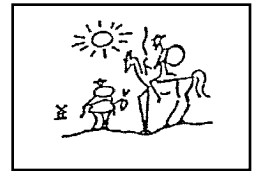


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THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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JULY 10/25, 2011

Xenophobic Solon Shames State **Shortey's Shenanigans**

By Kari Lydersen

Oklahoma has relatively few immigrants – about 5% of the population – but it has long been in the vanguard of anti-immigrant and more recently anti-Muslim legislation of the type sweeping the nation.

Last fall more than 70% of voters passed a constitutional amendment outlawing the use of Sharia law in Oklahoma courts, and state legislators have also pushed anti-Sharia laws, even though the Muslim legal code has never been introduced in an Oklahoma courtroom. On June 14 the Oklahoma Supreme Court upheld most provisions of the state's strict anti-immigrant law, passed in 2007 and seen as a precursor to Arizona's infamous legislation. And this year Oklahoma City state Sen. Ralph Shortey introduced a suite of anti-immigrant laws including one billed as "Arizona Plus."

Shortey is Native American and as a child lived on a South Dakota reservation. He said that's one of the reasons he wants to send a message to undocumented immigrants that they are "not welcome" in Oklahoma. In March Shortey told a group of reporters with the Institute for Justice and Journalism that he knows what it feels like to have one's land stolen, and he doesn't want it to happen again through an influx of undocumented immigrants.

The bill he introduced would order police to enforce immigration law, allow law enforcement to confiscate the property of undocumented immigrants – including homes and cars – and could criminalize providing social services and otherwise interacting with undocumented immigrants.

Shortey, a freshman legislator whose district was actually majority Latino until recent redistricting,

also wrote laws that would mandate English-only, re-interpret the 14th Amendment so that children of undocumented immigrants would not be citizens, and prevent undocumented college students from getting in-state tuition.

Civil rights advocates say Oklahoma is an example of the illogical and political nature of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim state laws, since the state as a whole and specifically the areas where constituents disproportionately supported the measures have small immigrant and Muslim populations. But advocates also say

the ultimate failure of Shortey's bills this year shows that even in one of the nation's reddest states, coalition-building and activism can defeat proposals based on hate and fear.

Shortey and other anti-immigrant legislators had hoped their bills would build upon HB 1804, the draconian anti-immigrant law passed in 2007 and then challenged in court. Waves of Latino immigrants – documented and undocumented – left Oklahoma after 1804's passage, according to many accounts. On June 14 the state Supreme Court ruled that almost all the bill's provisions are constitutional.

The bill's author, Republican state Rep. Randy Terrill [who is facing felony bribery charges for allegedly trying to persuade a Democratic legislator not to run for re-election], hailed the decision as a major victory and an affirmation of statewide anti-immigrant sentiment. Such sentiment, Shortey said, fueled his Arizona Plus bill.

"You have Democrats and Republicans who want Arizona Plus, legal Hispanics and everybody else who wants it," Shortey told reporters in March. "Little babies come out screaming 'We want Arizona Plus.' I can't ignore them."

But after passing in a Senate subcommittee, the Arizona Plus bill eventually died. A coalition of community activists, human rights groups and social service organizations lobbied hard against it. Pro-immigrant legislators refused to back even a watered-down version of the bill, according to state Sen. Andrew Rice, whose Oklahoma City district borders Shortey's, while other right-wing legislators thought it didn't go far enough.

Mana Tahaie, director of racial justice programs for the YWCA in Tulsa, said the bills proposed by Shortey had a definite impact on immigrants even though they didn't pass. "When a bill is proposed, often people hear about it and think it's law," she said. "There's a heightened climate of fear and anxiety."

Last summer the Tulsa police de-

See SHORTEY Page 18



Observations

An Outrage

All thinking Oklahomans should be outraged that OETA's nightly newscast was canceled, destroyed by Republicans in control of the state budget.

Question: Why did OETA take a 9% cut? Answer: Because it's the only honest newscast in the state, reaching the entire state with coverage not found elsewhere.

Most of state government took a 5% cut so the message comes through loud and clear when OETA's cut is nearly double that.

For 30 years OETA's 6:30 p.m. newscast, repeated the next morning, has been a dependable source of hard news and investigative reporting.

Oklahomans are left without any nonpartisan source of news – especially the antics at the State Capitol.

It doesn't make us feel any better that we warned Oklahoma voters what would happen if Republicans took the reins of state government.

Collins Plea

New Democratic Party Chairman Wallace Collins was well received by an Oklahoma County party luncheon for his open, forthright manner and his statements, which included this information:

1. When he took over as chair of the State Party, the financial books were practically non-existent at party headquarters.

2. He was having to negotiate with the Internal Revenue Service for tax payments which had not been made [apparently for some time].

3. Past-due bills were coming in [including one from the Medallion Dinner!] which he was going to pay as soon as he could.

4. He is raising money at his speaking engagements statewide and said his intent is to wear his car out touring the state and bringing the party together.

5. Is asking former Democratic candidates for their leftover funds in their campaign accounts. One former

candidate has already complied.

Democrats have fallen to the bottom in this blood-red state and are fortunate to have a new leader – Wallace Collins – to lead them out of this terrible situation.

Donate what you can to get the party out of the hole. Mail your gift to The Oklahoma Democratic Party, 4100 N. Lincoln Blvd., Oklahoma City 73105.

Wasted Billions

The war is affecting more than just Western soldiers and their families and Afghan citizens. It has become a costly drain on our nation's treasury.

The money that is being spent on the war represents resources that are being drained away from important domestic priorities in a nation with sky-high unemployment and crumbling infrastructure.

Using data from the National Priorities Project, ThinkProgress calculated 10 investments America could've afforded if it didn't spend \$113 billion – the allotment made in Fiscal Year 2011 – on the war in Afghanistan.

Each one of these policy options represents an equivalent \$113 billion cost:

- Provide 57.5 million children with low-income health care for 2011.
- Provide 23 million people with low-income health coverage in 2011.
- Give 20.2 million \$5,500 Pell Grants to students in 2011.
- Provide 14.35 million military veterans with VA medical care in 2011.
- Give 14.7 million children Head Start funding in 2011.
- Give 14.26 million scholarships to university students in 2011.
- Employ 1.93 million firefighters in 2011.
- Hire 1.75 million elementary school teachers in 2011.
- Hire 1.65 million police officers in 2011.
- Equip 67.8 million households with the ability to use Wind Power in 2011.
- Equip 25.39 million households



with the ability to use Solar Photovoltaic Energy in 2011.

Of course, none of this accounts for the human cost of losing our sons and daughters in war. Hundreds have been killed or wounded in combat, and countless Afghans lost their lives as well.

We applaud the President's withdrawal plan.

Promoting Hunger

When it comes to criticizing the House Republican budget plan which Oklahoma's GOP delegation favors, some big-ticket problems are rather obvious.

For example, the GOP wants to eliminate Medicare and gut Medicaid – ideas that the American mainstream doesn't like.

And as far as the politics of this are concerned, it makes sense for Democrats to pick a small handful of glaring and scandalous priorities in the Republican plan, and focus their fire accordingly.

But when it comes to appreciating the larger policy, it's worth keeping in mind that Medicare isn't the only concern here.

There lesser-known problems with the GOP budget agenda, such as cutting SNAP, the program formerly known as food stamps.

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, if the states decided to react primarily by thinning the benefits for everybody, the maximum benefit would equal 88% of the "Thrifty Food Plan" – the government's estimate of what a typical family would need to pay for a "bare-bones, nutritionally adequate diet."

In 2012, a family of three would lose \$116 a month, while a family of four would lose \$147 a month.

If, instead, the government implemented the cut entirely by reducing eligibility for the program, SNAP would serve 8 million fewer people over the next 10 years.

Republicans claim they represent family values?

Bragging Rights

We know you tire of our tirades about the lack of health care in Oklahoma – 600,000 with no insurance,

half of them children. Still we brag about being the greatest country on earth.

An abiding belief in American exceptionalism is more or less ubiquitous across the political spectrum. But in many ways, what makes America different from other advanced democracies are relatively modest differences in priorities.

While all wealthy democracies share the same basic model – they derive the bulk of their economic activity from the private sector while offering some form of social safety net for those who fall through the cracks – even slight differences in priorities can have a huge impact on the lives of their people.

Nine countries do a better job providing health care for their citizens than we do.

In 2008, the U.S. spent 16% of its economic output on health-care and covered 85% of its citizens.

It was the only OECD country other than Mexico and Turkey to cover less than 90% of its people. We have the 37th longest average life expectancy, and a recent study found that American life expectancy has been stagnant for much of the country and is actually decreasing over much of the southern portion of the United States.

Still bragging?

Liar, Liar

Liar, liar, pants on fire. Republican U.S. Rep. Tom Cole is spreading a blatant lie via a mailer in his district. He claims there is no plan to privatize Medicare.

To the contrary, he must have been AWOL when the House approved the Ryan budget to privatize Medicare. It easily passed in the Republican House but since details have gone public, Cole and his fellow nitwits are distancing themselves from it.

Senate Leader Harry Reid said the bill was DOA in the Senate.

Cole said in his mailer that the Ryan budget plan would "personalize Medicare, similar to what federal workers have."

Oklahoma's House delegation voted for the Ryan budget, proving anew that as long as the local media don't keep the voters informed, they will continue to get away with their Tea Party voting.

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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

Remember, there is no July 25 issue of the Oklahoma Observer. See you Aug. 10 with important news and commentary you can't read anywhere else.

Dart: To new GOP State Superintendent Janet Barresi, casting the deciding vote not to fund National Board certified teachers. She leaves no doubt about her attack on public education.

OETA's superb evening newscast is ending, a victim of Republican budget cuts. GOP Gov. Mary Fallin and the Republican Legislature cut taxes another \$120 million, sacrificing the best of state government.

Laurel: To Oklahoma State University President Burns Hargis and his wife, Ann, for a donation of \$1.5 million for OSU scholarships.

What is it about public education, higher education and CareerTech that Republicans despise? Tulsa World editorial page editor David Averill was right – they took the biggest percentage cuts, \$167 million.

Dart: To the Oklahoma State Chamber of Commerce, spending a fortune on 10 – yes, 10 – lobbyists at the State Capitol, including CEO Fred Morgan, a voucher booster.

Increase in the real value of the minimum wage since 1990 is 21%. During the same period the cost of living has gone up 67%. A minimum wage is \$15,080 a year while economic security requires \$30,000.

Laurel: To 35,000 Oklahoma Indians protesting to no avail the \$3.4 billion settlement due to years of federal mismanagement of Indian assets – land, oil and natural gas, timber and grazing. The figure is laughable compared to the oil stolen from them.

LaTisha Reid, the State Treasurer's internal auditor has been fired and the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation has been called in. She administered the agency's banking activities.

Dart: To state agencies for spending \$42 million in the past year on bonuses and longevity pay – this while the Legislature was trying to fill a \$500 million shortfall.

Life expectancy for Oklahoma men is 72.8 years, for women 77.9 years – both below the national averages of 75.8 years for men, 80.8 years for women.

Laurel: To U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn, digging through federal spending discovered \$90,000 to study why some college teams are dominant in March Madness. That, folks, is your federal tax dollar at work.

Women continue to lag behind men in state and federal elective positions – 17 in the U.S. Senate, 72 in the U.S. House and only 1,738 in the 50 state legislatures.

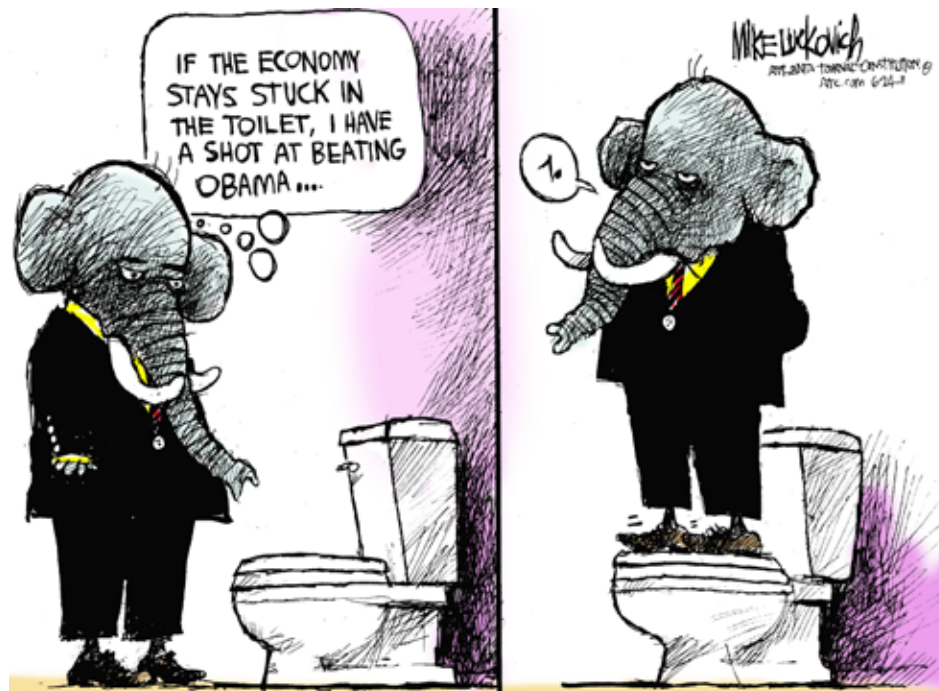
Dart: To Republicans at the state and federal levels determined to ruin unions. In doing so they ruin America – a union worker averages \$47,684, a non-union worker \$37,284. Union membership has been cut over 40%. [Bureau of Labor Statistics]

Failure of a bill making pseudoephedrine a prescription drug can be laid at the doorstep of the drug company lobby, according to Rep. Doug Cox, R-Grove.

Laurel: To legislative leaders for an interim study of Oklahoma's water. Such a study is long overdue. Federal treaties with American Indians will come up for review.

Nearly half of dads under 45 say they have one child born out of wedlock. The good news comes from Pew research – the average dad is now spending 6.5 hours a week playing with his kids.

Dart: To U.S. Rep. Dan Boren, D-OK, co-author of an amendment prohibiting the federal government from tracking multiple sales of long guns. Most end up in the hands of Mexican drug lords. Boren is on the NRA board.



They are lining up to take Rep. Dan Boren's place – all running to the far right of Attila the Hun. This is the reddest state in the Union so we may send another moron to Congress.

Laurel: To Oklahoma's community colleges for stepping up to fill the void of that "all kids should go to college syndrome" by turning out badly needed skilled craftsmen.

Sen. Ralph Shortey, R-OKC, came within hours of seeing his home up for auction since receiving an eviction notice. He and his wife found alternative financing. They owed \$80,000 plus interest on a \$90,000 home.

Dart: To the failure of this state's leaders to address the crying need for improved public education. Last year 67.7% of boys and 73% of girls graduated. Oklahoma is 47th in what it spends per student.

The Pardon and Parole Board is playing with fire when they study recommending commuting life without parole sentences. The case in point is Larry E. Yarbrough with five felony convictions involving dealing drugs.

Laurel: To Greg Main, named president of St. Gregory's University. The university has a proud tradition of turning out first-rate students. It was founded in 1875.

