car on the odd-numbered side of the street, so the snowplows can get through." The good wife went out and moved her car again.

The next week they are again having breakfast, when the radio announcer said, "We are expecting 12 to 14 inches of snow today. You must park ..."

Then the electric power went out. The good wife was very upset, and with a worried look on her face, she said, "Honey, I don't know what to do. Which side of the street do I need to park on so the snowplows can get through?"

With love and understanding in his voice, the husband replied, "Why don't you just leave it in the garage this time."

# **Youth The Rx For Democratic Renaissance**

*By Richard L. Fricker*

The Democratic Party of Oklahoma, in particular and nationally in general, has failed miserably, not only as a political party but also as a party claiming to represent the common citizen. Rank and file Democrats must demand a complete party reorganization.

Fraught with quislings, Democrats In Name Only [DINO], and the self-serving, the party has allowed the Legislature and principal state offices to be dominated by an ideological Taliban with no philosophy to its politics and no theology to its so-called religion.

They've allowed the electorate to be duped into voting against their own self-interests, save a few legislators.

The Democratic Party has failed to provide a platform. It has failed to explain why legislation is helpful or harmful. It has failed to show the voter, the citizen, why their interests are best served by the Democratic Party.

The current situation need not remain the status quo. It all depends on how hard the rank-and-file are willing to work. It depends on how willing the party is to shift from being a disorganized group to an actual political party.

Rebuilding is simple, labor intensive, ongoing and sometimes painful. However, it can be done, but must occur from top to bottom.

The precinct is the bedrock of any party organization. "Precinct Chairman" must become more than just a title.

Precinct chairmen must be encouraged and supported to keep in touch and keep track of the local electorate. The precinct chairman should be the person local elected officials, or potential candidates, go to on a regu-



lar basis for updates and concerns.

Democrats have forgotten House Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill's axiom "All politics is local." O'Neill remained in the House 34 years and was the second-longest serving speaker, 1977-1987. Sam Rayburn of Texas, also a Democrat, was the longest serving speaker, 17 years.

Democrats must re-invigorate the Young Democrats. Today's high school junior will be a voter in 2012. Today's college senior could well be a 2012 legislative candidate.

There was a time when the party put a lot of stock in the Young Democrats. YD's stuffed envelopes, filled coffee cups, put up signs and any number of things to make life easier so candidates could concentrate on

campaigning.

This same group, if tapped, can make the Internet hum, Twitterers twit and Facebook come alive. They know today's communication systems by nature; they can do it from an iPhone.

Why let such a resource lay fallow? Enfranchise these young people into the party. They need to become a part of the party. They need leadership that understands not only how to make them feel welcome, but recognize the vital part they can play.

Who cares if a YD has tattoos, multicolored day-glow hair, piercings, looks and talks as if from another dimension, as long as they vote and get out the vote. Young people like activity, they also like being treated

with respect. The party has failed the young.

YD's can bring more to the table than just labor, they can be a source of ideas. They need strong leadership that can not only speak their language, but listen. These young people are the future of the Democratic Party.

At the other end of the spectrum, legislators and the party leadership should have designated people to address each issue. It is silly to let each issue go unanswered.

Democrats should have a party person designated to address particular issues. There must be a "go to" person on each issue.

It is naive in the extreme to expect each legislator to speak on each and every issue.

E-mails, Twitter and other state of the art communication elements need to be employed without reservation. Again, the YD's are experts.

The Internet is not enough. On each issue the precinct chairman and the rank-and-file need to be on a shoe leather level with the electorate.

Until the Democratic Party can tell people, the electorate, who they are, what they stand for and why it is good for the rank and file, they need to be prepared to be relegated to second-class status.

There is a lesson in this off-year election, a lesson Democrats should take to heart. As so aptly stated by Donovan Phillip Leach, "The mongoose is gone." That is to say, Democrats must quit relying on past glories, and traditional power bases. Democrats need to rebuild their party and once again embrace politics, not consensus building.

- The author lives in Tulsa. More of his essays can be found at [www.okobserver.net](http://www.okobserver.net).

## **Common Sense Ways To Deal With The Deficit**

*By Edwin E. Vineyard*

President Obama mistakenly placed confidence in the "bipartisan" deficit commission he appointed to study and make recommendations about reasonable ways to reach a balanced budget in five years. From the report released by the co-chairmen, it would seem that the work of this group was hijacked. No Democrats are pleased, but a few Republicans like it. One leader has flippantly made the best suggestion of all, observing that he might need to go into a witness protection program to escape the public wrath.

Even as a starting point for talks among the commissioners most of these ideas have little merit. We need not commit now to raising the retirement age for social security to age 70. Doing away with tax deductions for the middle class, such as health care and mortgage interest, while cutting the tax rates for high income earners and corporations is a notion dead on arrival.

While not unrelated to the deficit, reforming the tax system is a whole different issue. Likewise, just as related to deficits is the whole matter of health care costs in this country. Proposing a government-run, price-controlled system like Medicare for everybody would have been just as appropriate and highly effective in curtailing deficits. How far would that have gotten with the Republicans?

It is difficult to see the value of some of their ideas, but perhaps the shock will jar some of us out of our sense of complacency.

### **SOCIAL SECURITY SOLVENT**

Perhaps it is strange to say, but Social Security is *not* the immediate problem. Some 30 or so years ago, politicians decided to put SS "on budget." Social Security itself has been running a surplus for years, right up to now. Politicians wanted that Social Security surplus to offset and minimize the annual regular budget deficits they were running - so those would not look so big. They created confusion.

All deficits during recent decades were actually much bigger, but showed up

less because Social Security ran surpluses. Now it is headed for a tougher period, and the actual deficits are going to show up big - unless taxes are raised or spending cut. But Social Security is *not* the real deficit problem! Neither is Medicare, now.

A few tweaks will fix Social Security for 100 years. Make a month or so advancement in retirement age every few years. Increase salaries upon which payroll taxes [Social Security and Medicare] are levied from \$106,000 by \$1,000 each year for a decade or two. Increase payroll taxes by 0.1% each decade for three. As a result, Social Security is fixed for a century and Medicare can be made better by a similar increase.

### **800-POUND GORILLA**

But the rest of the budget is much more of a problem. The big expenditure is military. Stopping wars and reducing our presence abroad in numerous unneeded military bases would be a huge start to a manageable budget.

War costs the last decade have exceeded \$2 trillion - all unpaid for with tax levies. This is the 800-pound gorilla in the budget room that nobody wants to recognize.

Then we can give up all those fiscally silly and politically hypocritical ideas about cutting taxes - anyone's taxes. All of the Bush income tax cuts must be allowed to expire now. That takes \$1.8 trillion off the anticipated deficit for the next 10 years. For fiscal responsibility, that is *now*.

Third, there is a need to reduce the advantage of the rich over everybody else in present tax rates and tax dodges. In 2007 the top 1% got 24% of the income, compared with 9% in 1976. Their income grew at 10% a year from 2002 to 2007, while the middle class lost purchasing power.

That is a tax system out of control and grossly unfair to the working American.

See DEFICIT Page 9

# Oklahoma Public Education: A True Bargain

By Jeanene Barnett

Recent news articles [i.e. "Superman exposes the myth of common school," in the 11.7.10 Tulsa World] repeat the old, tired, false statement that public schools are failing, in Oklahoma and across the nation, and that charter schools and private school vouchers will save education.

This is another example of a national obsession that tries to paint a picture of Oklahoma based on national preoccupations.

I'm tired of high-dollar, powerfully-connected national special interests trying to tell us what is good for Oklahoma. As Diane Ravitch reports in "The Myth of Charter Schools" [<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2010/nov/11/myth-charter-schools/>], the hedge fund managers Democrats for Education Reform [DFER], a pro-charter group who control billions of dollars, has "contributed heavily to political candidates for local and state offices who pledge to promote charter schools."

I must admit that I'm offended, insulted even, that New York City hedge fund managers are trying to control Oklahoma decisions about public education.

Any way you slice it – any way you analyze it – any way you assess it, Oklahoma public education delivers tremendous value to its citizens; Oklahoma public education provides a great return on our investment; in other words, Oklahoma public education is a true Oklahoma bargain.

**Student Performance:** Our students' ACT scores consistently beat all of our neighbors – and we test more students, percentage-wise, than they do. The law of statistics tells us that our kids should do worse, yet they perform better.

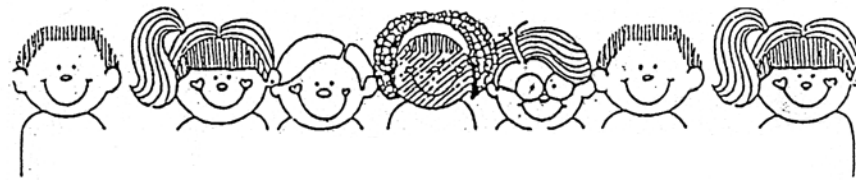
Many Oklahoma students enter school ill-equipped to learn, arriving from homes steeped in poverty, illiteracy, and failure. Our public schools have not created these problems, and the schools alone cannot work on these complex social issues. Yet, Oklahoma schools face those challenges consistently with successful results.

**Quality Administrators and Teachers:** All Oklahoma administrators must earn at least a master's degree [many hold doctorates], teach for at least two years, and pass rigorous standardized testing.

These same professionals are those people who tear up every time they stand in a crowded stadium or gymnasium to honor the national anthem as it is played or sung. They proudly and willingly stand even if it is the 50th time that year that they've heard it, for they are patriots and believe in and want to share the warmth of the American Dream with their students.

Oklahoma superintendents and principals attend ceremony after ceremony to honor students, but they always go to one more because they are so proud of their kids that they can't miss it. These tireless, selfless, dedicated individuals spend countless hours poring over student achievement and conducting research to find yet one more tool that will help students reach state and national standards.

School looks easy because true professionals are at work every day in Oklaho-



ma classrooms and support offices. Good schools don't just happen; they result from a group of intelligent, hard-working professionals who make it happen.

Educators deal with great complexity in the classroom as they promote and nurture knowledge and character in children. Every day, teachers must pull from their professional tool boxes multiple strategies and must fashion something new, something that applies to one child at one moment in one particular classroom.

Oklahoma teachers confront this task with great agility and versatility and demonstrate daily why they are consistently ranked among the best teachers in the nation. In fact, the Quality Counts 2010 Report ranks Oklahoma teachers ninth in the nation.

**Accountability:** The Quality Counts 2010 Report ranks Oklahoma ninth in the nation in "Standards, Assessments, and Accountability," as well. Enough said.

