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## State Braces For Water Wars Mutiny Over The Bounty

By Arnold Hamilton

In late July, as Oklahoma wilted in the searing heat and relentless drought, state Rep. Brian Renegar and state Sen. Jerry Ellis traveled to Clayton to see for themselves the harsh weather's impact on the scenic Kiamichi River.

The night before, the area was drenched with a 1 ¼-inch rain. Yet when the lawmakers arrived, they found the riverbed mostly dry, a once dependable stream more closely resembling a hiking trail.

"Normally," said Renegar, a McAlester Democrat, "there'd be three feet of moving water in it."

As a long-awaited comprehensive statewide water plan nears completion and a legislative committee begins the task of turning the research into public policy, Oklahoma faces a nightmare scenario: Not only is the state enduring what may be the worst drought since the 1930s Dust Bowl, it also is learning its once-pristine waters may no longer be so reliably clean.

Earlier this summer, blue green algae attacked Grand Lake and other reservoirs, leading officials to warn swimmers away. Last year, unacceptably high levels of mercury were found in some fish in 16 Oklahoma lakes, prompting warnings they shouldn't be consumed, especially by children and women of childbearing age.

Concerns about the quantity and quality of Oklahoma water underscore the gravity of the task facing state lawmakers – protecting the state's most important natural resource for future generations.

Among the questions to be answered:

Do we sell excess water to North



– Kiamichi River near Antlers in late July

Texas? Do we have excess water to sell? If we sell, who gets the money? What are the social and economic implications of transferring more water from oft-struggling rural Oklahoma to high-growth metro areas? Is the Grand Lake scare a portent of water quality issues to come? What can – or

should – be done to share more plentiful eastern Oklahoma water with parched western Oklahoma?

Those questions, and many more, aren't the esoteric stuff of navel-gazing lab-coaters or pointy-headed academicians. These are questions that – when answered – will determine the world our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren inherit.

In early August, eight senators and eight representatives embarked on a quest to answer those questions – a multi-year process that, given the state's off-and-on feuding over water, is almost certain to be contentious.

"If I do my job right," said Sen. Brian Crain, R-Tulsa, "I will have a great chance at getting everyone in the state mad at me."

There are big players who'll scratch

and claw to ensure they have a say in Oklahoma's water policies – because the financial stakes are so high.

Selling water to North Texas [which needs new water sources by 2040 to ensure continued growth] could generate billions of dollars for ... someone. Ensuring Oklahoma City controls Sardis Lake could help guarantee the capital's unimpeded growth, generating huge profits for developers. Tightening water quality standards could significantly impact poultry operations, resort developments and tourism.

Other key players: agricultural and energy interests that rely on abundant water supplies to grow crops and extract oil and gas; the state's tribal governments, with historic claims to Oklahoma water; and rural interests, worried that urban areas could dominate the decision-making.

The state's urban-rural split will be especially obvious when lawmakers consider what to do about the water plan's projection that it will cost \$87 billion over the next 60 years to replace the state's antiquated drinking- and waste-water infrastructure. The sore point is this: Half the cost would serve only 14% of the state's population – those in rural areas, many with declining population.

Already, the lawmakers on the joint House-Senate committee are poring over thousands of pages of documents supplied by the Oklahoma Water Resources Board, which is putting the finishing touches on a roughly \$15 million [state and federal dollars] comprehensive statewide water plan.

The plan already is a political hot potato. Based on draft discussions and public meetings, critics contend the study is woefully short on science and appallingly long on speculation and political spin. Others suggest the critics are focused on narrow self-interest – keeping their water for themselves – rather than on meeting statewide needs.

For the last decade or so, Tulsa geologist Robert Jackman listened to "experts" assert unequivocally that southeastern Oklahoma is replete with surplus water that could be sold

See WATER Page 19



# Observations

## Outrage!

This is no prank – the Mid-Del Board of Education has to come up with \$189,430 for a violent special education student shipped off to Heartspring treatment center in Wichita.

The State Board of Education is coming with an equal amount, plus expenses, for monthly visits by his family – transportation, lodging, meals, etc., at a cost of \$8,000 for the next 12 months.

The state Education Department came up with another \$50,000 for out-of-state teaching services for the student.

This outrage is possible because federal law mandates special ed until the 22nd birthday. A plan for treatment is enforceable in any federal district court.

We have nothing but sympathy for the student and his family but you should know that Mid-Del spends an average of \$6,790 per student.

The average stay at Heartspring is three years.

## Embarrassing

Oklahoma's Republican Legislature is one of 15 legislatures trying to upend the U.S. Constitution.

GOP Republican lawmakers in the Sooner State proposed nearly 30 bills dealing with various aspects of immigration. Two-thirds of them have come from the offices of state Rep. Randy Terrill, a member of the hard-line State Legislators for Legal Immigration, and state Sen. Ralph Shortey, a member of a newly created joint immigration reform committee.

The bills would crack down on undocumented residents of the state in numerous ways, ranging from restricting property rights of noncitizens to requiring school officials to check the legal status of students.

That makes no difference. The Constitution guarantees all kids admittance to public schools – legal or not.

The "Interstate Compact for Birth

Certificates Act" is a direct challenge to the birthright clause of the 14th Amendment. Several bills require schools to identify undocumented students; one would allow school districts to charge students not lawfully present in the country, while others would prohibit them from resident tuition.

With words echoing the Arizona immigration law enacted last year, one piece of legislation will allow law enforcement with "reasonable suspicion that a person is an alien" to "determine the person's immigration status."

Is there no end to embarrassing Oklahoma nationally – even internationally?

## Use An Advocate

Don't ever go to the hospital without an advocate. The Veterans Administration is the latest example of creating a surgery check list, reducing deaths and serious mistakes at 74 veterans hospitals by 18%.

Nearly 100,000 are killed each year by hospital mistakes; 18,000 by medical personnel not washing their hands. Make sure your advocate challenges every procedure because chances are you will be drugged or unconscious.

Last year the VA hospitals reported 30 surgeries on the wrong patient and 48 on the wrong body part. Some Oklahoma hospitals are now requiring a magic marker written on the limb designated for surgery.

The Oklahoma Heart Hospital and several others are requiring a check list, with an aide trailing nurses whether it's starting an IV drip or some other procedure.

## Sen. Warren?

It was terribly disappointing, but hardly surprising that President Obama announced he wouldn't appoint former Oklahoman Elizabeth



Warren to lead the new Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

With her track record of standing up to Wall Street and fighting for consumers, Warren was the best qualified for the job. Moreover, 350,000 Americans voiced their support for her. And nearly 100 members of Congress backed her selection.

The president, however, opted to appoint one of her deputies, Rich Cordray.

America still needs Warren's fierce advocacy for working families. Fortunately, it's reported that she's considering a run for Ted Kennedy's Senate seat in her home state of Massachusetts.

Paul Wellstone used to say he could use 10 more progressives in the Senate – "or one Elizabeth Warren."

Like Wellstone, Warren is a bold progressive icon. It would be fitting if she were the one to win back Kennedy's seat from Republican Scott Brown in 2012.

## Takes One

When we first read it we thought it was a joke: Gov. Mary Fallin praising nutty Minnesota Rep. Michele Bachmann!

Politico's blog quoted the Oklahoma governor as saying Bachmann's rise has been years in the making, and she isn't the least bit surprised at the popularity of her former House colleague.

Fallin and Bachmann were elected to Congress for the first time together in 2006, when they were the only two women in the GOP freshman class.

"From the very beginning, she has always been a person who engaged in Congress, who participated in committees, certainly was well read and learned the issues, was never shy about speaking out on things that she thought were important to our nation. And she's a hard worker," Fallin told Politico during the National Governors Association meeting in Salt Lake City.

"I started seeing signs back in Oklahoma about three years ago, before she was even thinking about running for president, where conservative citizens who were not necessarily

well versed in politics were asking me about Congresswoman Bachmann and liking her politics," Fallin said. "So I'm not surprised that she's got off to a good lead in popularity with the American public."

And she ends the interview with words of praise for Texas Gov. Rick Perry. You remember him? At an Austin Tea Party rally in 2009 his anti-federal government, states' rights rhetoric ignited chants of "secede."

Fallin said she isn't ready to endorse in the presidential race, or even narrow her list of 2012 options, but she predicted that her wingnut neighboring governor would be a "very strong presidential candidate" if he chooses to run.

We can only conclude that it takes one to know one.

## Casting Stones

State Rep. Tom Newell said he's disappointed in state Higher Education Regents for approving increases in tuition and mandatory fees.

The Seminole Republican adds he's frustrated by a chancellor who makes almost \$400,000 a year, and college presidents who earn anywhere from \$157,000 to \$384,000, because they are so disconnected from Oklahoma families.

"It's rather simple – Oklahoma families are struggling in today's economy," Newell said. "This translates into reduced revenues for the state, which resulted in funding cuts to higher education."

"Common sense would dictate doing everything possible to reduce costs – not increase them."

Tuition increases included a 5% hike at the University of Oklahoma and a 4.8% jump at Oklahoma State University.

Newell said he believes the Oklahoma Legislature should step up and address the way in which the higher education establishment operates:

"It is time for the Legislature to reign in the elitist, higher education establishment in Oklahoma."

Might we point out that Newell's new-found pain wasn't in sight when he voted for another \$120 million tax cut in the 2011 Legislature.

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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

Thanks to all who generously supported to our mid-year gift-subscription drive – still available for \$35 each. It's also not too late to become a member of Helen's Hall of Fame with a gift of \$100 or more.

**Dart:** To State Superintendent Janet Barresi and the State Board for violating the law. National Board Certified Teachers SHALL receive a \$5,000 bonus. Rep. Mike Brown, D-Tahlequah, has pre-filed HB 2186 to make sure they follow the law.

Trav Robertson of South Carolina will be the Oklahoma Democratic Party's executive director, according to new Chairman Wallace Collins. It's on a six-month trial basis.

**Laurel:** To the Oklahoma Education Association, weathering the Republican tax cuts for the affluent that cost them more than 700 members last year – out of 1,500 teaching positions lost. OEA critics be damned.

Think public education isn't under attack by the Republican Legislature? Ask the Union School district, having cut 90 teaching positions and anticipating 90 more this coming school year.

**Dart:** To the Daily Disappointment for a vicious personal attack on Sen. Jim Wilson, D-Tahlequah, because he filed a complaint with the State Supreme Court over obvious gerrymandering of Senate districts.

We mourn the passing of Bob Stapleton, a true gentleman and former state Rep. Wanda Jo Peltier Stapleton's beloved partner.

**Laurel:** To state Rep. John Enns, R-Enid, named Legislator of the Year by the Oklahoma Academy of Family Physicians. He pushed for adult stem cell research, helped stabilize rural hospitals and fought tobacco use.

It's official – Oklahoma is the seventh most obese state in the Union, with more than 31% obese, contributing to a doubling of diabetes in the past 10 years.

**Dart:** To Superintendent Janet Barresi for eliminating the Literacy First program that taught 3,000 teachers a year how to teach reading. More than 28,000 teachers have gone through the program.

Subsidies to U.S. oil companies cost American taxpayers \$77 billion last year while racking up profits of \$32 billion. Guess why? They gave members of Congress \$21 million in campaign contributions.

**Laurel:** To the unnamed air traffic controller who has complained to his superiors about just how dangerous a pilot Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-OK, is. He has escaped FAA discipline many times in the past simply because of who he is.

Want a little good news for a change? Oklahoma now ranks sixth in new wind power development. Nearly 7% of the state's electricity comes from wind power.

**Dart:** To Tulsa City Council member John Eagletown for asking the state's Attorney General to start ouster proceedings against Mayor Dewey Bartlett. AG Scott Pruitt told him to take a hike. Bravo!

More than 250,000 Oklahomans will receive health care coverage when the new Medicaid eligibility requirements launch in 2014. Nearly 729,000 Oklahomans already receive Medicaid. [AP]

**Laurel:** To the task force that has started looking into billions of dollars in tax credits, with an estimated \$2 billion never creating a single job. In all, there are 480 getting credits, deductions, incentives, deferrals and other special tax breaks.

Oklahoma is one of five states that bans insurance coverage for abortions. The others are Idaho, Kentucky, Missouri and North Dakota.

**Dart:** To Oklahoma, paying so little [49th at last count] that China is rounding up the best and brightest here to teach American-style education there.



If legislators are truly interested in downsizing government they could start by pushing a constitutional amendment killing the Criminal Court of Appeals – a waste of \$3.3 million a year that the state Supreme Court could easily handle.

**Laurel:** To Snopes, debunking HR 4646, a \$1 tax on bank deposits. It's a hoax being blamed on President Obama.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has paid Oklahoma legislators or their spouses nearly \$4 million since the mid-'90s. State Rep. Leslie Osborn, R-Tuttle, a constant critic of federal spending, picked up a cool \$1 million. Hypocritical?

**Dart:** To those Okies still clinging to the lie that President Barack Obama wasn't born in the U.S. We have a certified copy of his birth certificate – if someone will read it to them.

Folks who voted for Oklahoma's sorry congressional delegation should know they all voted for HR 2560, ending Medicare, gutting Medicaid and protecting Big Oil subsidies.

**Laurel:** To the life and times of the late Hardy George, 78, chief Curator Emeritus of the Oklahoma City Museum of Art. His contributions to art and culture were unparalleled.

Oklahoma's Washington delegation came out swinging at the Office of Surface Mining and Enforcement, accusing it of trying to kill the state's coal mining industry. We repeat for the 10,000th time – there is no such thing as clean coal.

**Dart:** To the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs for criticizing Oklahoma colleges for raising tuition. OCPA backed huge income tax cuts that would have prevented the increases.

It's official. State Rep. George Faught, R-Muskogee, is in the race to replace U.S. Rep. Dan Boren. He's running on the God, Guns and Gays platform.

**Laurel:** Thanks to Time magazine, you no longer have to be ripped off for a pair of glasses. Google Zenni Optical for the details.

Democrats ought to pray nightly that God will keep Grover Norquist going with his pledges by ignorant politicians to NEVER raise taxes, even if means that the Good Ship America sinks.

**Dart:** To Chesapeake Energy for a \$1,088,000 fine by the Pennsylvania Department of Environment Protection for ruining fresh water in Bradford County and a drill site fire in Washington County.

Little wonder that the Tulsa Police Department is up to its ears in problems – they laid off 124 policemen and have gone two years without a police academy.

Republicans are closing in on Democrats. Latest state registrations show Democrats with 47.7%, Republicans 41.1% and Independents 11.2%. In 1980 the figures were 75.8%, 22.8% and 1.4%.

**Dart:** To the Legislature for chronically underfunding the Department of Human Services. It's underscored by a social worker's suicide during the probe of the death of a five-year-old girl mistakenly placed with her grandparents.

A reader queries about legislative salaries fixed by a special compensation board. Base salary is \$38,800 – \$7,000 more than a teacher's starting salary. If they live 50 or more miles from the Capitol they draw \$148 a day per diem.

**Laurel:** To the feds for arresting 16 Oklahomans for faking their eligibility for low cost housing. Now if only we were as intent going after the Wall Street banks and hedge funds that collapsed the economy.

Sixty-five percent of Okies think the Affordable Care Act is bad for the country. If the Sooner Poll had wanted to get it right they would have asked how many had read it – or even a digest of it.

**Dart:** To GOP Superintendent Janet Barresi who continues to hammer the Oklahoma Education Association, saying their only interest is the best working opportunities for their "clients." That's a damned lie.