Newsweek magazine lists the 10 cities where you're likely to get the quickest sunburn. Oklahoma City ranks 7th. Worst are Boise, Amarillo, Bakersfield, CA, Salt Lake City, San Diego and Sacramento.

Dart: To Darrell Sorrels, announcing as a Republican for sheriff of Oklahoma County. He vows to "get us back on track." In fact, Sheriff John Whetsel is not only a fine public servant, he has a national reputation for excellence.

A national survey reveals that 13% of public school teachers are teaching creationism or "intelligent design" – a direct violation of repeated U.S. Supreme Court opinions. A teacher's job is to teach, not preach.

Laurel: To Vashina Butler, first African-American female to make captain in the Oklahoma City Police Department. She's a 20-year veteran.

Irony, lost? In selecting Kelly Dyer Fry as the Oklahoman's new editor, Publisher David Thompson boasted: "She will uphold our journalistic standards."

Dart: To U.S. Rep. John Sullivan, R-Tulsa, for his bill to give tax credits for natural gas as a transportation fuel. Eventually we will have to deed America to the oil and gas industry.

Surprise! Surprise! Medicare is going high tech to head off billions lost to fraud. Taxpayers Against Fraud, a nonpartisan monitor of federal spending, said such a computer program has been available since the 1980s.

Laurel: To U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn, R-OK, gunning for billions in federal tax breaks that don't create jobs. Sic 'em, Tom!

Every hour two Oklahomans are diagnosed with some form of cancer. That's why the new Oklahoma Cancer Treatment Center at OU-Tulsa Schusterman Center is opening. Bravo!

Dart: To the Oklahoma State Medical Association, against the proposal to require a prescription for pseudoephedrine, key ingredient in the meth mania sweeping Oklahoma. They said it would be an inconvenience to honest users.

More than 7,500 teen pregnancies cost Oklahoma taxpayers more than \$190 million a year. Costs include Medicaid, child welfare and a higher incarceration rate.

Laurel: To Tulsa firefighters, suing Mayor Dewey Bartlett due to his order that they can't actively campaign in municipal elections. When they're out of uniform it's none of the mayor's business.

The Daily Show's Jon Stewart interviewed Fox News Chris Wallace who admitted that Fox News presents a one-sided version of the news. Fox ran the interview but cut that part out.

Dart: To the Daily Disappointment for all but ignoring an advisory firm's urging that Chesapeake shareholders bounce Aubrey McClendon as chairman and ex-Sen. Don Nickles from the board. It took days for America's worst newspaper to sneak a few measly sentences into print.

**THE OKLAHOMA
Observer**


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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

Re: "Entitlements Are the Biggest Problem" [June 25]. Rep. Cox just about had me convinced to sign up for food stamps, disability, and other entitlements. However, his failure to do so himself has me wondering whether he really believes himself.

Perhaps when his "sore hands and knees" get better, his self-motivation will pick up, and we'll meet at the disability office someday.

Is it true there are freebies beyond belief with no forms to complete? No exams to take? No invasions of privacy? No distrusting or demeaning looks from government employees? No feelings of shame, failure, or inadequacy and certainly no follow-up visits to constantly reaffirm said failure or inadequacy?

Heck, just trying to figure out if I should leave my Lexus at home for the application process is leaving me a "little anxious and depressed."

Lonnie Yearwood
Colony

Editor, The Observer:

Your June 25th issue published an article by Rep. Doug Cox entitled "Entitlements Are The Biggest Problem," complaining that lazy people will not seek jobs and would rather "sit ... on their duff and collect a government check," sometimes while on drugs or alcohol. If he is trying to mobilize resentment, this can be an effective tactic but does not tell the whole truth. Corporate welfare is an even bigger problem than individual welfare.

Poor people, even if they happen to be lazy, cannot possibly make the unlimited gifts to political election campaigns that corporations can. Our unethical Supreme Court in its "Citizens United" decision made sure who can buy an election. Since Doug Cox is a state representative, we must assume that money and favoritism toward the rich may have influenced his election.

Heaping scorn on troubled men at a time of high unemployment, hard for those with little capital or education, is the type of cruelty that makes me doubt I will ever vote Republican again. As for drugs and alcohol, which can cause permanent brain damage, the solution I prefer is a Constitutional change to stop former abusers from running for president. Had that amendment been in place, our beloved country would have been spared both Ulysses S. Grant and George W. Bush, two men far too trusting of big corporations and their lobbyists.

Harry Compton
Bartlesville

Editor, The Observer:

Re: House Speaker Kris Steele's comprehensive study of the state's criminal justice system, which leaders hope will lead to the creation of legislation and policies that result in better use of public safety dollars:

What a crock. Thirteen months of sitting in courtrooms and seeing the "games" being played tells me that the problem is in our courts and the Republicans doing the investigations are reaping many bucks from this "game."

Then, reading the ignorant comments after this announcement tells you what is the problem. It starts in the lack of education from birth until death and the ignorance is purposely advanced by not funding our education systems.

Nothing is going to change. Witness the grand jury investigations of the judges [i.e. the one who was playing with his privates while sitting behind his desk during court sessions]. That is just the tip of the iceberg!

I've seen a group of thugs [armed police officers] create havoc in federal court by waiting until court sessions were about to begin to enter and arrest a black, female judge and carry her off. Why? Obviously to send a message that blacks and females would not be welcomed to practice or judge in an Oklahoma City federal court - or anywhere else in Oklahoma.

GAG! Double GAG!!!

Darla Reynolds-Sparks
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

Sen. Tom Coburn is unveiling a plan to reduce the deficit by making Medicare unaffordable for many. Specifically by:

- raising Medicare Part B premiums [for doctors' visits] by \$241 billion over 10 years [Congressional Budget Office];
- raising Medicare deductibles for hospitalization and doctor visits, and
- raising eligibility age from 65 to 67 by 2025.

Coburn also voted for Rep. Paul Ryan's budget bill [HCR 34] which ends Medicare as we know it for people now under 55 when they become elderly. Instead of Medicare, they would get a voucher for health insurance from a private company. This measure failed in the Senate by a vote of 40-57.

It's strange that Sen. Coburn has remained silent about the cause of the deficit which "concerns" him so much. Specifically: Republicans



racked up deficits under Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush, and his Republican Congress almost doubled the national debt while waging a trillion-dollar unfunded war in Iraq and handing another trillion in tax breaks to millionaires and billionaires.

The "conservative" position on debt appears to be: make it as big as you can by giving huge tax breaks to rich individuals and corporations and by waging continuous unfunded wars. Then start yelling about fiscal responsibility and "entitlement" spending, like Medicare. Finally, tell granny to find her own health care plan.

In conclusion, Sen. Tom Coburn's attempt to meddle with Medicare is not smart; but he's probably not worried since he says that he won't be running for re-election.

Wanda Jo Stapleton
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

We had to look the other way when U.S. House Republicans kept those tax write-offs for their wealthiest donors in the name of jumpstarting business.

Now there's a new assault against the middle class: the so-called Ryan Plan that would end the current Medicare system and shift the cost of health care coverage for Americans now age 54 and younger. U.S. House Republicans voted to dramatically "reform" Medicare by forcing us to begin paying two-thirds of our health care costs compared to the one-quarter we pay under current law. They also voted to raise the age we will become eligible from 65 to 67.

Republican politicians seem happy to subsidize millionaires and allow rich oil companies to pay no taxes whatsoever, but seniors who have counted on Medicare benefits would have to hand over "vouchers" like coupons and pay the difference in health care costs to private insurance companies [who are used to obscene profits].

All our lives we were warned not to count on Social Security and Medicare to cover all our retirement and medical expenses. So we scrimped and saved. Now those dad-gum Republicans want to use up our nest egg by almost tripling the burden of

health care expenses on us. What are we supposed to live on?

Enough is enough! Maybe it's high time to end tax write-offs for rich people who will never depend on Social Security or Medicare. Maybe it's time to help those of us who can't afford to donate to political campaigns.

Republicans were opposed to Social Security when it was signed into law by Democratic President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1935. They've been looking for a way to suck the life out of it ever since.

Not this time! American doesn't need Medicare reform. We need new politicians!

Phyllis Bryant
Bethany

Editor, The Observer:

Many thanks to Sen. Coburn for repealing the tax credits on ethanol. This is a product for which there is no defense and should be no support for. To realize we have a government that promotes its use is almost overwhelming. Everyone by now realizes what its production has done to corn prices and in turn everything that relies on corn.

If that isn't enough, try some in even a lawnmower and see how that works out for you. If it was acceptable by the public for use in their cars why did WalMart and others relent and advertise that their pumps were ethanol free.

Our government also does us a great disservice when they allow Venezuela's Hugo Chavez to profit by the Citgo stations and refinery in this country which are 100% owned by him and his country. There can be no excuse for his people having the advantage of \$.12 per gallon gas and their country profiting from our \$4 gas. On top of that, they produce in their country from the assets they seized of Exxon, Chevron, and ConocoPhillips, etc. And the United States allows it.

Try to get an explanation and all you'll get is a blank look.

Some estimates claim that Venezuela profits from Citgo to the extent of \$2 billion to \$3 billion a year. Tragic. But, again, thanks to you, Sen. Coburn.

Homer H. Hulme
Chickasha

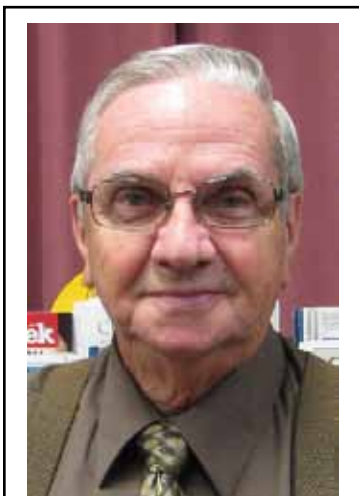
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Frosty Troy's Notebook

Journalism 101



FROSTY TROY
Founding Editor

I have often been asked why I never ran for public office. As early as the '60s, a delegation from the Tulsa Fraternal Order of Police drove to OKC to ask me to run for mayor. I thanked them but declined.

From my childhood forward I wanted to be a reporter. I worked on the school paper, The St. John's Siren. When I mobilized in 1950 with the 45th Division, I saw an opportunity to keep the folks in McAlester informed about what their friends and loved ones were doing.

My company commander, Captain Philip Fultz, said it was OK with him. I fired off a few missives to the McAlester News Capital during basic training at Camp Polk, LA. The editor, Howard Cowan, sent me a note of encouragement and thus was born a foreign correspondent.

My brother Kevin and I both rotated to the regular army, disgusted at being stymied on Hokkaido Island, Japan. We wanted action! [Is

there anything dumber than a kid who takes his life so lightly?]

The minute I hit Korea I read every word in Stars and Stripes. I was still writing back home but there was little to tell. So I wrote a story on the donation of a Swiss mobile hospital, sent it to Stars and Stripes and they published it!

Thus was the beginning of a friendship with the editor, Sgt. Bill Fitzgerald. He probably published 90% of my articles, and I know why.

During World War II, I devoured every word written by a foreign correspondent named Ernie Pyle, so I told ordinary stories about ordinary soldiers just as he had.

I knew the wire services and the big newspapers with correspondents embedded with the troops were keeping America and the world informed on the big picture.

Through the years when I talked to journalism classes I encouraged them to individualize their stories – real names of real people. Ernie Pyle had that knack, a column nicknamed GI Joe.

Eating with the troops, sharing a foxhole or going on patrol is what the people



back home really wanted to read about.

I only got in trouble one time and it resulted in the only time in my life I was arrested. Two CID agents came to my outfit on Hokkaido and placed me under arrest. I spent that night in a holding cell in a very bleak building.

The next morning I appeared before a major. He had a copy of a story I had written about seeing parachutes flying out of planes on an adjacent island. I assumed it was our side.

Wrong! It was the Russians! I hadn't sent the article through division headquarters before mailing it home. As he lectured me, all I could think about was going to a military prison. Instead, he let me off with a grave warning – do it again and I would be up on charges.

I kept writing home but I made sure they passed inspection at headquarters. I didn't write about my arrest – not because I was ashamed to, but I knew it would never pass inspection.

My Brother Bernie

I'm from a large family, eight boys and finally a girl. Mom also had twins who died at birth. I was number six and believe me when I tell you that there is such a thing as middle child syndrome.

Even the nuns had difficulty remembering my name. The funniest thing that happened was when I worked for the Tulsa Tribune. When I answered the phone. I recognized mom's voice.

"Bernard?"

"No, Mom, this is Frosty."

"You know who I mean."

She wanted me to check the Tulsa library because she was tracing her roots.

My favorite brother was Bernard, although he was five years older and I didn't run around in his crowd. He was my favorite because he had a sense of humor, he let me play with his marbles and didn't mind me when he hung out at the cab stand at the City Café.

He wasn't the best member of the McAlester Boxing Club but he had a left hook that decked more than one opponent. My Dad ran the Golden Gloves and even had a semi-pro team.

You've heard people talk about people with big hearts. None bigger than Bernard's, or as the locals called him, Bernie. He and his wife took over the dry cleaners when Dad retired, doomed by two-packs-a-day of Camel cigarettes.

It is no exaggeration to say he was easily the most popular man in town. He developed curbside at the cleaners, which meant customer never had to get out of their cars. Without any fanfare he was the bulwark at St. John's Church. He also oversaw the Catholic cemetery. He was a soft touch – if anybody needed a loan he came up with it. How many paid it back I'll never know. He would shrug it off.

He should have run for public office. With an infectious personality, the whole town of McAlester knew him and loved him.

His cleaners became a gathering spot for all things political. He was a Democrat and he had posters up to prove it. He was a people person – the kind of Democrat that's all but disappeared in Oklahoma.

Whoever dreamed a Troy boy would be elected president of the McAlester Country Club? He also staged the annual Fourth of July fireworks, a community event.

I still bump into people at the Capitol who ask about him.

He worked his heart out when my brother Pat ran for a state House seat. He lost, but if it had been Bernard, he would have won.

Nobody had better looking girlfriends than Bernie. I remember one blonde he dated because when I saw her, my little heart went pitty-pat.

He married a gorgeous woman, Carolyn, and there was nothing they wouldn't do for their kids.

When she developed lung cancer from smoking, he kept her at home. When she died, we all thought it would be the end for Bernie. Instead, he lived on in the satisfaction of knowing he would be with her again.

When he developed prostate cancer he never complained. I was holding his hand when he died at home. I whispered that he was my favorite brother.

"Thanks," he said.

At his funeral in 2008 there was standing room only in St. John's Church.

LOOK WHERE IT GOT THE GREEKS

WASHINGTON – Speaking on behalf of congressional Republicans, House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, R-VA, said today that trillions could be cut from the Federal budget if Congress can agree to eliminate empathy.

"The current budget is bursting at the seams with pet projects that reek of empathy," Rep. Cantor said. "As a nation, we can no longer afford to spend money on people's basic survival needs like a bunch of drunken sailors."

Rep. Cantor noted that "the word 'empathy' comes from the Greek word 'pathos,' meaning 'pathetic' – and that's exactly what helping people is: pathetic."

"We Americans should get out of the habit of using Greek words," he added. "Look where it's gotten the Greeks – straight into bankruptcy."

