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# THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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OCTOBER 25, 2012

## Why Sooners Reject The President Bashing Barack

By Arnold Hamilton

Why do so many Oklahomans loathe President Obama?

Detractors insist it's all about policy. Defenders assert it's all about race.

Whatever the reasons, Obama's presidency has stirred such hatred that some normally fair-minded Oklahomans are willing to believe almost anything they hear about him, no matter how preposterous.

Doubt it? Just listen to Sherri Goodwin, who called more than 1,000 registered Democrats in western Oklahoma to gauge their support for the president's re-election.

Some of the malarkey she heard:

- Obama's true birthplace and academic records are sealed.
- Obama does not support the Boy Scouts, salute military personnel or put his hand over his heart when saying the Pledge of Allegiance.
- Obama is a Muslim and hides it by attending a Christian church.
- Obama has cost the American people a lot of money by raising taxes.
- The reason America is suffering increased crime and drug abuse, overcrowded prisons – even the spillover of Mexico's drug wars – is because God is punishing us for electing Obama.
- Obama is homosexual.
- Obama is plotting to steal Medicare and Social Security.
- Obama is racist toward whites.
- Obama, his family and all those who support him will not go to heaven when the rapture occurs.

The antipathy towards Obama isn't limited to Roger Mills and Beckham



counties, of course. Obama didn't carry one of Oklahoma's 77 counties four years ago. He may not again this year.

Travel into southern Oklahoma and a sign outside a Madill convenience store reads: Obama may be president, but God is still in charge. Motor east of Oklahoma City on Interstate 40 to Shawnee and a billboard urges Obama be aborted, not babies.

Wingnuts on parade?

It is tempting to dismiss Obama's poor standing as simply the harvest of a half-century's careful cultivation of conservative, Republican ideology in Oklahoma.

But it is the widespread lapse into kook-dom – the embrace of far-fetched, not to mention demonstrably false Internet chain-letters and Fox "news" rantings – that suggests something else is happening here and in other anti-Obama hotbeds.

What may be at the core is that Obama's story doesn't fit the historic American presidential narrative, but instead represents what is better described as a more global, 21st Century paradigm.

As retired Oklahoma State University political science professor Bob Darcy put it, "We're part of a different kind of world – a much more cosmopolitan, internationalized world than in the '50s and '60s, and Obama represents that."

A mixed race president. Born of an African man and a Kansas woman whose family had Oklahoma roots. A Harvard grad who didn't access the Ivy League because of family legacy or wealth.

This isn't a Bush or Kennedy dynastic presidency. This is the presidency of the future – and that scares

### CAMPAIGN 2012

The Oklahoma Observer's election preview continues on pages 7-8 and 11-15. Our analysis and recommendations on the six state questions appears on page 7.

the hell out of those clinging to the 20th Century paradigm.

It also creates an opportunity for big money interests – Koch Brothers and others? – to exploit less informed voters already wringing their hands over the Great Recession's economic upheaval.

Think about it: Where do all these crazy chain e-mails come from?

There's clearly no one source, but even some non-partisan political analysts say they can't help but wonder whether wealthy uber-conservatives are underwriting boiler room operations that churn them out. Sort of the 21st Century equivalent of Donald Segretti and Nixon's dirty-tricks squad.

It's easy to see why some Oklahomans buy this nonsense hook, line and sinker.

They are preconditioned by the state's uniformly ultra-conservative mainstream media and some politically active religious leaders to believe the worst about Obama, in particular, and Democrats, in general.

Moreover, the e-mails often are forwarded by family members or good friends, affording a cloak of legitimacy that often is not merited.

Worse, when confronted with the facts – Snopes.com is an excellent resource – those who dispatch the bogus e-mails often aren't repentant but indignant, their anti-Obama views actually hardened.

It is undeniable, though, that some Obama hatred in Oklahoma is fueled by race.

Four years ago, Obama operatives were shaken by the racism they encountered, particularly in rural Okla-

# Observations

## Rural Schools

In response to Gov. Mary Fallin's call for a debate about the structure of Oklahoma's school systems, House Speaker Pro Tempore Jeff Hickman and Ringwood Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Tom Deighan presented an interim study on the issue to the House Common Education Committee.

The interim study in effect told the governor to take a hike.

Serious doubts were raised about whether widespread consolidation is even necessary, and if it is, to what extent.

Most committee members felt that deregulating all districts and splitting up large, struggling urban districts is a better route.

Some legislators learned that the state currently has 523 school districts, ranging from urban school districts serving large student bodies from small geographic areas to rural school districts serving smaller student bodies from vast geographic areas.

More than 75% of Oklahoma school districts have fewer than 1,000 students and more than half have less than 500 students. Those smaller, rural districts are often singled out as targets for consolidation.

Rural schools are not the problem. Close them in most instances you close the town. Rural students tend to have the best work ethic and be most respectful of authority.

The problems are urban schools, and yet when you talk about consolidation, it is always rural.

## Unringing The Bell

Leave it to a non-educator to mess things up. The state Board of Education delayed release of the first report cards of the new A-F grading system for all schools and districts statewide. The vote went against the wishes of State Superintendent Janet Barresi.

Board members agreed to the postponement in order to further review

the average state growth calculation – a major sticking point for about 260 school districts throughout the state.

"Fifty-seven percent of schools will get an A or a B. Don't let that get lost. This is a tool to tell you how we're doing. We're not against making schools better. I don't want that message to get lost. That is something to celebrate in this state," said board member Amy Anne Ford.

Board member Joy Hofmeister said: "We are in a position of public trust and their confidence in what is put out today. You can't unring the bell. But without restoring public trust on this issue, what good is the grade going to be?"

"This is about positive growth. I just don't understand how we will figure in someone who has negative growth or who stays the same," she said.

More than 200 school districts came together in a hastily formed coalition to urge school board members to delay the release of the grades because they said the calculations behind them skewed the results.

Almost 300 school districts were represented and about 75% of the state's student population, Tulsa Superintendent Keith Ballard told the board.

"I find it insulting for people to say that we're trying to hide from low scores. It's about fairness," he said.

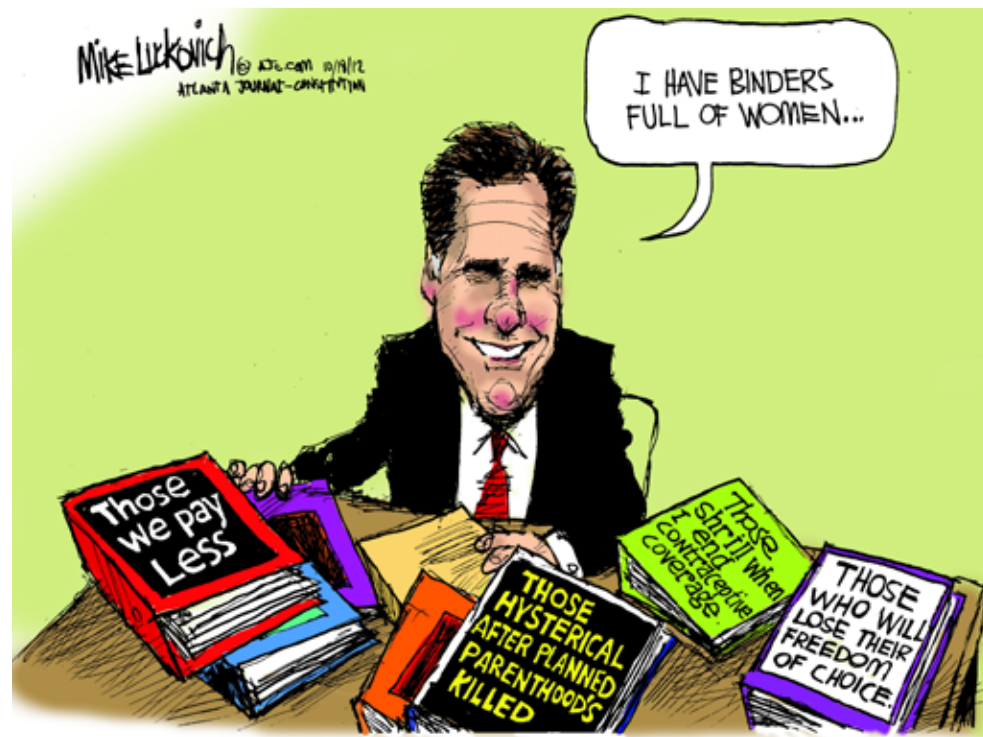
What does Barresi know? She's a dentist without any formal training in education.

She tossed her hat in the ring and – presto! – she was carried in along with the GOP tide that grabbed the entire political structure in the state.

## Faux News

At least one country has common sense. Fox News will not be moving to Canada.

Canadian regulators announced they would reject efforts by Canada's rightwing prime minister, Stephen



Harper, to repeal a law that forbids lying on broadcast news.

Canadian law requires that a licensor may not broadcast any false or misleading news.

That provision has kept Fox "news" and rightwing talk radio out of Canada.

Bobby Kennedy Jr. said he and his family lived in Vancouver, BC for about two years [between 2005-07], and he was astonished at the fact they actually got real world news.

"It's something I was not used to coming from the U.S. and I commented all the time," he said. "People there were shocked to hear when I told them what a traditional U.S. news broadcast entails."

Freedom of the press is one that too many Americans take for granted.

A news outlet is free to comment on the news, but not outright lie, such as Fox "news" does day after day.

## Hungry Kids

According to a new survey of public school teachers released by Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry campaign, childhood hunger remains a serious obstacle to learning.

With nearly one in five U.S. kids facing the threat of hunger this year, teachers across America are seeing its effects.

Here's what more than 1,000 K-8 public school teachers have to say about childhood hunger in our schools: three out of five teachers say they have children in their classrooms who regularly come to school hungry; four out of five of those teachers say these children come to school hungry at least once a week.

A majority of teachers who see hunger as a problem believe the problem is growing. Three prevalent consequences of hunger in schools: 1. Inability to concentrate; 2. Poor academic performance; 3. Headaches and stomach aches.

There is a solution to childhood hunger. As first-hand responders to

hunger in our schools, teachers are active in trying to ensure kids are fed, and three out of four teachers [77%] say addressing childhood hunger must be a national priority.

Teachers commonly help families enroll in free or reduced-price meal programs [71% of the time] or refer families to resources in the school [54% of the time].

More than half of teachers [53%] say they purchase food for hungry kids in their classrooms. One in 10 of these teachers buys food every week.

## Tobacco A Killer

Finally, the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services examined whether the state may have an opportunity to reduce the risk of disease and death among smokers through tobacco harm reduction strategies.

Requested by Sen. Rob Johnson, R-Kingfisher, the interim study focused on the potential impact of policies that encourage smokers to switch from cigarettes to smokeless tobacco products, which some claim are less likely to result in harmful health outcomes.

What planet are they living on? Smokeless tobacco is equally deadly. It cost the late U.S. Rep. Mike Synar his life.

Johnson said Oklahoma's high rates of smoking-related disease and death merited a closer look at alternative strategies.

Dr. Brad Rodu, professor of Medicine at the University of Louisville, explained that tobacco harm reduction encourages smokers to move down a risk continuum from dangerous products like cigarettes to less harmful alternatives, such as e-cigarettes and certain smokeless tobacco products, if they cannot quit.

In the next decade eight million Americans will die from smoking or chewing. The tobacco trust fund ought to show the final results of smoking – just like they do in other states.

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

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

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

# Observerscope

If you value The Oklahoma Observer, now is the time to step up and give a friend or a library a year's worth of the best and only journal of commentary in Oklahoma.

**Laurel:** To former Lt. Gov. Jari Askins, who will receive the 2012 Spirit of the Urban Indian Award at the Oklahoma City Indian Clinic's gala Nov. 3.

The fate of Affirmative Action will be determined by the U.S. Supreme Court. This year's docket is lengthy and includes environmental disputes.

**Dart:** To Republican Gov. Mary Fallin, saying she is "committed to education" but she stopped short of promising more money. The state ranks 49th in teacher salaries, 47th in per student funding.

One in four adult Oklahomans will experience a mental health disorder in any given year, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness – that's 57.7 million people nationwide.

**Laurel:** To the ACLU for appealing the decision of state District Judge Bill Graves, denying a name change for James Dean Ingram who had a sex change and wanted to be renamed Angela Renee Ingram.

Voters will face six state questions on the November ballot. Start doing your homework now because several are complex. Check this issue [page 7] for details before you cast your ballot.

**Dart:** To rightwing producers of the movie *Won't Back Down*, attacking educators' rights to form unions. No educator is required to join a union, whether it's the OEA or AFT.

The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reports that Oklahoma ranked seventh last year with personal income growth of 1.2%.

**Laurel:** To a record 1,078 women winning their primary races for state legislative seats nationwide. Unfortunately Oklahoma elects some female Republicans who are far, far right.

Critics keep saying public schools need to improve, given their international ranking in math and science. Gee, you think money would help? We rank 22nd internationally on what we spend on public education.

**Dart:** To American Airlines, once a world leader in aviation but today it's a joke. The latest gaffe is seats coming loose on AA airplanes. Nobody was hurt – just AA's public relations.

More than 696,000 Oklahomans are without health insurance despite the Affordable Care Act. One of the reasons is the lack of education for 35%, which means they settle for low paying jobs and no money for health insurance.

**Laurel:** To Oklahoma State University, for the second consecutive year named No. 14 out of 2,000 programs of Graduate Entrepreneurship. [Princeton University survey]

New corrections, mental health and public safety reforms take effect Nov. 1 but key components miss funding and won't be ready on the due date set by the new law. The Republican Legislature strikes again!

**Dart:** To Republican Gov. Mary Fallin, an all-time record junketeer. She has already racked up \$237,000. Yet she and the Republican Legislature starve vital state agencies.

State Architect Duane Mass says the beautiful paintings in the Capitol rotunda have been damaged by sunlight. It will take upwards of \$350,000 to fix the windows with no guarantee how long the replacements will last.

**Laurel:** To Delta Dental of Oklahoma, providing more than 10,000 poor families the dental care they need. They have also donated \$250,000 through their foundation.

Forbes magazine is out with its annual richest 400. Hobby Lobby owner David Green comes in at No. 79 with \$4.5 billion. He insists that "God is the owner" of his arts and crafts chain. He says his fortune will be distributed when he's in heaven.



**Dart:** To the Grove Board of Education for allowing the Bible in public schools. There is nothing wrong about teaching the Bible as history but when it's tied to school prayer it should be banned.

**Laurel:** To The Tulsa World's Ginnie Graham and Curtis Killman for their carefully researched and brilliantly written article on poverty in Oklahoma and the U.S. Believe or not, poverty is declining in the state – but we're a long way from erasing it.

AARP has listed the best places to retire on \$100 a day. Oklahoma didn't make the list. First was Pittsburg, PA, then San Antonio, TX; Grand Junction, CO; Gainesville, FL; and Omaha, NE.

The Associated Press reports that many parents with students in private schools are opting out of vaccines that are mandated in public schools. Catholic schools do it on a school-by-school basis.