**THE OKLAHOMA**  
**Observer**


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# Letters

Editor, The Observer:

Let me get this straight: In your last issue, it was "heartbreaking" when State Superintendent Janet Barresi chose not to request funds for the stipends paid to National Board Certified Teachers [page 8], but state agencies get a "dart" for paying state employees \$200 longevity pay for each year of service [page 3]. Oh, really?

Allison Gober, who used to administer a longevity pay program for a state agency, explained how the longevity pay system works in a letter published in The Oklahoman: "The pay structure for regular classified state employees allows newly hired workers to earn the same salary as experienced state employees with the same job classification. The longevity pay program is intended to rectify this disparity. It is not a performance bonus program. State employees haven't been allowed performance bonuses or individual raises since 1984."

The pay system for teachers allows annual step increases, another way of rewarding tenure. Where is your criticism?

State employees haven't had a cost of living increase in almost six years. Teachers, on the other hand, got two pay raises under "Education Governor" Brad Henry.

State employees make 16% less than other Oklahomans for the same work, which has significantly increased because many positions are not filled due to 20% to 25% budget cuts.

Legislators introduced more than 60 bills targeting state employees and teachers' medical or retirement benefits in this legislative session.

P.S. State employees work 12 months each year – no summers off.

Apparently, The Oklahoma Observer thinks teachers are worthy of protecting and defending. Teachers deserve fair pay and benefits. Actually, I agree. But why the love fest for teachers while you attack state employees? All of us provide essential services that citizens cannot do without. Instead of squabbling over relatively small change for hardworking teachers or hardworking state employees, let's stop hemorrhaging billions in tax credits, rebates, refunds and giveaways that exceed the TOTAL state budget. That's where we'll find the real money needed to address the current state budget shortfall.

Jody Harlan  
Yukon

Editor's Note: This was no attack on state employees. The difference

between stipends for National Board Certified Teachers and longevity pay for state workers is Oklahoma has a contract with NBCT teachers whose certification is nearly PhD equivalent. The real attack on public employees was engineered legislatively by Sen. Cliff Aldridge, denying collective bargaining rights to all municipal employees [except police and firefighters] in cities of 35,000 or more. No one champions over-worked, under-paid state workers more vigorously than The Observer. No one opposes corporate welfare more relentlessly than The Observer. No one assailed this session's \$120 million tax cut approved more vociferously than The Observer – it alone would have covered both NBCT stipends and state employee longevity pay.

Editor, The Observer:

Sen. Tom Coburn announced his grandiose plan for \$10 trillion deficit and debt reduction over the next 10 years. Nothing specific but he appears to be promoting changing the game on Social Security and Medicare by changing the retirement date to age 67. He also suggested new revenue [tax increases] by eliminating a tax deduction for home mortgages and including employer paid medical insurance as employee income.

All of the above directly affect middle and low-income families. I didn't see anything in his "plan" that had an effect on tax breaks to the rich, big corporations, big oil or Wall Street.

Did you ever expect anything else from this guy?

Robert J. O'Connor  
Bethany

Editor, The Observer:

We found out under President George W. Bush that you can't give big tax cuts [\$1.6 trillion] and operate a war on two fronts [\$1.3 trillion] at the same time and not run up a pretty big national debt. That's why that never happened before in the history of the U.S.

Rather than cutting Social Security for 47 million Americans, why don't we tax those rich people again – they won't miss it. Social Security would be OK if the government would stop borrowing money from it [\$4.6 trillion].

Why don't we stop the wars now – all three of them? We aren't appreciated in those countries. Time to stop throwing good money after bad. The military industrial complex literally lost pallets of money in Iraq. The wars



are absolutely ruining the lives of military families and their troops. Some Oklahomans in the National Guard have been deployed up to seven times. That is asking too much and costing too much.

Let's spend those dollars here at home for a change.

Red Goldfarb  
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

If you've ever paused, even for a brief moment, to reflect on WWJS [Where would Jesus shop?], then the answer has now arrived. It's WalMart of course! Adding validity to that statement is the integrity-challenged Fox News Network. They took this piece of information and added it to their long list of "great moments in journalism," reporting that a South Carolina couple discovered the face of Jesus on the back of their WalMart receipt. They just knew it was Jesus.

Of course, they don't quite explain how they knew what Jesus actually looks like, since 2,000-plus years ago we were some time away from the first camera being invented and there are only artist's concepts, not from memory, just artistic styling showing a likeness. That didn't get in the way of Fox News as they proudly broadcast the story. No opinion was offered as to why "Jesus" decided to make an appearance on the back of a WalMart receipt, instead of Target or K-Mart.

Earlier in the week it was reported that an Oklahoma City couple discovered the Virgin Mary on one of their shower tiles. I saw the photo and it looks more like crusty mold growing than a deity, but beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Can we be very far away from the arrival of another 900-foot-tall Jesus strolling across the Oral Roberts University campus?

Kenny Belford  
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

"There you go again." That statement by Ronald Reagan to Jimmy Carter is perhaps the most famous of the one-liner put downs by Reagan. It has been a standard in Republican rhetoric ever since. There is a phrase coined by David Stockman in 1981: "strategic deficit." It means that you create long-term debt by lowering taxes without trimming spending so

that you can advocate cutting government spending and preventing any new spending on social programs and at the same time sound tenderhearted by deploring the debt our children and grandchildren must pay.

Another part of the strategy is Standard & Poor's and Moody's declarations that they will lower the rating on U.S. government bonds. These are the same rating agencies that gave mortgage backed securities AAA ratings when they were pressured by investment bankers and thereby contributed to the financial crisis that greatly increased the government debt. How cheeky to have some of the contributors to financial ruin say that U.S. government bonds are not credit worthy. But it all fits neatly into the "strategic deficit."

Republicans are long on deploring taxes and long on deploring debt for future generations. They are also long on shielding the wealthy and corporations from paying taxes. They don't mention "strategic deficits" but that is clearly their reason for holding the country hostage over raising the debt limit. They want to eliminate Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, Children's Health Insurance and anything else except their own earmarks. "There you go again."

Allowing the Republicans to destroy the social safety net using Stockman's strategy would be a disaster for all but the rich. Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness would become fragile for all but the wealthy. We cannot – we dare not – let it happen.

Thomas E. Ikard  
Stillwater

Editor, The Observer:

Please explain to me again how there are insufficient funds for Social Security and teacher retirement COLAs because we need to cut millionaires' taxes and subsidize the oil companies. I don't really understand.

Al Engel  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Fifty-nine percent of U.S. physicians favor government legislation to establish national health insurance, according to a 2008 study, because they can't practice quality cause they cannot practice quality medicine un-

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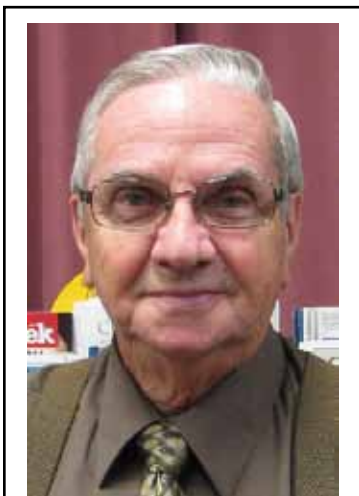
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# Union Jobs



**FROSTY TROY**  
Founding Editor

Right-to-work was going to bless Oklahoma with thousands of jobs, according its chief promoter Gov. Frank Keating. It has had the opposite effect.

Year after year since right to work became law, Oklahoma has lost union jobs, having a profound impact on Oklahoma families.

To give you an idea of how badly it hurts, in 2010, among Oklahoma full-time wage and salary workers, union members had median weekly earnings of \$917, while those who were not represented by unions doing the same work had median weekly earnings of \$717. [Census Bureau]

There were new jobs, sort of – thousands of Oklahomans went to work for call centers, averaging \$10 hour.

Major corporations, greasing the skids in Congress, have shipped tens of thousands of jobs overseas. Add to that they hide the money abroad so we not only lose jobs, we lose corporate taxes.

In 2010, the union membership rate – the percent of wage and salary workers who were members of a union – was 11.9%, down from 12.3% a year earlier, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported.

The number of wage and salary workers belonging to unions declined by 612,000 to 14.7 million.

In 1983, the first year for which comparable union data are available, the union membership rate was 20.1%, and there were 17.7 million union workers.

Highlights from the 2010 data:

- The union membership rate for public sector workers [36.2%] was substantially higher than the rate for private sector workers [6.9%].

- Workers in education, training, and library occupations had the highest unionization rate at 37.1%. Some wonder how long that will last since Oklahoma Republicans pushed through anti-collective bargaining legislation.

- Black workers were more likely to be union members than were white, Asian or Hispanic workers.

Among the states, New York had the highest union membership rate [24.2%] and North Carolina had the lowest rate [3.2%].

In 2010, 7.6 million public sector employees belonged to a union, compared with 7.1 million union workers in the private sector.

The union membership rate for public sector workers [36.2%] was substantially higher than the rate for private sector workers [6.9%].

Within the public sector, local government workers had the highest union membership rate, 42.3%. This group includes workers in heavily unionized occupations, such as teachers, police officers, and firefighters.

Private sector industries with high unionization rates included transportation and utilities [21.8%], telecommunications [15.8%], and construction [13.1%]. In 2010, low unionization rates occurred in agriculture and related industries [1.6%] and in financial activities [2.0%].

## The End Of Unions? Labor Losing Battles

By Eloise Myers

Many union activists viewed the 2009-10 battle for the most recent iteration of labor law reform – the Employee Free Choice Act [EFCA] – as labor's last stand.

EFCA could never attain the magic 60-vote threshold required to cut off a filibuster – despite the presence, at one point, of 60 Democratic senators.

Given the rate at which private-sector unionization continues to fall [which in turn imperils support for public-sector unions], many of labor's most thoughtful leaders now consider the Democrats' inability to enact EFCA a death sentence for the American labor movement.

In Oklahoma, the Republican-controlled Legislature passed legislation that cities of over 35,000 could ban municipal employees, exempting police and fire. Sen. Cliff Aldridge, R-Midwest City, pushed the legislation through.

"It's over," one of labor's leading strategists told me. Indeed, since last November's elections, half a dozen high-ranking labor leaders from a range of unions have told me they believe that private-sector unions may all but disappear within the next 10 years.

The SEIU's program – like its semi-counterpart in the AFL-CIO's Working America program, a door-to-door canvass in white working-class neighborhoods – would surely help Democratic candidates, despite the frustrations that nearly all labor leaders feel toward the party.

But, like Working America, it signals a strategic shift by American labor, whose ranks have been so reduced that it now must recruit people to a non-union, essentially non-dues-paying organization to amass the political clout that its own diminished ranks can no longer deliver.

Since labor law now effectively precludes workplace representation, unions are turning to representing workers anywhere and in any capacity they can. It's time, they've concluded, for the Hail Mary pass.

I suppose that might work in the shadow of Citizens United but it seems like



– Union members rally at the state Capitol last April

Among occupational groups, education, training, and library occupations [37.1%] and protective service occupations [34.1%] had the highest unionization rates in 2010. Sales and related occupations [3.2%] and farming, fishing, and forestry occupations [3.4%] had the lowest unionization rates.

The union membership rate was higher for men [12.6%] than for women [11.1%] in 2010. The gap between their rates has narrowed considerably since 1983, when the rate for men was about 10 percentage points higher than the rate for women. Between 1983 and 2010, the union membership rate for men declined by almost half [12.1 percentage points], while the rate for women declined by 3.5 percentage points.

In 2010, among major race and ethnicity groups, black workers were more likely to be union members [13.4%] than workers who were white [11.7%], Asian [10.9%], or Hispanic [10.0%]. Black men had the highest union membership rate [14.8%], while Asian men had the lowest rate [9.4%].

By age, the union membership rate was highest among 55- to 64-year-old workers [15.7%]. The lowest union membership rate occurred among those ages 16 to 24 [4.3%].

In 2010, 16.3 million wage and salary workers were represented by a union. This group includes both union members [14.7 million] and workers who report no union affiliation but whose jobs are covered by a union contract [1.6 million].

Government employees [783,000] comprised about half of the 1.6 million workers who were covered by a union contract but were not members of a union.

In addition to coverage by a collective bargaining agreement, the difference reflects a variety of influences including variations in the distributions of union members and nonunion employees by occupation, industry, firm size, or geographic region.

In 2010, 31 states [including Oklahoma] and the District of Columbia had union membership rates below that of the U.S. average, 11.9%, while 19 states had higher rates.

Frank Keating's latest campaign is to eliminate the state income tax, a third of the state budget. He doesn't mention how that loss would be replaced.

a long shot. It does explain why the Republicans are going even more nuts than usual to enact vote suppression laws, though.

When all is said and done this whole thing may just end up being a fight for basic democracy. Can you have worker's rights without it?

## THE BOTTLE OF WINE

For all of us who are married, were married, wish you were married, or wish you weren't married, this is something to smile about the next time you see a bottle of wine:

Sally was driving home from one of her business trips in Northern Arizona when she saw an elderly Navajo woman walking on the side of the road.

As the trip was a long and quiet one, she stopped the car and asked the Navajo woman if she would like a ride.

With a silent nod of thanks, the woman got into the car.

Resuming the journey, Sally tried in vain to make a bit of small talk with the Navajo woman. The old woman just sat silently, looking intently at everything she saw, studying every little detail, until she noticed a brown bag on the seat next to Sally.

"What's in the bag?" asked the old woman.

Sally looked down at the brown bag and said, "It's a bottle of wine. I got it for my husband."

The Navajo woman was silent for another moment or two. Then speaking with the quiet wisdom of an elder, she said:

"Good trade."



# As Centennial Nears, Capitol Sorely Needs TLC



**ARNOLD HAMILTON**  
Editor

Nine years ago, thousands gathered on the state Capitol grounds to celebrate completion – finally! – of the dome, the key piece missing from Solomon Layton's and S. Wemyss Smith's original design, shelved when the nation's World War I effort siphoned away materials originally earmarked for the state project.

Even though I'm a Capitol regular, I'm still captivated by its 157-foot-tall, 80-foot-diameter majesty – not only because of its architecture, but also because it symbolizes what Oklahomans can accomplish if they set aside political, religious, socioeconomic and regional differences.

To me, that's an especially encouraging notion in an era when unemployment is scary high, state services are being slashed, political vitriol shows no signs of abating and the summer feels way too much like the record-shattering scorcher of 1980.

I'm well aware, of course, that some still regard the \$21 million addition as a fool's errand, a preposterous, if not criminal, amount to spend on grandeur rather than substance – think: crumbling schools, prisons and highways.

And I'm painfully aware of the Republican-dominated Legislature's skewed spending priorities – tax breaks for well-heeled special interests, tax cuts that disproportionately benefit the wealthy and reduced services especially vital to the most vulnerable among us.

Even so, I view the investment in the Capitol as an investment in Oklahoma. After all, the white limestone and pink granite structure is "the people's house" – our house. It belongs to us all. And whether we like to admit it or not, it says a lot about us as Okies.

Do we dream big dreams? Do we keep our commitments? Do we take care of our properties? Do we share an over-arching sense of civic purpose?

It's not unlike improvements at the major airports in our two largest cities. You might not think of them this way, but Tulsa's International Airport and Oklahoma City's Will Rogers World Airport serve as de facto front doors to both cities and our state.