Once congressional Republicans eliminate such empathy-laden budget items as lunches for poor children, medicine for the indigent and oxygen for seniors, Rep. Cantor said, "We can move from cutting empathy to cutting humanity."

With humanity removed from the budget, he said, "That's where the real savings come in."

By eliminating the food, medicine and oxygen necessary to sustain human life, "We will reduce the single biggest drain on the U.S. economy: people."

Ending on an optimistic note, Rep. Cantor said that by eliminating people, "by the middle of this century the United States will be successfully transformed into one big unmanned Predator drone."

Elsewhere, presidential candidate Rep. Michele Bachmann, R-MN, today visited historic Monticello, which she called "the home of Jeffrey Dahmer."

– Andy Borowitz

Justice Reform: Right Policy, Wrong Politics?



ARNOLD HAMILTON
Editor

You know the numbers: Oklahoma's lock-up rate is first per capita nationally for women, fifth for men – yet our violent crime rate continues to climb.

You know the question: Does Oklahoma's elected leadership have the political will to do something about it?

Something other than cling to the electorally pleasing tough-on-crime mantra? Something other than give lip service to being smart on crime? Something innovative, visionary, even radical?

The answers may well be determined by House Speaker Kris Steele.

Steele shepherded an excellent first penal reform step through the 2011 Legislature, a package aimed at reducing the state's ridiculously high number of inmates by diverting low-risk convicts into less expensive community-based treatment and by reducing the governor's role in the parole process.

Now, he's unveiled a new initiative: the Justice Reinvestment Initiative, a state-national task force aimed at taking politics out of the criminal justice crisis and developing real solutions based on hard data.

"Our current path," the speaker said at a recent news conference, "is unsustainable."

He's correct: Even with ever-tighter budgets, the state is spending 41% more on corrections than it did a decade ago, thanks largely to a prison population that had swollen to 25,390 as of May. Even so, the mushrooming budget leaves Oklahoma in the bottom tier in per capita inmate spending.

But if past is prologue – which it so often is in politics – Steele's grand plans are anything but a slam dunk, even if he ostensibly wields the biggest gavel in the House and even with the public backing of Gov. Mary Fallin and Senate President Pro Tem Brian Bingman.

Let's just consider the last five years: The state's criminal justice crisis didn't materialize overnight. And it didn't just come to the attention of legislative leaders and the governor. It's been brewing for three decades, an inconvenient fact for tough-on-crime Republicans rising to state government power.

Oklahoma's non-partisan Criminal Justice Resource Center and its director, K.C. Moon, long warned of the looming crisis, but most lawmakers paid little heed. Even worse, they targeted Moon and the agency for oblivion – a variation of the old strategy *if you can't refute the message, kill the messenger*.

As Republicans seized control of the state House [2004 election] and Senate [2008], Moon's truth-telling was unwelcome. He resigned under pressure and the Criminal Justice Resource Center was de-funded, its tasks divided between the attorney general and the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation.

As cover for this injustice, then-GOP House Speaker Lance Cargill and then-co-Senate President Pro Tem Glenn Coffee [with acquiescence of Democratic co-Pro Tem Mike Morgan] demanded a performance audit of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections.

Republicans chose the auditor – Tallahassee, FL-based MGT of America Inc. – undoubtedly expecting the analysis to confirm their preconceived notions that Oklahoma's correctional system was rife with waste, graft and corruption, a money pit that would be better served by private prisons [operated by outfits

known to lavish campaign contributions on elected powers-that-be].

Six months and \$844,000 of the taxpayers' money later, MGT simply reinforced the message that penal experts – like K.C. Moon – had delivered repeatedly to lawmakers: The state's prison system is lean, mostly well managed and grossly underfunded.

In fact, MGT recommended spending at least \$30 million more annually to get the system where it needed to be.

You can imagine what happened to that report. It was released late on a Friday afternoon, at the end of a holiday week – a near-perfect time slot to ensure the fewest Oklahomans would take note, what with some still traveling and others gearing up for a return to work or school.

Cargill and Coffee, now the Secretary of State, ran for cover, offering perfunctory statements – "It's an example of good government," Cargill opined – then disappearing.

Where did MGT's recommendations end up? File 13.

At about the same time, the Oklahoma Academy focused on the state's criminal justice crisis, mulling the question: Can we be just as tough, but twice as smart?

What happened to the report developed by the state's brightest minds? File 13.

Task forces are the Legislature's time-honored way of jettisoning an issue they really don't want to tackle. The difference this time is Steele. It's a passion for him – "It will be a top priority for me," he said – and speakers do tend to get more of what they want than most House members.

But there's reason to fear that Steele's admirable dream won't ever become a reality, at least not during his tenure. Next year is Steele's final session. Term limits dictate he can't seek re-election.

The initiative he helped launch typically required 18 months to be completed in other states. He only has seven months until the Legislature reconvenes in February – and then only four months more to convince a majority of his 100 House and 48 Senate colleagues to embrace his vision.

This from a crew of lawmakers that continued to expand the number of mandatory sentences in the most recent session – despite the speaker's best efforts to explain that sending more people to prison for longer terms may sound like good, tough public policy, but it's actually fiscal lunacy and doesn't help reduce crime.

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Stipend Cut Betrays Teachers, Students

By Claudia Swisher

I am a National Board Certified Teacher.

Before I could even be considered for the rigorous work as a candidate, I had to have a college degree, a teaching license and years of experience. I had a master's degree, hours past my masters, teaching certificates in English, Library Science, Reading Specialist, World History, Journalism and others. I had over 20 years of experience before I tried National Board Certification. I knew it would be challenging and demanding. I knew I wanted to measure myself and my practice against the highest national standards in the profession.

With the support of the state of Oklahoma, and its recent covenant with teachers, I received a scholarship to go through the process of National Certification in 1999. The generosity of the law written by then-Sen. Darryl Roberts gave me the opportunity to hold myself accountable, to really look at my practice, to shine a light on the impact my decisions have on my students' achievement. I was so proud of the commitment Oklahoma made to its teachers, and so eager to live up to the faith placed in me. I wanted to become the best teacher I could be for my students.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE EVER

Pursuing National Board Certification early in the state's program was the most difficult professional endeavor I've ever undertaken. It was only the second year my certification area was offered, and no one had certified when I began my journey.

My colleagues and I learned together. We had professional conversations like I've never had before. We helped each other, supported each other. We talked about curriculum and pedagogy in more meaningful ways than in any college course. We learned to be brutally honest with ourselves. We learned to reflect on our practice, to look for those small successes, and to adjust our lessons when we saw students not responding.

I remember my whole-group discussion video, watching that video countless times, literally transcribing every word spoken. I still have my notebook with that script. Because of that work, I knew exactly which of my students spoke, how many times they spoke, and how their words supported the goal of the discussion.

I knew three students never said anything, and I knew why. One girl was painfully shy and got tongue-tied in front of the class. One girl was an English Language Learner who wasn't confident enough to speak in front of others, but I remember she checked in with the student next to her during the lesson. One boy was a chronic truant, one we had all worked with to encourage his attendance. He missed the entire unit we were discussing, and he knew how horribly disappointed I was in his absences. He was avoiding my attention.

A MAGNIFICENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Watching that lesson over and over allowed me to analyze at a level I couldn't in the classroom. I saw a magic moment when a shy girl held the attention of the entire class with her insights. Years later she and I laughed about our feelings at the time ... her nervousness, my elation. I saw missed opportunities to ask a probing follow-up question, to quiet a silly student who mugged for the camera.

But to this day, what I remember is the awe I felt as I gave the responsibility of the content of the lesson to my ninth graders and they listened and responded and shared. That video helped inform what I still do in the classroom. It was a magnificent learning experience.

But that one video was only one of six entries I was required to complete. So, multiply my learning and analysis and reflection by six. Then, in the summer after school was out, I took an all-day exam with four components, each 90 minutes of high-stress incorporation of the art and science of teaching ... of my knowledge of my profession.

I was not confident I'd certify the first year, and would have been fully satisfied to re-do some of the components of my work a second or even a third year. I was surprised and proud to have attained my National Board Certification on the first try. That didn't mean I was better than other teachers who needed more time. It meant I did attain, just a bit earlier than some of my friends did.

PROFOUNDLY CHANGED APPROACH

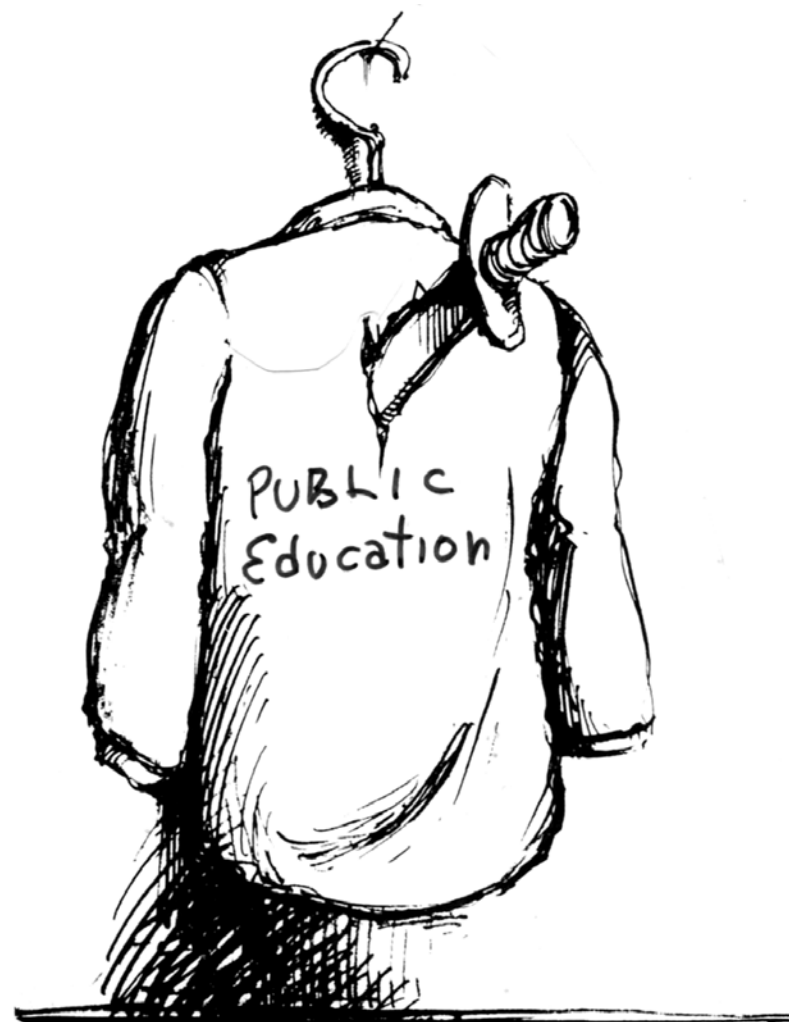
This experience profoundly changed the way I approach my profession - my classroom and my own learning. Now every lesson must result in identifiable student learning. Now students become fellow researchers and reflect on their own learning. Now everything I do, or my students do, must have, as its ultimate goal, learning.

My own practice changed fundamentally as I analyzed everything I do in the classroom and outside the classroom. I've become more efficient, because everything we do must have impact on student learning.

But my National Board Certification also gave me confidence. I invented a new class based on the learning principles I'd absorbed through my NBC journey. I carefully crafted the course to include the Five Core Propositions, and the Standards for English Language Arts. I can easily articulate why we do everything we do, every day. There is no wasted time or wasted opportunities for learning.

We are all fellow learners and researchers. We're in this together.

One of the agreements for receiving a scholarship through Education Leadership Oklahoma is to pay it forward ... to work as a candidate support provider. I did that from the very beginning, and became more and more involved with the premier program Oklahoma provides. I have worked with NBCTs from around the state, in every certified area. I've rubbed shoulders with the giants of our pro-



fession. I've trained new candidates, I've taught workshops for large and small groups.

I am now a Regional Coordinator, and help organize, with the help of other dedicated NBCTs, support group meetings for candidates. My groups are strong and positive. My candidates achieve certification at high rates.

WORKING MIRACLES EVERY DAY

Through my work with candidates and candidate support providers, I have met teachers who work miracles every day. They are committed to the profession and pursue hours and hours, days and days, weeks and weeks of professional development, not because they're required to, but because they hunger to know more so they can reach their students.

They are willing to take the risk of going through National Board Certification, to hold themselves accountable, to be that role model of a life-long learner. They are willing to admit when they need to adjust their lessons to assure students learn.

So far, I've had the privilege of shepherding three of my former students through the National Board process. I've always said they're part of my legacy to the profession: they'll carry on my passion for teaching in their own classrooms.

But the legacy will stop with them. Their students may never have the opportunity we've had to nurture budding teachers and inspire a new generation of NBCTs.

STATE POLICYMAKERS LUKEWARM

My involvement led me to Southern Nazarene University and their Master of Arts in Curriculum and Instruction: MACI. I have had the privilege of being an adjunct instructor, teaching reflective thinking and writing. This masters' program was designed around the Five Core Propositions of National Board. The courses provided both a strong background on the National Board process, but also grounding in the curriculum and instruction issues that all graduate students must know.

Each student, after graduating with her or his master's degree, could choose to pursue National Board Certification with the support of the faculty of SNU. MACI was an amazing degree program that inspired some of the best teachers I ever met.

I deliberately used past tense verbs discussing this program, because SNU, based on the lukewarm support of the policymakers in Oklahoma, has shut down this program. MACI will no longer work in concert with National Board Propositions, because the scholarship program for ELO has been placed on a moratorium.

Now, State Superintendent Janet Barresi chose not to request funds for the stipends NBCTs earn through their covenant with the state of Oklahoma. She did not ask for money; she characterized this decision as heartbreaking. I see it as cold-blooded.

ACCOMPLISHED TEACHERS DESERTED

She chose to desert nearly 3,000 of the most professional, accomplished teachers in her state. She chose to break that covenant. She didn't even try to find the funding.

Of course the stipends are important in every teacher's decision to pursue National Board Certification. Teachers in Oklahoma are always paid near the bottom of any ranking, regional and national. Many teachers are forced to leave the profession altogether or leave the classroom to join administration in order to support their families.

Often National Board Certification is seen by teachers as a golden opportunity

See BETRAYAL Page 8

GOP's Cynical Attack On Affirmative Action

By Nathaniel Batchelder

State Question 759 – prohibiting affirmative action programs in Oklahoma – will be on the ballot in November 2012. It must become a rallying cry for all justice advocates to mobilize as never before to defeat it.

Needed is a "Diversity Coalition for Victory" against this, and all assaults from the organized right wing. A coalition of all populations currently under attack by the right would be a winning majority. Such a coalition could turn politics around in Oklahoma.

So-called "conservatives" in America have a terrible agenda: They cut taxes on the rich and corporations, cut programs serving vulnerable citizens, and reverse protective regulations, allowing corporations to pollute and financial institutions to operate irresponsibly. They attack public education, health care programs, and cut budgets of police and fire-fighters rather than ask wealthy Americans to fund a civilized society.

How can they win elections with such an agenda? The answer is they never mention their agenda.

FEAR-MONGERING CAMPAIGNS

Instead, they run campaigns of fear, slander, and divisiveness, making people afraid of one another, and encouraging them to vote for "conservatives" to protect them from each other.