**Transparency:** All education funds are carefully tracked through the Oklahoma Cost Accounting System [OCAS], and districts are required to employ a system of checks and balances in which teachers, administration, and the school board work together to ensure the appropriate and efficient expenditure of public monies to meet the needs of ALL students. School budgets, revenues, and expenditures are audited annually.

Although the Education Law Center, in "Is School Funding Fair? A National Report Card," ranks Oklahoma's education funding level 50th in the nation, it ranks funding distribution equity as 14th. The same report ranked Oklahoma's efforts to fund its public schools, based on the percent of the state's Gross Domestic Product [GDP] allocated to education, as 38th.

It seems that recently public education has really suffered some strong criticism. Admittedly, no school is perfect, but access to good, quality public education remains the backbone of America and the basis for American democracy.

Over 95% of Oklahoma's students attend Oklahoma public schools, and we can be proud that they are receiving more than our money's worth.

All Oklahomans should stand up against the constant belittling of our state's public education system. No alternatives [paid with public dollars] are necessary.

– The author, who holds a doctorate in education, is superintendent of Bristow Public Schools

## Seeds Of Discontent Fertilized By Greedy

By Sharon Martin

It is easy to understand the seeds of discontent that have sprouted in the hearts of American voters. It's hard to make a living. Real wages haven't grown in decades, but the prices keep going up. There are too many people demanding too many services. We're tired of paying for what we don't get.

The latest election reflects our dissatisfaction. Here is what we asked for: personal freedom and a chance to achieve the American dream. Here's what we got: a bill of goods sold to us by a handful of billionaires who want freedom from taxes for their billions, freedom from regulations for their operations, and freedom to hire us at peon wages with no hope of employee negotiations. Meanwhile, they stand in line for our tax dollars to achieve their own ends.

"Taxation without representation" wasn't a cry for freedom from taxes but a demand that citizens had a voice in how those tax dollars were spent. The organizers of this latest party want to pay no taxes. If they get what they want, removal of the income tax, watch out for property taxes and sales taxes to skyrocket. They play; we pay.

In the early days, citizens of a town would raise money to build a school and hire a teacher. They knew the money they threw into the kitty would gain inter-

est in the next generation. They helped each other build barns and houses. In the most prosperous settlements, people worked together for the good of the entire community.

Likewise, our taxes should be an investment in our communities and our states, not a gift program for the greedy. Our money should buy us roads to drive on, schools for our children, access to health care and a safe food supply. It shouldn't subsidize corporations, factory farms, or military regimes on another continent.

We've been lied to, tons of bull manure shoveled over the seeds of our discontent.

Let's pull ourselves out of the compost and make demands of our elected officials. First, however, decide what those demands might be. Don't let the greedy dupe you with their version of the truth. For the first freedom we must demand is the freedom to think for ourselves. If we get this freedom, all the other freedoms will follow.

– The author lives in Oilton. More of her essays can be found at [www.okobserver.net](http://www.okobserver.net).

## DEFICIT

From Page 8

It has to be stopped. Raise tax rates, and change the rules favoring the rich over everybody else.

### JOBS, JOBS, JOBS

Next, all of our working age people need to have employment, either private or public. America cannot afford the failure of productivity from a huge segment of its population. Unproductive people not only rob the economy of any contribution, but they are a liability and a burden on the worker-producers.

Something has to be done about those in our population who do nothing productive, yet draw down the bounty of productivity from others. Those able to work, yet without private sector jobs, should be trained and working on infrastructure and public service jobs.

A final remedy, as a money producer and a booster to the economy, is a consumer tax on imported goods and services. That may be called a tariff, but it does not deserve its bad reputation. Starting points should be crude oil and manufactured goods. It is unrealistic to expect to maintain our high standard of living and at the same time compete with the low wage levels being paid in much of the world. Some believe that we need a major consumption tax.

Rather than retail sales and gas taxes, which have no economic growth value, let's just tax those things we import and increase domestic production and jobs at the same time.

– The author, AKA The Militant Moderate, lives in Enid. More of his essays can be found at [www.okobserver.net](http://www.okobserver.net).

## BOOKS

# 'W Has The Self Awareness Of A Bison'

By Matthew Norman

### DECISION POINTS

By George W. Bush  
Crown Publishing Group  
497 pages, \$35

May the Lord the former president so ostentatiously worships have mercy on my soul, and those in Iraq without water, electricity and medicine forgive me, but I just cannot suppress a twinge of sympathy for George W Bush.

The source of this pity pang isn't the usual one with those struggling bemusedly with the loss of power [Mrs. Thatcher literally unable, for example, to dial a phone number]. So far as the practicalities, Mr. Bush has adapted well.

Apparently he concludes his memoir *Decision Points* with the familiar anecdote of how, within days of leaving Washington, he was picking up his dog's mess with a plastic bag in a Texas park. Evidently he regards this as a cute vignette of the transience of power, as well as his own endearing lack of pomp. Yet what causes the stab of pity is the stupidity at which it hints.

How could anyone in possession of a three-figure IQ [still a moot point with Bush] fail to see what a golden gift that image is to satirists?

### OBAMA LEFT TO CLEAN UP

There he is, in the cartoon in my head, scooping up a couple of Cumberland sausages while following him, shovelling up the Augean Stable-sized steaming pile he left behind in the Oval Office, is Barack Obama at the wheel of an industrial digger.

This blindness to visual imagery is quite a motif, judging by Times extracts and an interview with its editor. Apart from being attacked for indifference to black people by Kanye West, the rapper Obama dismissed as a jackass, all his greatest regrets are pictorial public relations disasters.

His sadness over Hurricane Katrina is not for the victims in New Orleans, as Mr. West understood, but for the damage done to his reputation by that snap of him staring blankly and aloofly down on the catastrophe from the window of Air Force One.

His paramount distress over Iraq is not over the loss of life, civilian and military, but how that banner proclaiming "Mission Accomplished" on the aircraft carrier came to make him look naive and vainglorious.

### SHALLOWNESS, VAPIDITY

He reveals his shallowness and vapidty with these reflections in the most crystalline of clarity, and hasn't a notion he is doing so.

It takes a certain minimal intelligence for the truly dim to have a notion of their own dimness, but this is denied him. Unlike Mr. Tony Blair, who emerges from his well-calibrated if often chilling memoir as a man of colossal cleverness [though not intellect], W has the self-awareness of a bison. There seems even less to him than met the eye, and there was precious little of that.

Astounding as it appears, we misoverestimated him.

And so the Wagner Question poses itself yet again. Every Saturday when the Brazilian sea monster murders his X-Factor song, 14 million people ask themselves how and why he is there.

### NO ANSWERS

Reading these ghost-written tidbits, you ask yourself the same. How in the name of all the saints did George W. Bush, wastrel drunkard son of an East Coast patrician family, find his way to Pennsylvania Avenue by playing the genial good ol' boy from the South, and why in heaven's name did he want it anyway? And answers come there none.

The reduction of Bush's two terms to a satirical sequel to one of those U.S. prep school movies in which the smirking, idiot boy breaks the honor code but is rescued by his Brahmin dad had come to seem shamefully hackneyed. But the one cliché worth trotting out here is that clichés are clichés because they are true.

Somehow this half-witted frat boy journeyed, via some jovially preposterous

sequence of events involving failed oil deals and baseball team franchises, from japes with Alpha Sigma Phi to possession of the nuclear codes.

Nothing, not even W himself, is ever quite that simple, and palpably there was an edge of madness in the family.

In his teens, when his mother Barbara had a miscarriage, he relates, he drove her to the hospital. "I never expected to see the remains of the foetus," he recalls, "which she had saved in a jar to bring to the hospital. I remember thinking there was a human life, a little brother or sister."

Enough in that alone, to drive any adolescent to drink, you'd have guessed, yet the tale is told as a homily to his mother's wisdom, and in some impenetrable way to justify his pro-life, anti-stem cell research hard line.

### WHAT HISTORY?

Almost every sentence in the Times extraction [and it does feel like having a tooth pulled] invokes a fatigued he-just-doesn't-get-it. Churchill is inevitably adduced, while W bangs on about his passion for reading history. Inevitably, he fails to make the connection.

"Study history, study history. In history lies all the secrets of statecraft," urged

See DECIDER Page 18

## THE SCOOP ON BUSH'S BOOK

The Borowitz Report has obtained an advance copy of former President George W. Bush's memoir, entitled *I Can Has Prezidency*. Here are some highlights:

- The book contains a "Where's Waldo?" foldout section with WMDs.
- Bush says the biggest disappointment of his eight years in office was learning there was no Santa Claus.
- The book's appendix includes a series of connect-the-dot drawings Bush was unable to complete.
- Bush on the unfinished business of his Presidency: "I never did learn how that neat story about the goat ended."
- Bush's memoir is a quick read, since 95% of it has been redacted by Dick Cheney.
- Six months after the book's publication there will be an English-language version.

— Andy Borowitz

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## Check The Facts

# Tax System Favors Wealth Over Work

By Gerald E. Scorse

Tea Partiers rage against taxes and say they're too high. Wrong, says billionaire Warren Buffett: on the rich, they're too low.

The tax code holds the answer to this standoff, and the code backs Buffett. Taxes may be the bane of the Tea Party, but they're a relative boon for the wealthy. Let's look at some of the ways America's tax system keeps Warren Buffett's fortune in Warren Buffett's hands.

The major vehicle is George W. Bush's 15% levy on long-term capital gains – the lowest since FDR's first term – and on corporate dividends.

The top 1% of U.S. households owns nearly 40% of all privately held stock, from which the dividends flow. Similarly, the super-rich get more than half their income from capital gains, as documented by tax expert David Cay Johnston in his book *Perfectly Legal*.

### WORKING MIDDLE-CLASS

In the meantime, for the working middle-class, the tax rate on wages is 25%.

Taxing income from wealth at little more than half the rate of income from work: it's the perfect recipe to make sure that Warren Buffett [and all the Buffett wannabes] pay effective tax rates far below what their incomes suggest.

How far below? In 2006, Buffett told an interviewer that his tax bill was "far, far less as a fraction of his income than the secretaries or the clerks or anyone else in his office" [and he repeated the statement only recently]. His shame in 2006 hits home still: "How can this be fair? How can this be right?"

The tax code sets marginal rates, too, and these were gutted by President Reagan in 1981 and again in 1986. He slashed the top rate from 70% to 28%, and made the code even less progressive by cutting the number of brackets from 15 to four. The yearning for tax simplification [fewer brackets] trumped the case for progressivity [more brackets].