The first impression many visitors get of Oklahoma is when they emerge from the jetway into the terminals in Tulsa and Oklahoma City. It's cliché, but true: You only get one chance to make a good first impression.

The Capitol is even more important. It's an iconic structure in most states, a must-see for many travelers. You don't have to be a political junkie like me to make it a priority. It's a draw because it gives visitors a sense of history and place, context for which to judge a state.

I've worked in the Capitols in Austin and Sacramento, both so distinct you knew instantly you were in Texas [the pink granite structure is larger – surprise! surprise! – than the U.S. Capitol] or California [towering palm trees framing the white Capitol with gold accents].

I've visited others that I remember for breathtaking vistas [Vermont's surrounded by the densely forested Green Mountains] or unique architecture [Nebraska's 400-foot, 15-story tower seemed to reflect its unicameral legislature].

Some are memorable for all the wrong reasons: I mean no disrespect to our Nevada friends, but I would never mention Carson City or its Capitol in the same sentence with the phrase "awe-inspiring."

As far as I'm concerned, Oklahoma's Capitol isn't just OK. It's terrific – especially since the seedy flophouses along North Lincoln were razed, the dome was erected, the legislative chambers were restored and Capitol devotees, led by former Tulsa Sen. Charles Ford, committed their lives to outfitting it with some of the most interesting, historically significant artwork you'll find anywhere.

It's obvious, though, that Oklahoma's investment in its Capitol didn't end in 2002 when the dome was dedicated. And therein lies a significant challenge: As it approaches its centennial [construction began in 1914 and ended in 1917], Oklahoma's Capitol is in dire need of some TLC – probably about \$80 million to \$90 million worth.

The needs are detailed in the 181-page State Capitol Building Historic Conditions report completed earlier this year by architects and engineers that gave the grand old structure a thorough going over.

"It is time," wrote Capitol architect Duane Mass, "for us to begin a dialogue on the maintenance of this historic structure."

The Capitol was built in an era when – let's face it – things were built to last. Structurally, it's solid and sound. But there are deteriorating parts that, left unattended, could reap dire consequences in the not-too-distant future.

Original parts of the electrical system are still in use – for example, cloth insulation around copper, rather than plastic. Like the building itself, the plumbing system is approaching a century's use – and is pretty well shot.

Even more modern additions to the building – such as the elevators – are in poor shape and need to be replaced. Particularly woeful: the 1960s era tunnel that connects the east-side parking lots to the Capitol itself, enabling pedestrians [often school children on field trips] to avoid dodging oft-heavy traffic on Lincoln Blvd.

When it rains, the tunnel leaks badly. Large, gray plastic trash cans and other

plastic buckets are positioned strategically in a desperate attempt to catch the spillage. It's not uncommon for tunnel-users to slosh through standing water or inhale the distinct odor of mildew and mold – a perfectly dreadful welcome to Capitol visitors.

As John Richard, the director of the State Department of Central Services, and John W. Morrison, the state's construction administrator, summed it up in the report:

"The exterior façade is rapidly deteriorating, exponentially, through seasonal weather extremes. Mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems are worn out. Life-safety systems – fire alarms, fire suppression and emergency egress – are woefully inadequate or nonexistent. Modern communications systems have been piecemealed over the years and will not support future innovations in technology.

"As with any major, historic building, it is time to restore and preserve this priceless asset and make it ready for its Second Hundred Years."

It won't be easy to muster the political will to pump \$80 million to \$90 million into state Capitol repairs during a time when teachers are getting pink slips by the thousands and other state workers are being furloughed.

But think of it this way: You wouldn't let the electrical wiring in your home reach the point where it becomes a fire hazard or the plumbing a health hazard before you did something. You'd protect your investment. You'd spend the money to fix it.

What if we don't commit the financial resources necessary to restore this Oklahoma treasure? What if something terrible happens – a fire or some other calamity? What if the building eventually is allowed to deteriorate to the point it's too costly to repair?

According to experts, replacing the Capitol would cost roughly the same as Oklahoma City's new 850-foot-tall Devon Tower: about \$750 million.

If we're really serious about getting the most bang for the taxpayers' buck, then it's a no-brainer: it's much smarter to pay now than later. Costs are only going to increase. Plus, we won't have to make excuses about how we've allowed the inexcusable – an officially designated National Historic Landmark to lapse into disrepair.

And we won't be left to answer a most embarrassing question: Have we no pride?

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# State Tax Breaks Put Under The Microscope

By David Blatt

The Oklahoma tax code is riddled with some 450 “tax expenditures” that reduce state funds by exempting or giving back tax payments for favored groups and activities.

Despite widespread rhetoric about the need for serious reform of tax expenditures, eliminating tax breaks was “the dog that didn’t bark” this past legislative session.

The Legislature did, however, pass HB 1285 to create a Task Force for the Study of State Tax Credits and Economic Incentives. The task force is charged with examining the justification and economic impact of all state tax credits and incentives.

## PACKED HEARING ROOM

On a sweltering Friday in mid-July, an overflow crowd of policymakers, lobbyists, reporters, and policy analysts packed the fourth floor committee rooms at the State Capitol for the task force’s first meeting.

The meeting began with opening statements from the 10 task force members, which includes legislative leaders from both parties, statewide officeholders, and Cabinet secretaries. Their remarks emphasized that in a time of severe fiscal constraint, expenditures through the tax code must be held to the same scrutiny and accountability as direct budgetary expenditures.

In particular, task force co-chair David Dank stressed that decisions about tax credit programs must be guided by a recent Attorney General’s opinion on the subject.

As we discussed in this blog post, then-AG Drew Edmondson laid out a three-part test to determine the constitutionality of a tax credit.

## TAX CREDITS QUESTIONED

The AG’s opinion cast doubt on several existing tax credits, particularly transferable tax credits where entities purchasing a tax credit are not held to the same standards and conditions as those who initially qualify for and receive the credit.

The task force began its work by reviewing one of the tax credits singled out for concern in the Attorney General’s ruling: the credit for qualified rehabilitation structures, informally known as the historic preservation credit.

This credit is allowed for rehabilitation of certified historic hotels, newspaper buildings, or other historic structures, in an amount equal to the federal credit, which is 20% of allowable costs.

The Oklahoma credit is transferable and can be used to offset tax liability over 10 years. According to the state’s OpenBooks website, the credit was claimed in FY ’08 on 28 income tax returns for a total of \$671,000; that same year, however, \$8.1 million in historic rehabilitation credits were claimed against the insurance premium tax.

## OKLAHOMA WATCH CITED

An Oklahoma Watch article identified Tulsa-based Community Care HMO as the most aggressive purchaser of building rehabilitation tax credits, using them to reduce its state tax payments by \$10.3 million over three years.

In his opinion, the AG voiced concern about the statutory language on the transferability of the historic rehabilitation credit:

“This transfer statute that does not permit enforcement of the three elements required to support a constitutional state economic tax credit against a transferor is infirm, for it would permit the granting of an economic development income tax credit to the transferee taxpayer without recourse, in instances when the transferor failed to provide the promised consideration, and in instances in which the tax credit either did not serve a “public purpose,” or did not have adequate protections and safeguards attached to it.

## ACCOUNTABILITY LOST

In other words, while the law contains provisions for holding a company engaged in historic preservation projects to certain standards, that accountability is lost once the credit is transferred, making the statute unconstitutional in the opinion of the attorney general.

Beyond the transferability issue, Chairman Dank expressed strong skepticism



that providing public subsidies to private developers for commercial development represents the proper role of government, especially in situations where qualifying commercial hotels are competing against non-subsidized developments.

The credits were defended by Bob Blackburn, director of the Oklahoma Historical Society, and developers and business leaders associated with the Skirvin Hotel in Oklahoma City, the Mayo Hotel in Tulsa, and other projects.

## PROponents SPEAK OUT

Proponents spoke to the importance of the tax credit for the financing of historical renovation project and to the impact that successful projects have had in transforming abandoned and blighted properties into commercially-feasible, revenue-generating enterprises that help lift up entire city centers and Main Streets. In total, 24 projects have been certified as eligible for state rehabilitation credits since FY 2005.

The first Task Force meeting also devoted several hours to an insurance industry tax credit. Insurance companies are allowed to claim tax credits equal to one hundred percent of the mandatory fees they are assessed to two insurance guaranty funds that pay claims to policyholders in cases where insurance companies fail.

The Insurance Department paid out an average of \$11.6 million in credits between 2007 and 2010. Industry spokesmen argued that without the credit, they would be forced to raise insurance premiums and some might issue fewer policies or leave the Oklahoma market entirely.

Rep. Dank and Rep. Scott Inman questioned, however, why the cost for the assessment should be fully borne by Oklahoma taxpayers rather than by companies and their policyholders.

The meeting made clear that this will be a long, often tedious, sometimes contentious process as the Task Force works to meet its year-end deadline for submitting a final report.

But for those looking for serious scrutiny and purposeful action to stop the runaway train of tax expenditures, the initial signs indicate clearly that this Task Force is serious about meeting the challenge.

– David Blatt is director of 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>

# Coburn Taken To Task For Criticizing Amtrak

U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn made inaccurate public comments that disparaged Amtrak and the Heartland Flyer, describing the state service as a federally funded profit bust.

“Unfortunately, Coburn’s comments were not accurate,” said state Rep. Richard Morrisette, author of the Eastern Flyer Passenger Rail Initiative [HB 1686]. “The Heartland Flyer operates on an annual \$2 million state supplemental contract with Amtrak. The train is not federally funded as Coburn stated.

“The train has demonstrated itself to be a viable economic tool with advantages for Oklahoma businesses, returning \$3.60 for every state dollar invested, while providing an increasingly popular transportation alternative for travelers.”

The Texas Transportation Institute Study, Measuring the Benefits of Intercity Passenger Rail: A Study of the Heartland Flyer Corridor estimated \$18 million in traveler spending along the Heartland Flyer Amtrak corridor in 2009.

The combined state of Oklahoma, State of Texas cost during 2009 was \$3.95 million. \$1.4 million was collected in local sales associated with the \$18 million.

“If Sen. Coburn’s fiscal standards were applied to other transportation modes,

Oklahoma and the nation would be supported by dirt road and grass landing strip infrastructure,” said Morrisette, D-OKC. “The Heartland Flyer represents a solid transportation investment.

“As our highway infrastructure crumbles and energy concerns grow, we must look at passenger rail as a solution to the greater transportation challenge facing our nation. I recognize the transportation value and economic advantage provided by the Heartland Flyer,” he said.

Morrisette’s bill created a task force that will study extending the OKC-Fort Worth Heartland Flyer to Tulsa, “using a public-private partnership.”

Coburn also cited as wasteful spending a double decker bridge on Interstate 244 in Tulsa that must accommodate high-speed passenger rail, though there’s not even a regular passenger rail line near the bridge.

Morrisette said he agreed that this is a bridge too far, whose time may never come, considering the cost to bring high speed rail is prohibitive.

“I just have to say that when Sen. Coburn makes comments to imply that the [Heartland] Flyer has never made money, he’s woefully misinformed,” he said.

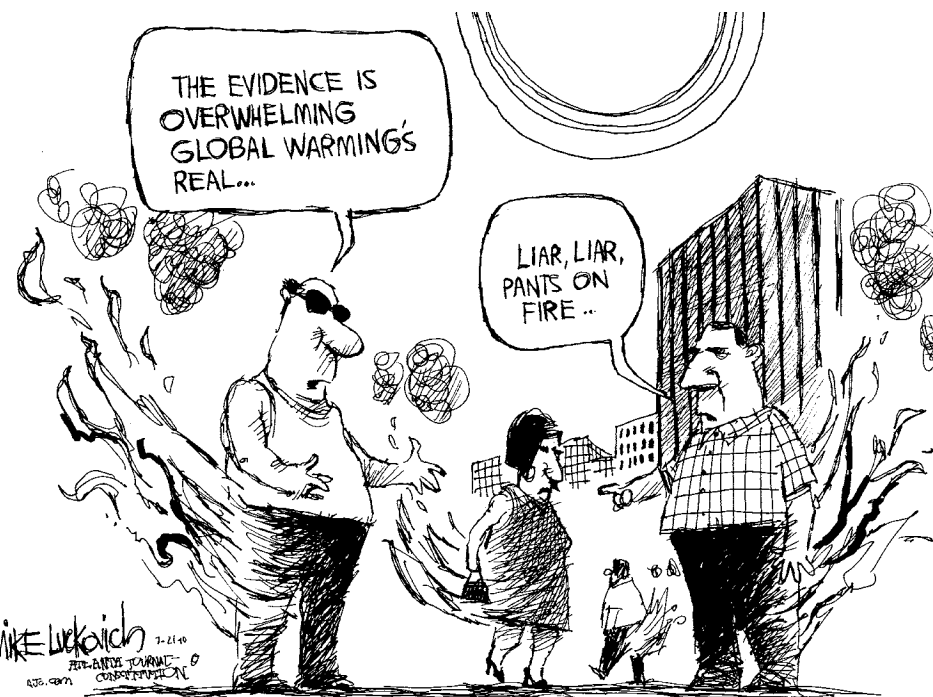
# **Wild Weather Is Just The Beginning**

**By Helen C. Miller**

Recently there have been extreme weather events. These are evidence of climate warming.

There are many significant happenings that show that climate is changing and the planet is warming. If you listen to TV news and/or read newspapers and magazines you will have heard of these:

- Glaciers everywhere are retreating, growing smaller.
- In the arctic, which is warming twice as fast as the rest of the planet, the ocean ice pack is growing smaller and thinner each year; melting of winter ice begins earlier, and it is expected that by 2013 there will be an ice free "northwest passage," a long dreamed of summer water route for ships between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.
- In the arctic the distance from shore to the summer ice pack is 200 miles. Just a few years ago it was, on average, 50 miles. This is endangering polar bears and the seals they prey on.
- Water temperature of the Arctic Ocean was 10 degrees above average in the summer of 2009, and the world's oceans were 1.1 degree higher than the average for the 20th century.
- The ice shelves surrounding the Antarctic continent are melting, breaking loose, and floating out to sea.
- Greenland ice cover is thinning, melting, and calving icebergs faster than ever before in recorded history.
- Ocean levels, as a result of the melting ice, have risen enough to permanently inundate beaches and shores of many low lying islands, driving residents inland or to other places.
- Coral reefs, sensitive to water temperatures, are dying in many places where the water has warmed beyond their range of tolerance.
- High mountain glaciers and snow packs are melting at a rapid rate everywhere. In the Himalayan Mountains, melt water from glaciers is the year around water supply for people living at lower elevations nearby. Several of the great rivers of India and the Asian sub-continent are fed by Himalayan glaciers and snow-melt. If melting continues and these glaciers disappear, life for people, plants, and animals will change drastically. In parts of Peru, 80% of water for drinking, other municipal uses, and irrigation comes from a melting mountain glacier. In Bolivia, ice on one of the highest mountains on the continent once supported a year around ski resort, but now has almost no glacier ice and so little water is available from the mountain that it is rationed in the cities and towns nearby.
- Some animals and plants have extended their ranges northward and in mountain habitats, upwards.
- The fire season – time when conditions like high temperatures and low humidity are right for forest and grass fires – has increased in the U.S. by 78 days during the last 20 years.
- 2009 and 2010 were among the hottest years on record for the planet as a whole and average ocean temperatures were warmer in July, 2009, than in the previous 130 years of record keeping. July was the hottest month on record in Oklahoma.
- Every summer now more cities in the U.S. report days when their temperatures soar beyond 100 degrees and break existing records for heat. In late Sep-



tember 2010 Los Angeles experienced 113-degree temperatures, the hottest ever recorded, for several days.