Conservatives claim to be the party of family values and Christian morality, condemning homosexuality and opposing women's right to make reproductive decisions and control their own bodies.

They vilify Muslims with wild exaggerations, and insult Hispanics by supporting Arizona-style "immigration laws" claiming they are protecting your job.

Now their focus in Oklahoma is on Affirmative Action, the laws that give minority contractors a fair shake in state and federal contracts. The shock-jocks on FOX radio inflame the uninformed by implying that affirmative action is "discrimination against white people."

WOMEN BENEFITTED MOST

In truth, affirmative action has done more for women than for any other group, and states that have repealed affirmative action are going backward in fair opportunities for women and minorities.

Here's what conservatives have done to Oklahoma:

In 2004, the Oklahoma Legislature – still balanced with both political parties – put on the ballot a state question for a Constitutional Amendment to ban gay marriage. Same-gender marriage was already illegal in Oklahoma, so a constitutional amendment was hardly needed.

It was a strategy to incite homophobic fears and inspire ultra-conservative religious leaders to call their flocks to go to the polls and vote against gay marriage. They did, and while there, most of them voted for the agenda recommended by Rush Limbaugh. It worked, and conservatives took a majority in both houses of the Legislature.

ONE-TRICK PONY STRATEGY

So they did it again: In 2010, they got SQ 755 on the ballot to prohibit the use of Islamic Sharia law in Oklahoma Courts: a law to prevent something that had never happened and is illegal anyway. It worked again, and so-called conservative candidates swept the state in unprecedented numbers.

Divisiveness works so well, they are trying it again: SQ 759 would outlaw Af-

firmative Action policies in Oklahoma. Appealing to racism, they are attempting to manipulate Oklahoma voters to go to the polls again. Supporting the bill, Rep. Sally Kern said on the House floor that "African-Americans and women just don't work as hard."

Our challenge is clear. We must organize and mobilize a Diversity Coalition for Victory to defeat SQ 759 in 2012, and return reasonable voices to state government.

SHADID SHOWS THE WAY

We must organize voters to flock to the polls in huge numbers to vote "no" to the politics of hate-mongering and divisiveness that have been so successful for so-called conservatives.

Ed Shadid showed us the way with his victory in the recent Ward 2 City Council election. Instead of shrinking in fear, he boldly reached out to minorities, outcasts, and disenfranchised populations.

He visited the Muslim Mosque in Ward 2 and found that it is the worship home for some 500 families. He reached out to gays and lesbians, promising to support their issues in City Council business.

His opponent Charlie Swinton never answered the questionnaire from the Gay/Lesbian Political Caucus.

ROVIAN NEGATIVISM DEFEATED

Ed Shadid attended events sponsored by women's groups for reproductive justice. He promised to represent all the people, for the common good of society.

Ed's opponent Charlie Swinton's campaign, and the PAC supporting him, ridiculed Ed Shadid as a vegetarian, for having a solar collector on his roof, for being endorsed by the Sierra Club, for associating with outcast groups. It backfired magnificently.

On election day, Ed Shadid won with a landslide 62.4% of the vote. He won by embracing a coalition of diversity, and counting on principled Oklahomans to be inspired by his courageous integrity. The Swinton campaign, grounded on classic Karl Rovian negativism, lost big.

COMMON GOOD, GENERAL WELFARE

Now we must build an Oklahoma Diversity Coalition of reasonable voters committed to the common good and general welfare of all, including environmental protection in America.

When we defeat SQ 759 to prohibit Affirmative Action, we will vote "no" to the divisive hate-mongering politics that so-called conservatives use to further their terrible agenda.

That agenda is obvious and exposed: to cut taxes on the rich and corporations, cut programs serving vulnerable populations, and reverse environmental and economic regulations.

Our victory on SQ 759, and the election of reasonable candidates in Oklahoma, will say "no" to the slimy strategies of Karl Rove and Rush Limbaugh, who laugh while America is torn apart for the benefit of their pay-masters: America's billionaires and corporations that would eliminate all regulations protecting the economy and the environment.

This is the winning strategy to take back the America we once knew, a nation and a government of, for and by all The People.

– The author lives in Oklahoma City

BETRAYAL

From Page 7

to stay in the job they love, and be able to provide for their families.

These stipends are part of that covenant Oklahoma policymakers and teachers entered into. If teachers will continue to teach in a public school in Oklahoma, the statute will provide \$5,000 stipends to those teachers.

Everyone benefited. Students had some of the strongest, most able teachers available. Schools had highly qualified teachers in classrooms. Teachers received a working wage that allowed them to stay in the profession.

The largest beneficiary was the state of Oklahoma, who had bragging rights: we ranked ninth in the nation in the number of National Certified Teachers.

Now, an entire program of scholarships, support, and stipends is probably dead. Teachers see that the state of Oklahoma does not live up to its promises. The covenant has been broken, not by the teachers who come to school every day and educate students, but by the superintendent who never asked for the funds.

I know the statute is clear: if funds are available, teachers will earn their stipend. But, if the superintendent never asks for the funds, how do we know they weren't available? Has the letter of the law, as well as the spirit of the law been violated?

I'm near the end of my career; I can retire tomorrow. My loss to the teaching ranks of Oklahoma is a natural occurrence. But I hear the anger and the frustration of many teachers who could easily leave the profession, or leave the state. They will do that.

They'll be replaced by someone ... but not a National Board Certified Teacher. They'll be replaced by an inexperienced person who may or may not have a strong background in the art and science of teaching, of the curriculum and pedagogy necessary to help students learn and achieve.

If the ELO program is reinstated, I fear no young teacher will trust the state

again. I fear no one will take the chance, the challenge to hold his or her practice up to the most rigorous standards in the profession. No one will be willing to risk his or her family's future to the whims and politics of our policymakers.

I grieve that I'll never work with new candidates, eager to show their worth, or with advanced candidates, saddened that they did not achieve certification their first or even second year, but determined to see the challenge through. I grieve that I'll never receive those hugs of joy of new NBCTs. I grieve that I'll never console another amazing teacher who ended up needing an extra year to certify.

My heart breaks at what I've lost – not the money, but the excitement of watching candidates grow and reflect on their practice, and the pride in my state that made it all happen.

I grieve for our state.

I am a National Board Certified Teacher. I know first-hand what we have lost in Oklahoma. We have lost university programs. We have lost a generation of teachers. We have lost a generation of students.

– Claudia Swisher teaches at Norman North High School and is a National Board Certified Teacher. More of her essays appear at www.okobserver.net.

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DHS Cuts Blow To Working Families, Kids

By David Blatt

The Oklahoma Department of Human Services recently approved changes to the state's child care subsidy program that will increase hardships for struggling low-income working families, threaten access to quality child care, and harm child care providers who serve low-income children.

DHS' actions were precipitated by budget shortfalls for the upcoming year exceeding \$30 million. The Legislature reduced state appropriations to DHS for FY '12 by a modest \$6 million, or 1.1%, compared to FY '11. However, the agency also faces the loss of one-time funding in this year's budget, expected increases in program utilization, and higher employee benefit costs.

To balance its budget, DHS proposed a series of measures, which included voluntary buyouts of 231 positions, mostly within its field operations division for children and family services, and cuts in contracts for various social services.

However, the largest program cuts are concentrated on the child-care subsidy program. Funded through a combination of federal and state dollars, the subsidy program provides assistance to qualifying families by paying all or part of their child care expenses while parents or caretakers are working, going to school or receiving training.

37,000 CHILDREN SERVED

Children may attend licensed child care centers or family child care homes, which are paid a daily amount for subsidized children based on the child's age and the facility's quality of care. Families above a certain income level contribute a monthly co-payment.

The program currently serves some 37,000 children in just under 24,000 families.

DHS has adopted two major changes aimed at reducing the cost of the child-care subsidy program effective Aug. 1:

- Raising monthly co-payments by 20% to 35% depending on income and the number of children in care. The increase is expected to affect some 13,000 families and reduce annual costs for DHS by \$5.8 million. Families with income below \$850 per month will continue not to have a co-payment obligation;

- Lowering the eligibility threshold for families newly applying for child care subsidies. The maximum monthly income for families not currently receiving subsidies will drop from \$2,425 to \$2,125 for a family with one child in care; and from \$3,625 to \$2,925 for families with three or more subsidized children.

Families in the higher income brackets who are currently receiving benefits will remain eligible.

DHS projects annual cost savings of \$3.8 million from this measure.

WORKING FAMILIES WILL FEEL PINCH

These measures can be expected to have a significant financial impact on low-income working families.



For example, the monthly co-payment for a single parent working full-time at \$9.50 per hour will increase by \$41 – from \$162 to \$203 – if she has two children in subsidized care. The child-care co-payment, equivalent to \$1.21 per hour, will now absorb over 12% of her wages.

Meanwhile, as a result of the eligibility changes, a two-parent family with two children where both parents make the minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour will no longer be eligible for subsidized care.

Coming at a time of rising costs for fuel, health insurance, and other household necessities, increased child care expenditures will squeeze already tight family budgets and place greater strain on public and private safety net providers.

Faced with higher child care costs, some parents may choose to pull their

See DHS Page 16

Cox's Rant Standard GOP Malarkey

By Mark Burkett

As a long-time Observer subscriber, I usually assume that, just because a particular article or opinion appears in its pages, it doesn't necessarily mean that management agrees with all the views expressed therein. From time to time, however, I have to wonder why certain examples of conservative propaganda of the kind that usually shows up in the pages of the Daily Disappointment, or the Oklahoma Constitution, or some similar right-wing mouth-piece appear instead in The Observer.

Rep. Doug Cox's op-ed "Entitlements Are The Biggest Problem" in the June 25 Observer seems so oddly out of place, I can't help but wonder if Frosty or Arnold agree with any of the assertions he makes in it. If not, why include it in your relatively limited space?

Are Observer readers supposed to accept Dr. Cox's claim that the reason why most "Americans [who] can work [aren't] working" is because Big Government welfare payments are "too rich," and not because Big Business wages for low-skilled, "entry-level" jobs are too low?

Is there really anything novel or noteworthy or edifying about a wealthy Republican politician declaring that most Americans getting public assistance in this country don't really deserve it?

Dr. Cox refers to seeing "too many folks who are perfectly capable of working but have managed to get on disability." I don't know what Oklahomans in this category he claims to be "seeing," but, for whatever it's worth, here's my family's experience.

In 1994, my wife's brother was in a near-fatal car accident in Texas. The head-on collision drove his right leg back up through his pelvis, shattering both and almost killing him. Since he had no health insurance, he ended up at Ben Taub — Houston's "charity" hospital — where he received just enough treatment to "stabilize" him. By the time he was prematurely discharged, he was told that he still needed further surgery and extensive physical therapy to fully recuperate. He never received either the surgery or the therapy because he had no insurance and had also lost his job.

Standing and walking was a struggle, let alone working a 40-hour week. Anybody watching him hobble into a room, leaning on his cane could see that he was obviously disabled. Nevertheless, his first application for Social Security Disability was DENIED. Every subsequent application was also DENIED. Eventually, he learned that, in stark contrast to the easy and automatic approval process depicted by Dr.

Cox, MOST initial applications for SSI in this country are ROUTINELY denied. It was only when he moved up to Oklahoma — and only after he got a lawyer — that my brother-in-law finally got to "collect a government check," and only then after a lengthy WAITING PERIOD.

More recently, one of my wife's friends from work lost her job when she became unable to function after being diagnosed with Stage II breast cancer. A diabetic, her chemotherapy resulted in an atypical side effect that left her extremely weak and unable to walk, let alone work.

Are SSI benefits any easier to get today than they were years ago for my brother-in-law? Evidently not: her first, unassisted application for Social Security Disability was DENIED. As if that weren't enough, she can no longer live with her sister to make ends meet since it threatens her sister's Section 8 housing assistance eligibility. [So much for "[t]hey may qualify for additional subsidies to help them with their rent."]

For a guy you ranked as No. 1 in The Observer's list of Oklahoma's Top 10 "best" legislators, Dr. Cox's views publicized June 25 seem like standard GOP BS to me.

According to Republicans, if you're an honest, God-fearing, hard-working, blue-collar, working

stiff Okie, the people screwing you over are never bankers or businessmen or — God-forbid — certain self-serving doctors. No, it's SSI disability cheats, "welfare queens," meth-heads, "union bosses," public employees — anybody or everybody except Republican politicians and/or businessmen.

When Republicans cynically pit one non-elite social group against another for political gain, it's called "straight-talking realism." When Democrats and/or liberals point out that massive income inequality eventually leads to economic collapse and social disorder, they're instantly accused of "class warfare."

As a native Okie myself, it never ceases to amaze me that, in a state with a higher percentage of people already in poverty and/or on welfare than in most other states, so many of my fellow Okies never seem to notice that they could easily be one accident, job loss, fire, flood, tornado or serious illness away from needing the very "Big Government" public assistance they keep holding in such contempt.

Dr. Cox's op-ed — and your inclusion of it in the June 25 edition — only serves to irresponsibly reinforce and perpetuate this mind-set.

— The author lives in Oklahoma City

BOOKS

'We Fear What We Do Not Understand'

By Derrek D. Belase

RISING ROAD

A True Tale of Love, Religion and Race in America

By Sharon Davies

Oxford University Press

352 pages, \$27.95

Like many readers of this fine publication, my interests in life are wide and varied. If pressed to make a Top 10 list of my own interests, sociology, law enforcement and the United Methodist Church would be in the top five.

Those three interests come together in a powerful, yet tragic way in a book written by Ohio State University law professor Sharon Davies. Her thoroughly researched, well-documented book *Rising Road* chronicles the murder of a Catholic priest in Birmingham, AL at the hands of a "local deacon" in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Precipitating the murder was the marriage of Deacon Edward Stephenson's daughter, Ruth, to Pedro Gussman, a local wallpaper hanger of Puerto Rican descent. Stephenson, a member of the Ku Klux Klan and a barber who gave up that profession after shooting himself in the foot, was known around Birmingham as the "Marrying Parson."

Though he was not an officially ordained Methodist clergyman, he earned his living hanging around the courthouse and offering to marry persons after they received their marriage licenses from the clerk of the court.

These hasty marriages typically took place in a darkened corner of a hallway, but there was at least one instance in which Stephenson was actually allowed to conduct a wedding for someone who was in jail waiting to stand trial for murder.

However, not even his love for marrying churchless couples was as life-consuming for Stephenson as was his hate for Roman Catholicism.

When his daughter was 12, he caught her talking to the local priest, Father James Coyle, on the front porch of his rectory. But the rage he felt that day was nothing compared to the day he found out his daughter had converted to the Roman-based faith AND married a Catholic some 20 years her senior.

So enraged was Stephenson over these actions that he shot Father Coyle on his porch and then calmly walked to the local courthouse where he turned himself in to authorities.

What was compelling about Davies book was not only her recapitulation of the events leading up to the murder and subsequent trial of Stephenson, where he was found not guilty by a jury of 12 white Protestant men, but also the way she wove together a history of early 20th Century race and religious relations in the South. It was not a pretty picture.