### A NARROW SPREAD

There are six today, with the top four taxed at 25%, 28%, 33% and 35% – a narrow spread, easily offset by provisions like the capital gains rate.

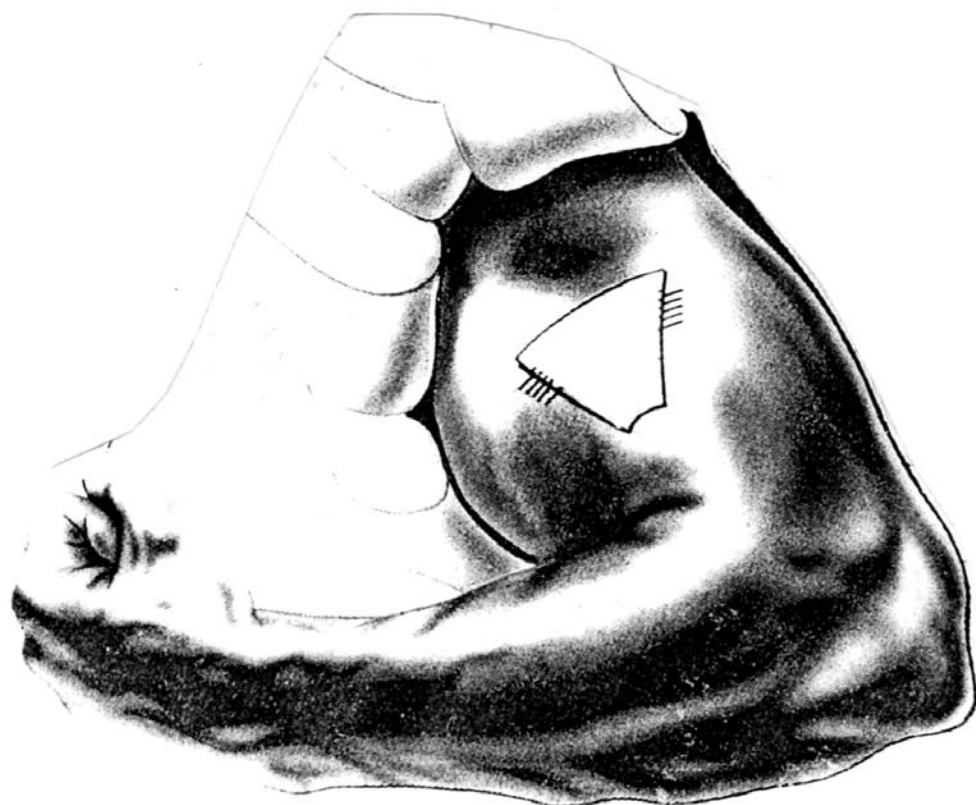
The top rate kicks in at about \$400,000 of taxable income, a practice Johnston told Truthout he finds "bizarre." It's a long way, he argued in a recent e-mail, from \$400,000 to \$1 million, \$5 million, \$100 million and hedge-fund billions: "Why don't we have higher rates for those incomes?" he asked.

Even the bottom marginal rates help top earners. A millionaire, filing singly, pays the same 10% on the first \$8,375 of taxable income as the working poor, and so on, up the income scale.

As the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities notes, the real winners from extending Bush's middle-class tax cuts wouldn't be middle class: "In fact, a family making more than \$1 million will receive more than five times the tax cut benefit, in dollar terms, as a middle-class family making \$50,000 to \$75,000 ..."

### PROFUSE DEDUCTIONS

The tax code is also loaded with deductions that effectively rain down dollars on the rich. The code doesn't overtly discriminate, but it's hardwired to make



every tax break worth more at the top.

All deductions get written off at 35%, starting with personal exemptions and standard deductions. This alone trims \$7,315 off the tax bill of a post-65-year-old couple.

The serious money goes to itemizers, with Uncle Sam handing out five-figure amounts to help pay mortgages on pricey real estate. [Step limits on personal exemptions and itemized deductions are set to return in 2011. The limits expired in 2010 as the last phase of Bush's 2001 tax cuts.]

President Obama once proposed capping the mortgage interest deduction at 25%, the middle-class rate. His idea was attacked as class warfare and quickly died.

### THE RICH ARE DIFFERENT

This summer, in a piece titled "The Class War We Need," conservative columnist Ross Douthat was aghast to learn that the owners of McMansions were defaulting at twice the usual rate. "The rich are different from you and me," he wrote. "They know how to game the system."

They also know that Congress always stands ready to tilt the tax laws their way. When the market crashed in 2008, lawmakers rushed to pass a one-year suspension of required distributions from retirement accounts.

Only the haves stood to gain. Those who actually needed the distributions had to take them and pay taxes. The haves took a pass and saved thousands.

Back to Douthat: "In case after case, Washington's web of subsidies and tax breaks effectively takes money from the middle class and hands it out to speculators and have-mores."

It's taken a fortune in lobbying and campaign contributions, but America's tax system is bearing golden fruit. As even a conservative can see, it's shifting income to the wealthy.

© Truthout

# Bankers Feast, Everyone Else Suffers

By Jim Hightower

I've seen some truly amazing feats of magic, but here's one that beats them all. Right before your eyes, this thing rises into the air on its own, with no wires or mechanical devices giving it lift. And it hovers there effortlessly.

But it's not magic, for magic is an illusion, and this gravity-defying phenomenon of perpetual levitation happens to be real. What is this "it" that keeps floating up, up, up? The annual bonuses paid to Wall Street's top bankers.

By the laws of economics, if not physics, those bonuses should fall to earth this year, because the bankers have performed poorly. Trading is down, profits are flat [despite being given trillions of dollars in almost-interest-free money through the back door of the Federal Reserve], firms are handing out pink slips to lower-level employees, and the blatant greed of bank honchos has ruined the public reputations of their financial outfits.

Who cares, shriek the big-shots, we make our own laws – it's bonus time, baby, so grab all you can! Sure enough, the CEOs of Goldman Sachs, Citigroup, JPMorgan Chase and others have set aside billions of dollars to flood their executive suites with bonus cash at the end of this year – money that rightfully should go to shareholders.

Their claim is: "We deserve it, for we took low pay during the crash of 2008-2009." For example, Lloyd Blankfein, Goldman Sachs' boss, was paid a mere \$9 million last year, so now he wants that "sacrifice" made up to him.

Lest you worry that poor Lloyd's family had to resort to food stamps to make ends meet with that tough \$9 million year, note that he had a bit of a cushion, having pocketed a record Wall Street payday of \$68 million in 2007 – even as the financial condition of his bank was crumbling.

One banker-pay analyst says he had assumed that bonuses would go down this year. But, he said, "I underestimated the industry's resiliency." By "resiliency," I assume he was referring to the industry's incurable greed.

While Wall Street bonuses to top bankers keep going up, up, up, guess what

keeps going down, down, down? Hint: A recent New York Times headline used the word "soft" to describe it. Give up? It's our economy. Of course, the word-smith that used the term "soft" to describe today's economy clearly doesn't live on our planet. Soft implies cushions and comfort, while the economic reality that most Americans are experiencing is one of unrelenting hard times.

Indeed, the content of the Times' article defied its own headline, revealing that national economic growth this summer was pathetically weak. Tens of millions of people remain unemployed or underemployed, with millions of them having been mired in joblessness for nearly two years. Even those with jobs have seen their hours cut or wages slashed, so the nation's income growth was an abysmal 0.5% during July, August and September – and practically all of that went to the richest Americans, who enjoyed a nice uptick in their stock portfolios.

The way out of this, say the contented flock of economic gurus roosting on their lofty theoretical perches, is for consumers to spend more. Yoo-hoo, wise ones: spend what? The Times conceded that, with incomes of the masses plummeting, consumer demand remains "flaccid" [yet another word for soft]. As noted by James K. Galbraith, a down-to-earth economist grounded in reality, "The problematic factor is that consumers remain fundamentally insolvent."

Still, reaching for a silver lining in a dark and stormy cloud, the Times noted that American families are at least shedding some of their consumer debt. Good! Except that much of this is the result of millions of hard-hit families having to default on their credit card bills, student loans, mortgages and other debts they can no longer pay.

The only thing "soft" in today's economy are the heads of economists who keep blaming consumers, rather than fingering the big bankers and corporate CEOs who continue to knock down America's wages, the middle class ... and America itself.

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## Coburn Leads The Pack

# 7 Ways GOP Wants Constitution Changes

By Ian Miller

Since President Obama took office, Republicans have shrouded their agenda of opposition by wrapping it in the flag and the Constitution.

Yet, for all of their constitutional pablum, the GOP's agenda is nothing less than a direct assault on America's founding document.

Time and time again, Republicans have called for basic constitutional freedoms and fundamental aspects of our constitutional government to be repealed either by amendment or by activist judges:

**REPEALING CITIZENSHIP:** Numerous GOP lawmakers, including their Senate leader and the most-recent Republican candidate for president, are lining up behind a "review" of the 14th Amendment's grant of citizenship to virtually all persons born within the United States. Such a proposal literally revives the vision of citizenship articulated by the Supreme Court's infamous pro-slavery decision in *Dred Scott v. Sanford*. It has no place in the 21st Century.

**REPEALING CONGRESS' POWER TO REGULATE THE ECONOMY:** The Constitution's "Commerce Clause" gives national leaders broad authority to regulate the national economy, but much of the GOP has embraced "tenterism," the belief that this power is small enough to be drowned in a bathtub. The most famous example of tenterism is the ubiquitous frivolous lawsuits claiming that health reform is unconstitutional, but these lawsuits are part of a much greater effort.

In his brief challenging health reform, Virginia Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli claims that Congress is allowed to regulate "commerce on one hand" but not "manufacturing or agriculture." Cuccinelli's discredited vision of the Constitution was actually implemented in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and it would strike down everything from child labor laws to the federal ban on whites-only lunch counters.

**REPEALING CONGRESS' POWER TO SPEND MONEY:** The Constitution also gives Congress power to "provide for the common defense and general welfare," a broad grant of authority to create federal spending programs such as Social Security.

Sen. Tom Coburn, R-OK, however, recently called upon the Supreme Court to rewrite the Constitution's clear language and repeal parts of the budget he doesn't like. A Texas GOP official even went so far as to claim that the federal highway system is unconstitutional.

Should this GOP vision of the Constitution ever be adopted, it could eliminate not just Social Security, but also Medicare, Medicaid, federal education spending and countless other cherished programs.