- In Colorado there were no severe freezing winter temperatures between 1997 and 2010 and during this time 1 ½ million acres of pine trees died due to damage by Mountain Bark Beetles that before were mostly killed by winter cold. If there is no annual control on their population, foresters fear that pines will disappear by the middle of the 21st Century.
- More often now than in the recent past, in the winter a few places experience colder temperatures than normal, an example of extreme weather. This phenomenon was extreme during the winter of 2010-11 in the U.S. when at certain times all 50 states had snow and temperatures in some places were as cold as those in the Antarctic summer.

See WEATHER Page 9

## **Crazy Weather And Human Response-Ability**

**By James Stovall**

Al Gore was wrong. Recent evidence indicates that climate change is happening much faster than he, or the scientists that he relied upon, predicted. Climatologists have been predicting that heat-trapping pollution will produce simultaneous drying and flooding. Warmer air holds more water vapor than cold air. Periods of high temperatures will last longer. Heavy rains and floods will become more extreme.

Consider the following:

- The drought and wildfires currently sweeping through the southwestern part of the U.S. is considered to be worse than the Great Dustbowl of the 1930's.
- 2010 was the hottest year on record during the past 100 years.
- Current averages indicate that 2011 will be hotter than 2010.
- Massive flooding has swept over Pakistan, Australia, New Zealand and numerous states in the U.S. over the past 12 months.
- April 2011 had more tornadoes across the U.S. than any month in recorded history.
- Record breaking high temperatures have wiped out wheat and grain harvests in Russia, France, Germany and much of Texas.
- Weather related disasters in the first six months of 2011 have cost over \$30 billion in the U.S. alone.
- The arctic ice cap, which continues to melt at an unprecedented rate, will no longer reflect heat away from the Earth.

Since its inception, religion has sought to explain the unexplainable or in some way to make sense out of things that seem random or arbitrary. Imagine the cave man faced with lightning or the earliest farmers praying for rain. Mystery and the unknown seems to be built into the very fabric of existence and we all, at times, struggle to make sense of those parts of our lives that seem impossible to understand.

One such source of mystery has been the weather. We often attribute the power

to control weather exclusively to the divine. No one has ever been able to predict, much less control, weather with any great degree of accuracy. To this day, insurance companies describe catastrophic weather events as "acts of God;" events that are unavoidable and beyond control. In light of wild and unprecedented weather patterns in recent years, and what we know about climate change, we might want to examine the assumption that the weather is, in fact, beyond the realm of human influence.

A funny thing happened on the way to the 21st Century: human beings began to effect earth processes like never before. Human activity now has a tremendous influence on the earth's natural systems, including crazy weather. Humans destructive imprint on nature has never been greater. It is now quite clear that humans have a significant impact upon climate and weather systems. It is as if the earth's natural systems have been on automatic pilot for several hundred thousand years and now, as a result of human intervention, we are in control and we don't know how it all works.

There are many small steps that ordinary people can take to combat climate change and protect the planet for future generations. Personal and policy changes need to happen very soon if we are to respond in a timely manner to this unprecedented crisis. We are on a journey of discovery in regard to figuring out exactly what is required of us to ensure a viable future for those yet to be born. No one has all the answers. No one is asking that we turn back the clock and live in caves. We are being asked to be aware and pay attention to how our actions affect the future. There are many instances in our country and around the world of people taking heroic action on behalf of the future. We can change our way of doing things but we won't do it with our eyes closed.

– James Stovall is Director of the Mediation Institute and serves on the steering committee for Transition Oklahoma City. He can be reached at [j\\_stovall@site.net](mailto:j_stovall@site.net).



# Cole Fights Executive Order On Political Cash

By Janie Lorber and Annie Shuppy

Rep. Tom Cole knows that offense is often the best defense. The Oklahoma Republican is on track to derail an executive order that doesn't even exist yet by inserting prohibitive language into one spending bill after another.

House lawmakers are expected to vote on an amendment Cole offered to the Energy and Water Development appropriations bill that would bar the creation of any rule mandating the disclosure of political contributions. If it passes, it will be the third such change the congressman has made since June.

His amendments are a pre-emptive attack on an executive order the White House is considering that would require federal contractors to disclose money given to third-party groups. And if the language remains in the bills adopted by the Senate, it could prevent President Barack Obama from moving forward.

## BUILDING A RECORD

"It's a strong statement that you make when the House continues to vote for this on all these bills," said Steve Waskiewicz, a legislative aide to Cole. "It builds a record that becomes an important bargaining chip."

Under a draft of the executive order, which was leaked in April, contractors and some of their high-level employees would be required to disclose money given to third-party groups "to ensure an efficient and economical procurement process." Those contributions would then be made publicly available online.

The leak prompted a political firestorm on Capitol Hill, raising the ire of Republicans concerned that such a rule could suppress contributions to the groups considered pivotal to the party's success in 2010.

## MIXED REACTION

Rep. Darrell Issa, R-CA, chairman of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee, held a hearing investigating the issue, and lawmakers in both chambers publicly condemned or celebrated the idea.

The administration, however, has remained silent because the order is still under negotiation. It is part of the White House's ongoing effort to counter the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision, which removed limitations on corporations' and unions' political spending to outside groups.

Cole's first two amendments, to bills funding the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security – which awarded \$367.4 billion and \$13.6 billion, respectively, in contracts last year, according to government data – both passed the House

with 20 Democratic votes.

Reps. Walter Jones Jr. of North Carolina and Geoff Davis of Kentucky were the only Republicans who voted against the amendment on the defense bill. Jones and Rep. John Shimkus of Illinois were the lone

Republican crossovers on the homeland security amendment. While government watchdog organizations and a group of small businesses have praised the Administration's push for increased transparency, many House and Senate Republicans – and a growing number of Democrats, including House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer of Maryland – say it would politicize the contracting process, chill free speech and circumvent the wishes of Congress.

The would-be order's opponents point out that the Senate last year rejected the DISCLOSE Act, which would have compelled the disclosure of donations to third-party political groups.

## HOYER DECLINES

Hoyer, whose district is home to several federal contractors, repeatedly said he'd oppose such an executive order when the draft was circulated earlier this year, but he decided not to vote for Cole's amendments.

"Hoyer does not want to pre-empt the executive branch on a policy that does not exist," said Daniel Reilly, a spokesman for Hoyer.

Cole also persuaded the Appropriations Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government to incorporate his amendment in the original text of its spending bill, which is likely to come to the House floor next.

The congressman plans to include his language in upcoming spending bills, Waskiewicz said. Members have also introduced standalone bills intended to counter the order. Sen. Susan Collins, R-ME, sponsored the measure in her chamber with 21 co-sponsors and inserted the language in the defense authorization bill, which was recently approved by the Senate Armed Services Committee.

The Senate has yet to take any action on the Defense and Homeland Security appropriations bills, so the prospects for Cole's amendments are not clear. But policy language in spending bills, unlike disagreements over funding levels, typically survives cross-chamber negotiations.

© Roll Call

# WEATHER

From Page 8

Weather events everywhere have become more extreme – where and when it is cold, it is colder than normal; where hot, hotter than normal; when it rains, there is more rain than average, causing more flooding than usual; when dry, drier and dry longer; storms when they occur, are more often severe ... all signs of climate perturbations.

Examples of these climate perturbations abound and more occur almost every month. If you listen to or read the news you will here of these...a few are listed below:

- On Aug. 9, 2009, in Louisville, KY, 6 ½ inches of rain fell in one hour causing the worse flooding ever experienced by that city.
- In November of 2009 the Lake District of England received more rainfall in one day than was normal for a several month period, and towns were inundated by rushing floodwater up to 10 feet high.
- In July 2009, Portland and Seattle experienced a record setting heat wave with daily temperatures of over 103 degrees. At the same time northeastern states were experiencing the coolest weather ever recorded for that time of year.
- In October 2009 Atlanta, after years of drought, experienced the worse flooding in its history.
- In December 2009 and 2010 and in January 2011 the eastern coast states experienced blizzards that brought several feet of snow in some places and disrupted transportation, caused power outages, and provided a white Christmas [2010] for the first time ever for many southeastern states.
- On Christmas eve Oklahoma City [among other towns and cities] received more snow and ice than ever before in recorded history. This was called the blizzard of 2009 because of the excessive cold and snow. In early February 2011 another snowfall set a new record for parts of Oklahoma.
- Severe weather events called derechos – characterized by thunderstorms and strong straight winds – are much more common. One hit southern Illinois on May 8, 2009. The media dubbed it an inland hurricane because winds peaked at 106 mph and were 80-plus mph for 30 minutes, causing thousands of trees to topple and leaving electricity off in the area for six days. Two people died. A similar event occurred in Chicago on June 18, 2010. Wind gusts of 77 mph downed power lines, leaving 300,000 customers without power; trees were toppled; and glass windows were blown out in tall building in the downtown part of the city. Type in derechos on Google to learn more about this phenomenon.
- During the night of June 14, 2010 it began to rain in the Oklahoma City area and in about six hours poured six to 14 inches, the most ever in such a short time, in various parts of the city causing massive flooding.
- About the same time as the Oklahoma City flooding in mid-June, record breaking floods killed thousands of people in southern France, southeastern China, and Brazil. At the end of June 2010, Romania experienced severe flooding that left 22 people dead.
- During the first week of July in 2010 the northeast from Baltimore to Boston experienced record heat, 20 cities suffering from heat more than 100 degrees.

- At the end of July and the first of August 2010, flooding in northwest Pakistan and neighboring Afghanistan killed more than 800 people and millions of people were displaced in southern China as heavier than normal monsoon rains inundated these areas. At the same time Russia was suffering from the hottest and driest summer in recorded history. Hundreds of wildfires blanketed the land with smoke.

- In mid July 2010, Argentina experienced its coldest winter in decades, with more snow than ever before in many places in the country.

- A severe draught during the summer of 2010 dropped water levels in the Rio Negro, a rain forest tributary of the Amazon River in Brazil, to the lowest levels ever recorded, isolating villages and 60,000 people along its banks because they depend on the river for transportation and contact with the outside world.

- Mid-December 2010 was a time of record-breaking events in the U.S. and Europe. Europe experienced blizzard conditions that closed roads and airports for many days. In southern California a record setting four to 13 inches of rain caused flooding and landslides and 13 feet of snow in the mountains. The storm moved east and caused flooding in Utah and Nevada. In the midwestern U.S. heavy snow and extreme winds brought misery and deaths.

- Late December 2010 and early January 2011 brought relentless rain and massive flooding to Queensland, Australia. More than 200,000 people were displaced and many killed as 23 cities were entirely evacuated as an area the size of France and Germany were inundated. This was a year after Australia, after years of drought and the worst heat wave in history, experienced Black Saturday, the beginning of 400 separate wildfires that burned for three weeks killing 175 people and countless animals.

- During the first week of February 2011, 26 states experienced blizzard conditions with numerous snowfall records set and 13,000 airline cancellations, "the largest extreme weather event in recent history" according to one weatherman.

- In early April 2011, in a two-day period 240 tornados tore through six southeastern states, from Oklahoma to Virginia, killing 46 people. This was "unprecedented," according to one weatherman.

One reason for colder winters and more snow is the loss of Arctic sea ice and the effect that change has on the winds that circle the North Pole. The extent of sea ice in the Arctic is rapidly diminishing resulting in more open water and thinner ice. This allows heat to escape to the atmosphere. This releases the Polar Vortex, winds that normally circle the North Pole, and like a fence keep the cold air in, to break down and allow cold air to spill south bringing arctic cold to the U.S. Therefore, the recent extreme cold is also the result of climate warming.

These extreme events probably will become more frequent in the future and more and more people will suffer as a consequence. It is necessary for everyone to accept the reality of climate warming and do everything possible to slow the process.

– The author, a retired Oklahoma State University zoology professor, lives in Stillwater

## BOOKS

# Greenfield Cleverly Plays 'What If' Game

By Bob Sanders

### THEN EVERYTHING CHANGED

*Stunning Alternate Histories of American Politics:  
JFK, RFK, Carter, Ford, Reagan*  
By Jeff Greenfield  
Penguin Group USA  
448 pages, \$26.95

In today's curious world where the search for truth is often damnably difficult to pursue, much less find, I recently set about chasing just who qualifies as a journalist.

Starting at a logical first step in acquiring historical insight, I consulted my somewhat battered Webster's New World Dictionary whose 1994 copyright assured me that it would contain neither new words inspired by Twitter short speak nor the inadvertent creative efforts of Sarah Palin.

My Webster's suggests a journalist is a person whose occupation is journalism; reporter, news editor. Etc. 2 a person who keeps a journal or diary.

Seeking something a bit more modern, I checked in with my computer's handy dandy TheFreeDictionary and, not surprisingly, found a broader interpretation in which journalists who broadcast on radio or television are taken into the journalistic fold. Thesaurus, offering a list of various types of journalists, came up with a truly faded phrase: sob sister.

I could have sworn that one went out with Rosalind Russell and His Girl Friday.

### PLAYING 'WHAT IF?' GAME

What I'm getting at is that journalists, once an easily-defined species, are all over the place these days.

As amateur and professional photojournalists, they have taken us amazingly close to tornadoes, inside mass murder in Tucson, and, by way of cell phone photography, uprisings in the Middle East. Twitter has played a key role in the development of the uprisings.

We may be approaching a time when journalists-to-be won't need a large leg up by getting a degree at a prestigious school of journalism.

That's not to suggest that rabble-rousers like Rush Limbaugh and Ed Schultz are journalists although their followers disagree. Bloggers are of a quality to be considered on an individual basis.

One of this country's very best journalists is Jeff Greenfield whose most recent book, *Then Everything Changed*, prompts further questions. Fortunately, the category Alternate History is enabling to writers who want to play the game of What If?

It is challenging territory.

### GIFTED STORYTELLER

As historian Doris Kearns Goodwin suggests on the book's cover flap, "Historians have long been tantalized by the what-ifs of history - imagining where we might be if certain events had unfolded in a different way. In the hands of this tremendously gifted storyteller, *Then Everything Changed* will captivate the reader every step along the way."

Greenfield's story, of three novella-length pieces about modern presidencies, come together as highly plausible.

In 1960, just before John Kennedy was sworn in, a suicide bomber [Richard Pavlick] failed to detonate his charge at the President-elect's home in Palm Beach when wife Jacqueline and daughter Caroline appeared at the front door.

Greenfield posits the question: what if he had carried out his mission thus forcing Lyndon Johnson into making decisions about the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis?

The other what ifs include the failure of Sirhan Sirhan to murder Bobby Kennedy [he is saved by brother-in-law Steve Smith who suffers a shoulder wound] and a campaign surge by Gerald Ford that beats Jimmy Carter in 1976 enabling Ford to handle the Iran hostage crisis and other matters.

### RFK, WARTS AND ALL

Greenfield is, perhaps, at his best with understandable insight into John Kennedy's younger brother, warts and all, whose conflicts with J. Edgar Hoover and Johnson are legendary.

Greenfield, in addition to his impressive reportorial work [CBS, ABC, CNN, Time magazine, New York Times], was a speechwriter for Kennedy. There can be no doubt that Greenfield thoroughly enjoyed writing *Then Everything Changed*. Political news junkies will delight in this one.