Many people were appalled at the not guilty verdict, including the governor of Alabama who said, "We have not advanced far from savagery or barbarism if murder is to be justified on account of the religious creed of the victim."

Regardless of the governor's words, the anti-Catholic sentiment in the United States at the time of the Stephenson murder was astonishing.

In some states, there were laws on the books allowing warrantless searches of Catholic institutions and of course, marriage to a "Negro or any descendent of a Negro" was not allowed. It would be another 46 years before the U.S. Supreme Court weighed in on the issue. By that time, Stephenson's defense attorney, Hugo Black, would be a member of the court which unanimously struck down this overtly racist law.

A lesson in history is not the only reason to read this book. There are certainly some themes in the book with which modern day readers might identify.

Sadly, the issues regarding interfaith dialogue and misunderstanding of another's faith still haunt us. While relationships between Catholics and Protestants seem to be amicable in almost all parts of the United States today, ask any Muslim or Mormon if they face scrutiny from those who do not understand their religious backgrounds and core beliefs.

Human nature is such that we fear what we do not understand.

THE ORIGIN OF A SPECIES EXPLAINED

A woman and her 10-year-old son were riding in a taxi in Birmingham, England. It was raining and all the prostitutes were standing under the awnings.

"Mum," said the boy, "what are all those women doing?"

"They're waiting for their husbands to get off work" she replied.

The taxi driver turns round and says, "Geez lady, why don't you tell him the truth? They're hookers, boy! They have sex with men for money."

The little boy's eyes get wide and he says, "Is that true, Mum?"

His mother, glaring hard at the driver, answers in the affirmative.

After a few minutes, the kid asks, "Mum, what happens to the babies those women have?"

"Most of them become taxi drivers" she said.

After reading this book, I have committed myself even more fully to a comprehensive understanding of other religions.

However, for all of the morally repugnant situations which are written about in this book, there is something redeeming about the fact that Stephenson's defense attorney eventually became a crucial part of the movement to desegregate America and give equal rights to African-Americans.

After years of serving as a defense attorney, Black was eventually appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court by Franklin D. Roosevelt. During his time on the court, he sided with his fellow justices on a number of cases expanding civil rights to those he once seemed to loathe, including *Brown v. Board of Education*, Topeka, KS which finally desegregated public schools.

The oft-quoted line, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it," seems apropos to this story.

Regardless of your own religious beliefs, it does us all good to be reminded that we must exercise restraint in dealing with those with whom we disagree or do not understand. In a religiously pluralistic world like the one we find ourselves in today, we must seek first to understand before we can expect to be understood.

- The author is senior pastor of Highland Park United Methodist Church in Stillwater

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ORU Law School Grad

Michele Bachmann Is Moving Up Very Fast

U.S. Rep. Michele Bachmann, who's announced she's running for president on the Republican ticket, was a member of the last graduating law school class at Tulsa's Oral Roberts University.

Now a resident of St. Paul, MN, she organized the Tea Party Caucus in the U.S. House. At 55, she's a dazzling presence in national politics – mainly for her goofs and personal attacks on President Barack Obama.

"We cannot risk giving President Obama four more years to dismantle our nation," she said in announcing her candidacy. "That's why I've made the decision to get in this race."

She suggested at a public forum that President Obama secretly wants Medicare to go bankrupt so retirees would be forced to enroll in the new national health care law.

WANTS MEDICARE BROKE

"This hasn't been talked about very much – the president's plan for senior citizens is Obamacare," she told party activists. She added, "I think very likely what the president intends is that Medicare will go broke and ultimately that answer will be Obamacare for senior citizens."

She told the Associated Press she will take on the Democrats and Republicans in her own party if they don't toe the Tea Party line.

She and Sarah Palin are a boon to late night comics. Such as her claim that taxpayers would be stuck with a \$200 million per day tab for President Obama's trip to India.

She has also mistakenly identified New Hampshire as the site of the Revolutionary War's opening shots. In fact, that key moment in history occurred in Massachusetts.

She has served three terms in the U.S. House, known for her fierce campaigning and misstatement of facts. Still, a majority in her district adores her.

A CARTER VOLUNTEER

While attending Winona State College in Minnesota she was a volunteer in Democrat Jimmy Carter's presidential campaign, attending his inauguration in Washington.

She said Carter's evangelical Christian beliefs attracted her to campaign for him. She gave up on him, she said, because of his flawed attempt to lift the country out of a recession.

Her megaphone [yes, megaphone] is a trademark that she carries to various rallies.

Her initial job after finishing ORU Law School was working for the IRS – the same IRS agents she says will enforce President Obama's Affordable Health Care Act.

Her first venture into politics was losing a 1999 school board race. Then she was Michele Amble. She married her college boyfriend Marcus Bachmann and they now have five children.

SOUGHT CHRISTIAN VALUES

She went to ORU's law school because she said it graduated students with



Christian values. One of her teachers was Anita Hill, later to be in the national spotlight for her accusations against Clarence Thomas. She is staunchly pro-life.

Her fellow students told the AP that while she lived in Tulsa, she was a pleasant person and not outspoken on politics. The law school subsequently transferred to Pat Robertson's CBN [now Regent] University in Virginia Beach, VA.

After her school board loss she toppled a sitting state senator in 2000. She won an open seat in Congress six years later.

She's a nightmare to work for – six chiefs of staff in the past four years. She has also lost five press secretaries, five legislative directors and three communications directors during the same period.

MOVING TO PAWLENTY

Some of her former staffers have gone to work for former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty, also a candidate for president.

The right-wing Minnesota congresswoman kicked off her campaign during the first national debate, which necessarily made it newsworthy, and then surprised a lot of people with a strong performance.

Based on the debate alone, Bachmann was the one who emerged as the anti-Mitt Romney from the otherwise drab field. That is supposed to delight Romney's advisers, who see her as less viable than the more accomplished Pawlenty.

She served the Tea Party all their favorites: "I want to announce tonight President Obama is a one-term president. I will not rest until I repeal Obamacare. There is no other agency like the EPA It should really be renamed the job-killing organization of America. I fought behind closed doors against my own party on TARP."

Is Bachmann stark raving mad? Of course she is. But she was also confident and prepared, positioning herself as the candidate ready to carry the banner for

OH, MICHELE!

Alternet, an online news service, has been keeping track of Michelle Bachmann public utterances. Here are the worst:

- **BACHMANN WARNED "THE LION KING" WAS GAY PROPAGANDA:** At the November 2004 EdWatch National Education Conference, Bachmann said the "normalization" of homosexuality would lead to "desensitization." "Very effective way to do this with a bunch of second graders is take a picture of 'The Lion King' for instance, and a teacher might say, 'Do you know that the music for this movie was written by a gay man?' The message is: I'm better at what I do, because I'm gay."

- **BACHMANN CLAIMED ABOLISHING THE MINIMUM WAGE WOULD CREATE JOBS:** While testifying in front of the Minnesota Senate in 2005, Bachmann said, "Literally, if we took away the minimum wage – if conceivably it was gone – we could potentially virtually wipe out unemployment completely because we would be able to offer jobs at whatever level." This isn't remotely true. Even simply reducing the minimum wage would, as Paul Krugman noted, "at best do nothing for employment; more likely it would actually be contractionary."

- **BACHMANN CLAIMED THAT SCIENTISTS ARE SUPPORTERS OF INTELLIGENT DESIGN:** During a 2006 debate, Bachmann said, "There are hundreds and hundreds of scientists, many of them holding Nobel Prizes, who believe in intelligent design." This was, and is, not true.

- **BACHMANN CLAIMED TERRI SCHIAVO WAS "HEALTHY:":** Not long after Terri Schiavo died, Bachmann said she would have voted for the Palm Sunday Compromise because Schiavo "was healthy. She had brain damage – there was brain damage, there was no question. But from a health point of view, she was not terminally ill." An autopsy found that Schiavo had suffered irreversible brain damage and her brain, said the medical examiner, was "profoundly atrophied."

- **BACHMANN LIKENED VISITING IRAQ TO VISITING MALL OF AMERICA:** In 2007, Bachmann returned from a junket to Iraq and told her colleagues, "[T]here's a commonality with the Mall of America, in that it's on that proportion. There's marble everywhere. The other thing I remarked about was there is water everywhere." As ThinkProgress documented at the time, the comparison was preposterous.

- **BACHMANN CLAIMED THAT CARBON DIOXIDE IS "HARMLESS:":** In 2008, a Stanford scientist revealed "direct links" between increased levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and "increases in human mortality" – globally, he found that as many as "20,000 air-pollution-related deaths per year per degree Celsius may be due to this greenhouse gas." The next year, Bachmann, who is not a scientist, said that "carbon dioxide is portrayed as harmful. But there isn't even one study that can be produced that shows that carbon dioxide is a harmful gas."

- **BACHMANN CALLED FOR A CONGRESSIONAL WITCH HUNT:** Pivoting off the news of Barack Obama's alleged relationship to former Weather Underground member William Ayers, and his former pastor, Rev. Jeremiah Wright, Bachmann accused the candidate of having "anti-American views." She then suggested that Congressional liberals – including Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid – ought to be subject to "an exposé" by the media because of their views. "I think people would love to see that," she told a stunned Chris Matthews.

- **BACHMANN SUGGESTED GAY SINGER SHOULD REPENT AFTER GETTING CANCER:** Bachmann saw Melissa Etheridge's cancer as a teachable moment: "Unfortunately she is now suffering from breast cancer, so keep her in your prayers," she said in November 2004. "This may be an opportunity for her now to be open to some spiritual things, now that she is suffering with that physical disease. She is a lesbian."

- **BACHMANN BOASTED ABOUT BREAKING THE LAW:** In advance of the 2010 national Census, Bachmann told The Washington Times that she would break the law by not completing the forms. "I know for my family, the only question we will be answering is how many people are in our home," she said. "We won't be answering any information beyond that, because the Constitution doesn't require any information beyond that."

- **BACHMANN CLAIMED THAT GLENN BECK COULD SOLVE THE DEBT CRISIS:** During a February trip to South Carolina, Bachmann told an audience, "I think if we give Glenn Beck the numbers, he can solve this [the national debt]."

Democrats should be so lucky to have her on the national ticket.

'You'd Be Crazy Not To Watch'

Bachmann's Run Absurd, Surreal, Insulting

By Mark Morford

Meanwhile, while you were sleeping, while you were allowing your attention to wander to issues more pressing, heartwarming and good, such as gay New Yorkers in Love and goofy dogs running marathons, easily the most insane and wide-eyed squirrelmonkey pseudo-politician in your lifetime announced that she is hereby running for president of the United States.

And by "running" she does not mean putting on those supercute little silver jogging shoes with the funny blinky LED lights in the heels that she saw at DSW that one time, because that would be silly and not make any sense at all, and she wants people to understand she is very serious about this campaign thing and is definitely not as totally loopy bats--t crazy as your demented Aunt Sylvia with the twitchy eye, 23 parakeets and the addiction to little tubes of Oscar Meyer bologna wrapped around a fistful of oxycodone.

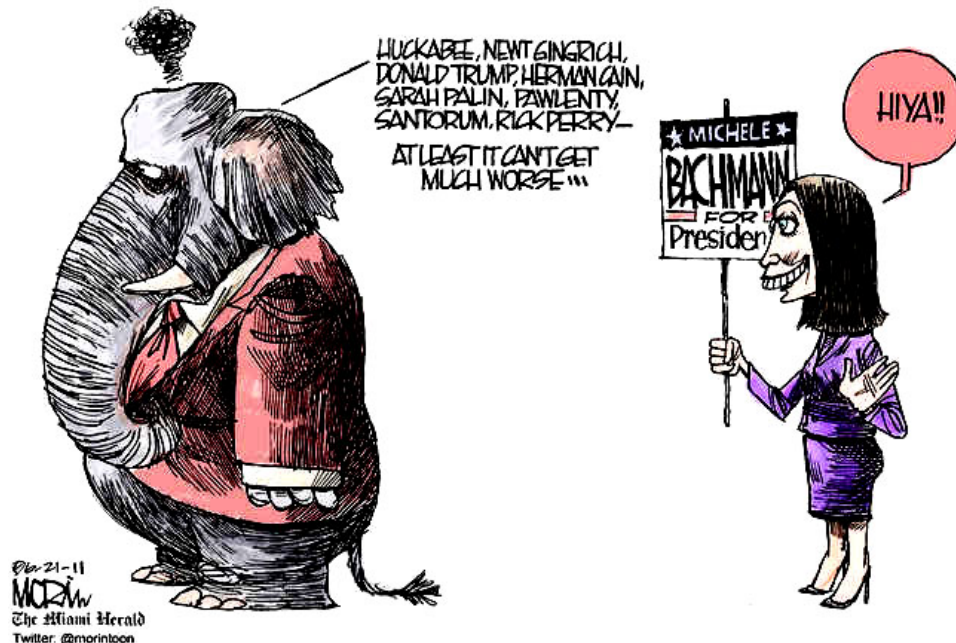
Except, of course, that she totally is.

Yes, Michele Bachmann is running for president. Michele Bachmann, fundamentalist Christian zealot, paranoid isolationist, lowbrow conspiracy theorist, heavily shellacked automaton, anti-choice anti-gay anti-everything neo-Stepford throwback and easily the flat-out nuttiest female ever to raise a hugely depressing \$13 million for her clumsy campaign launch, Michele wants to lead us all to salvation.

Well OK, not all of us exactly, mostly the whites and the rich and people who collect colorful black-light posters featuring sweaty, bare-chested Jesus riding a T-Rex into the Castro to smite the gays. But you know, that's nitpicking.

And why? Why on earth is she running? Because apparently certain key GOP advisers were partially sober just long enough to tell her, well, not that she actually has a shot, not that she can possibly make it past the second round of debates without imploding, but that she could, you know, "change the conversation."

That's just an educated guess, by the way, because "you can change the conversation" is basically shorthand for "score big points with your rabid constituents," "make national headlines you'd never make otherwise," "suck in piles of money from the freaky old Koch brothers," and



"maybe, just maybe become the next Sarah Palin, who herself isn't really Sarah Palin anymore, given how numb the country has become to her endless malapropisms and embarrassing public moments, thus leaving a huge opening for someone even more dangerously bizarre to step in and mortify the human race." Thanks, Minnesota!

That Bachmann can now reference God and Jesus more times than Sarah Palin can reference mama grizzlies and Paul Revere? That she could half-heartedly represent the Tea Party in all its ragged, nonsensical, Coors Light-filled, garage band glory? That she can now espouse any one of her laundry list of bizarre claims, including [but far from limited to] the idea that AmeriCorps is a government brainwashing program, that Michelle Obama wants to force all women to breast feed, Sharia law is coming to middle America, Creationism is fact, global warming is a hoax, the Treasury has a secret plan to create a "one world" currency, health care reform will send kids on "abortion field trips," and that Obama might use new census data to round up Americans and put them in camps? Baby, that's just for starters.

But let this not solely be a column detailing the well-documented and – let's just admit it – hugely entertaining insanity of Michele Bachmann. I don't nearly have the space, and Matt Taibbi's fantastic Rolling Stone piece, combined with Mother Jones' disturbing three-page list of assorted Bachmann bombs, does a far better job of cataloguing her big box of crazy than I ever could.