**Dart:** To Oklahoma oilman Harold Hamm, urging Congress to keep \$4 billion in tax incentives for the oil and gas industry, now earning extraordinary profits. That industry is the greediest in America.

Republicans continue to idolize Ronald Reagan, wanting his face on Mount Rushmore. One foundation is trying to erect a statue on every state capitol grounds. Odd they never mention his administration added \$1.9 trillion to the national debt.

**Laurel:** To Steve Allen, awarded the third Caliber Award by the Central Oklahoma Home Builders Association.

You could have guessed who authored the A-F grading of the schools. On the Senate side it was GOP Sen. Clark Jolley, on the House side it was Rep. Lee Denney. If you're grading legislators both earn "F" for this law.

**Dart:** To the Department of Mental Health, which won't close Narconon/Arrowhead near McAlester. The department received word in late 2011 that a 32-year old Claremore man's death was a result of him using "healing" drugs. The so-called rehab facility is headquarters for Scientology.

The American Community Study reports household income for 28.8% of Oklahoma families of four is \$25,000. Yet the Republican Legislature and the GOP governor continue to cut taxes for the rich. More than 7% of Oklahomans earn \$100,000 or more – enjoying unprecedented tax breaks.

**Laurel:** To those 500 students who rallied at the state Capitol after six suicides this year as the result of bullying. Rep. Anastasia Pittman said nine students have committed suicide. She will reintroduce her anti-cyber bullying bill next session.

Leave it to the Daily Disappointment to lead the cheering squad for the Lindsey Nicole Henry Scholarship Law – another way to send money to private and parochial schools. Tulsa at first refused to participate because there is no way to follow up on "special needs" students in private and parochial schools.

The interim committee probing Oklahoma's Veterans Centers has run into a roadblock obtaining details despite repeated requests. What are they hiding? Ask the widow of Louis Arterberry, whose husband, 86, died in a scalding whirlpool bath at the Claremore Center.

**Laurel:** To GOP House Speaker Kris Steele, honored by the George Kaiser Family Foundation for his commitment to programs that affect the state's most vulnerable. Too bad Steele is term-limited. Wish we had more Republicans like him.

**Dart:** To state Reps. Mike Reynolds and Mike Ritze, filing a lawsuit demanding that the Department of Agriculture not fund a junior livestock show. Oops! The program has already been funded.

If two state questions are approved [758 and 766] voters should be prepared for property tax increases. That's the opinion of Tulsa County Assessor Ken Yazel.

**Dart:** To our mouthy Republican U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn who predicts that the contraception mandate in the Affordable Care Act will be overturned. This from an OB/GYN who sterilized an unmarried teenager after delivering her baby.

**THE OKLAHOMA  
Observer**


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# Letters

Editor, The Observer:

I read your article on medical marijuana [10.10.12 Observer]. I just wanted to say thank you and let you know that everybody I know thinks it is an excellent article.

Sen. [Brian] Crain appears to be in the mood to try and sweep medical cannabis under the rug for another year, and we need to do whatever it takes to ensure that doesn't happen again, because this year's deadline will be here in a few weeks.

This really shouldn't be such a difficult thing to do, because we're not asking for full legalization, just to help the Oklahomans that are suffering.

Postponing or denying this relief to Oklahomans should be a crime. This one issue has hurt more people and ruined more lives than any other single thing that I know of, including wars.

It actually should be known as the Crime of the Century.

Chuck Vaughan  
Edmond

Editor, The Observer:

Re: Darla Reynolds-Sparks letter in the 9.25.12 Observer:

While I agree that the availability of fresh water is a crisis waiting to happen, I take issue with her comment about "the use of billions and billions of gallons of our water for nuclear projects."

Since I know of no other "nuclear projects" that use copious amounts of water except nuclear energy generation, I assume this is the use to which she refers. It's true that nuclear power plants use water to dissipate waste heat; so does power generation by the burning of coal or gas.

About 60% of the energy produced by these three methods of generation ends up as heat that needs to be dissipated into the atmosphere, usually done by the evaporation of water. This water is uncontaminated and is returned to the environment.

To select just nuclear energy is unfair and biased. I look forward to the day when this publication gets its facts straight about nuclear energy.

Robert Petry  
Norman

Editor, The Observer:

Charges that Mitt Romney has raised funds from foreign nationals for his presidential campaign must be investigated by the Federal Election Commission. U.S. campaign laws expressly prohibit candidates for federal offices accepting contributions

from non-U.S. citizens.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Blumen v. Federal Election Commission*, in a 9-0 decision, that, "It shall be unlawful for - [1] a foreign national, directly or indirectly to make - [A] a contribution or donation of money ... in connection with a Federal, State, or local election; ... or for - [2] a person to solicit, accept, or receive a contribution or donation described in subparagraph [A] or [B] of paragraph [1] from a foreign national."

A *Veterans Today* report asserts, "Mitt Romney has raised millions in foreign cash at fundraising events across Israel and London ... One table alone gave him a million in cash. None was from American citizens. Fewer than 10% of Romney's contributors in Israel are estimated to be 'dual citizens.'"

If these charges are true, Mr. Romney has demonstrated ignorance of or disregard for U.S. election laws; has compromised his commitment to U.S. interests by accepting money from foreign nationals; may be ineligible to run for Federal office; and may be subject to prosecution.

Nathaniel Batchelder  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

I am admittedly not a financial oracle but I would like to ask a question of the readers of this august fountain of information.

Is there any real solid reason for any person - let's say Mitt Romney for instance - to keep their money in Switzerland or the Caymans other than tax evasion?

Does the full faith and credit of the Cayman government make their banks safer than American banks? Can a man who evades paying taxes to this great country be thought worthy to lead it?

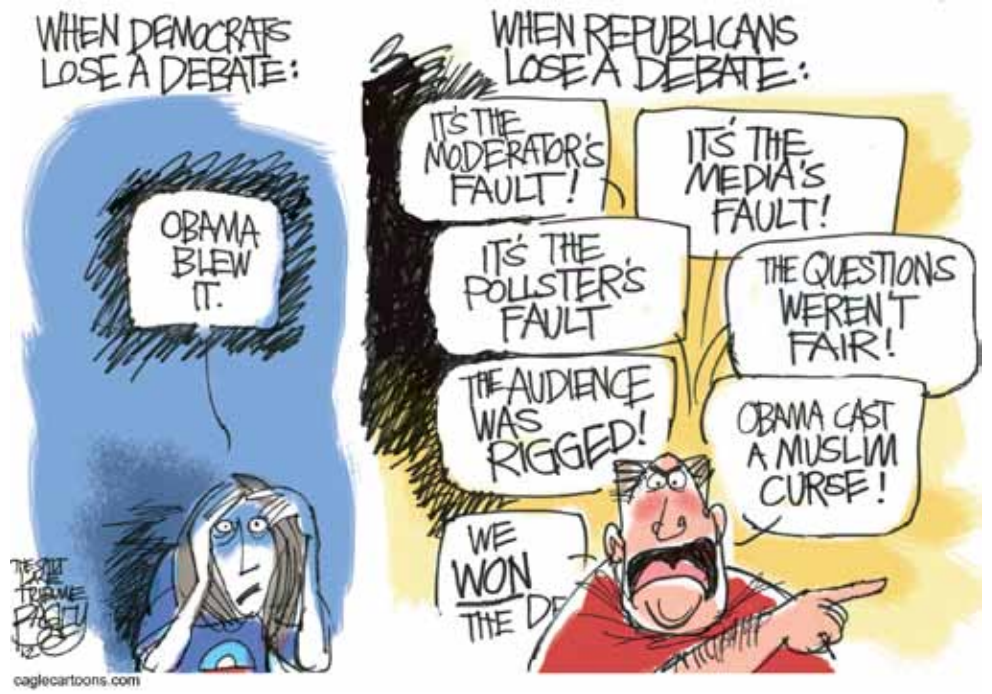
Rick Ewing  
Lexington

Editor, The Observer:

I remember hearing Joe Biden make a very funny, and appropriate, joke at the expense of Rudy Giuliani. Biden observed that everything with Giuliani is a noun, a verb and 9-11. So true. Giuliani has milked that horrific event for every political angle he could.

With the rest of the Republicans, it's a noun, a verb and Ronald Reagan. I wonder if they know Reagan is dead. I looked this up and I'm pretty sure I'm right. Ronald Reagan died in June 2004, over eight years ago.

Further, the Reagan policies that



Republicans advocate are from an administration almost 30 years old. I looked this up, too. Reagan was president from 1981-89. His policies would not work in this new era. An era that Republicans refuse to acknowledge.

News flash it's almost 2013!

I understand that as presidents go the Republicans don't have much to brag about - Richard Nixon, George W. Bush, Gerald Ford. Compared to that crowd Reagan might seem like a real prize, but he was nothing special.

Turn the page, Republicans.

Deborah Lewis  
Garland, TX

Editor, The Observer:

The Oklahoma Water Resources Board must first be reformed before additional duties and financial powers are granted to it under SQ 764.

Currently, the OWRB doesn't have any in-house professional civil engineers or hydrogeologists to prudently evaluate if future new water supplies or wastewater systems have proper design merits.

OWRB has approved \$900 million in past water projects without independent professional reviews. Many projects had high, unexplained cost overruns - a classic example of Oklahoma government waste.

A cartel of Oklahoma civil engineering, contractors and equipment supply companies have a long-time monopoly on rural water systems, water supply and wastewater plant system's enlargements, new construction and upgrades.

Until this white-haired gang of greedy politically-connected rascals are dismantled, you should vote against SQ 764 because it guarantees them more excessive profits, paid for by the taxpayers.

If [State Chamber CEO] Fred Morgan and the State Chamber are for something, then double- and triple-check why! Remember, they are not for it unless there are substantial, unreasonable profits to select groups.

On SQ 764 voters are not told how much Oklahoma [too big to fail] banks and their "bond boys" will make off each bond issue. Before voting, Oklahomans should demand transparency and financial details, so they can look for insiders' tricks and traps.

SQ 764 will force taxpayers to pay for Oklahoma City's proposed pipeline from Sardis Lake, even though Oklahoma City is by no means broke.

It is true that SQ 764 would allow refinancing at lower interest rates some older state bond and debt is-

sues. But why didn't supporters of SQ 764 tell us about refinancing charges that would be imposed by Oklahoma's Big Banks? Follow your tax dollars!

The need for financial help to Oklahoma communities for new water supplies and wastewater plants is real and growing, but SQ 764 allows Capt. Morgan's Profiteers inside through unguarded financial back doors.

Where are the fact-checkers' reports on SQ 764? And how much in "free" federal funds are available?

Bob Jackman  
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

President Truman said you do not have to like or respect me, but you should respect the office of the presidency. How true!

Romney and his elitist son should follow Truman's advice.

Tom Birbilis  
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

I got this from a friend who got it from the *New York Times*:

*The 47 percent closer  
For Mitt was a pernicious poser,  
As he fumbled and mumbled  
His edifice tumbled,  
The POTUS was a Mitt exposer!*

Craig Case  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

For lawyers, the pursuit is for the great prize: a judgeship.

Judges receive excellent money, have short working hours, no term limits and a splendid retirement.

"You only need to know three things to be a judge - 'Overruled,' 'Sustained' and 'Proceed,'" said the late Tulsa County District Judge W. Lee Johnson.

Do judges get through their briefs? "Oh, no," said a clerk for a U.S. Supreme Court justice, "but they sure get through their newspapers."

That may be why Oklahoma judges have a practice of non-compliance with - if not outright ignoring of - U.S. Supreme Court precedent.

That precedent, a legal decision serving as a rule in future similar cases, prohibits a relative of a murder victim from giving an opinion as to whether the death penalty or the "hell hole" of life in prison shall be imposed.

In the LeFlore County murder trial of James Lewis DeRosa, a family member of his victims told jurors,

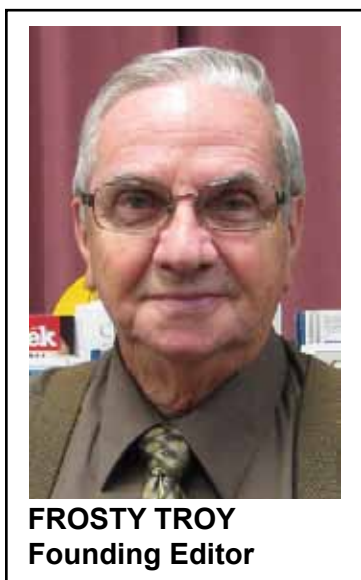
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# Catholic Crisis



**FROSTY TROY**  
Founding Editor

*Editor's Note: The author is a practicing Catholic who spent time in a seminary.*

The worst kept secret is the Catholic Church in America is in dire straits.

First it was the exposure of a number of priests and several bishops guilty of being pedophiles. It has cost the church millions in lawsuits and isn't over yet.

Fewer than 25% of Catholics now regularly attend Sunday mass. As for confessions, the number has dropped like a ton of bricks.

Confess your sins to a priest who might be harming young children? And who hears their confessions? For years those guilty have been offering Mass while molesting children.

Is it any wonder that Catholics find it hard to reconcile their faith when some Bishops running the country are guilty of cover-ups?

Now comes official word that Catholic school enrollment has declined more than 600,000, down 22.4% from 2,031,455!

The continued hemorrhaging is felt in all regions of America but especially in the church's strongholds of the New England and Mid-Atlantic states.

Catholic school enrollment reached its peak of 5.2 million in 1965. The existing schools are holding on largely due to Hispanics, accounting for 14% of enrollment. Other minorities account for 12.5% of the total.

Growing up in McAlester, there was a back pew for African Americans. That so incensed some in St. John's Church that a new church was built a few blocks away, welcoming all.

The bishops are now going after nuns – claiming they are not obedient. How far from the truth can the bishops get?

Nuns have always been treated like second class Catholics, shunted to the convents. The total number of U.S. nuns is 57,000 and many of them are fighting back.

According to the Pope, Catholic schools and nuns must "contribute to the evangelical mission of the church." Both do more of God's work than the entire hierarchy combined.

The lack of teaching nuns has resulted in hiring lay teachers. They are held to the same high standards as nuns – without the veil.

Catholic students start each day with Mass and are rigorously trained in Catholic dogma. So why are so many Catholic parents unwilling to enroll their children in Catholic schools?

It isn't money. Some are frightened of the priests teaching religion in the schools. The school is connected to the rectory, which in most cases provides funding for those parents lacking resources.

Another factor is the divorce rate – 50% of couples split – usually leaving the mother to raise the children.

Catholic schools want parents involved – even single parents. They see that homework is done, Mass is attended and are involved in school functions. That, for a single parent, is difficult if not impossible.

Public schools have buses, food and vo-tech for the students – something Catholic schools don't have.

Helping foot the bill are non-Catholic students, 15.4% of the total enrollment. It's expensive but many parents believe it's worth it because public schools are non-religious.

In an unprecedented move, 13 Catholic dioceses have joined with Catholic so-



cial service and educational groups in filing a dozen lawsuits against the federal government, alleging violations of religious liberty.

If prayer in public schools becomes the norm, even more Catholic schools will lose students. The debate over contraception, taught as a sin in Catholic schools, will further erode Catholic schools.