Greenfield has a lot of fun with Gen. Curtis LeMay making reference to him as having inspired the Gen. Buck Turgidson [George C. Scott] character in *Dr. Strangelove* while Nixon is a paranoid presence whose hatred of the Kennedys knows no bounds.

All the major political players of their times are here including John Lindsey, George Wallace, Ted ["Spiro"] Agnew, Chicago's Mayor Richard Daley, Hubert

Humphrey, Dean Acheson, Eugene McCarthy, and Clark Clifford.

### JOHNSON PREFERRED NIXON?

The latter, a trusted and discreet advisor to Presidents, had soldiered on for Johnson largely because of contempt for Nixon. He eventually comes to the conclusion that Johnson is so perturbed by Bobby Kennedy that he wants Nixon to beat him in the alternate history run for the White House.

I'll not reveal more since, in a very real sense, *Then Everything Changed* is a kind of whodunit perhaps best described as a what's-going-to-happen-next? A nice surprise at the end is an Afterward in which Greenfield explains how reality shaped his speculation with plausibility his goal.

"Many of the words, thoughts, and deeds described here are taken from the real-life record. Many of the words spoken by the principles were actually spoken by them, in different settings, of course. The political terrain on which these stories played tracks as closely as possible to reality; and where I have turned an 'almost happened' event into reality, I've tried to shape an altered political atmosphere based on history."

Greenfield's book is compelling largely because he has achieved plausibility.

Among other things, one wonders how many of us have even heard of the Kennedy Palm Beach would-be bomber? As the author explains, historian Robert Dallek, who wrote a JFK book titled *An Unfinished Life*, had no knowledge of the event until a newspaper reporter called him about it in 2003.

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# Democrats Need Presidential Primary, Too

By Froma Harrop

Ed Rendell, do you have plans for 2012? Hillary Clinton? If you, the former Democratic governor of Pennsylvania, or you, the secretary of state, are free next year and wouldn't mind, would you please launch a primary challenge against President Obama?

This request stems not from anger at Obama's penchant for blithely negotiating away certain Medicare benefits or the need to modestly raise tax revenues – things that Democrats want, and if the polls are correct, so do most Americans. It was about not negotiating at all while appearing to negotiate on a matter that should be non-negotiable: the full faith and credit of the United States.

In the last half-century, Congress has raised the debt ceiling 49 times under Republican presidents and 29 times under Democrats. The votes were cast without drama because the idea of this country defaulting on its debts was unthinkable. This last-minute deal notwithstanding, the dangerous precedent whereby America's promise to pay what it owes can be brought into political play has been set. Meanwhile, the spectacle of government dysfunction has already hastened our decline as a world power.

Make no mistake: The Tea Party Republicans have engaged in economic terrorism against the United States – threatening to blow up the economy if they don't get what they want. And like the al-Qaeda bombers, what they want is delusional: the dream of restoring some fan-



tasy caliphate in which no one pays taxes, while the country is magically protected from foreign attack and the elderly get government-paid hip replacements.

Americans are not supposed to negotiate with terrorists, but that's what Obama has been doing. Obama should have grabbed the bully pulpit early on, bellowing that everything can be discussed but America's honor, which requires making good on its debt obligations. Lines about "we're all at fault" and "Republicans should compromise" are beyond pathetic on a subject that should be

beyond discussion.

That the Republican leadership couldn't control a small group of ignoramuses in its ranks has brought disgrace on their party. But oddly, Obama's passivity made it hard for responsible Republicans to control their destructive children.

The GOP extremists would ask Obama for his firstborn, and he'd say, "OK." So they think, why not ask for his second-born, to which he responds, "Let's talk."

House Speaker Boehner couldn't go back to his caucus members and tell them: "We fought like tigers with

an intransigent White House. We did well, considering what we were up against." But he couldn't say that because they were up against Jell-O.

Obama can take credit for some major achievements. His auto industry bailout saved the industrial Midwest from collapse. The financial industry reforms will begin to force at least some discipline on Wall Street. And the health care law will ensure coverage for all Americans while reducing deficits in the long-term.

But Obama's successes are undermined by his inability to vigorously sell them, even to a receptive mainstream.

Recall the summer of idiocy, when Obama sat mute amid moronic charges that Democrats were establishing "death panels." A Democratic president with his party holding majorities in both houses of Congress could have quickly whipped health care reform into law. But Obama let it fester for month after month of phony negotiations.

Republicans are ultimately going to take the rap over this debt-ceiling outrage. The full faith and credit of the United States is not a matter over which reasonable people may disagree, and the larger public knows that in its heart.

But Democrats would do themselves a huge favor if they had a living, breathing leader as their presidential candidate in 2012. Won't someone step up?

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## Provocateur Or Sober, Serious Historian?

By Chris Allen Carter

Admirers of the work and career of Bart D. Ehrman of the University of North Carolina welcome Anneli Rufus' review of *Forged: Writing in the Name of God – Why the Bible's Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are* in your June 10 issue.

We use the term "review" loosely because Rufus develops only one main idea – namely, that a considerable number of the books of the New Testament were forged.

Rufus does recognize that the technical legitimacy or illegitimacy of these books is not really Ehrman's main point, that he is actually more concerned with the continuing acceptance of such books as direct messages from God.

Documents that steal their authority may gain undeserved influence and, combined with the notion that they are divinely inspired, do greater damage down through the years than might have otherwise been the case.

Take, for example, Rufus's brief discussion of the impact of First Timothy. Considered by most Biblical scholars, not just Ehrman, to have been forged under the name of Paul sometime in the 2nd Century, long after Paul's death, certain passages in that text, such as the admonition against female teachers [1 Timothy 2.12], persist down to the present day as a hindrance to full participa-

tion by women in the church.

According to an orthodox interpretation of the Scriptures, Paul was chosen for his mission by Jesus Christ, who appeared to him on the road to Damascus, as Jesus was chosen for his mission by God, who anointed him at the River Jordan.

Thus God, Jesus, and Paul are linked in a kind of succession [the model for apostolic succession] and comprise pretty much One Unified Authority, Gender Male, whose word is all for one and one for all and whose combined commandments assume absolute force by definition.

If Paul wrote it and Jesus commissioned it and God stands behind it, that pretty much settles it. You see what the problem is – and how it is exacerbated by the forgery. If First Timothy is accepted as the word of Paul, it becomes virtually a text-message straight from pearlygates.com and gender discrimination becomes divine law.

Rufus does not dwell on such issues. She includes some useful biographical material and enough quotes from Ehrman's critics to reveal how extreme they are. But most of the rest of the review is devoted to sensationalizing the debate between Ehrman and his opponents rather than explicating Ehrman's larger argument. Thus we get a radical Eh-

rman who thrives on controversy.

Admittedly, Ehrman can be provocative. Any enlightenment provokes its preceding dark age. However, such statements do not catch the tone of the typical Ehrman paragraph, nor do they convey the depth and balance of his overall project as we have come to know it.

Looking back at his writing as a whole, we find an Ehrman who seems a fair-minded and methodical student of the culture wars of late antiquity. Pointing out the dubious authorship of certain texts is not the same thing as dismissing wholesale their contents.

Ehrman appreciates the difficulties faced by early Christians in their search for meaning in the chaotic first three or four centuries after the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth and understands the campaigns they waged to gain a foothold in this anxiety-ridden free-for-all.

With the structures of traditional authority breaking down, various Christianities [note the plural] fought to fill the power vacuum. Embroiled at a new level of handwritten controversy and using the relatively new means of communication at their disposal, they hurled at each other an assortment of documentary genres: epistles, gospels, acts or histories, apocalypses, and eventually creeds

and tractates.

Whatever truths [note the plural] they achieved, they did so in the midst of a swirl of collective endeavor and confrontation with others, of loyalty to insiders and opposition to outsiders, of merger and division.

But that is how truths always emerge, out of a cauldron of rhetorical conflict.

Ehrman describes these rhetorical battles in great detail. He even does research. He brings to life the ancient documents by treating them as the products of years of human strife rather than as the deposits of more or less instantaneous, supernatural visitations. Who does the author of *Forged* think he is? A modern academic?

Maybe Rufus is correct. Maybe Ehrman is now losing patience with ignorance and gullibility, stepping up his attacks, and hyping his arguments. But what we have read so far of his new book suggests not.

Confident, forceful, and univocal, yes; inflammatory, no. So we would simply recommend that curious and open-minded readers delve into *Forged* or his earlier volumes.

Then we can all decide for ourselves whether Bart Ehrman is a sensational provocateur or serious and sober historian.

– The author lives in Norman

# 'Crusader For Christendom' No Christian

By Charles C. Haynes

Within hours of last month's mass murder in Norway, headlines around the world proclaimed the accused killer, Anders Behring Breivik, a "Christian terrorist."

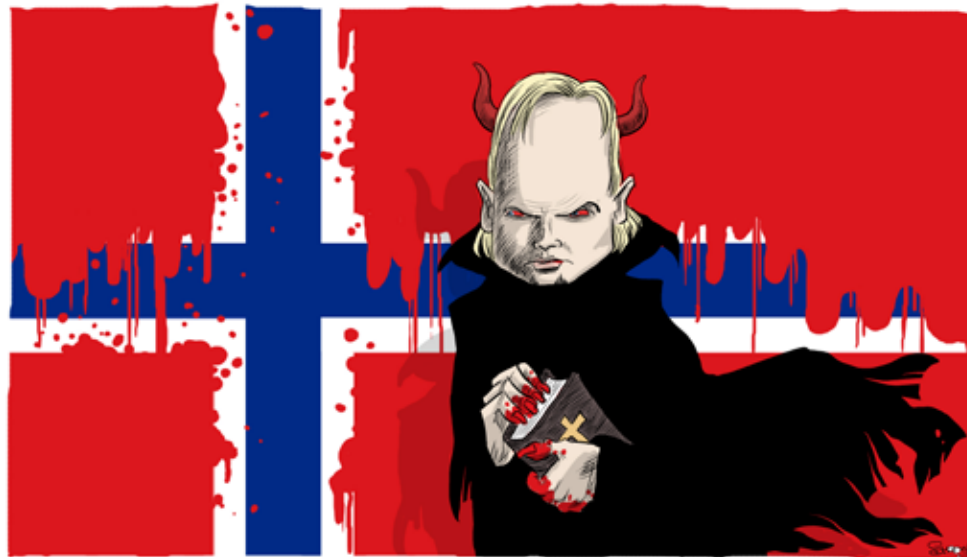
The "Christian" label apparently came from initial statements by a Norwegian police official describing Breivik as a right-wing, Christian fundamentalist – a characterization based on the official's quick read of Breivik's Internet postings.

A closer look, however, reveals that Breivik sees himself as a cultural, not a religious, Christian. "Myself and many more like me do not necessarily have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and God," he writes in his manifesto. "We do however believe in Christianity as a cultural, social, identity and moral platform. This makes us Christian."

Styling himself as a "crusader" for Christendom, Breivik claims to have reconstituted the medieval "Knights Templar," cells of like-minded warriors committed to fight what he sees as the Islamic threat to Christian Europe. Borrowing Islamophobic rhetoric from American anti-Muslim groups, Breivik rages against "multiculturalism" that he warns will result in a Muslim takeover of Christian Europe.

If this is "Christian," it is a Middle Ages throwback bearing little or no resemblance to the Christian faith practiced by millions of Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox believers throughout the world.

Breivik's delusional manipulation of Christianity is, in fact, a mirror image of al-Qaeda. Just as Osama



bin Laden twisted Islam to fit his violent political agenda, so Breivik distorts Christianity to advance his racist vision of a "Christian Europe." And just as bin Laden was determined to remove all Westerners and non-Muslims from the holy lands of Islam, so Breivik seeks to remove Muslims from Europe by any means necessary.

Parts of Breivik's manifesto are drawn from al-Qaeda's playbook. Like Muslim extremists who murder in the name of restoring a lost Caliphate, Breivik killed at least 76 innocent people in service of his demented defense of Christendom.

Of course, this toxic mix of religion and politics isn't new. As Roger Williams observed nearly four centuries ago, much of history is a tragic story of rivers of blood spilled in the

name of one religion fighting against another in an endless struggle for political domination.

That's why when he founded Rhode Island in 1635, Williams was determined to build what he described as "a wall or hedge of separation" between the "garden of the church" and the wilderness of the world." Williams condemned the idea of "Christendom" as profoundly unchristian because, he argued, state appropriation of religion inevitably corrupts faith and coerces conscience.

With no established faith and "soul liberty" for all, Rhode Island would become the proving ground for the American experiment in religious pluralism and freedom. By separating the institutions of religion and government, Americans have been able to live with deep religious differences

– without violent holy wars.

But then, as now, there are those among us who fear and oppose a multi-religious, multicultural society. Growing numbers of Europeans and Americans might readily agree with those 18th Century critics of Rhode Island who disdained the colony as "the sewer of New England." Although few would endorse Breivik's violent tactics, many accept his analysis of Europe's "Muslim problem" and sympathize with his demand for a society that is racially and religiously pure.

For Breivik, "multiculturalism" is the filthiest word in any language. For Williams, who welcomed all "consciences" [including those with whom he deeply disagreed], "Christendom" was the word he most despised. In the United States, religious freedom makes possible the first while preventing the second.

As we absorb the larger meaning and scope of this tragedy, let's remember that Breivik may be a self-appointed defender of Christendom, but he's no Christian. He may have been baptized as a Protestant at age 15, but in the words of Roger Williams, "Christenings make not Christians."

The initial headlines got it very wrong. Labeling Breivik a "Christian terrorist" – or, for that matter, to label others "Muslim terrorists" – not only unfairly demonizes an entire religion, it also fuels the hate and anger of those who seek a "clash of civilizations."

– The author is director of the Religious Freedom Education Project

## Threat Of America's Nativist Far Right

By James Ridgeway

As emerging reports would have it, Kevin William Harpham, 36, who is accused of setting a bomb to go off at the Martin Luther King Jr. Day parade in Spokane, WA, was yet another "lone wolf" terrorist, acting at his own behest and on his own behalf.

Even groups on the racist, radical far right that so clearly inspired him are rushed to disown and denounce the indicted man.

Regardless of whether he was a "member" of an organized group, there can yet be no doubt that Harpham saw himself as part of a movement – one that has an especially broad reach in the age of Obama, and roots as deep as American culture itself.

### RACIST RIGHT GETS BOOST

The vision of a black president has given the racist far right one of its biggest boosts since the civil rights era of the 1960s.

Figures toted up by the Southern Poverty Law Center suggest a dramatic rise in the numbers of organized groups: their numbers grew by 40% from 2008 to 2009, and an additional 22% from 2009 to 2010, bringing the total to 2,145 groups.

It's difficult to know precisely what these numbers mean, since these groups are constantly changing names, dissolving, reforming or springing up, and few of them maintain public membership rolls.

What is nonetheless clear is that a strong far right movement has re-emerged, and what unites it is the age-old American doctrine of nativism, born out of fear of some dark outsider sneaking in to steal the white man's homeland and his hegemony.

### SOVEREIGN CITIZEN MOVEMENT

Nativist thinkers are spread all over the map, but the strongest current comes in the form of the Sovereign Citizen movement, or what used to be called the Posse Comitatus and before the posse, the Silver Shirts.