Let us instead pause for a moment as we offer wayward and sidelong thanks to ... Hillary Clinton.

You read that right. For without Hillary, there would be no Michele. Without Hillary to pave the way for all shapes and IQs of women to follow her lead, well, Bachmann would still be cruising the wealthy suburbs of Minnesota, hurling Bibles at terrified children from the trunk of her pink Lexus.

Let us briefly recall all those lifetimes ago – going on four years now – when Hillary was in top form as presidential candidate, when all the talk surrounded whether or not America was possibly ready for a female president and everyone was all aflutter over the notion that an enormously intelligent, capable woman was finally about to shatter the last

political glass ceiling.

Well, Hillary did it. She might not have won, but she certainly made it far enough that no one is batting an eye that Bachmann is [well, questionably] female.

No one is flinching at the idea that a woman could run a successful campaign, be a serious candidate, possibly win the big prize.

In fact, so successful was Hillary in cementing this truism in the American consciousness, it's essentially negating the collective, agonized scream of all former Hillary supporters, all the feminists, pro-choicers, intelligent and empowered humans everywhere who are right now looking at Bachmann – the monstrous, reverse-world embodiment of everything Hillary is not – and going, "Oh sweet Jesus no, this is not what we meant at all."

Regardless, perhaps it is time for celebration. I know plenty of liberals – myself included – who were completely delighted to hear Bachmann declare her candidacy. Despite the dour alarmist bells sounded by a few pundits who think there's a very slim chance Bachmann could actually be a threat, her announcement pretty much guarantees the GOP race will be nothing short of a hilarious mad-cap clown car slugfest, with Jesus.

And if Newt Gingrich manages to stay afloat and Ron Paul and perhaps even Palin herself gets in there, and someone asks if Jesus is gay, gold should be the only valid currency or whether or not God can take Allah in a Wrestlemania grudge match? Let's just say, history will be made.

What's more, if all goes well, if the Bachmann Express does what it's expected to do and makes easy mockery of the last iotas of human intelligence the GOP has left, her campaign – already off to a cringing start when she confused John Wayne the actor with John Wayne Gacy the serial killer – could easily spell the end of the Tea Party once and for all. Bonus.

No matter how you slice it, it's guaranteed to be a stretch of political theater so wonderfully absurd and surreal, so brazenly insulting to history, grammar, science, logic, sexuality, common sense, gender and fundamental human progress itself, well, you'd have to be crazy not to watch it.

© SFGate

Voters To Congress: Don't Cut Medicare

July marks the 45th anniversary of the implementation of Medicare [July 1, 1966], following President Lyndon Johnson's signing of the landmark health care program on July 30, 1965.

Despite Medicare's great run, House Republicans voted almost unanimously to end it in order to pay for tax more breaks for Big Oil, hedge fund billionaires, huge corporations, and corporate jet owners.

Every Republican candidate for President supports this disastrous plan to end Medicare.

Here are some facts on the beloved program the GOP is devoted to destroying:

47 MILLION – The number of Americans for whom Medicare provides comprehensive health care.

51% – The number of Americans 65 or older who did not have health care be-

fore Medicare was passed, while today virtually all elderly Americans have health care thanks to Medicare.

30% – The number of elderly Americans who lived in poverty before Medicare, a number now reduced to 7.5%.

72% – The number of Americans in a recent poll who said that Medicare is "extremely" or "very" important to their retirement security.

What would the GOP plan to end Medicare mean?

- The end to Medicare's affordable package of guaranteed benefits.
- Immediate increase in prescription drug costs for seniors because the notorious "donut hole" would be re-opened.
- A massive shift of health care costs to seniors, more than doubling their out-of-pockets costs.

Resignation Or Impeachment?

Justice Thomas Is Disgrace To Court

By William Rivers Pitt

Ethics is knowing the difference between what you have a right to do and what is right to do. – Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart

For the sake of full disclosure, I will tell you that I do not like Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. In my opinion, he has no business sitting on the high court after the reprehensible treatment he forced Anita Hill to endure, and has been a disgrace to the bench for these last 20 years.

Anthony Weiner, one of Clarence Thomas' most ardent critics, was just run out of Washington, DC on a rail for behavior far less offensive; Thomas is lucky there was no such thing as Twitter when he was sexually harassing Hill, or he'd be chasing ambulances outside of muni court like the hack he is. He sits up there like a lump, never speaking or offering questions to petitioners, and has not had an original thought since his shameful Senate approval.

But his rapid intellectual presence on the bench is only a small part of the story. Thomas has, by all appearances, turned his position on the court into a license to print money for himself, his family, and a few choice friends.

PLAYING FAST, LOOSE WITH ETHICS

Conservative corruption is nothing new in Washington, but Thomas has taken the practice to bold new heights, and finally, people are beginning to sit up and take notice. Thomas has been playing fast and loose with judicial ethics for a long time now, and though Supreme Court justices are not technically beholden to judicial rules of ethics, his behavior has become so egregious as to warrant deep attention, and in my opinion, removal from the high court.

Thomas is in possession of a gorgeous bust of Abraham Lincoln, which was cast in 1914 by the noted sculptor Adolph Alexander Weinman. The bust was given as a gift to Thomas in 2001 by Christopher DeMuth, president of the notoriously right-wing American Enterprise Institute. The value of the bust was \$15,000. In the intervening years, AEI has filed briefs on three separate occasions regarding cases before the high court, and on each occasion, Thomas has ruled in their favor, often going beyond the scope they were seeking.

Thomas has attended fundraisers sponsored by the Koch Brothers in support of far-right media outlets, think tanks and groups. His habit of openly supporting right-wing causes has earned him an enormous amount of financial largesse from heavy-hitting right-wing donors, most notoriously Harlan Crow, who helped finance the "swift-boating" of John Kerry in the 2004 presidential election.

Crow financed a library project dedicated to Thomas, and gave Thomas' wife \$500,000 to create a Tea Party group that has since been throwing its weight all around the country. Crow, it should be noted, is a trustee of AEI, which gave Thomas that bust of Lincoln.

REAL SHOW CENTERS ON HIS WIFE

The list of his brazen improprieties runs long, but the real show centers around his wife, Ginni. Crow's massive donation allowed her to create Liberty Central [and later Liberty Consulting], an advocacy group dedicated to the overthrow of President Obama's health care reform legislation.

The conflict of interest inherent in this – given that Obama's health care legislation will certainly appear in some form before the Supreme Court – is manifest.

The high court's decision in Citizens United, which Thomas voted in favor of, has opened the financial floodgates for groups like Liberty Central, so Thomas' family appears to be reaping wonderful monetary gains from that decision.

And there is the fact that Thomas failed to disclose nearly \$1 million of income earned by his wife, and brushed off that failure to disclose with an "Oops, didn't understand the paperwork" excuse.

NEW STANDARDS FOR JUSTICES?

As has been stated, Supreme Court Justices are exempt from following the judicial code of conduct, but Thomas' behavior has been so egregious as to create a groundswell towards changing that. Nan Aron of the Alliance for Justice recently penned an editorial for the Washington Post which argued:

The behavior of Supreme Court justices has come under increasing scrutiny. Questions have been raised, for instance, about the propriety of Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas appearing at political strategy conferences hosted by the conservative Koch brothers. Other justices' activities have also prompted concerns that the line between justice and politics is increasingly blurred.

Regardless of whether one shares fears of politicization, disputes are inevitable so long as the nation's highest court operates with almost no compulsory ethics rules to guide – or constrain – behavior. The Supreme Court, whose members are shielded with lifetime appointments, is the only entity in our government that is not subject to mandatory ethics requirements. That is why reformers are calling for the Code of Conduct that governs all other federal judges to apply to the justices. Surely it makes no sense to have lesser standards for the highest court than those in place for lower courts.

The Code of Conduct doesn't frown on ideological activity but does prohibit political activity, and that's where Scalia and Thomas crossed the line. The fact that they did so with seeming impunity demonstrates that voluntary adherence to ethical standards doesn't always work. How to enforce such a code would be the hardest question, but there are options – possibilities include adjudication by other sitting justices, retired justices, lower court judges, the judicial conference or some combination of these. Exact methods could be explored in



congressional hearings.

HUGE EFFECT ON COURT

The bottom line is that if the judicial Code of Conduct becomes mandatory the number of events that would be placed off-limits is small. Meanwhile, the effect on the integrity of the court would be large.

Some suspect this is an effort by progressives to tweak justices they don't like. But the Supreme Court itself effectively answered that charge in 2009. In Caperton v. A.T. Massey Coal Co., a case that dealt with a West Virginia Supreme Court justice who ruled in favor of a corporation that had made large contributions to his campaign, the high court said that "codes of conduct serve to maintain the integrity of the judiciary and the rule of law."

The lifetime appointment for a Supreme Court Justice is not set in stone, as Justice Abe Fortas found out to his woe 40 years ago. Fortas, who was appointed to the bench by President Lyndon Johnson in 1968, was found to have taken large sums of money from litigants who appeared before the high court, including Phillip Morris. After a second pay-for-play arrangement benefiting Fortas was discovered, he was forced to resign in disgrace. As Ian Millhiser of Think-Progress argues:

It is difficult to distinguish Fortas' scandal from Thomas'. Like Fortas, Thomas accepted several very valuable gifts from parties who are frequently interested in the outcome of federal court cases. One of Thomas' benefactors has even filed briefs in his court since giving Thomas a \$15,000 gift, and Thomas has not recused himself from each of these cases.

Of course, Thomas is also the least likely justice to actually follow the command of precedent. Thomas embraces a discredited theory of the Constitution which would return America to a time when federal child labor laws were considered unconstitutional. His fellow justices criticize him for showing "utter disregard for our precedent and Congress' intent." Even ultra-conservative Justice Antonin Scalia finds Thomas' approach to the law too extreme – in Scalia's words, "I am a textualist. I am an originalist. I am not a nut."

IMPEACHMENT MAY BE ONLY REMEDY?

But Thomas' disregard for what has come before him changes nothing about the precedent he faces. If Abe Fortas had to resign his seat, so too should Clarence Thomas.

Given the simple, unavoidable fact that Thomas is bereft of both shame and a code of personal ethics, it is highly unlikely he will resign, especially if his wife is raking in the cash thanks to his decisions.

In that event, the final remedy of impeachment must be deployed. The Supreme Court must not be a place for partisan political fundraising or friendly-donor back-slapping. It is the place of last recourse in our system of laws, and must be as far above reproof as can be humanly managed.

Clarence Thomas is an embarrassment to the ideals of our system of government, and must go. He can choose to leave, or be removed by Constitutional remedy, but his time on the bench must be concluded.

He and Ginni will just have to go find honest work like everyone else.

© Truthout

Gas Fracking Is Worse Than Coal

By Nina Berman

Cassie Spencer said she nearly “had a cow” when she returned home one day and saw her yard sprinkled with little red flags, like land mine markers in a war zone. Her 5-year-old daughter was playing in the midst of them.

The family property had become a methane field. The cause: two Chesapeake gas wells 3,000 feet away that she never saw and doesn’t profit from had somehow been sending methane onto her property and into her water, and onto her neighbors’ properties on Paradise Road in Wyalusing, PA.

Testing by the Department of Environmental Protection [DEP] traced the methane to Chesapeake wells but the company has denied responsibility.

PROPERTY VALUES PLUNGE

The Spencers’ house, once valued at \$150,000, is now worth \$29,000. They have a methane monitor in their basement, a methane water filtration system in a backyard shed. They leave the door open when they take showers because with no bathroom windows they are afraid the house could blow up.

Their neighbors were forced to evacuate once already because of high methane levels. In the middle of their yard, a shaft resembling a shrunken flagpole vents gas from their wellhead.

Next to the doorway, a huge “water buffalo” storage container, a signature imprint of the collateral damage brought on by gas drilling, sits like a bloated child’s pool, filled with water, not fit for drinking.

THEY GET AWAY WITH IT

“We moved here because we love the woods. We wanted to stay here our whole lives,” Cassie said, speaking of her family, her husband Scott and their two small children. “We’re not asking for a lot and now they’re taking it all away. In a million years, I never would have thought that people could do this and get away

with it.”

All the damage occurred before the wells had even been “fracked,” which is set to happen later this year, and could make things even worse.

Hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, involves injecting a slurry of toxic chemicals, water and sand underground to release gas. Pennsylvania’s Gov. Tom Corbett, and most of the state’s politicians have embraced gas drilling and the tandem practice of fracking as a terrific boost for the economy and a “clean” alternative to foreign oil.

MINOR CONCERNS?

Water well contamination, spills, truck diesel emissions, migrating methane, and radioactivity waste leaked into rivers, have generally been dismissed as minor concerns or isolated problems. There is pressure to keep the picture positive despite more than 750 violations issued by DEP last year alone.

A new directive supported by the gas industry now requires inspectors to first get approval from Harrisburg before writing any violations, a move considered unprecedented in the agency’s history.

Recent visits to Bradford County, the heart of the Marcellus Shale region, tells a different story of the widespread human impact from gas drilling, not to mention a colossal reshaping of the natural environment. And more information is emerging about the dangers of fracking. A new report about to be released from Cornell University contends that fracking contributes to global warming as much, or even more, than coal.

The research sinks the gas industry’s long-standing claim that natural gas is a clean energy source. But people who live in gas-drilling areas already know this.

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Three Democrats Blast Well Fracking

Millions of gallons of potentially hazardous chemicals and known carcinogens were injected into wells by leading oil and gas service companies from 2005-09, according to a report by three House Democrats.

The report said 29 of the chemicals injected were known or suspected human carcinogens. They either were regulated under the Safe Drinking Water Act as risks to human health or listed as hazardous air pollutants under the Clean Air Act.

Methanol was the most widely used chemical. The substance is a hazardous air pollutant and is on the candidate list for potential regulation under the Safe Drinking Water Act.

The report was issued by Reps. Henry Waxman of California, Edward Markey of Massachusetts and Diana DeGette of Colorado.

The chemicals are injected during hydraulic fracturing, a process used in combination with horizontal drilling to allow access to natural gas reserves previously considered uneconomical.

The growing use of hydraulic fracturing has allowed natural gas production in the United States to reach levels not achieved since the early 1970s.

However, the process requires large quantities of water and fluids, injected underground at high volumes and pressure. The composition of these fluids ranges from a simple mixture of water and sand to more complex mixtures with chemical additives.

The report said that from 2005-09, the following states had at least 100,000 gallons of hydraulic fracturing fluids containing a carcinogen: Texas, Colorado, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Wyoming, North Dakota, New Mexico, Montana and Utah.

States with 100,000 gallons or more of fluids containing a regulated chemical under the Safe Drinking Water Act were: Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Oklahoma, Mississippi and North Dakota.

The report said many chemical components were listed as “proprietary” or “trade secret.”

“Hydraulic fracturing has opened access to vast domestic reserves of natural gas that could provide an important stepping stone to a clean energy future,” the report said.

“Yet, questions about the safety of hydraulic fracturing persist, which are compounded by the secrecy surrounding the chemicals used in hydraulic fracturing fluids. This analysis is the most comprehensive national assessment to date of the types and volumes of chemical used in the hydraulic fracturing process.”

The investigation of chemicals used in fracturing was started in the last Congress by the House Energy and Commerce Committee, which then was controlled by Democrats.