Read the exact words in the Oklahoma Constitution:

*"Section 11-5, Public Money or Property – use for Sectarian Purposes: No public money or property shall ever be appropriated applied, donated, or used, directly or indirectly, for the use, benefit or support of any sect, church, denomination, or system of religion, or for the use, benefit, or support of any priest, preacher, minister, or the religious teacher or dignitary or sectarian institution as such."*

The Archdiocese of Washington claims in a brief in the case before the Supreme Court that the government would force Catholic schools and other organizations to "sacrifice their beliefs in order to be able to continue their mission of serving people in need."

An Oklahoma voucher law was ruled unconstitutional by Tulsa County District Judge Rebecca Nightingale.

That 2010 law, pushed though by Republican legislators, was tossed out by the Oklahoma Supreme Court, holding the law violated the state Constitution's prohibition of public money for religious purposes.

The GOP legislators are not fans of private schools; their motive is to use voucher schemes to harm the AFT and OEA – both unions of teachers, administrators and other staffers.

They cleverly named it for a stillborn child of Gov. and Mrs. Brad Henry, specifying that it meant to serve disabled children. But they didn't spell out the definition of "disabled."

By the time the law took effect, 149 students were admitted to private and parochial schools. The judge put a hold on the law until it could be decided by the appellate court. The law would have helped Catholic schools but they were not a party to the lawsuit.

The Catholic church is hanging by its fingernails, but that's not new. The church has, through the centuries, had its woes but always bounced back.

It will again.

## THE ENLIGHTENED STATES OF AMERICA

Dear Red States:

We're ticked off at your Neanderthal attitudes and politics and we've decided we're leaving.

We in New York intend to form our own country and we're taking the other Blue States with us.

In case you aren't aware, that includes California, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois and the rest of the Northeast.

We believe this split will be beneficial to the nation and especially to the people of the new country, The Enlightened States of America [E.S.A].

To sum up briefly: You get Texas, Oklahoma and all the slave states.

We get stem cell research and the best beaches. We get Andrew Cuomo and Elizabeth Warren. You get Bobby Jindal and Todd Akin.

We get the Statue of Liberty. You get OpryLand.

We get Intel and Microsoft. You get WorldCom.

We get Harvard. You get Ole Miss.

We get 85% of America's venture capital and entrepreneurs. You get Alabama.

We get two-thirds of the tax revenue. You get to make the red states pay their fair share.

Since our aggregate divorce rate is 22% lower than the Christian Coalition's, we get a bunch of happy families. You get a bunch of single moms.

With the Blue States in hand we will have firm control of 80% of the country's fresh water, more than 90% of the pineapple and lettuce, 92% of the nation's fresh fruit, 95% of America's quality wines [you can serve French wines at state dinners], 90% of all cheese, 90% of the high tech industry, most of the U.S. low sulfur coal, all living redwoods, sequoias and condors, all the Ivy and Seven Sister schools plus Harvard, Yale, Stanford, Cal Tech and MIT.

With the Red States you will have to cope with 88% of all obese Americans and their projected health care costs, 92% of all U.S. mosquitoes, nearly 100% of the tornadoes, 90% of the hurricanes, 99% of all Southern Baptists, virtually 100% of all televangelists, Rush Limbaugh, Bob Jones University, Clemson and the University of Georgia.

We get Hollywood and Yosemite, thank you.

Thirty-eight percent of those in the Red states believe Jonah was actually swallowed by a whale, 62% believe life is sacred unless we're discussing the death penalty or gun laws, 44% say that evolution is only a theory, 53% that Saddam was involved in 9/11 and 61% of you crazy bastards believe you are people with higher morals than we lefties.

We're taking the good weed, too. You can have that crap they grow in Mexico.

Sincerely, Citizen of the Enlightened States of America

– Thanks to Fran Morris for sharing this gem. The author is unknown.

## A Dominionist In High Places



**ARNOLD HAMILTON**  
Editor

Most gubernatorial appointments elicit a giant y-a-w-n.

It's not that they aren't important. It's just that they often involve boards or commissions few ever heard of. Or they regulate the narrowest of special interests.

Occasionally, though, an appointment doesn't get near the public attention it deserves.

Such was the case recently when Gov. Mary Fallin appointed Norman attorney R. Marc Nuttle to the Oklahoma Health Care Authority board.

Unless you're a political junkie, you probably never heard of Nuttle. But he has a strong Republican pedigree.

In Oklahoma, he's worked in key positions for the likes of Henry Bellmon, Dewey Bartlett, Don Nickles and Jim Inhofe. Nationally, he was senior advisor to George H.W. Bush's 1988 and 1992 presidential campaigns and served as national campaign manager for Pat Robertson's

presidential bid.

He even was executive director of the National Republican Congressional Committee. And he was involved this year with the pro-Michele Bachmann SuperPAC known as Citizens for a Working America.

A GOP big shot. Landing a big appointment from a GOP governor. No big deal. Right?

Wrong.

The big deal isn't that Marc Nuttle, Republican insider, was appointed to the state board that manages health care for the poor.

The big deal is what else Nuttle represents: He is deeply involved in a movement that not only would shatter the traditional American wall separating church and state, but also impose a Christian theocracy worldwide.

The movement is called Dominionism – which the Religious News Service reports is a term generally ascribed to “the belief that Christians are biblically mandated to control all earthly institutions until the second coming of Jesus.”

Nuttle is chairman of the board of a group called The Oak Initiative, which lists among its “strategy and objectives” “to raise up effective leaders for all of the dominant areas of influence in the culture, including: government, business, education, arts and entertainment, family services, media and the church. [<http://theoakinitiative.org/strategy-and-objectives>]

“For us,” the group declares in its purpose statement, “it is not just a voting ballot or a single set of issues – it's about being a part of an historical shift in a nation that is called to a destiny by God to disciple other nations.”

It's a free country. Nuttle is welcome to believe whatever he wants. And to encourage others to join his crusades. Onward Christian soldiers, and all that jazz!

But there is a long, troubling history of the havoc that religious zealots – no matter the faith tradition – wreak when they attain public positions of power.

You need look no further than the Texas State Board of Education, when extreme fundamentalists slipped into office and attempted – among other things – to rewrite science textbooks and history to fit their religious views.

Iran offers another prime example of what can happen when a somewhat modern, educated society is taken over by theocrats bent on imposing their views and eradicating all others.

The genius of America, and a primary reason we remain a beacon to the world, is pluralism – we are free to say what we think and embrace any religion [or none]. No government interference.

However, a cottage industry of pseudo-historians has popped up in recent years in an attempt to rewrite the nation's founding principles – insisting the Founders were Christians creating a Christian nation.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Most were deists that believed a higher power created the world, and its natural laws, but otherwise took a hands-off approach to humankind.

Dominionism is an enemy of Thomas Jefferson's wall separating church and state. Jefferson's principle doesn't mean your religion can't or shouldn't inform your politics or your views on public policy. It means that we have to be careful in crafting public policy and carrying out the functions of government not to impose our religious beliefs on others who many hold different beliefs.

Rational. Fair. As it should be.

As a practicing Christian, I well know there are more shades of the faith than I can count. And not just denominationally, but also how people interpret the same scriptures.

I am repulsed, for example, by the Westboro Baptist Church crowd that pickets soldiers' funerals and spews a hate-filled theology. I am offended by the likes of state Rep. Sally Kern who publicly scorns homosexuals as a greater threat to America than terrorists. And I am deeply troubled by religious extremists of any stripe that seek to incite violence and otherwise divide us.

That is why it is important that we pay attention to those who are elected or appointed to government service. We must remain vigilant to ensure our public servants aren't driven by a narrow, egocentric agenda, but by a pursuit of the common good.

Pollyanna? Perhaps.

But it's also true that you can't be too vigilant these days when it comes to protecting our freedoms – especially from those on the political fringe who wrap themselves in the flag, thump their Bibles and espouse glorious, patriotic rhetoric.

Let me be clear: I'm not suggesting that Fallin or Nuttle are advancing some plot to impose their religious worldview on the rest of us. But I am suggesting it's important to know who's in the pack with our leaders.

Call it the you-sleep-with-dogs-you-might-get-fleas theory.

And here's an example why it's important: State leaders, including Fallin, soon will have to decide whether Oklahoma opts into ObamaCare's Medicaid expansion. And the Oklahoma Health Care Authority board – including Nuttle – will undoubtedly influence the decision.

At first glance, it would appear to be a no-brainer: The authority estimates the Affordable Care Act's Medicaid provisions could save the state \$47.8 million – not exactly chump change given the state's recent budget woes.

But this is not strictly a dollars-and-sense – much less a common sense – decision. It's a political decision.

And more than a few state GOP leaders live in mortal fear that being tied in any way to ObamaCare will leave them politically vulnerable to their party's noisy and increasingly influential wingnut wing.

Remember when Fallin first accepted – then rejected – the federal government's \$54.6 million grant to set up a health insurance exchange?

She and other Republican leaders gambled that the U.S. Supreme Court would overturn ObamaCare, eliminating its requirement that states set up the exchanges or risk the federal government imposing a plan. You know how that turned out.

Fallin, Nuttle and Co. presumably will be on the front lines of the Medicaid decision. Now you know why gubernatorial appointments aren't always yawners.



**UNDER CONSTRUCTION**

**The New**  
THE OKLAHOMA  
**Observer**

**Coming January 2013**

Vote

**NO** on ALL six propositions

Where did these propositions come from?  
**ANSWER.** A power crazed legislature.  
*Paid for by John E. Orr*

# 6 On November 6

## Voters To Decide Key State Questions

*Editor's Note: The six state questions on the Nov. 6 ballot may not appear as contentious as Voter ID, Sharia Law or same-sex marriage, but they are no less important. In this issue, The Observer not only offers its recommendations, but also includes essays on SQ 766 that would exempt corporations' intangible property from property taxes; Gov. Mary Fallin's flip-flop on SQ 762 that would remove the governor from the parole process for non-violent offenders; and a letter to the editor [page 4] that explains problems with SQ 764, which would set up a mechanism to fund water infrastructure projects across the state.*

### FIVE NO'S, ONE YES

The Observer urges Oklahoma voters to defeat five of the six proposed constitutional amendments on the general election ballot.

Only SQ 762 – which would remove the governor from the parole process for non-violent offenders – is worthy of support. The others are either bad public policy or bald-faced power grabs by the state's wealthy corporatists – or both.

• SQ 758 is appealing, at first blush. It would lower from 5% to 3% the annual cap on property tax increases. Good news for those on fixed incomes or struggling to make ends meet, right?

Actually, it would put Oklahoma on the same slippery slope as California with its Prop 13 that has plunged the once-Golden State into fiscal chaos – a \$16 billion budget deficit that is crippling vital state services.

It would be dangerous to further tie the hands of Oklahoma's elected leaders. Thanks to SQ 640, it's virtually impossible already to raise taxes, no matter how grave the emergency. SQ 758 would make matters much worse.

Among the casualties would be the state's already underfunded public schools – it would take \$6.5 million the first year from a system already 49th in teacher salaries and 47th in student finding.

Recommendation: No.

• SQ 759 is a solution in search of a problem. It would ban something that doesn't exist – affirmative action quotas in state employment, education and contracting. So why is this even on the ballot?

It is evidently the closest thing to a hot-button, social issue the Republican legislative majority could conjure this year, playing to the preposterous notion that white males are victims of rampant reverse discrimination.

Here's the reality: Approving SQ 759 would send a terrible message to the rest of the nation – and the world – that Oklahoma doesn't give a damn about equal opportunity.

Moreover, SQ 759 if approved would ban the one thing that is required of state agencies – a mandate to periodically report to the public how well they're doing in hiring a workforce that reflects Oklahoma's increasingly diverse population.

Call it a return of the Good Old Boy system.

Recommendation: No.

• SQ 762 would remove the governor from the parole process when it comes to non-violent offenders.

Oklahoma is bankrupting itself thanks to a three-strikes mentality – more women incarcerated per capita than any other state, fourth per capita in men.

Taking the governor out of the parole process will speed the transition of non-violent offenders from expensive and more successful state incarceration – averaging \$16,000-plus per inmate per year – to less expensive community-based supervision and treatment. The savings could be used to invest in underfunded vital state services such as education.

Recommendation: Yes.

• SQ 764 is another proposal that looks good at first, but doesn't stand up to closer scrutiny. It would create a \$300 million bonding authority under the Oklahoma Water Resources Board [OWRB] to help municipalities rebuild, update and expand water and wastewater infrastructure – an estimated \$82 billion will be needed over the next 50 years.

The problem is, OWRB would control the money and the projects – which means the State Chamber and the Oklahoma City powers-that-be would be in charge.

Given how OWRB and OKC handled Sardis Lake, that's more than disconcerting. It evokes fear of a slush fund for the privileged few, helping make the rich richer in Oklahoma City while leaving rural Oklahoma to wither.

Recommendation: No.

• SQ 765 would throw the baby out with the bathwater when it comes to the state Department of Human Services. It would eliminate the DHS commission and transfer its powers to the governor and the Legislature.

That's hardly a comforting thought. The last thing DHS needs is to be politicized further. What it really needs is to be funded – fully. It never has been, leaving child welfare workers, for example, with crushing caseloads far beyond professional standards.

Recommendation: No.

• SQ 766 is a corporatist's dream come true – a tax avoidance scheme that would make Mitt Romney proud.

The proposal would provide huge tax cuts to major business interests – think utilities, telecommunications companies, airlines and railroads – by exempting stocks, bonds and investments from their net worth.

It would cost local governments an estimated \$50 million annually – 60% of which goes to schools and roads, among other vital services.

Recommendation: No.

### Will Fallin's Flip-Flop Doom SQ 762?

By Arnold Hamilton

Less than three weeks before the general election, Gov. Mary Fallin flip-flopped on SQ 762 – the proposed constitutional amendment that would remove the governor from the parole process for non-violent offenders.

Believe it or not, Fallin signed legislation in 2011 aimed at accomplishing that goal. But it turned out the fix couldn't be made legislatively – only by changing the state Constitution.

So this year's Legislature ordered the proposed amendment be placed on the Nov. 6 ballot. And Fallin offered her hearty, unqualified endorsement.

Until she didn't.

"It appears State Question 762 would define nonviolent offenders only by their current offense and would not mandate the consideration of past violent behavior," the governor said.

"Since taking office, I have denied parole for 437 offenders, who would be considered non-violent under the terms of State Question 762, keeping them off our streets and out of our communities."

See FLIP-FLOP Page 8

### Fall Peace Festival



Celebrate Peace & Justice

Sunday, November 11<sup>th</sup> \*\*\* 11 am to 5 pm

Civic Center Hall of Mirrors, 201 N. Walker, OKC

Free Admission \*\*\* Free Parking at Meters

Booths & Tables of Social Justice Groups

Live Music & Entertainment All Day

Supervised Children's Activity Area

#### Holiday Shopping Opportunities

Fair trade goods, books, calendars, crafts, pottery, home-made candles & soaps, African carving, Central American fabrics, organic coffee, jewelry, T-shirts, bumper stickers, buttons

Sponsors include: \*The Peace House \* Peace Education Institute

\*Social Justice Committee First Unitarian Church \* Bob Lemon

\*Summit Business Systems, Inc \* The Oklahoma Observer

\*Home Creations \* Bright Lights of OKC

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

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

# State Chamber's Nasty War On Judiciary

By Kent Morlan

If you haven't noticed, the State Chamber has opened its newest offensive on your rights to use the courts to redress wrongs that you believe have been visited upon you, your loved ones, and/or your clients.