For the old Posse adherents and their contemporary progeny, the white Aryan man is the only true "sovereign" over his land and his life.

White women serve beneath him; black and brown "mud people" are menials worthy only of disdain; and Jews [who do not qualify as white] are usually behind it all, running the economic and financial systems through a worldwide Jewish

conspiracy.

They do not admit to being subject to the laws and dictates of the U.S. government; they eschew Social Security, cars and drivers' licences, and won't pay taxes.

### 'CHRISTIAN IDENTITY' MOVEMENT

For the true sovereign, the sheriff is the highest legitimate law enforcement official in the land, and a jury of his [white male] peers the only legitimate government body. These beliefs are underpinned by the religion of Christian Identity, which claim white sovereigns are the direct descendants of the lost tribes of Israel, who on their long trek out of the Middle East made their way up through Scotland and Ireland over to the United States.

Different facets of the nativist movement have enjoyed periodic heydeys in 20th-century America – first in the 1910s and '20s, when anti-immigrant sentiments were rife and membership in the Ku Klux Klan reached more than two million.

In the 1930s and 1940s, they penetrated the edges of the political mainstream through figures like Father Charles Coughlin, who was the Glenn Beck of his day. A Catholic priest and radio personality, Coughlin was at once enormously popular and virulently anti-Semitic and anti-New Deal.

His ally Gerald L.K. Smith, leader of the Share Our Wealth campaign, was evocative of some of today's more extreme Tea Party candidates.

### PERIODIC RESURGENCE

The Klans and related groups had another resurgence in response to the civil rights movement of the 1960s. In the 1980s, groups like the Posse, which drew together white supremacy and Christian Identity with anti-government "patriot" sentiments, found particularly fertile ground for recruitment among dispossessed Midwestern farmers.

While figures like David Duke ran for political office, others, like the violent group The Order, carried out bombings, bank robberies and murders, and engaged in blazing shootouts with federal agents, all in service of their plan to build a white homeland.

See NATIVISTS Page 13



# Is It 'We The People' Or 'I The Person'?

By Linda Wagner Schmoldt

There is a concerted effort these days by the powers that be to break down the structures that allow people to come together.

It is no accident that we see the Supreme Court taking rights and power away from groups of citizens and workers while increasing the powers of the ruling class and corporations.

On state and federal levels we see rulings that restrict the formation of unions, negate collective bargaining, and squelch class-action suits.

It is harder and harder to hold public demonstrations and protests as codes, laws, and fees limit where, when and how we can gather. We have lost many of our common spaces – places where we can come together and speak truth to power.

## RIGHTS THREATENED

The rights of civic/social leaders and organizers are threatened with scrutiny and abuse. Exorbitant prison sentences and fines are imposed on those who gather to protest and /or do civil disobedience.

The making of crowd control devices is a strong industry in the U.S. [and in our ally, Israel.] We are becoming a police state and the military is waiting in the wings.

When the news covers demonstrations they always focus on the most radical looking people. They don't show the old women and the families walking peacefully with their children.

The media relishes any show of violence or aggression. The message is clear. These people are not like you. People like you don't take to the street and protest. We are taught to fear the masses.

And what shall we gather around? It becomes more and more difficult to sort out truth from lies, especially when the lies are echoed across the corporate-owned media and halls of power.

## CRACKDOWN ON WHISTLEBLOWERS

Support for WikiLeaks, or any other organization that exposes the truth behind what is really going on, is labeled as treason. There is a crack down on whistleblowers.

Terrorist alerts and the nightly news, as a police blotter of all the crimes we need to fear, forces us to stay in our homes, to be suspicious of our neighbors and to be fearful of anyone who differs in skin tone, speech, culture or way of life. Report your neighbors; don't talk to them.

Whole groups of people get labeled as a threat to our security, whether it is gays who want to marry, immigrants who want to earn a fair wage for their labors, teachers and other public "servants" who want to claim the money set aside for their health care or retirement. Our enemies and those we can't trust increase daily.

We are taught that what are most important are our rights as individuals. Our god is free-enterprise, the unchecked, unregulated right to make as much as we like, even at the expense of our society and our earth.

## THE THREAT OF REGULATION

We see regulations as a threat to our individual rights to do business and make a profit.

We are urged to think of ourselves first. If I am not old, why should I pay for those on Social Security or Medicare? If I don't have children, why should I care about education? If I'm not gay, not an illegal immigrant, not unemployed, not losing my house, not confronting an unwanted pregnancy ...

And when crisis affects me, I will blame myself. I will think I am alone. I will think I have to solve my own problems. I certainly won't blame a broken social



system.

Across the world there are huge demonstrations. The powers that be are threatened by masses of people in other countries who force their leaders to put the good of their society ahead of individual and corporate interests.

## VENEZUELA IS AN EXAMPLE

Note the reaction to any resource industry being nationalized. In Venezuela we have spent millions to bring down the popularly-elected Hugo Chavez who has nationalized the oil production and channeled the profits to fund social programs. That's one of the actions that Muammar Gaddafi was threatening to do as well.

Countries or leaders that might want to put their people first are a threat. We constantly hear about the high taxes individuals pay in socialist countries. If we knew the truth we might start to compare how other countries empower their people by meeting their basic needs – that when the needs of the community are put ahead of individual rights, everyone benefits.

We are told the myth that the U.S. is No. 1 and do not see the abysmal ranking of our country on meeting social needs.

To those who want to protect their greedy accumulation of wealth and power, We the People [anywhere] are a scary proposition. God forbid that we should come together and discover our commonality and our strength.

## OUR DEMANDS

We might demand education that teaches us to think. We might start to question. We might want transparency in government or demand truth in the media. We might demand justice and equity, a say over our daily lives.

It is effective to keep us isolated. To use wedge issues to keep us divided. To make us think we aren't connected to the rest of the world. To keep us suspicious and fearful. To keep us ignorant. To keep us focused on "I the person."

We, together, are obviously a huge threat, otherwise why is so much effort being expended to keep us apart?

A few will recognize our interdependence. They realize that we can't do it alone, that we need community and that democracy is about We the People, not I the Person.

– The author is a "wonderer, wanderer, writer and social agitator" who lives in Portland

# NATIVISTS

From Page 12

After the Oklahoma City bombing, with its perpetrators' ties to the militia movement [and, most likely, to other far right groups as well], the movement tended to dig in further underground.

Just as Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols were deemed to be acting alone, the periodic bursts of far right violence – whether they be an attempted bombing, the murder of an abortion doctor, attacks on undocumented immigrants or on Muslims, or the shooting of a congresswoman – are attributed to "lone wolves" rather than to organized plots by any particular group.

## LEADERLESS RESISTANCE

Yet the distinction belies the reality of a movement that has long encouraged its adherents to act in "leaderless resistance" cells or carry out one-man guerilla attacks [and become celebrated as "Phineas Priests," named for the Bible story of a man who executed an interracial couple].

The alleged MLK Day parade bomber, Kevin William Harpham, may or may not have consider himself a lone wolf if, as he is accused, he put together a backpack bomb laden with shrapnel dipped in rat poison to induce bleeding and placed it on the route of the parade. But there can be little doubt as to where his inspiration came from.

Bill Morlin, formerly a reporter for the Spokane Spokesman-Review and now an independent investigator, traced Harpham's background in a comprehensive report for the publication Hatewatch.

In the military, Harpham was stationed at Fort Lewis in Washington, home base for 320 far right wingers. He was once a member of the racist far right National Alliance, and had left various postings on extremist websites suggesting he had had enough of the "international Jewish conspiracy," which, among

other things, he held responsible for 9/11.

## LEANING TO TEA PARTY

Leonard Zeskind, a leading expert on the radical far right and author, says that today, "the main tendency of organizations is mainstreaming ... The movement imperative is towards the Tea Parties, running for office, anti-immigrant mongering – not roadside bombs."

None of this, of course, prevents people from being "recruited" to their ideas and choosing to act on them. One far right leader said much the same in an interview following the attempted bombing in Spokane.

"There are many aspects to the white supremacist movement," Shaun Winkler, Imperial Wizard of the White Knights of the KKK in Idaho, told a local television station. "There are those of us that are on the political side, and there are those of us that are revolutionary.

"It sounds as if this individual was on the revolutionary end rather than the political. And there are a lot of lone wolves out there. People that are sympathetic to us, but people that we don't know."

Historically, federal law enforcement has given little credence to the power of the nativist current in American society, and has paid relatively little attention to the activities of nativist groups.

That has perhaps changed since the election of Barack Obama, whose presidency has so focused and emboldened the racist far right. Yet, despite their obvious threat, there are no competitors to Republican New York Rep. Peter King, holding congressional hearings on the recruitment of homegrown jihadist terrorists.

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## Lies Become Truths

# Demise Of Newspapers Leaves People Dumber

By Chris Hedges

I visited the Hartford Courant as a high school student. It was the first time I was in a newsroom. The Connecticut paper's newsroom, the size of a city block, was packed with rows of metal desks, most piled high with newspapers and notebooks.

Reporters banged furiously on heavy typewriters set amid tangled phone cords, overflowing ashtrays, dirty coffee mugs and stacks of paper, many of which were in sloping piles on the floor.

The din and clamor, the incessantly ringing phones, the haze of cigarette and cigar smoke that lay over the feverish hive, the hoarse shouts, the bustle and movement of reporters, most in disheveled coats and ties, made it seem an exotic, living organism.

I was infatuated. I dreamed of entering this fraternity, which I eventually did, for more than two decades writing for The Dallas Morning News, The Washington Post, The Christian Science Monitor and, finally, The New York Times, where I spent most of my career as a foreign correspondent.

### FORTUNES DECLINING FAST

Newsrooms today are anemic and forlorn wastelands. I was recently in the newsroom at The Philadelphia Inquirer, and patches of the floor, also the size of a city block, were open space or given over to rows of empty desks.

The great newspapers sustained legendary reporters such as I.F. Stone, Murray Kempton and Homer Bigart who wrote stories that brought down embezzlers, cheats, crooks and liars, who covered wars and conflicts, who told us about famines in Africa and the peculiarities of the French or what it was like to be poor and forgotten in our urban slums or Appalachia.

These presses churned out raw lists of data, from sports scores to stock prices. Newspapers took us into parts of the city or the world we would never otherwise have seen or visited. Reporters and critics reviewed movies, books, dance, theater and music and covered sporting events.

Newspapers printed the text of presidential addresses, sent reporters to chronicle the inner workings of City Hall and followed the courts and the police. Photographers and reporters raced to cover the lurid and the macabre, from Mafia hits to crimes of passion.

### IMPOVERISHING DISCOURSE

We are losing a peculiar culture and an ethic. This loss is impoverishing our civil discourse and leaving us less and less connected to the city, the nation and the world around us. The death of newsprint represents the end of an era. And news gathering will not be replaced by the Internet.

Journalism, at least on the large scale of old newsrooms, is no longer commercially viable. Reporting is time-consuming and labor-intensive. It requires going out and talking to people. It means doing this every day. It means looking constantly for sources, tips, leads, documents, informants, whistle-blowers, new facts and information, untold stories and news.

A democracy survives when its citizens have access to trustworthy and impartial sources of information, when it can discern lies from truth, when civic dis-



course is grounded in verifiable fact. And with the decimation of reporting these sources of information are disappearing.

The increasing fusion of news and entertainment, the rise of a class of celebrity journalists on television who define reporting by their access to the famous and the powerful, the retreat by many readers into the ideological ghettos of the Internet and the ruthless drive by corporations to destroy the traditional news business are leaving us deaf, dumb and blind.

### WHAT LIBERAL PRESS?

The relentless assault on the "liberal press" by right-wing propaganda outlets such as Fox News or by the Christian right is in fact an assault on a system of information grounded in verifiable fact.

And once this bedrock of civil discourse is eradicated, people will be free, as many already are, to believe whatever they want to believe, to pick and choose what facts or opinions suit their world and what do not.

Those who insist on reporting uncomfortable truths always try the patience of the careerists who manage these institutions. If they are too persistent, as most good reporters are, they become "a problem."

This battle, which exists in all newsrooms, was summed up for me by the Los Angeles Times reporter Dial Torgerson, whom I worked with in Central America until he was killed by a land mine on the border between Honduras and Nicaragua. "Always remember," he once told me of newspaper editors, "they are the enemy."

### ONE MORE BULWARK GONE

The death of newspapers means that we will lose one more bulwark holding back the swamp of corporate malfeasance, abuse and lies. It will make it harder for us as a society to separate illusion from reality, fact from opinion, reality from fantasy.

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# Confronted With Truth, Some Believe In Lies

By David McRaney

**The Misconception:** When your beliefs are challenged with facts, you alter your opinions and incorporate the new information into your thinking.

**The Truth:** When your deepest convictions are challenged by contradictory evidence, your beliefs get stronger.

Wired, The New York Times, Backyard Poultry Magazine – they all do it. Sometimes, they screw up and get the facts wrong. In ink or in electrons, a reputable news source takes the time to say "my bad."

If you are in the news business and want to maintain your reputation for accuracy, you publish corrections. For most topics this works just fine, but what most news organizations don't realize is a correction can further push readers away from the facts if the issue at hand is close to the heart.

### NOT ACCEPTING THE TRUTH

In fact, those pithy blurbs hidden on a deep page in every newspaper point to one of the most powerful forces shaping the way you think, feel and decide – a behavior keeping you from accepting the truth.

In 2006, Brendan Nyhan and Jason Reifler at The University of Michigan and Georgia State University created fake newspaper articles about polarizing political issues. The articles were written in a way which would confirm a widespread misconception about certain ideas in American politics.

As soon as a person read a fake article, researchers then handed over a true article which corrected the first.

For instance, one article suggested the United States found weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. The next said the U.S. never found them, which was the truth.

### HOW THE TRUTH FARED

Those opposed to the war or who had strong liberal leanings tended to disagree with the original article and accept the second. Those who supported the

war and leaned more toward the conservative camp tended to agree with the first article and strongly disagree with the second.

These reactions shouldn't surprise you. What should give you pause though is how conservatives felt about the correction. After reading that there were no WMDs, they reported being even more certain than before there actually were WMDs and their original beliefs were correct.

They repeated the experiment with other wedge issues like stem cell research and tax reform, and once again, they found corrections tended to increase the strength of the participants' misconceptions if those corrections contradicted their ideologies.

People on opposing sides of the political spectrum read the same articles and then the same corrections, and when new evidence was interpreted as threatening to their beliefs, they doubled down. The corrections backfired.

### REAGAN'S MYTH LIVES ON

In 1976, when Ronald Reagan was running for president of the United States, he often told a story about a Chicago woman who was scamming the welfare system to earn her income.

Reagan said the woman had 80 names, 30 addresses and 12 Social Security cards which she used to get food stamps along with more than her share of money from Medicaid and other welfare entitlements. He said she drove a Cadillac, didn't work and didn't pay taxes.

He talked about this woman, who he never named, in just about every small town he visited, and it tended to infuriate his audiences. The story solidified the term "Welfare Queen" in American political discourse and influenced not only the national conversation for the next 30 years, but public policy as well. It also wasn't true.

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# French Medical Care Keeps Prof In Stitches

By Gladys Lewis

Health care debate in this country has the ring of armed camps, one on each side of a river, shouting at each other. I have spent my adult life in U.S. health care culture. Before my current profession as a university professor, I was an R.N. My husband of half a century was a surgeon. Our youngest daughter is a critical care R.N. I know all the politics and pre-suppositions about national health care evils but am re-thinking them from three experiences.