**REPEALING CONGRESS' POWER TO RAISE MONEY:** The Constitution also gives Congress broad authority to decide how to distribute the tax burden. Thus,



for example, Congress is allowed to create a tax incentive for people to buy houses by giving a tax break to people with mortgages, and it is allowed to create a similar incentive for people to buy health insurance by taxing people who have health insurance slightly less than people who do not.

Nevertheless, the frivolous assaults on health reform would eliminate this Constitutional power. Many Tea Party Republicans go even further, calling for a full repeal of the 16th Amendment, the amendment that enables the income tax.

Paying taxes is never popular, but it would be impossible to function as a nation if America lacked the power to raise the money it needs to pay our armed forces, among other things.

**REPEALING EQUALITY:** The Constitution entitles all persons to "equal protection of the laws," a provision that formed the basis of Judge Vaughn Walker's decision that California cannot treat gay couples as if they are somehow inferior.

Immediately after this decision was announced, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-GA, called upon Congress to "act immediately" to overturn it – something that it could only do through a constitutional amendment. Of course, Newt's proposal does nothing more than revive President Bush's call for a constitutional amendment repealing the parts of the Constitution that protect marriage equality.

**REPEALING FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS:** As Judge Walker also held, marriage is a fundamental right protected by the Constitution's Due Process Clause. The GOP's anti-gay amendment would repeal this constitutional protection as well.

**REPEALING ELECTION OF SENATORS:** Finally, a number of GOP candidates have come out in favor of repealing the 17th Amendment, the provision of the Constitution which requires direct election of senators, although many of these candidates also backed off their "Seventeenth" stand after it proved embarrassing. It is simply baffling how anyone could take one look at the U.S. Senate, and decide that what it really needs is even less democracy.

## Secret Big-Money Takeover Of America

By Robert Reich

Not only is income and wealth in America more concentrated in fewer hands than it's been in 80 years, but those hands are buying our democracy as never before – and they're doing it behind closed doors.

Hundreds of millions of secret dollars are pouring into congressional and state races in this election cycle.

The Koch brothers [whose personal fortunes grew by \$5 billion last year] are behind some of it, Karl Rove has rounded up other multi-millionaires to fund right-wing candidates, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce is funneling corporate dollars from around the world into congressional races, and Rupert Murdoch is evidently spending heavily.

No one knows for sure where this flood of money is coming from because it's all secret.

### CORPORATIONS FAVORED

But you can safely assume its purpose is not to help America's stranded middle class, working class, and poor. It's to pad the nests of the rich, stop all reform, and deregulate big corporations and Wall Street – already more powerful than since the late 19th Century when the lackeys of robber barons literally deposited sacks of cash on the desks of friendly legislators.

Credit the Supreme Court's grotesque decision in *Citizens United vs. the Federal Election Commission*, which opened the floodgates. [Even though eight of nine members of the Court also held disclosure laws constitutional, the decision invited the creation of shadowy "nonprofits" that don't have to reveal anything.]

According to FEC data, only 32% of groups paying for election ads disclosed the names of their donors. By comparison, in the 2006 midterm, 97% disclosed; in 2008, almost half disclosed.

### REPUBLICANS VOTED NO

When the Senate considered a bill to force such disclosure, every single Republican voted against it – thereby revealing the GOP's true colors, and presumed benefactors.

To understand how far the GOP has come, nearly 10 years ago campaign disclosure was supported by 48 of 54 Republican senators.

Maybe the Disclose Bill can get passed in lame-duck session. Maybe the IRS will make sure Karl Rove's and other supposed nonprofits aren't sham political

units. Maybe pigs will learn to fly.

In the meantime we held an election marking an even sharper turn toward plutocratic capitalism than before – a government by and for the rich and big corporations – and away from democratic capitalism.

As income and wealth has moved to the top, so has political power. That's why, for example, it's been impossible to close the absurd tax loophole that allows hedge-fund and private-equity managers to treat much of their income as capital gains, subject to a 15% tax [even though they're earning tens or hundreds of millions a year, and the top 15 hedge-fund managers earned an average of \$1 billion last year].

### THE RICH GET RICHER

Why it proved impossible to fund expanded health care by limiting the tax deductions of the very rich. Why it's so difficult even to extend George Bush's tax cuts for the bottom 98% of Americans without also extending them for the top 2% – even though the top won't spend the money and create jobs, but blow a \$36 billion hole in the federal budget next year.

The good news is average Americans are beginning to understand that when the rich secretly flood our democracy with money, the rest of us drown. Wall Street executives and top CEOs get bailed out while under-water homeowners and jobless workers sink.

A Quinnipiac poll earlier this year found overwhelming support for a millionaire tax.

But what the public wants means nothing if our democracy is secretly corrupted by big money.

Right now we're headed for a perfect storm: An unprecedented concentration of income and wealth at the top, a record amount of secret money flooding our democracy, and a public in the aftershock of the Great Recession becoming increasingly angry and cynical about government. The three are obviously related.

We must act. We need a movement to take back our democracy. [If tea partiers were true to their principles, they'd join it.] As Martin Luther King once said, the greatest tragedy is "not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people."

# Extreme Makeover Pushed By The GOP

During the campaign season, Republican candidates pushed to revive failed and unpopular policies from the GOP past, such as eliminating the Department of Education or privatizing Social Security.

Unfortunately, Oklahoma's Republican delegation is for this craziness, thanks to the fact that 100% of them are on board with the Oklahoma Chamber and U.S. Chamber. Thankfully, President Obama opposes their agenda.

"We need to get back to transferring many of the powers of the federal government to the states," said Alaska's Republican Senate nominee Joe Miller, calling for the abolition of Social Security as we know it.

"I'd start by eliminating the U.S. Department of Education at a cost of \$50 billion and then move on to Housing and Urban Development," said Utah Republican Senate nominee Mike Lee.

Lee's call was echoed by Nevada's Republican Senate nominee Sharron Angle, who said, "I would like to go through to the elimination of the Department of Education. I think we start by defunding it, and the reason that we should eliminate it is because it's not the federal government's job to provide education for our children."

These newcomers to the national political stage find many sympathetic ears in the new Congress, as the GOP's shift to the right and embrace of the Tea Party has caused it to espouse an extreme anti-government zeal.

These ideas – and others becoming part of the mainstream right wing, like ending the 14th Amendment's guarantee of birthright citizenship – highlight the extreme policy positions that have come to define the modern-day conservative movement and the candidates that it has adopted.

## PRIVATIZING SOCIAL SECURITY

In 2005, President George W. Bush attempted to privatize Social Security, but the effort fell flat in the face of wide public opposition. Bush now says his greatest failure was not privatizing Social Security, and many Republicans are attempting to succeed where Bush did not.

According to a Center for American Progress Action Fund review, 104 Republicans in the previous Congress have, at one point or another, supported privatizing Social Security. In all, 47% of House Republicans and 49% of Senate Republicans were on record in support of the idea.

Many Republican candidates for the Senate – including Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania, Ken Buck of Colorado, John Boozman of Arkansas, and Rob Portman of Ohio – had also proposed some form of privatization.

This push comes despite the 2008 turmoil in the stock market, which would have cost an October 2008 retiree almost \$30,000 in lost savings.

In the end, creating private Social Security accounts would impose new risks on seniors, create new administrative costs and benefit reductions, and wouldn't even set the Social Security system on a path to solvency.

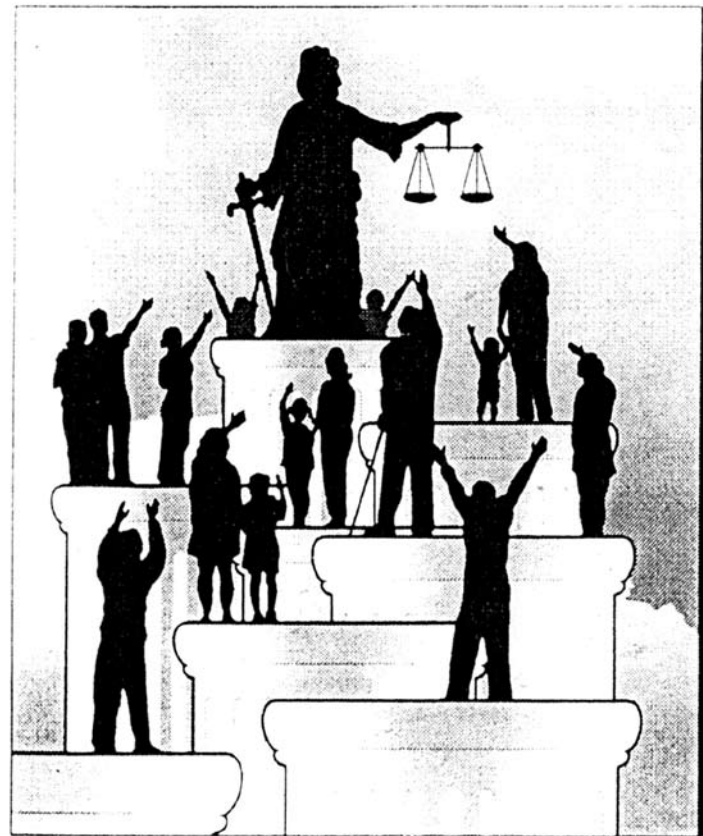
In fact, such a move would force the federal government into trillions of dollars of new borrowing, as money that should have gone into the general Social Security system gets diverted into the creation of personal accounts.

This is an unnecessary risk, as more than 13 million seniors [and 20 million people in all] are kept out of poverty only because of Social Security.

## ABOLISHING DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

As recently as 1996, the Republican Party platform declared, "The Federal government has no constitutional authority to be involved in school curricula or to control jobs in the market place. This is why we will abolish the Department of Education."

However, multiple bills attempting to do so were stymied in Congress. As ThinkProgress' Scott Keyes pointed out, "The last time the Republicans made a



concerted effort to eliminate the Department of Education in 1995, they ran into a strong public backlash. Polling conducted by Hart Research Associates found that 80% of respondents in June 1995 wanted the Department of Education to be maintained, while just 17% wanted it eliminated."

Evidently not much has changed, as a recent New York Times/CBS poll found that education funding is the last area in which respondents would like to see spending cuts. But that didn't stop plenty of GOP candidates – 36 in all – from advocating for the department's abolition. Those candidates would find plenty of like-minded colleagues in Congress, as 75 incumbents have also supported the idea in the past.

The Department of Education is currently responsible for the federal student loan program, Pell Grants, and education reform programs like the Teacher Incentive Fund and Race to the Top.

## ENDING BIRTHRIGHT CITIZENSHIP

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-SC, after previously working with Sen. Chuck Schumer, D-NY, on drafting an immigration reform package, proposed that the 14th Amendment's guarantee of birthright citizenship should be overturned.