The first phase of the Chamber's war on your rights was the "lawsuit reform" campaign. People were told that because of frivolous medical malpractice lawsuits filed by greedy trial lawyers, doctors were leaving the state. The claim was not true.

What people did not know was that the same campaign was being waged across the nation. This could be done because people, if they read a newspaper at all, read locally published papers and not papers from other states.

As a result of "lawsuit reform" campaigns, legislatures erected new procedural impediments to the filing and prosecution of all kinds of lawsuits, including medical malpractice cases. By mandating affidavits of merit and enacting other procedural impediments, and limiting non-economic damages, more people, who are harmed by substandard medical care and unreasonably dangerous products, are not able to obtain representation to prosecute their claims.

**IT WAS CHICKEN LITTLE-STYLE** "The sky is falling" propaganda. Sacrifice your rights or lose your doctor. It was all lies!

Having achieved success from its "lawsuit reform" campaign, the state Chamber of Commerce has now opened a second front in its effort to ensure favorable treatment for the politically powerful in the courts.

I call this the "Intimidate the Judiciary" campaign and it will work unless, at

the end of the day, our judges feel secure in making decisions based on the law and the facts, rather than what is politically acceptable to the powerful.

On June 2, the Tulsa World published an article that announced that the State Chamber was instituting a "rating system" to be launched by the Oklahoma Civil Justice Council, whatever that might be, which sponsors a zero-to-100 rating system for judges on the Court of Civil Appeals and Oklahoma Supreme Court. The rating system will rate whether judges support the expansion of liabilities.

The ostensible purpose of this rating system is to provide the public with information upon which to rely in voting for or against retaining Oklahoma's appellate court judges in office.

**THE STATE CHAMBER ALREADY** operates Legislative Watch [www.wearewatchingthem.biz] where it reports on the votes cast by various members of the Legislature including a list of Top Offenders that are labeled "Anti-Business."

The Oklahoma Civil Justice Council's website [http://okciviljustice.com] says that its mission is to "educate the public and promote fairness and equity in Oklahoma's civil justice system." Its goal is to "educate" you about the anti-business tendencies of our appellate court judges.

If you look at the "ratings" given to state Supreme Court Justices Colbert, Edmondson, Kauger, Reif and Watt, you will see that Oklahoma Civil Justice Council finds them to be wanting. Judges Taylor and Winchester do better but still only score 69% approval ratings.

See NASTY Page 19

## FLIP-FLOP

From Page 7

So, we are to believe that Fallin has become so troubled by the wording of the proposed constitutional amendment – which hasn't changed in months – that she can no longer support it?

**SORRY, THIS DOESN'T** pass the smell test.

No other state but Oklahoma requires the governor to review all non-violent paroles. Why? It thrusts politics into what should be a judicial-type decision and ends up unnecessarily costing the taxpayers a fortune.

Governors are political animals. All live in constant fear they will be the one to release the next Willie Horton, the Massachusetts felon who failed to return from a weekend furlough and instead went on a crime spree in Maryland that included armed robbery and rape. The incident doomed former Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis' 1988 White House bid.

It's doubtful Fallin considers the governorship to be her final station in political life. But even if her only goal is re-election in two years, she isn't about to unnecessarily risk her 65% approval rating – certainly not for some convict who may or may not make it on the outside.

In Oklahoma, there are few things worse for a sitting governor – or almost any elected official, for that matter – than to be considered soft on crime.

That's what makes Fallin's reversal on SQ 762 so troubling.

**SURE, IT'S GOOD POLITICS**, but it isn't good public policy. And sadly, these days, good politics all too often trumps good public policy ... which contributes to increasing cynicism, doubt and despair among the electorate.

SQ 762 was a centerpiece of House Speaker Kris Steele's Smart on Crime initiative. Oklahoma is being bankrupted, in part, by a senseless lock-em-up and throw-away-the-key mentality that's made us No. 1 per capita in women behind bars and No. 4 in men.

Worse, we're not any safer. In fact, we're arguably less safe. Other states – including Texas – that enacted smart on crime initiatives have seen declines in their violent crime rates and massive savings that could be invested in core public services such as education and highways. Not Oklahoma.

Approving SQ 762 would get non-violent offenders out of the costly warehouse – \$16,000-plus a year to incarcerate someone in Oklahoma – and into cost-effective community-based supervision where they can be monitored while working to put their lives back together.

"This was good policy when the governor signed it into law last year, and it remains so today," the speaker said, in response to Fallin's reversal. "All the facts show that a vote for SQ 762 creates a stronger, more effective criminal justice system."

**SADLY, THE FATE** of SQ 762 has been in jeopardy since mid-summer when the state Pardon and Parole Board – which would become the sole arbiter on granting non-violent paroles – was accused of violating the state's Open Meetings act.

The dust-up involved the board's creation of a special "early consideration" list of inmates. State prosecutors went ballistic when they learned of the practice.

The board has changed its practices, but it was all opponents of SQ 762 needed to create doubt about the wisdom of removing the governor from the process.

Who would be opposed to something that criminal justice experts agree is vital? Those who have a vested interest in the status quo.

Consider, for example, the Prison Industrial Complex – it is alive and well in Oklahoma, anxious to keep prisons brim full. There's money to be made on contracts with the state, sometimes including private prisons that absorb the overflow.

**NOT SURPRISINGLY, THE PRIVATE** business interests wield considerable political influence through campaign contributions.

The state's district attorneys also are howling about SQ 762. Many of them are fine public servants who truly want to see justice administered fairly and without favor. But at their core, their electoral success depends on conviction rates and appearing as tough on crime as possible.

They like the system just the way it is, tilted strongly in favor of punishment.

Fallin sought to link her change of heart to a recent attorney general's opinion that implied a potentially dangerous loophole involving the parole board's ability to recommend – and the governor's to grant – commutations, even for inmates who haven't served at least 85% of their sentences as required by law.

"In the interest of public safety and the well-being of Oklahoma," Fallin said, "the governor's office should continue to provide this oversight until additional reforms and changes can be made at the Pardon and Parole Board."

So the parole board and governor already have this power ... is there any evidence it's been abused? No. This is a classic straw man argument.

**STEELE WORKED HIS HEART OUT** to get Oklahoma on the road to corrections reform. And he hopes that Fallin's reversal doesn't prove pivotal in deciding the fate of the state question.

"We knew this [Fallin's announcement] was coming," Steele's spokesman, John Estus, said in an e-mail. "We appreciated the governor's office making us aware of her position a few days before it became public. The position itself was unexpected, but we weren't caught off guard."

"He [Steele] was surprised, but not disappointed."

Estus said the speaker also believes "the justice reinvestment and corrections reforms will still work with or without the state question. The state could save more than \$200 million in the next decade under the state question and legislation, or about \$170 million under the legislation without the state question. About \$110 million in savings is needed for the justice reinvestment reforms to work, so things are still on track regardless of the outcome Nov. 6."

It is not unusual for thinking people to change their minds on important matters when confronted with new information that alters their perspective. Nor should someone automatically be condemned for reversing field.

But Fallin is yet to make a persuasive case that her change of heart is anything more than a politically expedient flip-flop – just like when the Tea Partiers demanded the state not accept a \$54.6 million federal grant to help set up a health insurance exchange.

If Fallin keeps getting whipsawed like this, she'll be searching soon for a good chiropractor.

*Editor's Note: For more on SQ 762, see "Is Oklahoma Ready To Be Smart On Crime?" in the Oct. 10 Observer.*

# Nix on Six

Vote **NO** on all **SIX** propositions  
All amendments are not in your interest  
And came from a power crazed Legislature

*Paid for by John E. Orr*



# 57 Republicans File Brief On Abortion Law

The rightwing's assault on women's reproductive freedom continues in Oklahoma.

Fifty-seven state legislators recently filed a brief in the Oklahoma Supreme Court defending a state law regulating abortion-inducing drugs.

In 2011, the Legislature approved HB 1970, which required Oklahoma physicians to administer such drugs in accordance with U.S. Food and Drug Administration [FDA] guidelines.

Supporters of the law claim at least eight women are known to have died following use of abortion-inducing drugs in an off-label, unapproved manner. No women have died from bacterial infection following FDA-approved administration of the drugs.

An abortion advocacy group immediately challenged the law, and a district court struck the regulations from state statutes, ruling it is "an unconstitutional law in violation of the fundamental rights of women to privacy and bodily integrity."

Not surprisingly, the state's anti-abortion zealots, including Attorney General Scott Pruitt, are fighting the judge's ruling, the latest in a long line of cases in which state courts – hardly the nation's most liberal – determined anti-abortion laws approved by the GOP-dominated Legislature were unconstitutional.

The HB 1970 case is now before the state Supreme Court. The amicus curiae – or "friend of the court" – brief was filed in support of reversing the previous decision.

Sen. Greg Treat, the legislation's co-author, argues the law enacted critical protections for pregnant women and common-sense regulations for dangerous drugs.

"The regulations outlined in our legislation fall well within established judicial parameters, and the decision of the district court represents an unfortunate departure from precedent," said Treat, R-OKC.

"Sadly, the decision could eliminate critical protections for pregnant patients and their unborn children. The district court's decision is reflective of an ongoing shift in liberal thinking on abortion. No longer is it important that abortion be safe, rare and legal, but instead it is a right and a priority that must be asserted even above the health and well-being of pregnant patients."

In addition to Treat and Rep. Randy Grau, principal authors of HB 1970, nearly



40% of the Legislature and the advocacy group Americans United for Life joined the amicus brief.

The Oklahoma Coalition for Reproductive Justice and Reproductive Services is fighting the law, rejected by District Judge Donald L. Worthington as "so completely at odds with the standard that governs the practice of medicine that it can serve no purpose other than to prevent women from obtaining abortions and to punish and discriminate against those women who do."

The New York-based Center for Reproductive Rights represents the Tulsa-based group. When the law was overturned last May, the group's president and CEO Nancy Northrup hailed the ruling, saying it "adds to a growing list of state and federal courts that have reaffirmed in no uncertain terms that reproductive rights are fundamental constitutional rights that must be afforded the strongest possible legal protection. It sends a strong message to anti-choice legislators in Oklahoma and beyond that their disingenuous tactics for restricting access to abortion and their hostility toward women's fundamental rights will not stand.

"The court has made it clear this law was never about protecting women. It was about banning safe and effective methods of terminating a pregnancy and making it impossible for women to exercise the full range of their constitutionally protected rights."

## Coercive Abortion Laws Deserve Disobedience

By Frank J. Silovsky

A god/creator infusing a soul into every embryo at the time of conception is theology. Our First Amendment guarantees that we are all entitled to our own theology or even no theology.

Abortion opponents deem it an unnecessary procedure. To the contrary, there are a myriad of perfectly understandable and good moral reasons why a woman might choose abortion.

The circumstances surrounding conception are personal, private and fully known to the woman who has conceived.

A woman is sometimes made pregnant by a man she does not love. Such an event might even happen in a marriage. Because of their warped concept of their "marital rights" to her body, some husbands are known to force sex upon their wife. What part of "no" did the husband misunderstand?

A wife can indeed be raped by her own husband and rape is obviously the antithesis of love. Any biblical interpretation that a husband has absolute right to the body of his wife is misogynistic in the extreme.

Consider the all too common case of a wife in a loveless marriage with an abusive alcoholic or drug addicted husband who is father to her children. Is it not perfectly understandable that she would absolutely dread the prospect of yet another child to face certain abuse? Precluding this dire possibility is morally sound.

About half of all marriages end in divorce. About half of the remaining marriages are often held together by guilt and fear. Three divorces in the lifetime of one adult are no longer uncommon. Spousal abuse and child abuse are epidemic. Conceiving and giving birth obviously calls for thoughtful deliberation.

Incest is more common than commonly believed. For example, 40 years ago our family gave refuge to a 14-year-old girl who was pregnant with yet another child fathered by her own father. Making the circumstances more tragic, there was reason to believe that she, too, was a child of incest. Ultimately, she gave birth and placed her child up for adoption.

The social agency that placed this young mother in our home was attempting to place several other victims of incest in homes like ours. Incest happens. Tragic lives ensue. All legal necessary means to prevent progeny of incest should be encouraged, not merely available.

Rape is not always by strangers. "Date rape" happens, sometimes occurring when a woman is drugged by the rapist. Consent is totally absent in date rape. Out of fear, or out of shame, such rape often goes unreported.

A victim of rape has both the legal and the moral right to end an ensuing pregnancy.

Women likely know the full facts and feelings attendant to their preg-

nancies. All women have the right to refuse being coerced or intimidated by medical staff, doctors, clergy, politicians, or anyone else attempting to force upon her values or scruples she does not own.

Women have the absolute legal right to make their own decision about continuing a pregnancy. Nobody has a right to coerce her or

mislead her into whatever decision she makes. Coercive laws regarding abortion deserve disobedience.

Except under very unusual circumstances, abortion is not murder. Anyone who considers all abortion murder can and should reject the procedure for herself.

– The author lives in Oklahoma City

## Charter School Tax Plan Draws Rep's Ire

The suggestion of using tax credits to help fund charter school facilities is preposterous, state Rep. Mike Reynolds said after participating in a legislative study on charter school facility funding.

Reynolds sharply questioned Astec Charter School board member Chip Carter after Carter mentioned that tax credits were among the ideas the school was tossing around to help fund a better facility than their current Shepherd Mall location in Oklahoma City.

"After I pressed Chip for details of how a tax credit might be used, he could not provide any details," said Reynolds, R-Oklahoma City.

"Tax credits were not the focus of the study and I do not know if it is even possible to use a tax credit in such a way, but I want to make it clear that I believe doing so would be inappropriate. Tax credits should be to create jobs, if at all. If charter schools are looking at funding options, they should go ahead and take tax credits off the table."

Reynolds also questioned the use of bonds and ad valorem for facility funding. "I do not think we need to find new, creative ways to tax people at the local level," said Reynolds.

"I sympathize with the facility funding problems the schools presented today, but I think the focus needs to be how to help these charter schools use existing unused public school facilities, rather than looking for new forms of funding. Charter schools are meant to be innovative and an additional tool for public education. They should not be an additional burden on taxpayers."

## BOOKS

# Like Straight Whiskey, Bracing And With A Burn

By Jess Hale

### DAYS OF DESTRUCTION, DAYS OF REVOLT

By Chris Heges and Joe Sacco

Nation Books

320 pages, \$28

The political conventions of the current political season have finished and I drive by a battered urban neighborhood. As I drive, Joe Sacco's poignant illustration's of Camden, NJ, and Chris Hedges' lacerating prose come to mind.