In the summer of 2009, I was at Oxford University as a participant in a session of the Oxford Round Table. A colleague at the meeting became ill one night and went to the local British health care facility. Her comments about her treatment were positive. Although a foreigner, she was not charged for the care.

I have friends in Boulder, CO whose daughter is married to a British subject and lives on the English Channel coast. My Colorado friends responded to my account of the treatment of my professional acquaintance with a story related to them by their daughter.

Johnny Depp was vacationing in her area when one of his children became ill. In appreciation for the quality of care received at the local health service, he went another day in his Captain Jack Sparrow persona to entertain the children in the hospital.

In June, I was in France. One afternoon, my family and I took a pedestrian bridge across the Seine to the Tuilleries Gardens and the Place de la Concorde where the guillotine was positioned during the Reign of Terror of the French Revolution.

The bridge flooring was very uneven. As I made my way along, I lost my balance and fell, creating three injury areas on my left leg and cutting a two-inch gash just above my left eye. Bleeding was immediate, profuse, and seemingly unending.

I spent the next four hours waiting for suturing in a local Emergency Room.

Even though limited by language from both English and French sides, I was interviewed, had basic information noted, and was posted into the



facility's computer network. When my turn came to see a doctor, I was attended by a young physician who said, "Tell me what happened."

Between his halting English and my pitiful French, I did, but enjoyed a chuckle when he asked, "Did you lose your mind?"

I knew he wanted to know if I lost consciousness, and was tempted to answer, "Not by the fall," but decided he might not appreciate American humor.

After the suturing, I was bandaged, given wound care instructions, and told to have the sutures removed in six days. When I asked about the fee for services, I was told there was none.

With assistance, I made an appointment with an English speaking, private physician six days later to have the sutures removed. When I arrived at his office in a three-story building, I discovered he and three other physicians shared the first

floor in an architectural square with each in respective corners of the square. They had no receptionist, only a waiting room that the patients of all four shared.

I knocked on his door; he greeted me and told me where to wait. Again, I was an interested observer of another level of national health care structure.

When one elderly lady was called by her doctor, she had some difficulty rising. He approached her, took her arm, placed it in his, held her hand and leaned toward her, chatting, as he took her to his office.

I can guarantee such gallantry to be better professional security for a physician than malpractice insurance.

When my physician called me, I discovered he had no nurse. He functioned as receptionist, nurse, and doctor. I sat by the big table-desk at one end of the room while he took my information and entered it into

his computer. Then we went to the other end to his examining table and equipment cabinet. With sutures out, we returned to his desk to complete the process.

I commented about a fine Oriental painting of a seascape on the wall behind him. "Do you like Oriental art?" I asked. "Yes," he said, "but I love that painting because of the surf. I am a surfer." As we chatted, he told me he went to California to surf.

When all was finished, I asked, "And where do I pay your fee?" "To me," he replied. "And the amount?" I asked. "Thirty euros," he answered.

I did the math – about \$42 – as I realized he was his own office manager, too.

I thought about the claims in our country about loss of income to physicians under a national plan. Obviously, my surfer physician was earning enough to fly to California to surf.

I paid and left, but have continued to think about my experience with national health care from my injury on the bridge.

My family and I have had fun embroidering the event: I was chasing a pickpocket, or the CIA was chasing me. The number of stitches required vary from four to thirty-six. And the amount of my blood remaining on the bridge resulted in the construction of a new chapel named "The Sacred Blood of St. Gladys."

I touch the scar above my eye, a special souvenir from Paris, as I echo Rick's line in Casablanca, "I will always have Paris." Perhaps it will equip me to be a pirate in a future Pirates of the Caribbean episode.

Some sober thoughts linger with me, too. I don't know if my positive experience with national health care would have endured if I had broken my leg or a hip and required hospitalization – or surgery. But I do keep returning to some questions. Why can't the adults in the room get together and make the best of both systems available both on the bridge and on both sides of it? A host of the health care needy wait on the bridge.

– The author is an English professor at the University of Central Oklahoma

# Ex-Sooner Solon Sokolosky Pens First Novel

By Jennifer Gilliland

Jerry D. Sokolosky's debut novel, *Politics Money and Drugs*, hooks the reader through its rich development of characters and plot twists.

The story revolves around Al Moreno, a U.S. senator from New Mexico. Moreno and his beautiful wife, Angie, are popular in their home state where they're known as philanthropists who give generously to good causes. In fact, Al financed his own campaign. While Angie runs the couple's successful corporation in Santa Fe, Al has made a name for himself in DC.

But when Brady Carlton, Al's chief of staff, starts snooping into their background, he finds little information.

Who are the Morenos and where did they come from?

Also on the Washington scene is Congressman Randy Taub from Texas, a former drug force officer who witnessed drug corruption first-hand in Houston. Taub believes America has lost the war on drugs, leaving jails and prisons full of drug offenders and addicts. He's proposed a constitutional amendment to legalize drugs in the United States. After three days of floor debate, eloquently argued

by Taub, the resolution passes.

As the amendment heads to the Senate, Moreno begins spending millions of his own money to defeat it, and calling in favors from his old friend Tony Amato.

As you come to know the two Washington politicians, Sokolosky introduces another character, Frankie Sanchez, a special agent for the Drug Enforcement Administration working in Bogota, Columbia. Just as the reader begins to wonder where the story is headed, Sokolosky begins putting the pieces together.

Interspersed throughout the book is information on government, civics, drug trafficking and politics.

Whether you're for or against the legalization of drugs, this book is a must read. Sokolosky has done his research and drawn on his experiences as an attorney and former member of the House of Representatives to pen a novel worth reading.

A digital copy of the book is available at [www.politicsmoneyanddrugs.com](http://www.politicsmoneyanddrugs.com).

– The author is the Oklahoma Press Association's Creative Services Director

# Corporate Rate

## Taxes 2nd Lowest In Developed World

By Marine Diamond

During negotiations regarding raising the nation's debt limit, Congressional Republicans defended tax loopholes for corporations, claiming that America has a high corporate tax rate that is stifling economic growth and job creation.

The Center for Tax Justice [CTJ] crunched the most recent data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], the Office of Management and Budget, and the Census Bureau, and finds that "the U.S. is already one of the least taxed countries for corporations in the developed world."

As a share of GDP, the U.S. had the second lowest tax rate, behind only Iceland. This statistic flips on its head the often-repeated Republican charge that America has the second highest corporate tax rate in the world [which is only true on paper]. In 2009, U.S. corporate taxes had fallen to only 1.3% of GDP, from 4% in 1965.

### THEY CLOSED LOOPHOLES

Conservatives love to point out that other OECD countries have lowered their corporate tax rates in recent years, but they conveniently ignore that "these countries have also closed corporate tax loopholes while the U.S. has expanded them."

As CAP Director for Tax and Budget Policy Michael Linden has noted, the U.S. is actually a very low-tax country across the board.

Recently, conservative Bill Kristol chastised his own party for pretending that lowering the corporate tax rate is a cure-all for America's economic woes. On Fox News Sunday, he interrupted a panelist who again tried to assert the U.S. is suffering from a high corporate tax rate.

### KRISTOL NAILS IT

He said, "Republicans are making a mistake if they focus on big businesses and corporate tax rates. Corporations have a ton of cash. The corporate tax rate is not killing big business in America."



The GOP presidential candidates have almost uniformly introduced proposals to radically lower the U.S. corporate tax rate. For instance, former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty wants to reduce the corporate tax rate to 15% and eliminate all taxes on capital gains, dividends, interest income and inheritance.

CTJ put the issue succinctly in a tweet: "Dear US Corporations: You pay 2nd LOWEST tax rate in industrial world, so quit whining or move to Iceland."

## NEWSPAPERS

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There is nothing, of course, intrinsically good about newspapers. We have long been cursed with sleazy tabloids and the fictional stories of the supermarket press, which have now become the staple of television journalism.

The commercial press, in the name of balance and objectivity, had always skillfully muted the truth in the name of news or blotted it out. But the loss of great newspapers, newspapers that engage with the community, means the loss of one of the cornerstones of our open, democratic state.

We face the prospect, in the very near future, of major metropolitan cities without city newspapers. This loss will diminish our capacity for self-reflection and take away the critical tools we need to monitor what is happening around us.

### CIVIL RIGHTS PROGRESSED

The leaders of the civil rights movement grasped from the start that without a press willing to attend their marches and report fairly from their communities on the injustices they decried and the repression they suffered, the movement would "have been a bird without wings," as civil rights leader and U.S. Rep. John Lewis said.

"Without the media's willingness to stand in harm's way and starkly portray events of the Movement as they saw them unfold, Americans may never have understood or even believed the horrors that African Americans faced in the Deep South," Lewis, a Georgia Democrat, said in 2005 when the House celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act.

"That commitment to publish the truth took courage. It was incredibly dangerous to be seen with a pad, a pen, or a camera in Mississippi, Alabama or Georgia where the heart of the struggle took place. There was a violent desperation among local and State officials and the citizens to maintain the traditional order. People wanted to keep their injustice a secret."

### TAKEN HOSTAGE

Our political apparatus and systems of information have been diminished and taken hostage by corporations. Our government no longer responds to the needs or rights of citizens. We have been left disempowered without the traditional mechanisms to be heard.

Those who battle the corporate destruction of the ecosystem and seek to protect the remnants of our civil society must again take to the streets. They have to engage in acts of civil disobedience. But this time around the media and the systems of communication have dramatically changed.

The death of journalism, the loss of reporters on the airwaves and in print who believed the plight of the ordinary citizen should be reported, means that it will be harder for ordinary voices and dissenters to reach the wider public.

The preoccupation with news as entertainment and the loss of sustained reporting will effectively marginalize and silence those who seek to be heard or to defy established power.

### BARELY COVERED PROTESTS

Protests, unlike in the 1960s, will have a difficult time garnering the daily national coverage that characterized the reporting on the civil rights movement and the anti-war movement and in the end threatened the power elite.

Acts of protest, no longer covered or barely covered, will leap up like discon-

nected wildfires, more easily snuffed out or ignored. It will be hard if not impossible for resistance leaders to have their voices amplified across the nation, to build a national movement for change.

The failings of newspapers were huge, but in the years ahead, as the last battle for democracy means dissent, civil disobedience and protest, we will miss them.

- The author is a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter and senior fellow at The Nation Institute

## LIES

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Sure, there have always been people who scam the government, but no one who fit Reagan's description ever existed.

### IT STILL MAKES THE ROUNDS

Despite the debunking and the passage of time, the story is still alive. The imaginary lady who Scrooge McDives into a vault of foodstamps between naps while hardworking Americans struggle down the street still appears every day on the Internet.

The staying power of the narrative is impressive. Some version of it continues to turn up every week in stories and blog posts about entitlements even though the truth is a click away.

This is why hardcore doubters who believe Barack Obama was not born in the United States will never be satisfied with any amount of evidence put forth suggesting otherwise.

When the Obama Administration released his long-form birth certificate in April of 2011, the reaction from birthers was as the backfire effect predicts. They scrutinized the timing, the appearance, the format - they gathered together online and mocked it.

### BIRTHERS DENY THE TRUTH

They became even more certain of their beliefs than before. The same has been and will forever be true for any conspiracy theory or fringe belief. Contradictory evidence strengthens the position of the believer. It is seen as part of the conspiracy, and missing evidence is dismissed as part of the coverup.

As Sir Francis Bacon put it, "The human understanding when it has once adopted an opinion draws all things else to support and agree with it. And though there be a greater number and weight of instances to be found on the other side, yet these it either neglects and despises, or else-by some distinction sets aside and rejects, in order that by this great and pernicious predetermination the authority of its former conclusion may remain inviolate."

Among the many biases and delusions in between you and your microprocessor-rich, skinny-jeaned Arcadia is a great big psychological beast called the backfire effect.

It's always been there, meddling with the way you and your ancestors understood the world, but the Internet unchained its potential, elevated its expression, and you've been none the wiser for years.

- The author is a journalist who posts his work at youarenotsmart.com



# A Rightwing Jobs Program For America

By Jim Hightower

Here's the core economic problem we're facing today: Unemployment and underemployment are rampant and entrenched throughout America, stifling any hope for real recovery and threatening the very survival of the essential middle class that holds our society together.

The solution? Our ideologically pure, laissez-fairlyland leaders in Washington and various state capitals, along with corporate funded think tank geniuses and Wall Street gurus, are pushing a massive jobs program across America. Great, just what we need! Uh ... no. Unfortunately, theirs is not a program to create jobs, but a coordinated effort to add to America's jobless hordes by eliminating hundreds of thousands of public-service jobs. If ignorance is bliss, they must be ecstatic!

They're wallowing in the ecstatic right-wing mythology that prosperity will magically arise if only government budgets can be gutted, mainly by eliminating public employees. Yet, by going on a firing rampage that is targeting everyone from school librarians to NASA engineers, these

political and economic elites are shoving the entire U.S. economy back into the Great Recession, or worse.

This is because people who are out of work do not tend to be – how shall I put this? – “robust consumers.” Since consumer spending accounts for about 70% of our country's economic growth [and, in so doing, creates America's jobs], the dogma of deliberately destroying the purchasing power of middle-class wage earners is disastrous. It's like trying to cure a headache by chopping off your head.

Not content to undercut middle-class consumers by firing them, the extremist ideologues are also slashing jobless payments, food stamps, Medicaid and other safety-net programs that put money directly and quickly into the consumer economy as recipients spend for food, gas and other basics. Cutbacks in these benefits will drain some \$37 billion more out of consumer spending this year.

As the middle class slides backward, people are going to be hunting these ideologues with dogs.

But don't despair entirely, jobseekers, for if you're among the millions of long-term unemployed Americans who've been searching in vain for work, I have a hot tip for you: They're hiring in Wisconsin!

There is one little catch, though. You have to be a Wisconsin jailbird to get one of these dandy jobs. But that's no hill for a climber – I'm sure America has plenty of out-of-work folks who're enterprising enough to move to the Badger State, steal a six pack from a 7-Eleven, go to jail and – voila! – become eligible. I should mention, however, that you won't get paid for these jobs.

This so-called “work opportunity” is the first tangible product of Gov. Scott Walker's corporate-scripted mugging of the collective bargaining rights of teachers and other civil servants. He and his legislative cohorts rammed a bill into law this year to strip public employees of their democratic rights in the workplace. So, government managers can now replace them willy-nilly with low-wage workers – even with free prison labor.

Jim Ladwig, the executive honcho of Racine County, has leapt on this like a chicken on a juicy June bug. The day the law took effect, he announced that such jobs as landscaping and snow-shoveling would be transferred from unionized county workers to prisoners. The captives will receive no pay, but they could receive compensation in the form of reduced sentences. “We have a win-win when we use the inmates,” exulted Ladwig.

He's not the only one thrilled with this scheme to take middle-class paychecks from public employees. The Washington Examiner, a far-right tub-thumper for full-tilt privatization of public services, hailed Racine County's jailbird ploy as “great news for Wisconsin taxpayers. Hopefully we'll see more of it.”

So there you have it – the right-wing's idea of a good jobs program for America. When Walker ran for governor last year, he promised to create 250,000 new jobs, and now he's delivering. To apply, go directly to jail!

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## LETTERS

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til private insurers are removed from interfering in medical decisions and denying needed care. A recent CBS poll shows the same number – 59% – of Americans also want government-provided national health insurance.