"I'm looking at the laws that exist and see if it makes sense today," Graham said. "Birthright citizenship doesn't make so much sense when you understand the world as it is."

Graham's declaration was challenged by conservatives outside of Congress – Mark McKinnon, a former Republican adviser to President Bush, said, "The 14th Amendment is a great legacy of the Republican party. It is a shame and an embarrassment that the GOP now wants to amend it for starkly political reasons."

But Graham's idea received a very different reception on Capitol Hill, with Sens. John McCain, R-AZ; Jon Kyl, R-AZ, and Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-KY, all saying Congress should at least hold hearings on the issue.

In all, 130 Republicans in Congress want to consider ending the 14th Amendment's citizenship guarantee, which amounts to nearly 60% of the Republicans in Congress.

Ending birthright citizenship is no idle belief in the GOP caucus. Rather, Republicans have been pushing this idea for nearly two decades, introducing 28 separate bills to eliminate birthright citizenship since 1995.

It was birthed by the John Birch Society.

# The Divine Right Of Corporations

By Harry Compton

During the American Revolution, Europe was ruled by kings – each king with an established church supported by public taxation paid by all [exactly as in Iran today, the Islamic clergy and its petro-thugs are supported by subsidies none can escape].

The reason most of our ancestors risked their lives coming to America is they wanted to escape from the Christian nations of Europe, not to start another one here in America – because it was not merely freedom of religion but freedom from other religions they wanted. Europe had been engulfed in religious wars for centuries just as the Jewish and Islamic worlds had often been, even as recently as the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War.

In the 1950's, employment was high and most people were working, but every time they turned around they noticed that President Dwight Eisenhower was playing golf with Billy Graham, and when Billy took advantage of the game to evangelize, Ike should have told him to read history a little better, explaining that the Pledge of Allegiance should correctly say, "One Nation, Under Freedom," rather than insult our ancestors' honest motives.

Still, for all that, there is a kind of innocence about Americans and their presidents. Since our leaders don't have the divine right of kings, we are almost always disappointed in their humanity. Ike had his golf, Kennedy his Bay of Pigs, LBJ had Vietnam, Nixon had Watergate, Gerald Ford his premature pardon, Carter the 44-day Iranian hostage crisis, Reagan dementia [and astrology] in office, GHW Bush the First Gulf War ended just 72 hours too soon, Clinton had Monica,

and George W Bush started the disastrous Iraq War.

What about President Obama? The jury is still out, of course, but he seems to have been too optimistic about bipartisanship. He should have used anti-trust law to break up banks "too big to fail," insisted on single-payer healthcare simple enough to describe on very few sheets of paper, and appointed Anita Hill to the High Court to change its present configuration of three Jews and six Catholics in a country once known for Protestant liberalism.

To find a great president, it seems, you have to go all the way back to Harry Truman who ended World War II, wasn't afraid of filibusters, integrated the armed forces, and respected the separation of church [or mosque] and state, knowing that Christians are not the only ones who can develop an inferiority complex when new discoveries or experiences invalidate parts of ancient scriptures that can't be amended in the intelligent way that American founding documents can be, which is this country's particular contribution to civilization's modern genius.

But television was in its infancy, so Truman didn't face the hideous cost of TV campaigning, where today Meg Whitman in California spends over \$119 million just running for governor, breaking old records.

Money replaced ideas, partisanship replaced cooperation, anger replaced patience. Political paralysis may pitch headlong into the dreaded double-dip depression!

– The author lives in Bartlesville

# Midterms Decimate Black Political Leadership

By Devona Walker

The absence of black faces in the Senate is not even half the story when it comes to black political fallout from the midterms.

James Clyburn will lose his position as Majority Whip in the House of Representatives.

With Roland Burris retiring in Illinois and the failure of the Kendrick Meek campaign, there are now no blacks in the U.S. Senate. What did the mid-terms signal for the future of black political leadership?

The 2010 midterm elections were apparently a repudiation of President Barack Obama's policies, according to the pundits. But it was also a white-washing of the Senate.

Ironically, however, the House of Representatives got a little more black. Three black Congressional hopefuls sailed into office. However, two of those were staunch Republicans. Tea Party-backed Tim Scott and Allen West were elected to office.

## THERE WAS J.C. WATTS

This marks the first time African Americans will represent the GOP in Congress in about seven years – when Republican J.C. Watts quit.

Watts – much like West and Scott – came into office during a Republican congressional sweep.

Watts turned his back on the Congressional Black Caucus, coining the term “poverty pimps.”

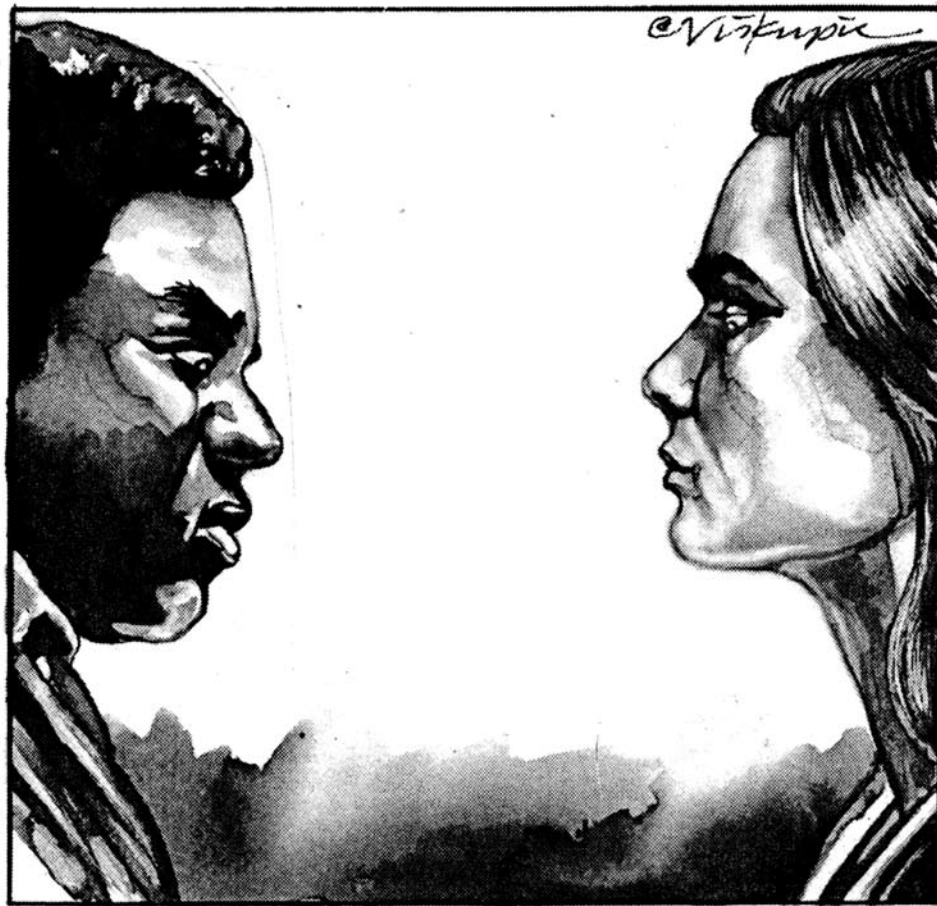
Scott, newly elected from South Carolina, will be the first black Republican in Congress from the Deep South since Reconstruction. His campaign was greatly aided by the endorsement of Tea Party groups as well as Sarah Palin.

When it comes to cultural issues such as stem cell research, immigration and national security, this guy is carrying water for the far right, not black people.

## INSANELY RIGHTWING

West, however, is altogether another situation. This guy takes extreme right principles to a point of near insanity.

This Army colonel's claim to fame is that while in Iraq he fired a gun near an Iraqi prisoner's head to scare



him into giving up information. He was infamously quoted saying that he couldn't stand President Obama.

West would like to abolish the Department of Education and the IRS. This guy is so extreme the Congressional Black Caucus actually campaigned for the white guy he was running against, trying to keep him out of office.

## HE MOCKS THE NAACP

West has accused liberals of racism and called the NAACP “a liberal racist enabler” that has demonstrated a double standard in portraying the Tea Party as discriminatory while excusing Democratic lawmakers who use insensitive language in describing black candidates.

So though these candidates may have pigmentation right, they are absolutely wrong on the issues affecting African Americans. Scott will

be a run-of-the-mill Clarence Thomas kind of Republican while West likely be much worse.

Equally important are the massive leadership losses in Congress. Forces like Clyburn will be replaced by Republicans. He has since told Politico that he plans on remaining in the Democratic leadership. But as Majority Whip he was essential when it came to moving the President's agenda forward.

According to the Labor Department's recent jobs report, black unemployment for September was 16.1% compared to the 9.6% national rate.

## BAD NEWS FOR BLACKS

With Republicans in charge, many black leaders speculate these numbers could get worse. Republicans voted 11 times against legislation that would close loopholes that allow

American companies to outsource jobs overseas and eight times to create loopholes that would enable them to do so.

Other powerful Congressional Black Caucus Committee chairmen will also be losing their gavels, including Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, who chairs Homeland Security; Rep. John Conyers, who chairs Judiciary; Rep. Edolphus Downs, who chairs the hugely important Oversight Committee, and Rep. Charles Rangel, who chairs the Ways and Means Committee.

If you look at subcommittee chairmanships, the CBC will lose another 18 leadership positions to Republicans.

## OBAMA TO BE PROBED

This will not only change the dynamics of this Congress, but it puts the White House in an increasingly vulnerable situation.

Darrell Issa, who will soon head the Oversight Committee, has already signaled he plans to spend a significant amount of time investigating the Obama Administration.

Issa is likely to investigate the Department of Justice over the New Black Panther Party voter intimidation case, according to Fox News.

He will personally target the administration over the alleged Joe Sestak job offer, over funding for ACORN, and the BP oil spill.

But Obama aside, political personalities in general aside, there are more direct ramifications for African Americans.

Republicans will attempt to cut back on things vitally important to blacks such as the unemployment structure [particularly in urban areas], educational subsidies, welfare, criminal justice, and catastrophic health programs.

When they talk about cutting spending, slashing back entitlement programs, this is what they mean. And the people who will be directly affected are black.

– The author is a veteran print journalist who worked for the Associated Press and the New York Times

# Voters Sent A Message? Oh, Really?

By Danny M. Adkison

Want to know what happened Nov. 2?

It is simple: the voters sent a message to the government [that is, President Obama]. That's what you heard if you watched any election results programs.