Carefully planned symbol-laden pictures and evocative political rhetoric juxtapose themselves with powerful reporting and images of Hedges and Sacco's new book, *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt*.

These authors take their readers on a gut-wrenching trip that begins with Native Americans on the Pine Ridge Reservation and ends in the Occupy movement's Zuccotti Park in New York City.

As tour guides of a definitely different kind, Hedges and Sacco will introduce one to Joe Balzano, Verlyn Long Wolf, Lolly Davis, Don Paquito, and John Friesen, instead of to aspiring national politicians.

*Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt* is a mix of graphic novel and traditional prose reporting.

**AS SUCH, SACCO'S** illustrations capture the struggle of life in two modes, one of street scenes and the other in telling the stories of interviewees in comic book fashion.

Then Hedges' prose comes at the reader like straight whiskey, bracing and with a burn. He moves from description of unidealistic warts and all pictures of battered lives to strident ideological analysis that indicts corporate capitalism.

If one is not already somewhat sympathetic to his anti-corporate viewpoint, then his stories may move but not persuade.

A former seminarian [we were in divinity school together], Hedges went on to prominence as a journalist with the *New York Times* and *Truthdig*.

Hedges' *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* was a popular masterpiece even though *Losing Moses on the Freeway* remains my favorite of his books.

**THIS GRIPPING EXERCISE** in history and reporting from gifted cartoonist Sacco and the award winning print journalist Hedges does not aspire to cookie cutter presentation of opposing viewpoints, rather it presents reporting with a point of view.

What it may lack in nuance, it recovers in passionate reporting [with all of its limits and strengths] "with the bark off" as the authors' jeremiad against an economic war by corporate elites on the poor and, in the background, on the middle class.

It accomplishes what Hedges described in his Introduction:

*Joe Sacco and I set out two years ago to take a look at the sacrifice zones, those areas in the country that have been offered up for exploitation in the name of profit, progress, and technological advancement. We wanted to show in words and drawings what life looks like when the marketplace rules without constraints, where human beings and the natural world are used and then discarded to maximize profit. We wanted to look at what the ideology of unfettered capitalism means for families, communities, worker and the ecosystem.*

Hedges and Sacco take the reader to five places where society's winners do not dwell and hope barely takes root.

**BEGINNING WITH "DAYS of theft"** in the Pine Ridge Reservation, they show us Native Americans trapped in a system of poverty, alcohol, violence and oppression, but only after they have shown the wreckage of a people after their land and life have been stolen from them.

Next Hedges and Sacco show us "days of siege" in Camden, where African Americans have similarly been battered by the demise of manufacturing and corrupt politics over decades that leave lives torn by drugs and brokenness. Almost incidentally the story depicts the role of Christian faith as a coping mechanism by African Americans with this battering.

The next trip moves to poor white Appalachia where "days of destruction" conveys the environmental and human carnage dealt by coal companies and compliant governments. Mountaintop removal and its literally sickening effects on poor people left without livelihoods or adequate services find unflinching portrayal in this chapter all the way down to the grit of rural drug abuse.

As a native West Virginian, I thought back to my parents who lived through the Depression and to stories of one of my dad's sisters striving to keep my father out of the coal mines holding out hope that he could live a better life by moving toward skilled factory work after service in World War II.

**HEDGES ARGUES FOR** workers rights and unions in the lives of society's working vulnerable.

We move on to "days of slavery" as the authors recount the plight of immigrant labor in Immokalee, FL. Harvesting tomatoes and other crops by exploited immigrant labor is their focus.

Hedges and Sacco indict the large growers and the corporate retailers where many of us shop for our groceries for the physical, sexual and economic abuse of immigrant labor. They make a fair case that it amounts to slavery as the fruit of corporate greed and globalization.

While earlier chapters were fairly bleak tales, here with the story of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, Hedges and Sacco sketch traces of hope grounded in the consensus-based organizing of the poor themselves through workers acting

together without prominent leaders.

Finally, this travelogue of pain ends with "days of revolt" in New York with the Occupy Movement. Permitting himself a glimmer of hope, Hedges links Occupy with his earlier reporting of popular resistance movements in the Middle East, Czechoslovakia and East Germany as he argues for the "intrinsic power of all acts of rebellion."

With its educated base, Occupy embodies a limited form of hope for Hedges. He labors at identifying guideposts on the road map to real change as revolt or Craine Brinton's revolution. Those guides involve nonviolence, broad participation without charismatic leadership, and acting to shift power away from corporate rule by dividing the powers that be.

**CLEARLY TO THE LEFT** himself, Hedges does not really address the Right at all in this book. That oversight is a weakness.

Corporate greed may be evil incarnate to Hedges but he does not make a strong case that we are seeing the crumbling of that greed's façade when the possibility of the rise of fascism or totalitarianism after it may be just as probable.

Further, Hedges' own example of Vaclav Havel shows the value of the political project for at least a half a loaf of gains.

See DESTRUCTION Page 18

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# How Our Politics Divide Us

## Republican Finds He's Man Without A Party

By Larry Kincheloe

The life form Euglena is hard to classify. It has chloroplasts, like a plant; no cell wall, like an animal; a flagellum to swim with, like some bacteria. Scientists have a difficult time classifying it as an animal or plant.

I feel a kinship for this life form because I do not really feel like I'm a Republican, Democrat or Libertarian. I feel as if I am a man without a party. I am registered as a Republican but being a child of the '60s, I've always considered myself to be a moderate – and possibly some would consider me a social Democrat.

Like many people, I am thoroughly disgusted with today's political process.

As a physician, I would use the analogy of a patient hemorrhaging to death while two doctors argue over the treatment plan. The gridlock in Washington has brought me to the point that I will vote against whoever is in Congress, regardless of party.

**THE REPUBLICANS' FAR** right rhetoric has become too extreme for me to accept. For a party that touts the values of less government intervention, it seems most willing to interfere with women's choice and contraception. It also seems overly concerned with who should be allowed to be married to whom.

I used to hunt when I was younger so I have no problem with a person owning a rifle or handgun for hunting or protection, but do we really need to have the ability to buy a Barrett .50 caliber sniper rifle?

The current Republicans serving in the Congress seem to have only one agenda and that is to make the president look bad. The amount of hard-line, anti-administration rhetoric is at such a pitch that it is hard for me to believe that it does not have some underlying racist overtones.

There is currently a "no compromise" mind-set that I believe is one of the most destructive themes to enter into politics in recent times. It is very reminiscent of the pushmi-pullyu that Dr. Doolittle discovers in Africa. This was the "gazelle-unicorn cross" which has two heads [one of each] at opposite ends of its body. When it tries to move, both heads try to go in opposite directions thus keeping it immobile.

**THE DEMOCRATS, ON THE** other hand, seem to believe that I have a financial responsibility to support government above the figure that I would consider is my fair share. I donate over 10% of my income to non-profit organizations that serve the community and help take care of the needy. I also volunteer a significant amount of time to provide medical services at free clinics. But I do this of my own volition.

I consider myself a very educated person, but I have never understood the concept of why it is my responsibility to pay more taxes solely because I am able. I do not use the public services or roads more than anyone else so why should I have to pay a higher percentage than someone else?

When I go to McDonald's for a Big Mac and fries, they do not decide how much to charge based on my income bracket. They do not say, "Dr. Kincheloe, because of your income, we will charge you \$25, which will be used to buy Big Macs for persons in a lower income bracket."

**I DO MAKE A VERY** comfortable income but at the cost of 12 years of higher education and working 60-80 hours a week. I do not understand why it is my responsibility to provide for those who made different and sometimes poor choices.

The Libertarian in me believes that a majority of people live in the lifestyle of their own choosing. A recent NPR story reported that Asians are 4% of the United States population yet make up 25% of students at major universities such as Columbia, Cornell and Stanford. The main reason for this is their work ethic.

We have been highly unlucky with hail storms so in the last few years we have had three roofs replaced. Every roofing crew has been staffed with 100% Hispan-

See PARTY-LESS Page 17

## Friendships One Casualty Of Hyper-Partisanship

By Vern Turner

In the spring of 1960 my best high school buddy [honorable-mention all-American] received many football scholarship offers from the major colleges east of the Mississippi.

My friend came from the Cumberland Gap region of western Virginia, though our school was in Ohio. His nickname was "Hillbilly."

He chose to attend Florida State University. I asked him why there and not Ohio State? Without blinking he said it was because in the South he didn't have to play with any ... [of those people]. It didn't register with me then what he really meant.

We kept in touch for a few years, but eventually went our separate ways. We reconnected again around 2003 and discussed a variety of things not the least of which was our invasion of Iraq.

**HE STILL LIVED** in Florida and sent me all sorts of material via the Internet supporting the weapons of mass destruction "theory."

During one of our telephone conversations he warned me that we probably differed on most things. I naively dismissed his warning because I didn't think my pal could be anything but my pal.

I was wrong.

After I pointed out to him that the stuff he was sending me was in error and part of a lie/cover-up he wrote me back to tell me we were done as friends.

It was then that I understood what he meant in 1960. Our paths were diverging, but I didn't want to accept that.

A couple years later I reconnected with an old roommate from my days in San Diego. He worked as a civilian contractor for the Navy.

After some newsy updates, he started in on the hate Obama rhetoric that I've come to see as the main theme for right-wing extremism, aka the Tea Party.

It was immediately clear that we – and the times – had changed. I terminated our communication.

**THESE ANECDOTES ARE** typical of what the instant communications environment and highly-charged political debate seen 24/7 on all our media,

including e-mail, has done to some of my relationships; many friends and relatives say the same.

E-mail gives people the chance to tell somebody off in language that they wouldn't ordinarily use face-to-face. I'm guilty of doing that and am not proud of it.

When the passions of belief and partisanship are high, common sense, grace and intelligent discourse seem to dissipate with each keystroke or word.

Beginning with the 2008 election cycle my political activism increased and my ability to hold old friends who felt differently decreased. I've made many, many new friends who are similarly active, but have lost many old friends who don't want to hear the other side or are just tired of it.

**I THINK THE LOSS** of friendships, civil discourse, bipartisanship, compromise and the ability to understand the pure and absolute truth about anything are the wages of disagreement that today's mind-flooding "communication/information" environment creates.

We're all prisoners of our own emotions – what we think is right – and are loathe to give any of it up.

Where do we go from here?

– Vern Turner lives in Marble Falls, TX, where he writes a regular column for the River Cities Daily Tribune. He is the author of three books – A Worm in the Apple: The Inside Story of Public Schools, The Voters Guide to National Salvation and Killing the Dream: America's Flirtation With Third World Status – all available through Amazon.com. More of his essays appear at [www.okobserver.net](http://www.okobserver.net).



# Flush Tribes Are Betting On Obama

By Matea Gold and Joseph Tanfani

At a July fundraiser in the elegant Mandarin Oriental hotel near Washington's Tidal Basin, President Obama met with some of his most steadfast supporters – two dozen political and business leaders eager to write sizable checks to help keep him in the White House.

All were leaders of Native American tribes, who pressed their issues with a president they say is attuned to their needs.

Bill John Baker, principal chief of the Cherokee Nation, told Obama his Oklahoma tribe was owed \$50 million for its costs of administering federal health services.

"He said, 'Let me look into this and see what we can do,'" Baker recalled.

A week later, he received a letter from the White House pledging to follow up. A White House spokesman said the administration had been reaching out to many tribes on the same issue.

"President Obama is a promise keeper," Baker said. "He promised that he would work with Indian country, that he would help us, and he has done that at every turn."

**THE TRIBES HAVE SHOWN** their gratitude, giving at least \$2.5 million to Obama's reelection campaign through the end of July – far outstripping their donations in other recent presidential elections, according to data provided by the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics.

Republican challenger Mitt Romney also is making appeals to tribes, holding a fundraiser at his Boston headquarters in August. As of mid-September, he had raised about \$750,000 from tribes, according to a campaign official.

The donations highlight a potentially lucrative and, until now, largely untapped source of funds for presidential politics.

Unlike corporations and unions, tribes can give directly to candidates. And because of their status as sovereign nations, they can donate more to presidential campaigns than individuals, who cannot give more than \$117,000 in federal donations every two years.

Tribes, primarily those engaged in the \$26-billion Indian gambling industry, already have become major players in state and congressional politics. In California, for example, four tribes spent more than \$100 million to pass a ballot measure allowing them to expand casinos in 2008.

**TRIBAL LEADERS SAY OBAMA** won their loyalty by doing more for Native Americans than any other president. Obama – dubbed Barack Black Eagle when he was adopted by the Crow Nation during the 2008 campaign – is the first president to hold an annual summit with leaders from the 566 federally recognized tribes.

The tribes received \$3 billion as part of the 2009 economic stimulus package. In addition, the administration beefed up tribal law enforcement powers and improved Indian healthcare services.

Perhaps most significant, the administration has settled billions of dollars in outstanding land and trust claims, including a 13-year-old class-action lawsuit originally brought by Elouise Cobell, a member of the Montana Blackfeet Nation, alleging that the federal government had cheated Native Americans out of income from land and mineral rights the government managed on their behalf for more than a century.

At one point, President George W. Bush's administration offered a \$7 billion deal to settle the Cobell case and more than 100 other tribal trust claims, as well as bar any future suits and relieve the government of its historic accounting obligations. Cobell rejected that as "an insult."

**THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION** ultimately settled the Cobell case in December 2009 for \$3.4 billion, and has committed another \$2 billion to settle dozens of other long-standing claims by the tribes.

At a Native American caucus held during the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, NC, administration officials reminded tribal leaders that Obama ended the contentious Cobell litigation.

"Barack Obama said he wanted it resolved and he wanted to do good things for Indian country to address the injustices that had happened," said Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, whose department oversees most Indian affairs.

Until Obama's election, "what the United States has done is essentially taken a position that Indian country is something to almost be forgotten," Salazar said. "Your president, Barack Obama, Black Eagle, has said that's not going to be the case."

"He has your back, and so come this November, we need you to have his back."  
**A KEY PLAYER WHO IS** both helping Obama's re-election and representing tribes in claims against the government is Washington lawyer Keith Harper, who signed on early to the Obama campaign in spring 2007 and helped design a strategy to woo tribal leaders.

Harper, a member of the Cherokee Nation, helped organize the July fundraiser, as first reported in *Indian Country Today*, a Native American publication, as well as an earlier one in January. He served on the president's 2008 transition team, has helped raise more than \$500,000 for Obama's reelection and co-hosted the Native American caucus at the convention.

At the same time, Harper has represented tribes in high-stakes dealings with the government. Several clients, including the Ak-Chin Indian Community and the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, currently have cases against the government.

He was one of the lead lawyers in the Cobell case and stands to share in \$99 million in legal fees. His work on Cobell presented a potential conflict in 2008, when he was advising the incoming administration. During the transition, Harp-

See TRIBES Page 13

# The One Percent's Cry For Justice

By Jim Hightower

It's out! This year's list of American success stories has just been published, and according to its compiler, it "instills confidence that the American dream is still very much alive."

Maybe you are one of these success stories. You might be a great public school teacher, for example, who motivated students to achieve new heights or an inventor who came up with an energy-saving device and got it to market at a fair price, generating a profit for yourself, the environment and society generally.