In spite of growing support for single-payer insurance, supporters seem to be left out of the national debate on health reform. A single-payer system is the only plan that is guaranteed to stop sky rocketing health care costs by taking the profit margin out of health care.

It would reduce costs, guarantee choice, and ensure all Americans have quality, affordable health care and would give Americans far more in savings than other options.

The National Health Care Act, HR 676, currently has 77 Congressional cosponsors. Look up your Oklahoma Congressman at <http://www.capitol-connect.com/oklahoma/default.aspx> or call 202.224.3121 and ask him to get on board with health care we can afford before it's too late.

Phyllis Bryant  
Bethany

Editor, the Observer:

After attending an Oklahoma Education Association Leadership Day recently, I feel compelled to let you know the following:

Kirk Smalley, a parent from Perkins, was the keynote speaker for the day and his topic was bullying. Mr. Smalley has first-hand information on the subject as his son, Ty, a precocious 12-year-old from Perkins, took his own life after continuous and concentrated bullying while he was at school.

Mr. Smalley's message was simple and clear. “Our babies are being taken from us while we watch it happen, and either don't realize what's hap-

pening or turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to it.” Bullying is as prominent in schools and society as it has ever been, and it's time to do something about it. Teachers, administrators, parents, and the “silent” majority must respond when bullying occurs. Bullying cannot be tolerated ... it must be stopped.

It's too late for Ty Smalley and his parents, but Mr. and Mrs. Smalley continue to wage their war on bullying. They do it on their savings and on donations. Superintendent Barresi has turned her back on them as well as the Tulsa area legislators who told them when they killed the bill to address bullying last session that “if we'd all just follow the golden rule there would be no bullying.” What? If we all just followed the golden rule there would be need for legislators!

I have taken it upon myself to help spread the Smalley message. Hopefully there are others who will do the same. Now's the time.

Bruce Treadaway  
Minco

Editor, The Observer:

Coal production declined in Oklahoma from 5.73 million tons in 1981 to 979,000 tons last year. Yet the Oklahoma congressional delegation opposed a water quality protection rule by the federal Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement [OSM]. The source of information was a leaked environmental impact statement draft on a stream-protection rule that would block new mining activity in Oklahoma, Arkansas, Kansas and Missouri.

Why would we give the green light to a dying industry that nationally generates more than 100 million tons of coal ash full of harmful toxins like arsenic, lead and mercury? If the min-

ing industry is on the way out, why do we care? Because those who oppose the environmental legislation say it would cost 260 high-wage jobs. Does anyone else wonder why existing jobs would supposedly be lost when the proposed rule is intended to block only new mining activity?

Jobs are important – but so are public health and safety. When toxins are dumped in abandoned mines – like the one poisoning people in Bokoshe – protection is under the jurisdiction of the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement. When coal ash toxins stashed in underground mines leak into drinking water supplies, people living near coal ash sites suffer a staggering one in 50 risk of cancer and significantly reduced quality of life and use of their property. Just ask the citizens of Bokoshe.

We all remember the 1.1 billion gallons of coal fly ash slurry that broke the dike at the Kingston Fossil Plant in Roane County, TN in December 2008. It covered 300 acres of land, destroyed dozens of homes, caused a train wreck and flowed up and downstream into nearby waterways. Final cleanup costs were more than \$800 million, not including fines and lawsuits. Then there's the negative impact on the health and safety of the taxpayers who faced the destruction of their property and ongoing exposure to toxic chemicals.

We need mandatory federal safeguards that protect Oklahoma citizens' health and waterways from improper coal ash disposal. We need composite liners, water run-off controls, groundwater monitoring, and financial assurance that companies pay to clean up what they pollute. We need to say no to toxic polluters and let the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement [OSM] do

its job.

Tim Wagner  
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

If any area of human endeavor needs a critical analysis it is the tuition and related costs of higher education in Oklahoma. I've had considerable experience associated with higher education beginning as a student with a BBA and a MA degree, later as a teacher of accounting and finance for some 32 years and today as a provider of scholarships.

The growth in tuition of four times the inflation rate is unacceptable and along with that are unconscionable costs of textbooks. If those facts don't move you, consider that many, many students seldom hear in a classroom the professors on the highest rung of the educational status and too many freshmen have to cope with graduate assistants whose speech they sometimes cannot understand and who probably are only one book or so ahead [educationally] of the poor freshman.

I'd like to see published, by school, a list of what the college administrators continually say are “cutbacks,” “holding the line,” and “conservation” in their budgets. Most of us would be amused.

Unlike most revenue and expense situations, the college has the ability to raise tuition, and in Oklahoma they accomplish this often and unabashedly.

Getting back to book costs. Recently, I picked up a text in accounting in the bookstore of one of our universities and even I was stunned. To me the college book monopoly has forever been in no small way a racket. And if the student can even sell it later as

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# Seriously, Can't America Do Better Than This?

By Jim Hightower

OK, Barack Obama has not exactly turned out to be Mount Rushmore material, but – good God! – the petulant pettiness of right-wing Republican congressional leaders has turned them into a national embarrassment.

America has big needs right now. But those needs are not even being addressed, because little whiney ideologues like Eric Cantor, the GOP's House majority leader, keep throwing hissy fits, demanding that they get their way, or there'll be no way.

Of course, their way – on everything from tax policy to Wall Street regulation – is always the corporate way. Their plutocratic theories were exactly what was tried throughout George W's eight-year reign, and they failed spectacularly. Yet Cantor & Crew are now pushing the same nonsense – the very policies that caused America's economic crash, which continues to crush grassroots people. "But it's ideologically correct," cries Little Eric, "so we and the Koch brothers won't stop screaming until you give us more of it."

They are so insanely obsessed with extremist anti-government dogma that they have even hitched their star to the reviled Lords of Wall Street – the only group in America with a lower public approval rating than that of Congress itself!

Bankers are furious that Democrats created a new regulatory agency last year with real clout to protect consumers from the assorted rip-offs and frauds that banks keep inventing. So, in a perverse political reflex, Republicans have rushed to protect Wall Street's gougers from us gougees, locking arms [as well as



their minds] in a ridiculous "Save-the-Poor-Bankers" stand.

Stamping their tiny feet, they say they'll block Obama's nominee to head the agency until Democrats let them rewrite the law to make the agency toothless. In fact, they've declared that they'll block anyone that Obama nominates, no matter how qualified.

Great – a government of dogmatists, by temper tantrum, for corporate elites. How pathetic.

Meanwhile, both the GOP Congress and the Obama White House continue to ignore America's greatest economic need: good jobs. Beaucoup of them. Now.

As Bob Dylan famously wrote, "You

don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows." Especially when the wind is right in your face, howling at gale force. While Washington fiddles with the knobs and levers of budget reduction, America's great working class is being blown down by harsh economic winds.

Our country's political and financial elites, sitting in the comfort of their power centers, however, don't seem to see, hear or care. If the elites just looked around, here are just a few of the real-life indicators that would hit them right in the face:

- In Central Texas, a surge in poverty is now severely straining the area food bank, which is struggling

with more than a 50% increase in demand in the past three years.

- Arizona, which has added only 4,000 jobs in the past year, has 10 unemployed job seekers for every opening – and 45,000 Arizonans are set to lose their jobless benefits in the next few months.

- By the end of the Great Recession in 2009, the median white household in America had lost \$36,000 in net worth. Worse, the median African-American household had lost 83% of its net worth, which is now down to the financially perilous level of less than \$2,200.

- While CEOs of major corporations have jacked up their pay by a fourth since the recession technically ended in 2009, average wages for workers have stagnated. Meanwhile, the price of such basics as food and gasoline have risen relentlessly. Real wages today are 1.6% lower than a year ago.

So, who is Washington working to help? Not the hard-hit workaday majority, but those pampered CEOs, who're now averaging more than \$9 million a year in pay, and the Wall Street hedge-fund barons who are hauling in as much as \$5 billion each!

Suffering from what appears to be incurable ethicalitis, these moneyed narcissists are demanding that officials of both parties make devastating budget cuts in programs that help working families, while also insisting that their own lavish fortunes be spared from even the slightest dings.

What a shameful time in our history! Can't America do better than this?

## LETTERS

From Page 17

a used book, well, you've heard that horror story.

So, I hope the tuition, fee, and books of our higher education facilities receive every investigation possible. Oh, by the way, that text cost \$294 [before tax]. Ludicrous.

Homer H. Hulme  
Chickasha

Editor, The Observer:

She is a migraine headache for us, girls!

Being a feminist firebrand, I thought our first female governor would appoint 50% from her own sex. We, girls, deserve it because we are 51% of the population.

The Honorable Mary Fallin has appointed 137 men and only 25 women [as of late July].

With all due respect, our governor is a redneck woman.

Redneck women stay in the pickup truck while good ol' boys discuss politics.

Redneck women have domestic rather than intellectual tendencies.

Redneck women have a doormat complex and are easy to manage.

Redneck women hang on a man's words as if he was one of the three

wise men.

Redneck women think quality entertainment is sitting in the backyard with a six-pack and a bug-zapper.

Redneck women always vote righteously against a woman's right to choose an abortion.

Maybe, it makes no difference if a woman is governor.

After all, our first Republican governor, Henry Bellmon, said, "A lot of people look at the governor as kind of a low-paid movie star. They want to shake his hand, get his autograph and tell folks they did."

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner  
Wagoner

Editor, The Observer:

The Tulsa World has investigated the financial reports of several Oklahoma legislators and governor to see how much in the way of Federal farm subsidies they have received over the last several years. Some of these taxpayer-paid legislators are professional farmers while most are engaged in the agricultural industry as a sideline to their white-collar day jobs as lawyers and doctors.

Some have reported the subsidies as income as required by law, others

have not. Most of the payments have been for wheat crops.

Let's look at two of the GOPers who have cried the loudest about the uselessness and waste of government spending: Rep. Leslie Osborn of Tuttle and Gov. Mary Fallin-Christensen.

There's this comment from Rep. Osborn: "Osborn said receiving the subsidies does not contradict her fiscally conservative platform. She also noted that the payments were in her husband's name."

This is a laughable excuse! Does she not benefit from her husband's prosperity, yes or no?

Towards the end of this article there is a comment from Gov. Mary Fallin-Christensen's spokesperson that Gov. Fallin-Christensen is "not involved with her husband's Blue Chip Farm business." According to the Tulsa World's investigation Fallin-Christensen's husband, Wade Christensen, an Oklahoma City lawyer, "has collected more than \$1.96 million in federal farm subsidies since 1995."

Again I ask: Does Gov. Fallin-Christensen benefit from the prosperity of her second husband, yes or no?

Both these elected women claim to be conservative, small-government

leaders yet fall back on the time-honored excuse of being subservient to their private-sector husbands when the wives get caught with their hands in the federal cookie jar – a treat they want to keep the rest of us from enjoying. They try to skedaddle under the chicken wire fence of IRS and ethics committee rules.

As these two Oklahoma patrons [in the Spanish pronunciation] receive federal payments in agriculture, both of these women are opposed to public health care for America's citizens – in other words, Medicare for all, not just those 65 years of age and older. While they enjoy the Cadillac of health care for themselves and their families, we peons are expected to get by as best we can.

As Oklahoma leaders, or mendacious mendicants if the truth were more clearly stated, Osborn and Fallin-Christensen demonstrate a shallow, crocodile-tear empathy with Oklahoma's struggling middle- and working-class families.

To paraphrase a famous queen of history, "Have they no cake? Let them eat wheat."

James Nimmo  
Oklahoma City



# WATER

From Page One

to North Texas.

Jackman, though, remained unconvinced, demanding proof the region's reservoirs and streams could meet the demands of future growth, much less any contractual obligation to ship water south of the Red River.

"Science," he insisted, "is based on facts, not opinions. I never saw the supporting facts to prove there was excess water."

Now, Jackman points to alarming evidence that Oklahoma's water supply may not be nearly as plentiful – or certain – as some proclaimed.

U.S. Geological Survey gages recently recorded scant water in what historically were some of the state's most prolific streams: The Kiamichi River, both at Antlers and Big Cedar,

no flow. The Glover River, no flow. Clear Boggy Creek at Caney, 11% of its normal flow.

The instruments along South Central Oklahoma waterways recorded similarly dire conditions: The Washita River at Dickson, 5% of its normal flow, and Cache Creek at Walters, less than one-third of its normal flow.

Unfortunately, clear-eyed, data-driven, dispassionate, verifiable research all too often is steamrolled in this state by politics, special interests and money.

"The drought is going to be the driver to get this thing done right," Jackman said. "They have to get it right. They have to give people confidence that here's a workable plan, a smart plan that's done by hydro-scientists."

There is evidence that Oklahoma's political leaders recognize the gravity of the situation. The special committee appointed by Senate President Pro Tem Brian Bingman, R-Sapulpa, and House Speaker Kris Steele, R-Shawnee, doesn't appear to be stacked in favor of a particular special interest.

Of course, the threat looms that Oklahoma could be forced legally to make some decisions before the statewide water plan is fully vetted and the issues fully debated by the Legislature.

North Texas' Tarrant Regional Water District sued Oklahoma in federal court in an attempt to force the sale of water from three of the Sooner state's tributaries. A federal judge dismissed the suit, but the matter is on appeal in the 10th Circuit.

More than a few experts think North Texas has a good case because federal dollars were used to help create much of Oklahoma's abundant water infrastructure – with the promise [check the congressional record] that it

would be shared with our neighbors.

Something else to consider: With water plan critics contending it is long on opinion and short on fact, will it simply end up raising more questions than it answers?

For example, are there undiscovered aquifers with water of sufficient quality to meet the needs of rural [particularly western Oklahoma] towns? Are there untapped aquifers whose lower-quality water could be deployed in farming or oil and gas exploration?

This much is certain: Lake levels are dropping daily in much of the state. Some of southern Oklahoma's scenic rivers and streams are bone dry. Water rationing is common in cities and towns across the state. More than 150 wildfires have been reported. Outdoor burning is banned in most areas until further notice. High temperatures are shattering triple-digit records.

It's a painful reminder that we best be careful stewards of an asset that is the 21st Century's equivalent of 20th Century oil.

## HOW DRY IS IT IN OKLAHOMA?

A buddy out of Wyandotte [with temperatures this summer averaging 100 to 105 each day] said he'd killed a mosquito that was carrying a canteen.

A man in Fairland said the chicken farmers were giving the chickens crushed ice to keep them from laying hard-boiled eggs.

In Grove, they caught a 20-pound catfish that had ticks on it!

In Miami, a fire hydrant was seen bribing a dog.

It's so dry in Oklahoma that the Baptists are starting to baptize by sprinkling, the Methodists are using wet-wipes, the Presbyterians are giving out rain-checks, and the Catholics are praying for the wine to turn back into water.

Now *that's* dry! Amen!



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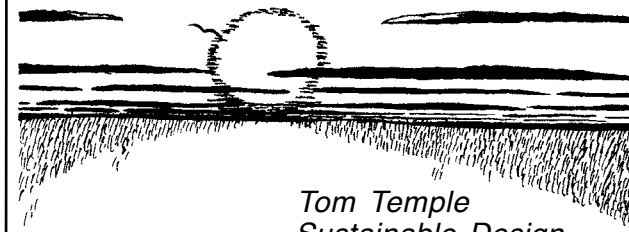
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