The “we sent a message” explanation is actually a lot more complicated. It is also a lot more involved. And it is one other thing: too wrong.

Here is the complete explanation. The American voter has, since President Obama's inauguration, grown increasingly upset with the government. They thought they were voting for change in 2008. Not only a change in personnel but a change in how politics is conducted in Washington, DC. That is why the voter then gave control of the total government to the Democrats.

But the Democrats, led by the President, became obsessed with socialism, even communism, and taking over our lives to the point where we had to take our government back. We couldn't take it all back [there was no presidential election this year and only one-third of the Senate was up for election], but we took back the House [giving it to the Republicans].

Thus, the voters stopped the slide to socialism and purposely created divided government.

With divided government then, at least, the people's House will be controlled by a party that differs with the President. Not only will this block Democrats, THE OKLAHOMA OBSERVER, NOVEMBER 25, 2010, PAGE 14

but it might mean that Obamacare will be repealed, this nonsense about global warming can stop, we can finally do something about illegal immigration, and we can forget about repealing “don't ask, don't tell.”

That is the “message” sent in the election just held.

Several years ago there was a piece of research asking political scientists what bit of political information they thought came closest to actually being political “science.” What principle emerged as one of the most scientific? It was one that explains what actually happened on election day.

Here, simply put, is the explanation. A lot more people show up to vote in presidential elections than vote in midterm elections. Furthermore, these “extra” voters tend to surge toward a particular candidate [rather than splitting their vote equally between them]. Two years later [in the midterm elections] these “extra” voters stay home. What this tends to produce is not a rational “message” but an irrational reoccurring pattern.

The pattern [true since the Civil War] is that whichever party wins the presidency, tends on average to lose 35-40 seats in the House of Representatives. After re-electing FDR with a landslide in 1936 [one of four in the 20th Century], the voters handed his party a 71-seat loss in the House of Representatives two years

See MESSAGE Page 16

# U.S. Needs To Just 'Disappear And Go Home'

By Harry T. Cook

As wars and rumors of wars have been always with us, I can say that, never having been given a choice about whether to have one, I was able to tolerate our longest war best. It was the one that lasted about 45 years, roughly from 1945 to the early 1990s.

It was called the Cold War because neither the Soviets through their client countries nor the U.S. deployed nuclear weapons during the wars in Korea and Vietnam – as much as both sides must have been tempted from time to time to do.

The strange thing about the Cold War was our enemy. He was, as Walt Kelly's Pogo said of the human race on the first Earth Day, us. And more than once we all but shot ourselves in our collective foot.

## PARABLE OF PEACE

In that regard, I refer you to the 1966 slapstick movie "The Russians Are Coming, the Russians Are Coming," in which a Soviet submarine, with no hostile intent whatsoever, is depicted as running aground on an island somewhere off the New England coast.

Its crew comes ashore and fans out to "borrow 'bott'," as the character played by Alan Arkin says, to assist in freeing the sub marooned on a mud reef.

The results are hilarious, and the ending of the movie is a goofy parable of peace on earth.

My favorite character in it is a hapless town cop played by Jonathon Winters who repeatedly says with as much frustration as his pea brain can manage: "We gotta get organized." Had it been a real Soviet invasion, it would have succeeded because the islanders, far from ever getting organized, turned their idiotic response into a circus. They were their own worst enemy.

The Russians weren't too swift, either. They were barely one step ahead of the chicken-with-their-heads-cut-off islanders, as well as fewer in number. In a real war, the wise person would have bet a dime or two on the Russians and nothing on the natives.

## OH, FOR A REMAKE

The islanders' weapons in the movie war included an ancient motorcycle with a side car, several fishing trawlers and a gaggle of rusting cars and trucks, farmers with pitchforks, shotguns – and a horse. The Soviet submariners had their wits, their threatening accents and, only at the end, their well-armed ship.

The film's plot was helped along by a post-adolescent crush shared by a Soviet sailor and a summer vacationer's blond, teenaged daughter. Its denouement was the rescue of a young boy who tried to climb to the steep roof of a church, the better to see over a gathered crowd, and ended up hanging precariously from an eave. He is rescued unhurt in a joint effort of Soviet submariners and islanders.

A flotilla of fishing vessels piloted by grateful villagers escorts the sub out to sea. Air Force fighter planes, summoned by an island alarmist to kill the Russians, turn away without firing – pilots scratching their heads in confusion – allowing the Soviet craft to submerge unharmed and head back to its own waters.

# Blame This 'Dust Up' On The EPA

By Norm Rourke

Once again the Environmental Protection Agency [EPA] has embarked on another of its crusades. It seems this bloated government bureaucracy like most government bureaucracies has nothing better to do than come up with idiotic ideas that cost taxpayers.

This time the wizards at the EPA have determined that dust created by farmers plowing their fields increases pollution and adds allergens and other discomforting things that buzz around in the air we breathe.

Wow, is that not a revelation?

Clearly the EPA wizards, like most of the Washington wizards, have little to do.

It's pretty simple: Farmer's plow their fields. Plowing creates dust. Dust is another thing we allergy sufferers must deal with. It's no different than driving on a gravel road [which most are around here], or mowing a yard or field, or doing anything that stirs up dust and pollen.

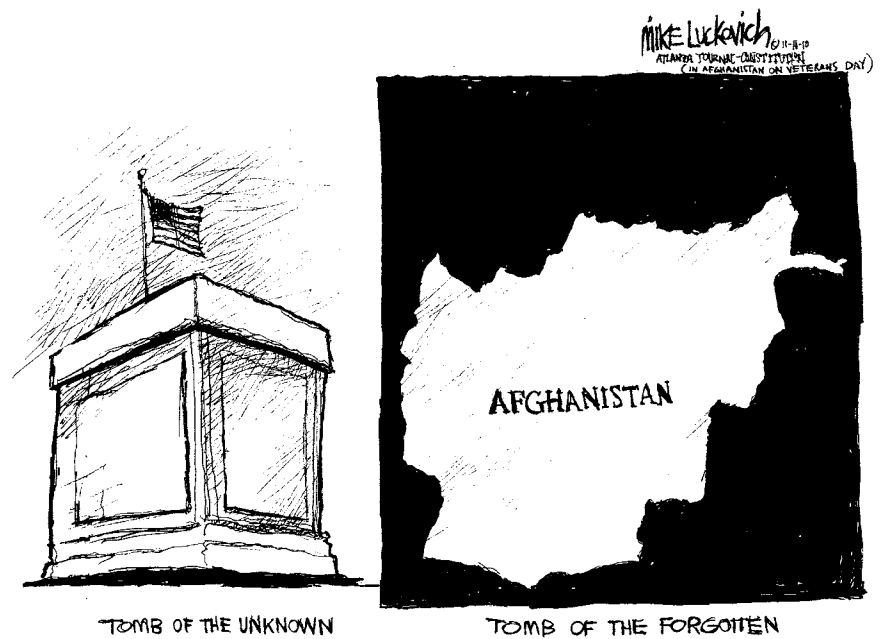
The EPA brains said if farmers would install water tanks on their tractors to wet down the soil being plowed that would reduce the dust. What a brilliant idea! But there are a couple of problems with it; not the least of which is the added cost to farmers who already are in hock for expensive equipment. Then where do you mount a water tank large enough that can hold umpteen gallons of water to cover fields of several hundred acres?

And as one local farmer pointed out, what about the amount of water being wasted doing this? Don't we have enough trouble educating people to conserve water?

The stupidity of EPA's ideas is only exceeded by its ability to waste taxpayer money.

If memory serves me correctly, wasn't it the EPA that several years ago raised its voice in horror about the amount of methane gas being added to the atmosphere by the passing of wind by cattle? I think they included in their "study" [another name for an expensive busy work project] the manure piles at stockyards also contributed to the methane gas "problem."

Why don't they control the hot air and manure created by the politicians in Washington? They're big in wasting taxpayer money on worthless "hearings," "investigations," "fact finding trips," "junkets" and other silly things.



Would that we could find, as the makers of "The Russians Are Coming" found, a cause for even a moment's humor in a seemingly endless war – the one we've been in now for almost a decade out of fear of al-Qaeda, the Taliban and our own shadow.

## PEACE MIGHT BREAK OUT

I have this dream of a squad of U.S. Marines approaching an Afghan village, infantry men and women wearing Mickey Mouse ears and waving white flags and bubble wands, others pushing wheelbarrows full of fresh fruit. The risk would be no greater than Jonathon Winters' rabble of paranoid islanders defying the sub captain's threat to vaporize them and their village with the ship's rocket gun.

Peace might break out amongst the floating soap bubbles. Afghan kids could sink their teeth into juicy apples and beg to wear the Mickey Mouse ears. Totally nuts, of course, but it'd be worth a try. Were the Pentagon to allow it, I would go to Afghanistan myself, put on the ears, wave the white flag, make the bubbles appear and pass out the apples.

In any case, the U.S. military needs to follow the example of the Soviet submarine: disappear and go home.

But as the Jonathon Winters character said, and rightly so, "We gotta get organized."

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

## THEN THE FIGHT STARTED ...

A woman is standing nude, looking in the bedroom mirror. She is not happy with what she sees and says to her husband: "I feel horrible. I look old, fat and ugly. I really need you to pay me a compliment."

The husband replies, "Your eyesight's darn near perfect."

I rear-ended a car this morning. Slowly the other driver got out of the car. You know how sometimes you just get soooo stressed and little things just seem funny?

Yeah, well, I couldn't believe it ... He was a dwarf! He stormed over to my car, looked up at me and shouted, "I am not happy!"

So, I looked down at him and said, "Well, then, which one are you?"

# Why I Support President Obama

By Jill Gotcher

1. Established the Credit Card Bill of Rights, preventing credit card companies from imposing arbitrary rate increases on customers.
2. Health Care Reform Bill, preventing insurance companies from denying insurance due to pre-existing condition.
3. Health Care Reform Bill, allowing children to remain covered by parents' insurance until age 26.
4. Tax cuts for up to 3.5 million small business owners to help pay for employee health care coverage.
5. Tax credits for up to 29 million individuals to help pay for health insurance.
6. Require health insurance plans to disclose how much of the premium actually goes to patient care.
7. Added \$4.6 billion to the Veterans' Administration budget to recruit and retain more mental health care professionals.
8. Significantly increased funding for Violence Against Women Act.
9. Eliminated subsidies to private lender middlemen of student loans and protect student borrowers.
10. Increased funding for national parks and forests by 10%.
11. Significantly expanded Pell grants which help low-income students pay for college.
12. Expanded hate crime law in the U.S. to include sexual orientation through the Hate Crimes Prevention Act.
13. Appointed first chief technology adviser.
14. Signed financial reform law establishing a Consumer Protection Bureau to look out for the interests of everyday Americans.
15. Signed financial reform law requiring lenders to verify applicants' credit history, income and employment status.
16. Ended Bush Administration CIA program of "enhanced interrogation." Army's field manual to be followed as a guide in terrorist interrogations.
17. Tax cuts for middle- and lower-class Americans.
18. Signed financial reform law allowing shareholders of publicly traded companies to vote on executive salaries.
19. Cut prescription drug cost for Medicare recipients by 50%.
20. Provided \$12.2 billion in new funding for individuals with the Disabilities

Education Act.