No, no, no. Not that kind of success. We're talking money – the flow of mammon beyond regular people's wildest dreams. That's how Forbes magazine measures not only "success," but also a person's value: You are what's in your Swiss bank account.

And, just to rank last on this year's "Forbes 400" listing of America's wealthiest people, you need more than a billion dollars in financial wealth.

To get into the Top 10 requires at least \$25 billion. And to be numero uno means you've got \$66 billion socked away. Who says America is

broke?

As Ray Charles sang, "Them that's got is them that gets." And sure enough, these richest of the riches got a lot richer in 2011 – the magazine gloated that these 400 swells jacked up their cumulative haul last year by \$200 billion over the previous year – an average of half-a-billion each!

Now that's success, baby, especially when the typical American family's income dropped by 4%.

These ultra-wealthy, goes the Forbes narrative, are the "deserving rich," for they are our economy's makers and producers – as opposed to being takers and moochers, like those commoners who get Social Security, Medicare and other government help.

Before swallowing that, however, note that roughly 40% of these "achievers" on the list "achieved" their wealth by being well-born – they inherited the money from Dad and Mom. And all of them have indeed been takers, not only enjoying government programs, but also subsidies and tax advantages available only to the rich.

The Forbes list really says that you

got special treatment – not that you are special.

But if the rich need to feel special, they can always count on the editors of Fortune. We should not be surprised that a magazine named Fortune would be empathetic to the feelings of the 1%, but – good grief – how embarrassingly sycophantish of the editors to hustle out a piece just before the presidential election titled, "Stop Beating up the Rich."

Written by Nina Easton, the timing of the article was less than fortunate, for it came out just as the infamous video surfaced showing Mitt Romney "beating up" the poor and the middle class, while his audience of fellow multimillionaires laughed, cheered and shouted encouragement.

Despite the timing, Mitt and company undoubtedly appreciated the writer's disdain for those who so insolently dare to criticize and even demonize those worthy ones at the top who, as she explained, "gained their wealth through their own efforts."

Also, you can almost hear the privileged ones applauding appreciatively as she scorns the divide between the 1% and the rest of us as a "flawed prism, marred by hyperbole, half-

truths and unnecessary pessimism about what it means to succeed in America."

Passionately deploring "diatribes against the 1%," Easton assails critics of America's widening wealth inequality as being people who want "to raid the gold pot." On behalf of the pampered rich, she issues her own emotional "grito," wailing that critics must "stop the name-calling."

Does Easton propose any specific remedies for narrowing the wealth gap? You betcha, and it just happens to be one that's a favorite of Mitt and the multimillionaire's club – one that they prescribe for any and all of our nation's economic woes: "corporate tax reform," by which they mean lowering the corporate tax rate.

Yeah, three decades of that trickle-down idea has worked so well for the middle-class and the poor, let's give 'em another jolt of it.

It's unclear why Fortune felt the need to print this piece of fluff or why Easton got the assignment, but her credit line does mention that her husband "is senior strategist for the Romney campaign."

Curious, huh?

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# U.S. 'Sole Bright Spot' In World Economy

By Joe Conason

Unemployment is still too high, income is still too low and the recovery is still much too slow – but the United States is faring considerably better than other developed nations against the threat of a renewed recession.

Don't believe it? Maybe you should stop listening to the right-wing propaganda machine, which has been trash talking the U.S. recovery ever since Barack Obama's inauguration, and start paying attention to economic analysts who know what they're talking about – and provide hard data to back up their findings.

They provide a hard, factual, real-world context for our often-absurd political debate, especially as the presidential election approaches.

Every few months, a fresh report appears showing that the U.S. recovery is continuing and even strengthening, despite stagnation and austerity in Europe that drag down the entire global economy.

Last June, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development noted that the U.S. recovery was gaining momentum, in contrast to its weak trading partners, despite continuing problems in housing and construction and its report praised the Obama Administration's policy initiatives on employment, the budget and taxation.

Now the latest pronouncement

comes from the Financial Times, the London-based business daily, and the Brookings Institution, a centrist Washington think-tank, which jointly declared over the Columbus Day weekend that the U.S. remains "the brightest spot in the world economy."

Their assessment is based on a comprehensive worldwide report known as TIGER, or Tracking Indices for the Global Economic Recovery, which combines measurements of real economic activity, financial data and surveys of business and consumer confidence.

Using advanced statistical methodology, TIGER illustrates the simultaneous movements of all kinds of numbers that tend to be measured very differently in various countries.

What those numbers tell us now was summed up by the Financial Times on a recent front page under the headline "U.S. defies threat of global recession."

Within those few words lie a powerful argument against changing policies, and a presidential administration, that have kept us afloat in a whirlpool of drowning countries.

"The global economic recovery is on the ropes, battered by political conflicts within and across countries, lack of decisive policy actions, and governments' inability to tackle deep-seated problems, such as un-

sustainable public finances that are stifling growth," said Eswar Prasad, a Brookings senior fellow and creator of the TIGER index.

"The U.S. economy remains the sole bright spot, with economic activity, employment and financial markets all showing unexpected although still modest strength."

It is sobering to realize how fragile our present progress may be, given the recessionary pressures around the world. Global demand remains too feeble to promote a strong and steady recovery overall, despite continuing efforts by the central banks in the U.S., Europe, and Asia.

The TIGER data, compiled from the Group of 20 nations, shows worrisome deterioration. It was released on the eve of the annual meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in Tokyo, where finance ministers and central bankers discussed how to stimulate growth and forestall another recession.

The Financial Times also quoted leaked IMF data indicating that global growth projections for this year will be revised downward, from 3.4% to 3.3%, and for next year from 3.9% to 3.6%. But that is only another strong argument for the U.S. to avoid the same errors that have hobbled recovery abroad.

Favorable comparison with other nations doesn't provide jobs for

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**[A] powerful argument against changing policies, and a presidential administration, that have kept us afloat in a whirlpool of drowning countries.**

---

the unemployed or save an over-mortgaged home from foreclosure, of course. But in a faltering world economy, America's relative growth and stability reinforce President Obama's argument that his policies are working far better than the alternative offered by Republican Mitt Romney.

And the incessant criticism by Romney loses credibility if the U.S. economy is truly outperforming the rest of the developed world – especially those nations pursuing the austerity policies advocated by Romney and his running mate, the budget-slashing Rep. Paul Ryan.

Will we really do better by imitating the United Kingdom and other nations where those policies have already failed?

Creators Syndicate

## TRIBES

From Page 12

er was originally assigned to oversee a review of the Interior Department, which was involved with the Cobell negotiations, with an understanding that he would not participate in discussions of the case.

**WITHIN DAYS, HOWEVER,** the Obama transition team – worried about a perception of a conflict of interest – changed his assignment to the National Indian Gaming Commission, according to people familiar with the situation.

Harper represents tribal clients with casinos. But he said he did not have any client matters before the gaming commission during his time on the transition team, or during the year before and after, following the campaign's rules. And Harper said he recused himself whenever the Cobell case came up during the campaign.

"That means that I did not participate, directly or indirectly, in the discussion of Cobell," he wrote in an e-mail.

White House spokesman Eric Schultz said Harper complied with rules that required transition team members to meet the "highest ethical standards of conduct."

Harper's "important role in the Cobell case should not preclude him from playing a part in the political process on behalf of one candidate or another," added Obama campaign spokeswoman Clo Ewing.

**DURING THE 2008 CAMPAIGN,** Obama met about a dozen times with tribes across the country, including a visit that May to the Crow Indian Reservation in Montana, where he was given a Crow name that translates as "One Who Helps People Throughout the Land."

Cedric Black Eagle, the tribal chairman whose parents adopted Obama in a traditional ceremony, praised him for his efforts to honor old obligations to Indians. "I think that's really important for us, as almost the forgotten people in this country," he said.

At least 47 tribes have donated to Obama's campaign or the Democratic National Committee in the last two years. Among them are some of the top Indian casino operators, including prominent California tribes, such as the Morongo Band of Mission Indians in Banning [\$135,800] and the Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians in Temecula [\$126,600].

Melvin R. Sheldon Jr., chairman of the Tulalip Tribes of Washington state, which have donated more than \$181,000 to the campaign, said he expected "another surge of giving between now and November."

The Tulalip Tribes have received more than \$10 million in stimulus funds, including \$2.7 million for early childhood development services and \$2 million to

restore a fish passage for Chinook salmon on the lower Snohomish River.

**THE CHEROKEE NATION** received more than \$10 million to repair highways and build housing, among other projects. Baker, the tribe's chief, called the Recovery Act "a godsend."

"We live and die in DC," said Baker, whose iPhone has a picture of him with Obama. "There are so many programs in the past we've had to go hat in hand."

There is much at stake for tribes in the coming four years: outstanding trust claims, efforts to expand tribal authority over domestic violence cases and regulation of online gambling.

At the Native American caucus in Charlotte, Harper urged a room crowded with tribal representatives to do everything possible to reelect Obama if they wanted the "inclusion of Indian country in every policy consideration."

White House counselor Pete Rouse, who referred to Harper as "my old friend Keith," told the leaders that their support had been noticed.

"Believe me, you're having an impact," he said. "Certainly the president knows about it, the president's people know about it."

**RICHARD A. MONETTE, FORMER** chairman of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians in North Dakota and an assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin Law School, has misgivings about the tribes' increasing role in Washington politics.

He says tribal donations are mostly casino money in Indian dress, and he worries that playing big-money politics may end up damaging the tribes.

"They used to have a little bit of moral high ground because of the historical situation. They used to know who their friends were in DC," said Monette, who formerly worked at the Senate Indian Affairs Committee and at the Bureau of Indian Affairs. "Now it's the friends they bought and paid for, and when they stop paying, their friends are going to leave too."

Tribal leaders say it's silly to expect Native Americans to play by different rules from those of other interest groups.

Jacqueline Pata, executive director of the nonpartisan National Congress of American Indians, said some Indians, as members of sovereign nations, once shunned the idea of voting for president. Now they realize that engaging in national politics – and writing checks to campaigns – is "important for keeping our voice at the table."

"Whether we like it or not, it's the way America runs," Pata said, "and it's the system that's out there."

© Los Angeles Times

# Key Issues Aren't Even On Campaign Radar

By Zack Beauchamp

The media focus on political minutiae in the presidential campaign can often crowd out the substantive issues that the winner will have to deal with once taking office. And while the candidates themselves occasionally talk about these issues, there's a number of critical concerns that get no attention, including some of the worst problems [in terms of the harm they cause to people's lives] in the United States and the world.

To address this lamentable state of affairs, ThinkProgress has compiled a list of eight of the most significant problems being severely underserved by the campaign and American political discourse more broadly. In no particular order:

## MASS INCARCERATION AND THE DRUG WAR

Writing in the *New Yorker*, Adam Gopnik termed "mass incarceration on a scale almost unexampled in human history...perhaps the fundamental fact [of American society], as slavery was the fundamental fact of 1850."

Indeed, as Gopnik notes, there are more black men in prison today than were enslaved then and more total people in prison than there were in Stalin's gulags at their largest.

The result of this wave of imprisonment was structural inequality so severe that it was called "the new Jim Crow" by a famous book of the same title, as the strict limitations placed on convicted felons have rendered millions of black Americans second-class citizens.

One of the principal causes of the rise of mass incarceration is the War on Drugs, which has failed abysmally at limiting the use of dangerous drugs but succeeded wildly at aiding and abetting racial inequality in the United States and the murderous drug trade abroad.

The Justice Department recently doubled down on these policies by initiating a massive crackdown on medical marijuana in states that have legalized the drug's medicinal use.

## THE HOUSING MARKET

Though it's well-known that the housing bubble collapse precipitated the financial collapse, the subsequent woes of the housing market have received comparatively little attention.

John Griffith, Julia Gordon, and David Sanchez, in a recent report for the Center for American Progress, call the current housing market "one of the biggest drags on our recovery," writing that "the historic decline in home prices since 2006 has cost Americans more than \$7 trillion in household wealth, forced millions of families out of their homes, and left nearly one in four homeowners owing more on their mortgages than their homes are worth. Private investment in housing is a fraction of its historic norm, translating to billions in lost economic output and millions of missing jobs. And more than five years into the crisis, the U.S. mortgage market remains on life support as the federal government guaranteed more than 95% of home loans made last year."

## THE INDIA/PAKISTAN CONFLICT

As the United States exits Afghanistan, tensions are likely to flare up again between



the two nuclear-armed states over concerns about terrorism and relative influence in the country. The status of the contested Jammu-Kashmir province also remains unresolved.

Former Pakistani director of Arms Control and Disarmament Affairs, Feroz Hassan Khan, concluded in a paper published by the U.S. Army War College that "this region seems to be the one place in the world most likely to suffer nuclear warfare due to the seemingly undiminished national, religious, and ethnic animosities between these two countries."

## OVERFISHING

Fish stocks have been in free-fall since 1989, and the reason for that is clear: humans are killing fish so quickly that "large ocean fish" stocks have been reduced to 10% of their pre-industrial peak.

This pace, which could destroy every fishery in the world by 2048, isn't just of interest to animal rights activists, as the fishing industry plays a critical role in both feeding the world's poor and the American economy.

Marine ecologist Daniel Pauly goes further, worrying that the effects of the "end of fish" on the ocean ecosystem could imperil its stability altogether, undermining one of the central bases of life on earth.

## INTERNET PRIVACY

We routinely put our vital information online without thinking, but it's becoming increasingly unclear that such information is protected from government

See ISSUES Page 15

# Etch A Sketch, Made in China

By Froma Harrop

Nine years ago, the Ohio Art Co. closed its Etch A Sketch operation in Bryan, OH, and moved the jobs to Shenzhen, China. The 100 laid-off American workers weren't surprised. They'd been training their Chinese replacements.

Months ago, a Mitt Romney aide famously declared an "Etch A Sketch" campaign – whereby the candidate would erase what he'd done before [like shaking an Etch A Sketch toy] and draw a more appealing portrait for a general electorate. That image is apt, in an unwelcome way, for a Romney now bashing China for taking American jobs. Romney's private equity company, Bain Capital, did its bit to help China win the work, and with enthusiasm.

In the second presidential debate, Romney accused China of "cheating," mainly by holding down the value of its currency. But that doesn't shake clean the Bain prospectus promoting China's "strong fundamentals" – among them, wages 85% lower than Americans. "Accordingly,"

the prospectus reads, "Bain Capital expects to see an increasing array of high-growth companies available for investment."

Does that sound like anyone wanting to see the Chinese currency rise in value? The stronger the Chinese currency, the harder it is for Bain's [or anyone else's] Chinese factories to sell their wares on world markets.

Offering another viewpoint, workers from Freeport, IL, demonstrated at the Massachusetts headquarters of Sensata Technologies, a Bain Capital creation that has moved thousands of Americans jobs offshore. Sensata made the Illinois workers train the Chinese who will take their jobs as a condition of receiving their meager severance pay. Sound familiar?