The committee asked the 14 leading oil and gas service companies to disclose the types and volumes of the hydraulic fracturing products they used between 2005 and 2009 and the chemical contents of those products.

Good Ship Tax Cut Has Been Mothballed

By Froma Harrop

Poll after poll shows that the American people want higher taxes. That’s not the same as *liking* higher taxes. The people have simply concluded that higher taxes are preferable to the alternative -- so vividly portrayed in the Republican plan to do away with government guarantees in Medicare.

And Republicans don’t even have that ugly option to offer anymore. After voters in western New York rioted over it by handing a formerly safe GOP congressional seat to a Democrat, many Republicans have been jumping ship. Odd that House Speaker John Boehner continues to sail on with nothing in the hold but a vague threat to let America default on its debt if ... if what? If Democrats refuse to make the drastic spending cuts Republicans are afraid to push.

What do the American people think? A Quinnipiac poll found that 69%, including nearly half of Republicans, want taxes raised on households making more than \$250,000.

A later Ipsos/Reuters polls shows three-fifths wanting to raise taxes to cut the deficit.

When President Obama recently urged Republicans to accept some tax increases as part of a deficit-cutting deal, the ship stayed dead in the water. “The American people know tax hikes destroy jobs,” Boehner stated.

Is that so? Perhaps the people remember that in 1993 President Clinton signed a tax increase that helped set off an economic boom and job bonanza. Why? America had shown a willingness to start paying its bills, and investors responded with enthusiasm. In this case, higher taxes created jobs.

Clinton left a budget surplus that his successor, George W. Bush, quickly squandered with tax cuts. Even then, polls showed public support for them only on the understanding that the surpluses would continue. They famously did not.

Today, high-tax Sweden has only

7% unemployment, while ours is 9%. How come? Before the 2008 economic meltdown, Sweden prudently maintained a budget surplus equal to 3.6% of its economy. Bush’s America was running a 3% deficit.

So guess which country was better prepared to weather the deep recession that followed? In the recent first quarter, Sweden’s economy expanded at an annual rate of 6.4%, while ours grew a mere 1.9%. Meanwhile, no one in Sweden is threatening the health care security of anyone, much less the elderly.

Offering no serious deficit plan that the public can stomach, what Republicans have left is a political plan. Here’s how it goes: After the 1993 tax hike, Democrats suffered grievously at the polls. Though other factors were involved, Republicans pounded them on the tax increase, despite its affecting only high-income households. At the same time, they hearkened back to Ronald Reagan’s famous tax cuts, even though

the Gipper had also raised taxes 11 times, and still, the national debt doubled during his two terms.

Republicans also recall the beating President George H.W. Bush took from the party’s anti-tax cultists after he broke his pledge, “Read my lips, no new taxes.” That raising taxes was the responsible thing to do back then did the elder Bush little good.

Many voters who bought the voodoo that tax cuts automatically pay for themselves, and more, are older now, and some are wiser. America must curb spending for sure, but clearly no tolerable path away from the deficit cliff can skirt the revenue side – especially when federal tax collections [relative to the gross domestic product] are the lowest they’ve been in 60 years.

The Good Ship Tax Cut has run its last cruise. The hard fiscal realities are getting harder to ignore, prompting even recovering tax-a-phobes to take a sedative and say, “Yes, new taxes.”

Double-Dipping The State Retirement System

By Edwin E. Vineyard

For several decades there has been continuing concern among retired educators and others about the sanctity of the Oklahoma Teacher Retirement System. One concern has been about the tendency of the Legislature to pass bills promoted by a single legislator to favor a particular retiree, or class of retirees, at the expense of the system. Much concern has been expressed about special legislation that allows schools and retirees to abuse the system for the advantage of a person and a school by double-dipping – being both retired and still working.

Currently scarce resources of the Teacher Retirement System are being exploited by schools to save salary dollars. Schools are allowed to hire back a retired teacher within a few months of official retirement. The teacher continues to draw a retirement check while the school pays him/her a salary. Usually the teacher makes more than before retirement, and the school saves a bundle on salary.

The Oklahoma Teacher Retirement System gets the fiscal shaft.

It is not the occasional hiring back of a retiree at less than half-time for a modest stipend that is of concern. That is not the real issue. But there is something wrong with retiring for three months, drawing full retirement, then going back to work half-time or more for second salary for doing the same job. Both the school and the retiree are abusing the system at the ultimate expense of all beneficiaries.

Both the retiree and the school are gaming the system. It is perfectly legal – since the Legislature has made it so. But on close examination, it is easy to see that there is something inherently wrong about laws that allow exploitation of the retiree trust fund for the benefit of school bud-



gets and a few privileged retirees.

However, some seem to think this is just great. Or, at least it appears so in the press. Not long ago facts were printed in a local newspaper about how much extra some rehired retirees were now making, yet how much the school was saving on these salaries. These were mostly second echelon administrators who retired and returned, making more than ever before but costing the school district less. How delightful! Win – win! Everyone, including the newspaper people, thought this was just great. Nobody considered that the losers were little old retired folk for whose benefit the trust fund money was intended.

This same Legislature that provided for a loophole for abusing the retirement system is constantly

engaging in a harangue regarding the poor fiscal condition of the retirement system. They say that the system cannot afford even the pittance of a 1% a year COLA for its elderly retirees, while they allow fund coffers to be milked by schools and colleges and to be abused by some younger retirees.

Only about five years ago the Legislature handed out lucrative benefit increases to the highest paid school personnel preparing to retire. They did so by removing salary caps and allowing certain buy back privileges for earlier years. This increased the unfunded liability of the system greatly. Perhaps worse, it added to the size and the unfairness of the chasm between the level of benefits received by newer, younger retirees and the elderly who have been retired

much longer.

Newer retirees do quite well. There is no need for them to be concerned about COLAs for years to come. But some who have been retired 20 years or more are hard pressed to maintain a decent standard of living. Some elderly retirees fall below poverty criteria. Nobody seems to care.

Younger retirees are better organized and more active than the elderly. Generally new retiree benefits get more attention and are better supported by the professional associations of the active professionals. In general, elderly retirees have had few champions to help them make their case to the Legislature.

For several years, the Oklahoma Council of Retired College and University Presidents made legislative proposals to take care of the elderly with higher COLA's. These have been introduced in bill form by friendly legislators in several sessions. But each time these have met a cruel fate at the hands of legislators who claimed to be concerned about the actuarial condition of the system.

The Oklahoma Legislature has used the "one size fits all" negative excuse for any consideration of the human plight of the elderly retirees for which it has responsibility. While they can allow convenient loopholes for the exploitation of retirement system funds for schools or politically influential interest groups, they turn a blind eye toward a segment of the retiree population with the greatest need.

Then they hide behind a cowardly broad brush ruling, "No COLA's unless the actuarial cost is paid in advance." Let them look at reality instead and take care of the need.

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

Stigma And Social Injustice

By Ron duBois

When we came to Stillwater 50 years ago, stigma in the form of segregation was in full force. We saw no blacks on the OSU campus, nor in restaurants.

As a young white couple with a family, we were too occupied to take time to stand up and speak out ... we were silent.

Today, thanks to the late Clara Luper, segregation has lost its power and legal status in Oklahoma. There is hope we are becoming inclusive rather than exclusive racially, to a place where skin color is no longer a mark of disgrace or infamy ... or a reproach to one's reputation.

Today's social hatred and stigma is towards a different social group ... those with a mental or addiction disorder. It is in full force and "just a step away." "Throw 'em in jail and throw away the key" defines the stigma.

According to a leading Oklahoma attorney, "Despite the fact that there are reams of literature about this subject, the public is for the most part highly uneducated about addiction being a medical and not a criminal issue."

The 40-year-old War on Drugs has been and still is the engine of incarceration for the poor and for people of color... there are more African Americans in jail today than slaves during the slave era!

"Everybody wants to fight stigma and for good reason" writes E. Fuller Torrey, celebrated research psychiatrist. For many, he writes, "It becomes a scarlet letter."

The public fails to understand that those suffering from addiction or from any brain disorder are not stupid; they are wounded and need respect. They don't need stigma and branding for the rest of their lives.

They need treatment, not incarceration that is expensive, futile, and a needless burden to taxpayers.

Rather than being part of the solution, attorneys, judges, police officers, legislators, news reporters, ministers, school administration, church boards, drug court programs [as opposed to mental health court programs], jail administrators, county and city commissioners and the lay public are too often part of the problem. Under the sway of stigma they make mistakes.

Fortunately a growing number of organizations understand the science of addiction and are part of the solution, i.e., working to change current punitive laws towards an illness.

William Burke said, "The progress of the human mind is slow." Happily in the course of decades stigma can be erased.

How long will it take to kick our

collective addiction to treating a public health problem with law enforcement means, and start thinking about the matter clearly? How long will we continue to allow more jail inmates to commit suicide from lack of proper medication? How long will the idea that one less inmate doesn't matter because it saves the taxpayers money? [The number of people who have committed suicide because of stigma is unknown.]

Stigma – the belief that some of us deserve disgrace and dishonor because we were born with physical or mental infirmities, are ill, have the "wrong" skin color or some other "wrongness" [even though conferred by genetics or a "higher power"] rules our thinking.

Stigma should always be exposed as delusional thinking, an illness in itself.

See STIGMA Page 16

Today's Grads Being Set Up For Disaster

By Bryce Covert

A new study recently came out that says young people get a self-esteem boost from taking on debt.

For those ages 18-27, its findings show, more credit card and student loan debt lead to higher self-esteem levels and a feeling of control over life.

This lines up with some common sense: student debt is considered to be "good" debt, an investment in the future.

And as Annie Lowrey reports, there is ample evidence that credit cards give us all the joys of consuming without the pain of spending actual money.

She quotes George Lowenstein of Carnegie Mellon explaining, "Credit cards effectively anesthetize the pain of paying. You swipe the card and it doesn't feel like you're giving anything up to make the purchase, unlike paying cash where you have to hand over bills."

But the other side of the coin, the study finds, is that the self-esteem high plummets later on when the students have to start paying that debt back — and realize how long and hard it will be to do so.

For those over 28, having higher levels of debt reduced that sense of self-esteem and mastery.

"By age 28, they may be realizing that they overestimated how much money they were going to earn in their jobs. When they took out the loans, they may have thought they would pay off their debts easily, and it is turning out that it is not as easy as they had hoped," one of the study's authors opined.

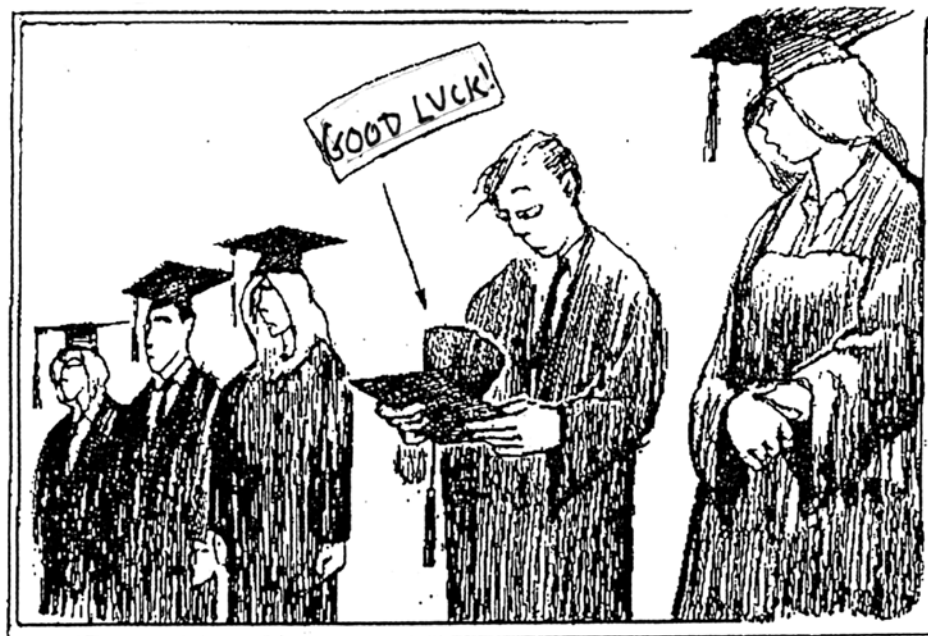
This is unsurprising: While student loans help finance a college degree, and that does have an effect on eventual pay, the burden of paying them back often hangs around late into life. About 9% of people ages 55-64 still have student loan debt.

Part of that is due to the fact that unlike most other forms of personal debt, student loans can't be discharged in bankruptcy — there's no way to get rid of them except payment.

And those loans will linger even longer without savings — even though young people think they are saving better than their parents. Almost half of respondents to a recent SavingsAccounts.com poll said they think as much. But as Jill Schlesinger points out, this isn't really true.

"The Bureau of Economic Analysis' personal savings data indicates that the personal savings rate averaged only 3.48% of income over the previous 10 years, and doesn't come close to matching the 10-year average personal savings rate of 9.63% seen from 1971-1981."

In fact, one in three adults under 33 have no savings at all. So on top of young



grads being loaded to the hilt with debt burdens, they have very little stocked up to help pay it off.

They'll be even more hindered, in fact, by another aspect: they can expect lower wages than their parents. Overall, middle class wages have almost completely stagnated over the past few decades.

As CNNMoney reports, "In 1988, the income of an average American taxpayer was \$33,400, adjusted for inflation. Fast forward 20 years, and not much had changed: The average income was still just \$33,000 in 2008, according to IRS data."

On top of that trend, grads are entering an absolutely dismal job market, one that will likely have lasting effects on how much they'll earn over their lifetimes.

The New York Times writes, "The median starting salary for students graduating from four-year colleges in 2009 and 2010 was \$27,000, down from \$30,000 for those who entered the work force in 2006 to 2008 ... Among the members of the class of 2010, just 56 percent had held at least one job by this spring, when the survey was conducted. That compares with 90% of graduates from the classes of 2006 and 2007."

And any reduction in pay now will have profound effects later. Charlie Eisenhower found that drops in initial wages due to high unemployment rates hang around: "Even 15 years after college graduation, the wage loss is 2.5% and is still statistically significant," according to one study.

All in all, the short-term ego boost of student and credit card debt pales in comparison to what young people are up against in the long run. A college degree can lead to good jobs, higher pay, and of course education, but the amount of debt students are asked to take on is getting out of control. They should probably sober up for a rocky road ahead.

— The author is assistant editor of *New Deal 2.0*

DHS

From Page 9

children out of the system of licensed and subsidized child care in favor of informal and often unstable care arrangements with siblings, neighbors or friends. In other cases, the higher cost of child care may lead parents to stop working entirely — with a consequent loss of family income and, perhaps, a return to the welfare rolls.

The cuts will also affect the bottom line for child-care providers, many of which are small locally owned businesses that are already economically fragile.

Many child care providers will lose clients, as higher co-pays and reduced eligibility lead some children to be withdrawn from the system of licensed care entirely. Others will be left to absorb part or all the higher co-payments themselves when families who are already receiving child-care are unable to afford a 20% to 35% increase.

For some providers, also dealing with rising operating costs and rates that have been frozen for several years, the lost revenue may push them out of business entirely.

Was DHS justified in making this decision?