21. Created more private sector jobs in 2010 than during the entire Bush years.
  22. Voluntary disclosure of White House visitors for first time in U.S. history.
  23. Appointed first Latina to U.S. Supreme Court.
  24. Promoted social responsibility through creation of *serve.gov*, a national database of volunteer opportunities
  25. Signed Family Smoking Prevention & Tobacco Control Act, giving the FDA authority to regulate the manufacture, marketing and sale of tobacco for the first time.
  26. Signed the new START Treaty, a nuclear arms reduction pact with Russia.
  27. Increased average fuel economy standards from 27.5 mpg to 35.5 mpg starting in 2016.
  28. Signed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, restoring basic protections against pay discrimination for women and other workers.
  29. Provided travel expenses for families of fallen soldiers.
  30. Provided the Department of Veteran Affairs with more than \$14 billion to improve services to America's veterans.
  31. Signed the Children's Health Reauthorization Act which provides health care to 11 million kids, four million of whom were previously uninsured.
  32. Reversed the policy of barring media coverage during the return of fallen soldiers.
  33. Launched *recovery.gov* to track spending from the Recovery Act, providing transparency and allowing the public to report fraud, waste or abuse.
  34. Signed the Christopher Reeve Paralysis Act, first piece of comprehensive legislation aimed at improving the lives of Americans living with paralysis.
  35. Developed stimulus package which includes \$18 billion for non-defense scientific research and development.
  36. Signed the weapons systems acquisition reform act to stop fraud and wasteful spending in the defense procurement and contracting system.
- This is but a small amount of what our president has been doing for America and why he has my support.
- The author lives in McAlester. This first appeared as a letter to the editor in the McAlester News-Capital.

## A Note On Health Care Reform

By Joe Conason

Overstating the importance of a midterm election is understandably tempting for politicians and pundits, especially when the partisan turnover reaches historic proportions, as it indisputably did on Nov. 2. It is a temptation to which Republicans and conservatives seem particularly vulnerable.

When their party won the first George W. Bush midterm in 2002, Karl Rove crowed that his political team had made history, which was true enough - and then went on to claim a partisan realignment that would put Republicans in charge for decades if not centuries. They lost control of Congress and the White House within the following six years, not least because of false assumptions about the meaning of their victories.

If the leaders of the new Republican majority believe that 2010 represents a sweeping ideological shift - rather than an expression of fury and fear over the nation's stagnant economy - they risk overreaching again.

That risk increases for them under enormous pressure to pander to the extreme elements of the Tea Party movement.

Consider the Republican promise to repeal health care reform, a position that might appear highly popular to anyone who hasn't read much polling data on the issue. Election Day exit polls showed that the health care bill is not nearly so widely despised as right-wing propa-

ganda suggests - and that its demise is certainly not the highest priority of voters.

Asked whether they want the health care reform bill repealed in the next Congress, 48% said yes and 47% said no - a statistical tie that belies any claims of overwhelming opposition. Asked whether health care was the most important issue in the midterm election, only 19% agreed, compared with 62% who cited the economy.

Keep in mind that the midterm electorate was heavily weighted toward the conservative, older white voters most hostile to President Obama and "Obamacare," as it is known on Fox News. Those same exit polls showed a drop in younger voters from 18% in 2008 to only 11% this year, and a rise in elderly voters from 16% in 2008 to 23% this year - a stunning shift. That helped conservatives to increase their share from 34% to 41%.

Of even greater importance is the fact that so many Americans - including many independent voters who say they want repeal - currently have little or no idea what the health care reform bill actually provides.

Thanks to Sarah Palin, Newt Gingrich and Fox News, millions still think the bill will force doctors to pull the plug on Grandma.

In a recent survey, up to 40% of respondents in a recent survey said they believe the bill creates the mythical "death panels" conjured by Sarah Palin and Newt Gingrich in a

"government takeover" of the system.

None of that is true, of course - and many of the bill's little known but real provisions will attract support as people learn about them in a debate over repeal.

Most people like the idea of regulating insurance companies to make sure they spend money on care rather than profits and promotion; most people like the idea of protecting consumers from exclusion for pre-existing conditions; and most people appreciate the idea of letting parents insure their children until age 26.

But come January, the Republicans

will be obliged to file repeal legislation - and to argue that the public will fare better under the tender care of the insurance oligopoly than with any government protections at all. Otherwise, the Tea Party will wreak havoc in the 2012 primaries, or so they warn.

There was no overwhelming mandate in this election on health care. Certainly there was no mandate to turn the country over to the insurance companies or any other corporate elite.

The Republicans assume otherwise at their own peril.

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## MESSAGE

From Page 14

later. After Eisenhower's relatively easy re-election in 1956, his party lost nearly 50 seats in the House. LBJ won a landslide election in 1964 [the last time Oklahoma voted for a Democratic presidential candidate], yet his party lost nearly 50 House seats two years later. Following Clinton's election in 1992, two years later the Democrats lost over 50 seats in the House.

More importantly, it turns out that not only is there a quantitative difference between presidential and midterm elections. There is also a qualitative difference.

In point of fact, this is exactly what Richard Nixon claimed in 1970. That year the Republicans beat the trend and lost only 12 seats in the House of Representatives after Nixon's victory over Humphrey in 1968. Nixon claimed that the reason Republicans lost so few seats in 1970 was due to his popularity. People were not just voting Republican, Nixon argued, but were switching to the Republican Party [much like the so-called Reagan "Revolution" of 1980].

What actually happened? Nixon was not that popular in 1968 [he barely beat Humphrey in one of the closest elections of the century]. Since he didn't help very many lower candidates win in 1968, there were not that many to lose two years later. That would have been the explanation [or "the message"] had the Democrats lost few seats this year.

- The author teaches constitutional law at Oklahoma State University

# ADOPTION

From Page One

"Um, no," she said quietly. "We're giving him up for adoption."

"Oh. Well, then, I understand," Dr. Carla said with a tone as flat as her expression. The room fell silent, save for the faint sound of the baby's heartbeat on the ultrasound monitor.

## 'SHUT UP, PREGGO!'

On a cool March evening, with everyone home for the weekend, this lower-middle-class family passed the time like many others: watching TV.

But though everyone was home and all the Tipton children were watching the same show, they were not really together.

In this house, the only discussion took the form of the shouting that could be heard above Seinfeld blaring from the TV set in our parents' room, through their locked door, behind which they feebly attempted to cover the deafening screams coming from the living room.

"Shut up, Preggo!" my brother yelled at Brianna from across the living room.

Another fight had broken out. This time, the epic battle between siblings was over seats.

Seventeen-year-old Lucas, who stands about a foot taller and weighs about a 100 pounds more than our sister, was upset he'd been kicked off the coveted couch and relegated to the uncomfortable computer chair.

"Stupid bitch!" he screamed as he launched a flowery sofa pillow at Brianna's head.

"Shut up! I hate you!" she fired back.

Before Brianna became pregnant, this sight was already an all-too-familiar one. The family, especially the three kids, have never considered themselves close.

On the contrary, they are lucky to be alive after being forced to coexist for so long.

Brianna's pregnancy gained her no mercy.

"Can we watch something other than ESPN?" Brianna asked. "I'm so sick of sports."

"Screw you, I have the remote," Lucas responded.

When Brianna attempted to grab the remote, she was pushed away violently, with little regard for her safety, or the baby's, in the debris-covered room.

"Get away, Preggo!" he shouted. "I don't care if you're knocked up. You don't get to do whatever the hell you want."

"I freaking hate him," my sister told me that night. "I don't even consider him my brother, and sometimes I just wish he would die."

As her words came out like sparks from a fire, the tears welling in her eyes alluded to more sadness than she was willing to share.

## OVER THE EDGE

"Oh my God, I didn't know he was going!" Brianna screamed, motioning toward her father, who wore an oversized college sweatshirt and a look of surprise.

That day, Brianna, by then 15, had to make the most difficult decision of her life, and she wanted to call the shots.



"I don't want Dad to be there. I don't even freaking want you to be there," the teenager screamed at her mother as they walked out the door.

Tears flowed down Brianna's face as she slammed the door of the family's gold Caravan.

That day, she would meet the first of two couples that would possibly be the parents of her unborn child.

Brianna was heading down the same path as thousands of girls before her, being forced to cope with the fact that she would be giving up her first child.

More than 57,000 children across the nation were given for adoption in 2009, according to the U.S. Administration for Children and Families.

Oklahoma itself set a state record last year with nearly 1,700 adoptions, a 35% increase over the last five years, according to the Oklahoma Department of Human Services.

"I don't even know if I want to do this anymore," Brianna said. "I don't know if I can handle this with you all right now."

But her mother knew their presence was not the real reason for Brianna's apprehension. Brianna wanted her best friend, Renee, there, but she could not make it.

"A week ago, you were at each other's throats," Brianna's mother said. "Why do you even want her there?"

"It's called support, and friends fight, and they make up, that's what they do," Brianna yelled indignantly.

When the car came to a halt in the parking lot of the Oklahoma City Fairfield Inn, it seemed like the family believed the vehicle might combust. They fled quickly.

The family's mood was ill reflected in the cheerfully bright hotel lobby.

As we took the cramped elevator up to Room 317, the air was stale and humid, but the silence was like a bitter frost.

Behind the fading yellow door to the room, Sharon, the adoption liaison, wore a grandmotherly matching green shirt and pantsuit.

As she asked the family to sit, Sharon attempted to break the tension,

addressing it straight on.

"Brianna, I know you're upset right now. Can you please talk about it?" she asked.

As Brianna explained her ordeal, her friend's absence and her parents' presence, it was clear the stress had sent her over the edge.

"I just need to know if this will be a deal breaker. Under the current circumstances, can you meet these couples and make a good decision you can be at peace with?" Sharon asked, her head cocked.

Brianna paused, pulling tissues from the cheap, flowery box next to her.