Part of Romney's rap against China is the stealing of U.S. technology. But Microsoft had accused Bain's Chinese retailer, Gome Electrical Appliances, of pirating its software. And Global-Tech, a Bain Chinese appliance company, was found to have violated a U.S. patent held by a French

company.

Around the time Etch A Sketch left for China, Asimco Technologies bought two auto parts factories in Michigan, closed them and laid off 500 Americans. Bain saw the "strong fundamentals" of Asimco's operations and acquired the company. Today, Asimco makes the same camshafts on land donated by the Chinese government. China has designated this area as an export metropolis, showering the companies that move there with a variety of government subsidies.

Romney counts himself among the American heroes who built a business, but what his business built above all was an army of crack Washington lobbyists. For example, the profits Romney collects from Bain are taxed at a low 15%, rather than the top rate of 35%. Even many Wall Streeters regard this as an outrageous loophole, but private equity lobbyists fight to preserve the deal, which Romney has no plan to change.

Forget the malarkey about a blind trust managing his Bain investments. It is run by Ropes & Gray, the Boston law firm that advises Bain.

The head spins over Bain's offshore holdings in the Cayman Islands, Luxembourg and so forth, all tasked with exploiting the U.S. tax code – or put in less neutral terms, tax-dodging. Sadly, too many of our paid-for representatives in Washington cast a blind eye toward such tax games. [The direct subsidies come from China.]

Once stripped of their jobs, the laid-off Americans apply for unemployment and other government benefits to survive. Guess that turns them into the "takers" whom Romney holds in contempt.

Romney didn't create globalization, but having made a pile off it, you'd think he'd at least spare some change for its American victims. A 9.5 magnitude earthquake couldn't shake that unpleasant a picture off the Etch A Sketch.

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# Better An Ignorant Misogynist Than A Dem?

By Harry T. Cook

The senatorial election in Missouri between incumbent Claire McCaskill, a Democrat, and Todd Akin, a Republican, is turning out to be a struggle between a commitment to basic decency and the lust for power.

Akin, as will be remembered, contributed to the ever more lengthy anthology of political gaffes the term "legitimate rape." Out of an awesome deficit of knowledge, Akin opined that a woman's violated body as a matter of course will prevent the fertilization of an ovum by a rapist's unwanted sperm.

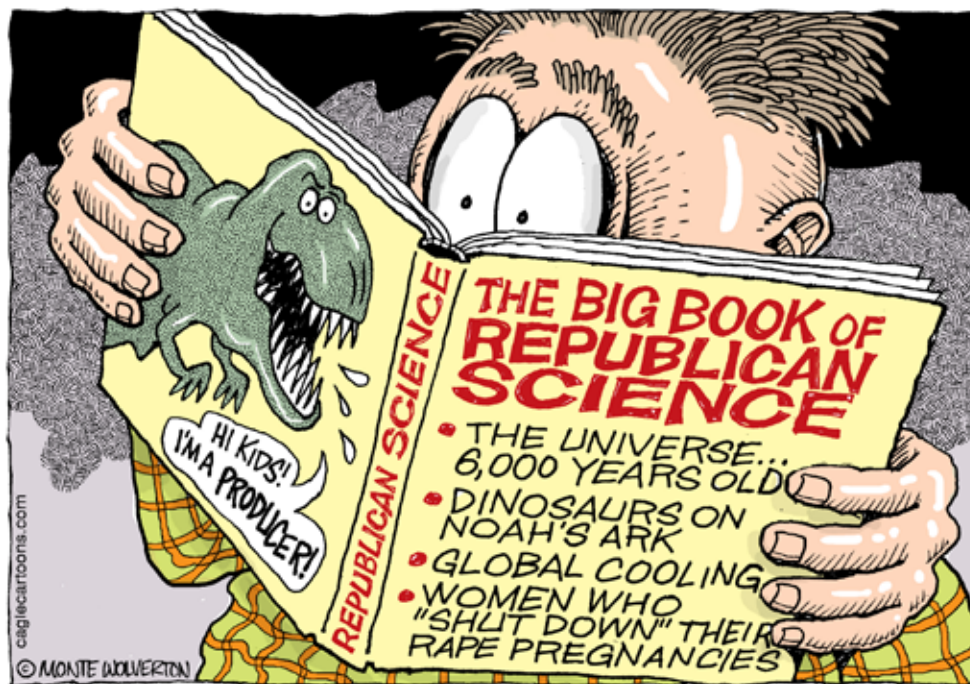
Akin's argument is that, in such a case, a woman's constitutionally guaranteed reproductive rights should be of non-effect because she would have no need to exercise them.

Upon the wide airing of Akin's astoundingly moronic statement, his campaign against McCaskill seemed to have sustained fatal wounds.

Those of his party who at first were anxious to get him elected – the better to retake power in the Senate and in that case be able to present a President Romney with a compliant Congress – backed off. Many demanded that he drop out of the campaign. Others vowed an end to any financial support, not so much on principle, rather in fear that Akin's idiocy would threaten other candidates' hopes.

Akin called their bluff, stayed in and is now enjoying the humble return of supporters who evidently decided to reward ignorance and misogyny for the sake of returning their party to power in the Senate.

Even after it was remembered that in 2008 Akin had declared on the floor of the U.S. House of Represent-



tatives that abortion providers were terrorists and commonly performed abortions on women who were not pregnant, Akin's poll numbers got stronger.

There is only one explanation for this state of affairs, and it is that Akin's party apparatchiks finally and completely have abandoned decency for power – an abandonment that has its roots in the malignant lies of the Bush-Cheney years.

That should keep you awake nights, unless you are hard both of heart and of hearing.

Think, though, of what the Missouri nightmare bodes. In every fascist state in recent times, power has trumped every other value.

I have just been re-reading the ac-

counts of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's short life and of his martyrdom. From the beginnings of the Nazi push toward the creation of a 1,000-year Reich of world dominance to Bonhoeffer's stoic march to the Nazi gallows in the concentration camp at Flossenbürg, his steadfast commitment to human rights and dignity had made him an enemy of those who lusted for power – power they could not have amassed while also maintaining human rights and respecting human dignity.

In the end – its end – the party could not abide his existence and so he was executed even as liberators were closing in and just a month before the unconditional surrender of Germany. The will to power finally and tragically trumped everything

else.

You may think this essayist is over the top with his comparison of the depredations of the Nazis to the political machinations of Rep. Akin's party. To which I say with Pontius Pilate: *Quod scripsi, scripsi.*

That a political party, even in its determination to destroy political opposition and to install its own untersturmführers, would stoop so low as to encourage people to vote for Todd Akin after the vicious and ignorant statements he has more than willingly made and continues to stand by means that power rather than principle has become acceptable political capital.

Think of that next time you gaze up at those images on Mt. Rushmore.

Should Akin win next month, a 21st Century Styx will have been crossed. He and his party will become residents of an underworld in which human dignity, freedom and reason will have been sacrificed to whatever dread deity is the patron of power for power's sake.

What would happen to the rest of us as the new order became one in which up is down and right is wrong?

If Akin is defeated, may it be because the majority of voters in Missouri came to understand that viciousness and ignorance together constitute a demon that is not easily exorcised. While a demon-possessed fascist society must eventually implode in a *Götterdämmerung*, millions of lives too often end up being consumed in its inferno.

Knowing that, we must all say, "Ich bin ein Bonhoeffer."

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

## ISSUES

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and corporate spying.

As products like Facebook become essential services, tech companies are employing shady privacy and security procedures that make it very easy for data to be leaked to third-party sources without your consent.

Moreover, FBI and similar government agents can gain access to private electronic information through national security surveillance powers.

### AMERICA'S SECURITY STATE AND SHADOW WARS

Though Guantanamo Bay, the Patriot Act, and warrantless wiretapping were thought to be vestiges of the Bush Administration in 2009, the Obama Administration hasn't rolled them back, threatening to make the supposedly emergency-only national security state a permanent institution.

In recent years, the security state at home has been supplemented by an escalating shadow war against terrorist organizations in several countries around the world, waged principally by Special Forces and a secretive drone program.

These stepped-up counterterrorism policies may be weakening al-Qaeda and associated movements, but it's not clear if the potential costs in terms of privacy violations, blowback, and deaths of innocent civilians are well understood, let alone worth it.

### FACTORY FARMING

Several billion animals live and get killed on factory farms, concentrated animal-raising plants where sentient creatures are forced to live their entire lives in tiny, often poorly maintained pens.

The treatment of the pigs, cows, and chickens on factory farms is horrific – the pens are so tight that animals develop sores, the stress of confinement produces psychiatric disorders that result in self-harming behaviors like gnawing on metal bars, and proprietors conduct painful, medically unnecessary tail amputations simply because they want to. Factory farming also hurts humans; the "farms" are ideal breeding grounds for infectious diseases and do serious damage to the local and global environment.

### SEGREGATION BY RACE AND CLASS IN EDUCATION

Despite *Brown v. Board of Education*, there is a pronounced trend toward re-segregation by race and class in American schools.

Poor students, especially black and Latino ones, are being shunted into a separate-but-unequal school system while wealthy students attend parallel, superior institutions.

The effect of this, as Chris Hayes documents in his book *Twilight of the Elites*, is to create a self-perpetuating class cycle where the wealthy use their advantage to secure that their children get access to the best possible schooling, making it significantly easier for said children to become wealthy and successful and do the same for their kids.

The less well off, by contrast, have only very limited ability to break into the upper echelons of American society through education, helping to cement broader trends toward inequality in the United States.

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# Much Of World Wants Freedom From Speech

By Gene Policinski

I can say what I want, even if it offends you. And so can you.

No American government official, high or low, federal, state or local, can silence our freedom of expression – whether it's our views on politics, public issues or religious faith.

If someone says something we don't like, we can freely express ourselves in opposition, even if that speaker is a mayor, governor or – as we see clearly this election year – the president or his opponent.

Not so in many other nations, where governments control news and information, and an intemperate remark or nonconforming view can bring condemnation, prosecution or even death.

Americans simply view freedom of speech differently from much of the world, where freedom from some speech also is seen as a right.

For example: Egyptian president Mohammed Morsi, speaking Sept. 26 at the United Nations: "Egypt respects freedom of expression. One that is not used to incite hatred against anyone. One that is not directed towards one specific religion or culture. A freedom of expression that tackles extremism and violence. Not the freedom of expression that deepens ignorance and disregards others."

Under the First Amendment, and over the past 90 years in our courts, we have developed law that sets specific criteria for the rare times we can be prosecuted and punished for what we say. Threats must pose real, imminent danger against a specific person to run afoul of the law.

Criticism and public commentary, however vile, are seen as less of a negative than the alternative – government control of what we say, leading to control of what we think.



Vulgarity may shock public tastes, but no government officials have the right to silence us simply because they are offended. Bigotry may be condemned by the many even as it is embraced by the few, but no court sits in judgment on the viewpoint. Blasphemy may enrage the faithful or entertain the faithless, but no religious council has secular power to silence the blasphemer.

Still, in the wake of the video *Innocence of Muslims*, angry mobs overseas have demanded prosecution of the film's maker and action by the Obama Administration to force YouTube to remove it. Failure

to do so is seen by many abroad as American government acceptance if not encouragement of the anti-Islam message.

Why the disconnect? The reasons for the violence, including the despicable attacks that killed the U.S. ambassador in Libya and three other Americans, are complex. But consider that in many nations, any public expression occurs with official approval or support. In those places with an official state religion, no blasphemy is tolerated.

Let's not forget that even in the United States, we're still trying to determine the proper role of reli-

gion in the public square more than 220 years after adopting the Bill of Rights. Think of prayer in public schools, posting the Ten Commandments in public buildings and religious influences on public policy on matters ranging from birth control to euthanasia.

There are some positive elements amidst the chaos of recent weeks.

We should not be too bothered by the Obama Administration's request that Google, which owns YouTube, determine whether *Innocence* violated the company's own terms of service, and should be encouraged that, when Google said it didn't, nothing happened.

It's troubling when our government criticizes any free expression or the speaker, as it did with the film. But we should find some comfort in the fact that even when high officials condemn a message, they don't feel empowered to censor the speaker.

In some ways, we all – Americans and those caught up in violence overseas – are paying the price for foreign governments that control speech and religious liberty. Those rigid systems fear dissent and diversity, and teach by example that cabal and conspiracy are behind every public utterance.

Societies used to the give-and-take of public debate are not so easily shocked by a video or cartoon with a contrary view. In nations where religious liberty exists for all, no faith need fear for its survival.

The only long-term solution in the Middle East and elsewhere to the outrage, destruction and death over speech that offends rests in the First Amendment's core provision for more speech, not less.

– The author is senior vice president and executive director of the First Amendment Center

## What Is The Truth About American Muslims?

By Charles C. Haynes

Over the past decade, an anti-Muslim movement in America has pushed for anti-Shariah laws in some 23 states and helped generate anti-mosque protests in more than 50 communities.

Even more disturbing, poisonous anti-Muslim rhetoric has contributed to an atmosphere of anger and hate that provokes acts of intimidation and violence – including the recent attack on a Sikh temple in Wisconsin where six people were murdered, apparently because the killer confused Sikhs with Muslims.

Groups involved in the "stop Islamization of America" campaign have spent more than \$40 million attempting to convince the public that American Muslims practice an inherently violent and oppressive faith that seeks to subvert the Constitution, according to a 2011 study conducted by the Center for American Progress. [www.americanprogress.org]

Enough is enough.

It's time for voices of reason to counter dangerous and often vicious

propaganda with balanced and accurate information about American Muslims.

To that end, the Religious Freedom Education Project of the First Amendment Center and the Interfaith Alliance have just released "What is the Truth about American Muslims? Questions and Answers." [www.religiousfreedomeducation.org]

Endorsed by a coalition of 25 religious, civil liberties and human rights groups, the document addresses key questions raised by anti-Muslim groups about Shariah [Islamic law], the role of mosques in the community, the views of American Muslim leaders on extremist violence and other questions about American Muslim beliefs and practices.

For example, the document discusses the actual role of Shariah in the lives of American Muslims – and corrects false claims about "creeping Shariah" in American courts, explaining that the First Amendment prohibits courts or other branches of government from substituting any re-

ligious laws for American law.

Concerning mosques, the document points out that a major study of American Muslims in 2008 found that involvement with the mosque actually increases civic engagement and support for American democratic values. [www.muslimamericansurvey.org]

At a time when the world is threatened by extremists committing violence in the name of Islam, the American people have every reason to be worried about the dangers of terrorism at home and abroad.

The vast majority of American Muslims strongly share that concern. That's why so many imams in the United States preach and work against extremism and why many American Muslims actively help law enforcement foil terrorist plots.

Over the past decade, 40% of domestic terrorism plots have been uncovered or deterred with assistance from American Muslims, according to a study by the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security. [http://tcths.sanford.duke.edu/].

Unnecessary and discriminatory anti-Shariah laws, alarmist claims about mosques in the neighborhood, and ugly attempts to paint all Muslims with the terrorist brush are all red herrings that divert Americans from our shared goal of fighting extremism [of all varieties] and securing our safety and freedom.

The anti-Muslim campaign in America may be the most significant threat to religious freedom in our country today.