The agency clearly faces a shortfall and had its hands partly tied by the Legislature, which passed a bill expressly prohibiting DHS from cutting senior nutrition services, home- and community-based waiver programs, and various other services.

Still, as noted by Commissioner Steven Dow, who was one of two commissioners to vote against the agency budget, the agency still has \$15 million in carryover TANF [Temporary Assistance to Needy Families] funds that it could have tapped to mitigate the extent of the child care cuts.

Linda Terrell, executive director of the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy, stated, "State agencies are being asked to make tough decisions, but people working directly with children know the impact of their decisions. It is unfortunate that members of the commission see the value of a surplus over the value of ensuring working families have access to high-quality and safe childcare."

There is no question that the main culprit for this decision is the Legislature, which painted itself into a budget corner by allowing income tax cuts to take effect and failing to repeal any tax breaks.

Still, given the available TANF surplus and a long history of actual expenditures coming in below projections, DHS could have adopted more modest co-payment increases and decided during the year whether additional budget-balancing measures were needed.

As it is, this decision will be a serious blow for hard-pressed families trying to pay their bills and ensure quality care for their kids.

— David Blatt is director of the Oklahoma Policy Institute. An earlier version of this article appeared on the OKPolicy blog. You can sign up for OK Policy's e-mail alerts and daily news digest at <http://okpolicy.org>

STIGMA

From Page 15

We need to stop viewing users as criminals and we need to treat those with substance abuse disorders as people with health and emotional problems.

Doing so would free up a significant amount of jail space, court time and law enforcement resources.

Stigma strikes at the core of a sense of self worth: it destroys essential self-esteem of a person or group to the point where its victims are driven into a corner of no escape, depression, despair, fear or suicide. Those addicted to stigma fail to look beyond the illness to the person. They fail to understand that it's OK to hate the disease, but not the person.

A book that for me sheds light on stigma is, *My Stroke of Insight*, by brain scientist Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor. She writes, "Although many of us think of ourselves as thinking creatures that feel, biologically, we are feeling creatures that think."

The implication for me is that stigma resides in the limbic system, that part of the reptilian brain triggered by unfamiliar or threatening stimulation.

Another book, *Stay Close*, by Libby Catalda, an educator and mother of a son with an addiction to heroin, is a contribution towards ending the stigma.

This fall, the Oklahoma Outreach Foundation, a private organization working quietly to bring about reform, will host Richard Dreyfus, well known actor and social commentator.

His comment — "I really think that living is the process of going from complete certainty to complete ignorance" — is typically thoughtful. He will speak about his own recovery from substance use disorder and connected issues. Tickets are \$125 and may be purchased by calling 405.843.2402.

— The author lives in Stillwater

Four Trillion For War – And Rising

By Joe Conason

Anyone paying attention to the costs of U.S. military action in Iraq and Afghanistan must have known that the president badly underestimated those numbers on June 22, when he told the nation that we have spent “a trillion dollars” waging war over the past decade. For well over two years, we have known that the total monetary cost of those wars will eventually amount to well over \$2 trillion, and might well rise higher, according to Nobel economist Joseph Stiglitz and his associate Linda Bilmes.

What we didn't know until the last week in June is that the expense in constant dollars – leaving aside the horrific price paid by the dead, wounded, displaced and ruined in every country – will likely reach well over \$4.4 trillion.

That is the conclusion of a study released by the Eisenhower Research Project, a group of scholars, diplomats and other experts based at Brown University's Watson Institute for International Studies. The Eisenhower study doesn't scant the human damage, which its authors say has been underestimated as badly as the fiscal costs. According to them, “an extremely conservative estimate of the toll in direct war dead and wounded is about 225,000 dead and about 365,000 physically wounded in these wars so far” – including those in Pakistan, which is embroiled in war just as lethally as Afghanistan.

The American military dead in all



three countries now total more than 6,000, a figure that does not include another 2,300 in U.S. military contractors; the American wounded, military and civilian, are well over 100,000, which doesn't include the psychological destruction wreaked on those who served and their families. The most obvious indicator is the exceptionally high suicide rate among the million or more returned veterans.

The Eisenhower study's authors concede that they cannot readily estimate the full value of the economic and social damage we have sustained

as a nation – in lost years of work and wrecked families, as well as huge interest costs on the money borrowed to finance these interventions. Nor can they fully account for the growth and investment forfeited because such a great proportion of the nation's resources was squandered on war rather than pressing needs in infrastructure, energy, education and health.

For less than 5% of what we have spent on war – to consider one example among many – we could have completed an American high-speed rail system and repaired most of our

crumbling infrastructure, too.

Even if the current war could somehow be concluded instantly, however, the moral and fiscal obligations incurred so far will continue for decades. Beyond the mandatory disability payments, medical and psychiatric care, and additional benefits to which our veterans are entitled, we will face the prospect of increasing military budgets to restore the equipment and readiness of the battered Army and National Guard.

And those costs in turn will subtract from the scant dollars left for domestic programs – as President Eisenhower himself observed when he said, “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies in the final sense a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.”

It is sobering to revisit the question of what war has cost us in this generation at a moment when the debate over the nation's finances is so furious and yet so often frivolous.

But it is ever more important to remember how we arrived at this dead end, especially as we listen to the braying Republican leaders who refuse to consider any tax increase. Our fiscal woe is the legacy of their policy, waging war at enormous expense, while sharply reducing taxes on the rich. What we live with now is what “conservatism” has wrought.

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The Unanswered Question Is, Why?

By Jim Hightower

America's long, long war in Afghanistan has drained more than 1,500 precious lives and a trillion dollars from our country. But, finally, this enormous outlay paid off this year with the capture and killing of that al-Qaida demon, Osama bin Laden, who attacked America and was the reason our military went into Afghanistan.

Oh, wait – Osama wasn't in Afghanistan, was he? He was comfortably ensconced in an urban compound in Pakistan, whose leaders are supposedly our allies in the bloody Afghan War.

And it wasn't the war effort that got bin Laden, it was old-time spy work, culminating in a raid involving a small team of Navy Seals, a dog and two helicopters.

So why have two presidents and a decade of Congress dumped so many lives and so much money into a country that poses no threat to us?

Afghanistan is an impoverished, anarchic, largely illiterate land that's split into ancient tribal factions and innumerable fiefdoms controlled by rival warlords. They have no desire or ability to attack us, some 8,000 miles away.

The only reason we're given for being in Afghanistan is that we must keep the al-Qaida terrorists network

from establishing bases there. But – like bin Laden – al-Qaida left this country years ago and now operates transnationally in Pakistan, Yemen, Uzbekistan and elsewhere, including England and Germany.

Yet, we're told we must continue to pour American lives, dollars and reputation into Afghanistan. But ... why? To create a central, democratically elected government with a 300,000-member army and police force, we're told. But why? To stabilize the country, they say. But, why? To keep al-Qaida out, they repeat, closing the endless loop on a Kafkaesque rational.

Yes, President Obama has finally started a slow withdrawal of U.S. troops, but that'll take at least three years, more than \$300 billion and untold numbers of shattered lives. The questions remains: Why?

At least one person was giddy with excitement upon hearing President Obama's announcement on June 22 that all of America's combat troops would depart from Afghanistan by 2014: Hamid Karzai.

“A moment of happiness for Afghanistan,” exulted the incurably corrupt, inept, weak and pompous Afghan president. Our leaders put this ingrate in power, and both the lives of our soldiers and billions

of our tax dollars have been spent to prop up his sorry excuse for a government – yet he's the one saying “good riddance.” It puts the dumb in dumbfounding.

The dumbest and most shameful aspect of America's 10-year Afghan War is the pretension that Karzai represents an exercise in democracy-building.

Installed in the presidency by dictate of the Bush-Cheney regime in 2002, he is widely despised and ridiculed by the people and has clung to power only through flagrant electoral fraud, not only in his two presidential “elections,” but also in last year's parliamentary contest.

Karzai was PO'd that 62 candidates he favored lost or were disqualified by the country's independent election commission because of fraud. So, Hamid haughtily set up his own special court to review those results, while also bringing criminal charges

against several of the independent election commissioners.

Last week, only one day after Obama's withdrawal announcement, Karzai's kangaroo court disqualified the 62 parliamentary winners, replacing them with his chosen ones. Of course, the 62 winners are refusing to budge from their seats. This has created a governmental stalemate, but that suits Karzai perfectly, for it allows him the defacto power to rule without parliament. As a top opposition leader puts it: “Karzai does not believe in the rule of law; he thinks democracy doesn't work in his favor.”

It's both insane and immoral for our leaders to cause even one more American to die for Karzai. Tell Obama to bring all of our troops home, pronto. The White House comment line is 202.456.1111, or www.whitehouse.gov/contact.

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SHORTIEY

From Page One

partment created a special outreach unit to Latino communities. Tahaie said it appeared driven by a notably increased reluctance of immigrants to report crimes since 1804's passage. The 1804 law has actually not been strongly enforced, Rice and others say, but its impact is still felt. "It's not as much about the enforcement as creating a climate in which certain categories of people simply don't feel welcome," said Tahaie. "They feel targeted, they are having to basically to look over their shoulder every day."

It is likely anti-immigrant bills will be introduced again next session.

"It's a hard dance to do every year - there is a very strong, angry political current among some parts," said Rice, a former filmmaker who decided to go into politics after his brother was killed in the Sept. 11 attacks. He noted that since redistricting, his district has become majority Latino. Once he decides not to run anymore, he hopes to see the state's first Latino legislator elected there.

Shortey said he needs to protect older, white, long-time residents from what he described as burgeoning crime by Latino immigrants.

"Their roots are there, they own homes and cannot leave," he said. "But they're frustrated and wish they could leave. Why? Are they racist? Some are. I don't think I am. I'm Native American, I'm married to a Vietnamese woman, I have nephews who are Hispanic and half black. But we're being affected by illegal immigration."

He said his constituents - largely retired - aren't worried about immigrants stealing their jobs, but rather "being shot by an illegal alien that's in a gang."

Meanwhile advocates expect an ongoing battle against anti-Muslim bills, even though a federal judge blocked the constitutional amendment from taking effect. The state attorney general is challenging that decision, and this spring legislators led by prominent far-right state Rep. Sally Kern introduced a law banning "foreign" law from Oklahoma courts.

Kern's bill reflects a strategy developed by Arizona lawyer and known white supremacist David Yerushalmi that has been the basis for legislation in various states. It passed the state House 76-3.

But after a public education campaign by local Islamic groups and resistance from business people who realized the law would complicate overseas investments, that bill died in a state Senate subcommittee.

The civil rights group Council on American-Islamic Relations sued to invalidate the constitutional amendment, and CAIR Oklahoma executive director Muneer Awad said anti-Sharia laws will never hold up in court. But the rhetoric they facilitate is still damaging.

"I never had a doubt about the legal case," said Awad. "But the public discourse surrounding these debates is what's so poisonous to the Muslim community. These politicians will get on radio, TV, and talk in town hall meetings, saying we need these amendments because Islam is violent and dangerous and wants to overthrow our government. Despite the fact that the amendment didn't make it very far, those sentiments are dangerous and are spread throughout Oklahoma."

The Muslim community is quite different demographically from the larger immigrant community in Oklahoma. The state's 15,000 to 30,000 Muslims tend to be either African American converts or legal Middle Eastern immigrants or descendants of immigrants from well-educated and relatively prosperous backgrounds, living mostly in Oklahoma cities. The Latino immigrant community, especially immigrants who are undocumented or have family members who are, were largely drawn to Oklahoma for relatively low-paying jobs in construction, meatpacking and other industries.

Nonetheless the two communities and the state's general peace and justice activists have joined forces to educate the public about the reality of

proposed legislation and to promote tolerance and human rights. This may be symbolized in the figures of Julia and Imad Enchassi. Imad is a popular imam and leader of the Islamic Society of Greater Oklahoma City. His wife, Julia, is a Mexican immigrant.

In the hours after the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, Enchassi and a Muslim friend were questioned by police as suspects. Enchassi displayed his trademark sense of humor as he described the ordeal, joking that their cultural tendency toward lateness meant they were frantically rushing to the airport for his friend to catch a flight to Jordan. Their hurry combined with electrical equipment in his friend's luggage - and most likely their ethnicity - triggered alarm bells.

"We use humor to try to help them see we're human," said Enchassi. "We joke they should outlaw cows in Oklahoma because they might all become Mooslims."

But on a serious note, Enchassi said the center still receives threatening phone calls and Muslims feel they are constantly subject to scrutiny and stereotyping. Awad agreed that prominent local Muslims still get death threats, and Oklahoma Muslims generally feel uncomfortable expressing their beliefs in public, knowing that just months ago almost three quarters of voters called for the anti-Sharia law.

Nathaniel Batchelder, director of Oklahoma City's Peace House, sees the anti-Sharia and anti-immigrant bills as part of a strategy hatched by evangelical and right-wing leaders in 2004 with an unsuccessful attempt to amend the constitution to outlaw gay marriage, which was already illegal under state law.

"The purpose of that initiative wasn't to forever ban gay marriage in Oklahoma, what that did was allow religious literalists, fundamentalists and ministers to become very excited and inflamed about urging people to go to the polls and vote," he said. "What happened as a result was Republican control of both the House

and Senate. I believe the bill was a Trojan horse to get motivated conservative voters to go to polls."

Batchelder sees the same strategy at work in SQ 759 [see page 8], a voter referendum scheduled for the November 2012 ballot that would end affirmative action in Oklahoma under the guise of prohibiting "certain preferential treatment or discrimination."

In response to these tactics, advocates aim to show moderate voters that the legislators pushing such tactics are "on the fringe," in the words of Awad, even in a state where Republicans now hold a record majority in both houses and every statewide office. He pointed to controversial statements by Kern this spring that African Americans earn less than whites because they don't work as hard and women earn less than men because they spend more time with family.

Rice said he thinks many non-immigrant residents have become more tolerant as the immigrant population in urban areas like Oklahoma City increases.

"One interesting thing that's changing their views is intermarrying - there are a lot of Caucasian-Hispanic marriages," Rice said. "When someone's son or nephew or niece marries a Latino person and they become part of the family, people let go of a lot of their prejudicial ideas."

Rice said the anti-immigration laws proposed in Oklahoma, as around the country, are also another symbol of why meaningful and humane federal immigration reform is crucial.

"The longer Congress fails to do that, it leaves states like us with a vacuum where people like the Randy Terrills and Ralph Shorteys get to take advantage of the situation and play off people's anger," he said.

- Kari Lydersen, a regular contributor to *AlterNet*, also writes for the *Washington Post* and is an instructor for the *Urban Youth International Journalism Program* in Chicago. This story was supported by the *Institute for Justice and Journalism*.

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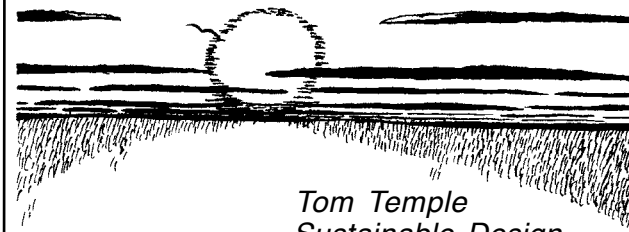
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