"I need to. I don't want to put off meeting them any longer," Brianna said with battered confidence in her voice.

"I want to do this. I can do this."

As Sharon fetched the couple downstairs, the Tiptons sat silently, taking note of the unmade bed, the cheap, mismatched upholstery, and their own forced, dressed-up appearance, with their nice jeans and best attempts at make-up.

After a few long minutes, a knock was heard at the door.

## 'MOM, WHO'S THAT LADY?'

The young couple, Tim and Lindsey, politely shook the mother's, the father's, the sister's and, finally, Brianna's hand.

It was not clear whether they were dressed like normal people on a normal day, wearing jeans, T-shirts and sandals, or if they wanted to appear as normal as possible.

As they sat in the faded green chairs, they knew the rest of their lives depended on the naïve opinion of the 15-year-old before them.

"As Brianna knows, I would like to begin with a prayer, if it's all right with everyone in the room," Sharon said.

With heads bowed and eyes closed, it's hard to imagine how mysteriously God's plan works out, if one believes in that sort of thing.

Perhaps Brianna was meant to become pregnant when she was too young to handle it only to provide this young couple with the child they so



desperately wanted but for some reason could not have.

Whether there was any divine intervention in the unbearably hot hotel room was unknowable. The fact of the matter was that Tim and Lindsey were interviewing with a child for a child.

For the next hour or so, the families learned about each other. But one pressing issue had not been addressed.

"Brianna, I would like you to explain to Tim and Lindsey what kind of visitation you need because I don't want there to be any confusion," Sharon said.

"I would like to see him every three or four months for the first year and then every six months indefinitely," Brianna said.

After a moment of silence, Lindsey, a petite young woman with bouncy brown curls, spoke gently.

"We understand why you would want that kind of assurance, but we just have a couple of issues," she said.

"First, I see the grief in your family's eyes and your eyes, and I would just like to wrap you in my arms and make everything better for you. But I just think it will be very hard for you to end the grieving process that way."

Lindsey seemed unsure of whether she wanted to continue, but she spoke again.

"We just don't want our baby, if you choose us, to ever be confused or saddened by anything. We would never want him to have to ask us with tears in his eyes, 'Mom, who's that lady that keeps popping up every once in a while?'" she said, a tear collecting in her eye.

This was a defining issue for Brianna, and Lindsey had not given her the answer she wanted. They would not become her baby's parents.

Whether the couple knew the outcome of their meeting, they politely thanked everyone for coming and waved goodbye.

Brianna's family soon departed, and it was Schlotsky's sandwiches and a little more conversation than before on the dinner menu.

As they sat around the table at the restaurant, there was even some laughing about the day's events.

## ROGER AND LEEANNE

The next day, the Tipton family returned to the Fairfield Inn.

If Brianna didn't choose that day's family, there would be more appointments to be set, potential parents to be contacted and a list of arrangements to be made to continue the process.

And time was running out. The  
**See ADOPTION Page 18**

# ADOPTION

From Page 17

baby would arrive in fewer than two months. Sharon again answered the door in a matching pantsuit, although this time it was a taupe number.

Brianna spoke first.

"So, what happens if we get to May and the baby is born and I haven't found a family I trust?"

"Then we would need to address whether you really are at peace with your decision to adopt," Sharon replied.

If she were not at peace with that decision, it would not be a unique occurrence.

On average, only 15% of teenage girls in her age group across the U.S. settle on adoption, due in large part to their inability to maturely evaluate the best option for themselves and their baby, according to Sharon Rodine of the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy.

## BACKING OUT

Many of these young mothers think they have found the perfect family to take their children but back out once the children are born.

But this time in Room 317, something different happened after the heart-tugging knock on the door.

This couple was older and a bit more frazzled, but they inspired a different attitude from the Tiptons.

LeeAnne wore a simple black and white sweater. She had a strange, bird-like appearance and sported short, blond hair.

Her husband, Roger, wore jeans and a plaid shirt. He seemed as if he would be at home shooting deer or gutting fish.

They politely introduced themselves, but it was obvious Brianna felt more calm in their company.

After discussing all the pleasantries – occupations, pastimes, beliefs – the topic came up.

Brianna laid down her visitation demands.

But the couple was unfazed.

"My family went through a similar situation," Roger began, tears pooling in his eyes. "So I understand completely how difficult this is for you and your family and we would never, ever want to keep you from being involved in his life however you want."

As the potential father continued, his emotion touched everyone in the room, especially the soon-to-be birth mother.

After the families said their good-byes and LeeAnne and Roger took their leave, a peace settled over the room. Brianna turned to Sharon.

"You know how I told you when we met that I felt like I wouldn't want to work with anyone else but you?" she asked. "I know that about Roger and LeeAnne. I don't need to meet any other couples."

## CORBIN

Again, Brianna ventured down a long hotel hallway, but this time under very different circumstances than those of half a year ago.

As she entered the cheery hotel room, the bright greens, blues and golds of the walls and curtains didn't seem ironic. The flowers adorning the overstuffed cushions didn't appear to mock the inhabitants atop them.

Brianna was about 30 pounds lighter, and there was an apprehensive excitement in her demeanor.

For the first time since Brianna had parted ways with her newborn son, since her mother had last seen her first grandchild, they would get to

hold Corbin Avery.

Sharon again greeted the family with her typical glee. But it seemed the couple on the other side of the door was not the same couple that had asked Brianna to make the ultimate sacrifice for their sake a few months ago.

This was in fact LeeAnne and Roger, but they projected utter contentment.

They looked weary, like all parents of infants do, but they didn't seem concerned. LeeAnne's once-blond, highly-styled hair had not seen a salon for some time. Roger's shirt was untucked. But they beamed with joy that reflected in Brianna's face.

## NOTHING BUT BOY

The plump Corbin, who had gone from modest six pounds to a healthy 12 in only four months of life, was dressed like a man imagines his boy should be: blue jeans and a red, striped T-shirt with a baseball motif.

There was nothing mistaking this baby was anything but a boy, and it made his parents happy when Brianna and her mother pointed that out.

"He loves to watch the game with me," Roger said, smiling.

"He's so heavy!" Brianna exclaimed as Corbin was passed to her. "He won't sit down at all."

The baby had no desire to do anything other than stand, though his legs would not support that wish. As Brianna attempted to hold him, he hinted at a tantrum if his unknown demands were not immediately satisfied.

"What should I do?" Brianna asked.

"Just try to make him comfortable," her mother replied.

"Maybe he wants to walk around for a bit," his mother said.

Brianna bounced him up and down, something he liked very much. She seemed disappointed that no smile emerged from her efforts, but elated that she had forestalled his cries.

For some time, the two families sat in the meager hotel room, talking.

They discussed Corbin and his development, Brianna and her activities, even how Roger and LeeAnne's lives had been changed by Corbin's arrival.

It was decided that it was time to grab a meal now that Corbin had finally closed his tiny eyes, so the families and Sharon made plans to meet somewhere nearby.

In the Tipton car, happiness mixed with a twinge of sadness. Excitement blended with the slightest hint of remorse.

"I couldn't even hold him right," Brianna said. "He's my baby. I should at least be able to hold him properly."

"You won't even have a baby for another 10 years, so what does it matter now?" I asked in my half-concocted attempt to console her. "Besides, it's not like he's your baby anyway."

"There's a part of him that will always belong to Brianna," our mother said, with a shocking degree of compassion and understanding.

Brianna didn't offer her typical sarcastic quip or hateful remark.

But she didn't say much for the rest of the ride.

– The author is a journalism student in the Gaylord College at the University of Oklahoma. This story originally appeared in Routes, a multimedia webzine that publishes the college's best student work. Routes can be found at <http://routes.ou.edu>

# DECIDER

From Page 10

Winston, and while Bush did little as president other than read history books, the stagecraft entirely eluded him. Some of those tomes must have dealt with the British and Soviet experiences of invading Afghanistan, and not a word sunk in.

I know how that feels from a tussle with *A Brief History of Time*. The difference is that I didn't extrapolate my failure to grasp a syllable into a bold attempt to rewrite the laws of quantum physics. He assumed he could rewrite the laws of geopolitics.

The process of historical revisionism has, like everything else, speeded alarmingly in the Internet age. The emergence of Sarah Palin as an imaginable presidential candidate, allied to the unending travails of Obama, have induced in the amnesiac, the obtuse and the plain bananas a fondness for the memory of George W. Bush.

It will not spread. If this great reader of history is concerned for his place in it – and that, needless to say, is why he hired a bright young groupie from Yale to write this memoir in something approximating English – he needn't fret. In those few lists ranking all the presidents compiled since he left office, W is invariably in the bottom five.

For the two imbecile wars he began, for condoning torture by denying waterboarding was torture at all on the grounds that his lawyers said it was legal; for turning the surplus he inherited from Bill Clinton into the crippling deficit that

is bringing the age of American hegemony to a startlingly abrupt end; and for being the pitifully Wagnerian fool who stumbled on to the grandest stage without any apparent clue why or for what earthly purpose, there he will forever remain.

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 On Nov. 2, angry Oklahoma voters – most uncertain what precisely fueled their anger, but angry nonetheless – unleashed a red tsunami that swamped our state and cemented our reputation as the nation’s most virulently rightwing land.  
 On Nov. 2, angry American voters – whipped into a lather by shadowy front groups financed by wealthy corporate interests, some foreign – unwittingly did the plutocrats bidding, returning Republicans to power in Congress.  
 On Nov. 2, legions of disillusioned Oklahomans and Americans – despairing of the rightwing media beat-down by Fox News, Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck and Bill O’Reilly and unfettered corporate electioneering courtesy of a venal U.S. Supreme Court – stayed home, convinced their dreams of a fairer, more decent state and nation were no longer achievable.  
 These are indeed the darkest of times for progressive-thinking Oklahomans. At least two years of absolute Republican rule lay ahead – no Democratic governor and too few Democratic lawmakers to thwart the GOP’s worst excesses.  
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 Neither Frosty, Beverly nor I are about to give up the fight, but we do confront an unsettling reality on a daily basis: These are tough, tough times for independent journals like ours.  
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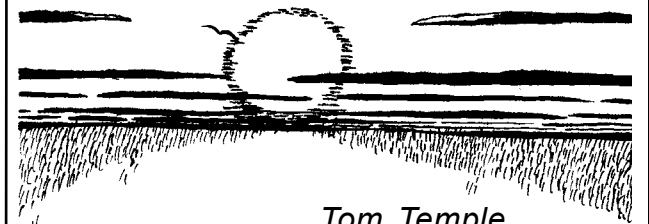
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