As we say in the document, unless "all Americans are assured of religious freedom, the freedom of all Americans is in question."

The coalition behind "What is the truth about American Muslims?" doesn't have a \$40 million war chest with which to correct the record. But we can stand together and say with one voice:

Enough is enough. Here is the truth about American Muslims.

– The author is director of the Religious Freedom Education Project at the Newseum



# Dirty Little Secret Of Private Equity Profits

By Jim Hightower

Today, for the first time, I am officially notifying the honchos of Bain Capital, Blackstone Group, Carlyle Group, Kohlberg Kravis Roberts and other big-time private equity funds that I am available. My little company, Saddle Burr Productions, can be had. For a price.

I publish this notice in response to a recent news item revealing that these firms have a unique and perplexing problem: They have too much money on hand. In all, they're holding a cool trillion dollars that super-rich speculators, banks and others have entrusted to them. Private equity funds are corporate predators that borrow huge sums from these richies, using the cash to buy out targeted corporations, dismantle them and sell off the parts to make a fat profit for the investors and themselves.

However, in these iffy economic times, these flush funds have hesitated to do big takeovers, so they've just been sitting on all that money [which the predators refer to as "dry powder"]. The problem is that, under the rules of this high-stakes casino game, the firms have to spend their

borrowed money by a set time – or give it back. And the clock is ticking.

So, using Wall Street's macho lingo, the big players have announced that they're now ready to go "elephant hunting" and are prepared to fire big bucks to bag some companies. To which I say: Fire away at Saddle Burr Productions!

OK, my company is hardly an elephant. But maybe it could be what the equity hucksters refer to as a "hot potato." That's what they call it when one fund grabs a company just to sell it to another fund, which might pass it off to yet another.

This year, equity firms are expected to spend more than \$22 billion selling hot potatoes to each other – in part, just to move cash out the door so they don't have to give it back.

This is what passes for good business sense in the truly screwy world of private equity. It's just churning money, producing absolutely nothing – except, of course, huge fees for the churners. But if that's the game, hey, put me in the mix. A billion dollars sounds about right.

Executives in private equity firms – such as Mitt Romney of Bain Capital

and Henry Kravis of Kohlberg Kravis Roberts – tend to be peacocks who think quite highly of themselves.

Fanning their splendid tail feathers, they unabashedly claim to be the ultimate free-enterprise risk-takers – worth every dime of the multimillion-dollar paychecks they award themselves each year. Excuse me, but the risks by these self-anointed "heroes of the market" are actually taken with other people's money, not their own. That's quite a bit short of heroic.

But here's a revelation that really ruffles their feathers: It seems they've been hauling in their massive profits not by bold and savvy competition in the marketplace, but through old-fashioned financial collusion with each other.

An antitrust civil lawsuit filed in federal court against 11 of the biggest equity firms includes internal e-mails in which they agree not to compete.

In 2006, for example, the head of Blackstone sent an e-mail to the co-founder of KKR: "We would much rather work with you guys than against you. Together we can be un-

stoppable, but in opposition we can cost each other a lot of money." The KKR honcho happily e-mailed back a one-word response: "Agreed."

Collusion, of course, perverts the marketplace they pretend to worship, artificially lowering the market price they'd otherwise pay. And they are not shy about playing this mutual backscratching game. In the 2008 takeover of the giant HCA hospital chain, KKR expressly asked its market rivals "to step down on HCA" and not bid. Agreeing to this blatantly illegal collusion, one rival wrote in an e-mail: "All we can do is do unto others as we want them to do unto us. It will pay off in the long run."

For his part, Romney insists that any collusion by Bain occurred after he left the firm. "He had no role," says a spokeswoman. Well, none besides pocketing the loot. Documents from the lawsuit show that Romney clearly received millions in profits from deals that Bain appears to have made through its collusion in the grand game of market manipulation.

If so, can we expect him to return those ill-gotten gains?

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## Guess Who Is Working To Create Dependence?

By Don Nelson

Is it just me? Or have you also noticed that the rich and powerful seem to be doing a lot of whining lately?

Frankly, I am tired of listening to the threats of being left alone and abandoned by the very wealthy. The right wing propagandists would have us believe that if they do not get their way they will just pack up and leave.

Supposedly the result will be that we will all repent of our ways and plead for their return. Supposedly

that will be the beginning of the end for us. Supposedly when the wealth leaves, we will all go bankrupt.

What I am getting ready to say is admittedly reactionary and not reasoned. I am speaking viscerally.

I wish they would go ahead and buy their tickets to wherever it is they want to go.

There is something so abjectly arrogant and prideful in that threat that I find it offensive.

It seems that these corporatists

are of the opinion that this nation "depends" on them to survive. It seems that they want us to believe that, without their great wisdom and beneficent care, this nation would not be able to carry on.

Who the hell do they think they are? Since when are they the source of strength, wisdom and creative genius that has built this great country?

How is it that a measly 1% or 2% of the total population of this country are responsible for the purposeful building of it? Who are these would-be "rulers" of the United States of America, the land of the free and home of the brave?

I think it is time for "We the People" to rise up and say with one accord and one voice: You want to leave – fine. Don't let the door spank your butt on the way out."

We are a nation built by the labor of the working class. We are a nation of common folk with diverse backgrounds.

We are not a nation of serfs willing to be told where to sleep, how to live or what to believe.

It is time. It is time to pick up our pitchforks, shovels and plows and start the building process a new.

I am so very tired of being threatened by the wealthy corporatists and would-be "rulers" with the withdrawal of their "gift" of capitalism and the great promise it holds.

Yes, there is a place for the investment of personal resources in business and the growth of business. But when it becomes weaponized and used to intimidate and oppress, it is time to call "bullsh--" and block the road.

The America I know and love does not belong to the wealthiest among us. It is not the sole property of those who want to exploit its resources and grow wealthy on promises of creating jobs.

We are seeing the slow but very deliberate takeover of our government and we tell ourselves that we are powerless. That is B.S.

In our history we have managed to come back from the direst of economic failings. The very worst of government has not brought us to our knees. But what we see happening today may very well be the undoing of our democratic republic. I do not want an oligarchy or a totalitarian state to be the legacy left to the future.

The America I have known from my childhood and have come to admire through study is better than what the wealthy want to create.

Who are the dependent ones? If the corporatists have their way – you and I will be. They are doing everything in their power to create a dependent society.

Dependent on what they supply. Dependent on what they want us to want. Dependent on a system of corporate over-lords that will decide who lives or dies. Dependent on the "corporate bottom line" to decide what is necessary for the education of our children and the care of our elderly.

Forget about what you want or believe is best for you or your family – the corporatists will decide for you.

After all, when the pigs take over the farm, things will get better – for the pigs.

– The author lives in Lawton

## PARTY-LESS

From Page 11

ics. I have asked each contractor about this and they all tell me the same thing. Even though the money is good, native-born Americans will not take these jobs because the work is hard. The native-born Americans are more likely to take an indoor Walmart job for \$8 than hour than a \$15 an hour roofing job that is cold in the winter and miserably hot in the summer.

As an obstetrician, I often see the 20-year-old mother of four who has dropped out of high school and I realize that she has dug herself into a hole that she is, sadly, unlikely to ever to escape. Although her situation is sad, I fail to see why it is my financial responsibility to subsidize her poor decisions.

We now have very effective and safe long-acting reversible contraceptive options. As a society, we now have the ability but lack the will to tie long-acting birth control to public benefits.

Delaying future childbearing would allow young women the chance to improve their financial situations through education and training until they reached a point in their lives where they could financially support themselves and their children.

So as a political Euglena, how do I vote?

Do I vote Republican even though they have made too many concessions to the right wing extremists? Do I vote Democratic even though they believe throwing more dollars at social issues will change the underlying conditions without having the will to make real change? Do I vote Libertarian even though I know as a society we are not ready to let people accept the full consequences of their actions?

At least we have a political system that allows me the freedom to struggle with these questions.

– Dr. Larry Kincheloe lives in Oklahoma City and is author of the children's book *The Master's Garden*. His mother, the late Maxine Kincheloe, served in the state House from 1980-86.

# Here's Why We Have Organized Labor

By Harry T. Cook

Labor unions, especially those of public employees, are currently much out of favor with just the very people who depend so heavily on what their members do while at work.

Who else on a moment's notice speeds to your house at 3 a.m. so soon after you dial 9-1-1, and brings the skills and latest lifesaving devices to pull you back from cardiac arrest or a debilitating stroke?

Who else will enter your burning dwelling to save a child in an upstairs bedroom from incineration or asphyxiation?

Who else will confront an armed intruder in your foyer and put himself or herself between the weapon and you?

The near-collapse of the U.S. economy has resulted in the layoffs – some permanent – of police, safety and fire departments in many a city, large and small. Those remaining as officers, firefighters and emergency medical technicians are sometimes strained to the breaking point.

**YET, THEY ARE THERE** for us day and night, week in week out, 24/7/365.

Monday through Friday, millions of American parents send their children out the door by 8 a.m. and do not expect them back before 3:30 p.m. The children go to public schools and into the classrooms of teachers who will be their only adult companions for the next six or seven hours.

All too many school systems have laid off teachers because of declining state support. Those left are in the gun sights of just about everybody. Teachers are in many cases unfairly blamed for kids' bad test scores and otherwise generally scorned by those who couldn't last five minutes in a classroom of third-graders.

It should come as no surprise, then, that most EMTs, firefighters, police officers and teachers have banded together in collective bargaining groups and, until such states as Michigan enacted laws that give so-called "emergency managers" the power to abrogate labor contracts, had some control over working rules and compensation.

**IN A PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY**, labor should always share such control with management.

Public employee unions serve the interests not only of their members but also of the constituencies to which they are assigned. Police officers, firefighters, EMTs and public school teachers perform vital functions in society. And yet, they are the punching bags of uninformed and ignorant citizens.

Just the other day, I heard one such person in the barber chair next to mine say, "Unions! What crap!" He is a retired autoworker and, as such, had his wonderful middle-class lifestyle handed him by Walter Reuther and other visionaries who set out in life to support the working class and got beaten up for their trouble.

Why unions, anyway? Here's an example that goes back more than 100 years.

In the last couple of decades of the 19th Century until around 1920, railroads were a huge part of American life. You could get from almost any hamlet to any major city in the country by boarding a train at the depot down the road from your house, reaching your destination, perhaps with a train change here and there, within two or three days at the most.

**RAILROADS WERE THE ONLY** overland common carriers in those days, and

they were busy. Almost any line had half a dozen or more trains per day, some dozens. They were run by what was known as the timetable and train order system that depended on telegraph operators at stations along the line and dispatchers in terminal cities. Actual trains were operated by engineers, firemen, conductors, brakemen and, on passenger runs, baggage masters.

Before the time that railroad workers were represented by unions, they could be forced to work until they dropped. The 40 years from 1880 to 1920 saw a great many railroad accidents that were attributable to worker exhaustion and lack of sleep.

Take this narrative, for example, from the pen of one Herbert E. Hamblen, a locomotive engineer in the 1880s:

*On one occasion, arriving at the end of the division after a particularly tedious trip, I was ordered to return at once 60 miles down the road to bring up 30 cars of coal as fuel for the engines ... I protested that I was tired out, unfit to go. To no avail. Fearing retribution, he followed orders and went. After a long night filled with delays, extra switching of cars and without sleep, he arrived back at the terminal. He entered on the engineers' log these words: 'Have been 52 hours on duty. Do not call me [for another train] until I have had eight hours' sleep.' Forty-five minutes later, a messenger from the railroad's superintendent roused him of out a sound sleep with an order to take out another train. When he refused on the grounds of being unfit to operate a locomotive safely, he was suspended for 30 days without pay.*

**THAT'S HOW RAILROAD UNIONS** got their start. Now the same kind of thing is going on with airlines and their pilots, despite their unions. The safety of air travel is compromised by requiring too many flying hours of pilots in a 24-hour period.

A multiplicity of horrible railroad wrecks toward the end of the 19th Century helped force rail companies into union contracts that mandated reasonable work hours and safety conditions for workers and passengers alike.

Pray let there be no such carnage in air travel.

As for public employees in this time and day, nothing but their capitulation to management seems to be the nation's political will.

Yet, if one has not worn the boots of a firefighter, or as an EMT performed CPR multiple times a day, or as an officer patrolled the mean streets of a mean city, or fought the good fight of trying to teach sometimes ill-mannered children – with little help and encouragement from principals, parents and the public who seldom are hesitant to make with the criticism – one may not understand why unions for such professions are a necessity.

**MEANWHILE, KEEP IN MIND** that many of the voices calling for the effective emasculation of unions are among those whose income in the years since Ronald Reagan inaugurated the Age of Greed has increased exponentially into the millions while wages for ordinary workers have stagnated, if not decreased, especially with respect to the cost of living.

That's why we have unions in what is supposed to be a participatory democracy.

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

## DESTRUCTION

From Page 10

Even though Hedges writes off Democratic and Republican politics, perhaps traditional political endeavor still needs change that draws on the strength of rebellion – much as Niebuhr noted that the witness of pacifists was valuable, if not necessary, to the practice of politics.

Still by eschewing regular politics as hopelessly corrupt, will Hedges accept responsibility for his electoral fruit?

As much as one may agree with significant aspects of Hedges' critique of capitalism as it is enabled by both major political parties and their "carnival act," the question remains: is it disingenuously Gnostic for a critic to rely on the proper consciousness about capitalism while denigrating the efforts of those who continue to speak to all sides as they seek to bring all along in community?

**HEDGES HIMSELF POSITIVELY** portrays the hell-raising West Virginia liberal former congressman Ken Hechler, so perhaps some role remains for those fighting within the system.

Some of Hedges own examples remain engaged and do not seek to "disconnect as thoroughly as possible from the consumer society" and "defy all formal systems of power." Indeed, many of the sacrificed souls whose stories he chronicles have no choice but to remain economically engaged even if they are traditionally politically disengaged.

In the midst of this unsentimental storytelling, the reader comes across traces of Christian faith. In passing, churches act as supports to working people in West Virginia, Camden and Florida [as well as Eastern Europe] even as they seem to harm Native Americans and lack any role in the story of the salvation they may just hope for from the Occupy Movement.

As "the physical embodiment of hope" which requires "self-sacrifice, discomfort and finally faith," it is odd that Occupy movements in the end do not find a place for communities of religious faith. Is it not possible that hope needs to be nurtured in broader communities of faith instead of in Hedges "monastic enclaves"?

**AS A POLEMIC**, *Days of Destruction* makes an optimistic argument for change because he believes that the Occupy movement is not dead.

In any event, I found myself unable read this book in one sitting as it stirred passions in every chapter. Instead of its allusions to hope at its end, the strength of this book is in its vivid portraits of the lives sacrificed to an economic system that makes everything a commodity.

Chris Hedges and Joe Sacco tell a powerful story of the underside of American society that deserves a wide reading and debate. These stories are not the carefully scripted scenes of a political convention.

Hedges sees the faces of dying children and broken adults. He makes us see them, too.

We may not make of them what he does, but we must see them. And we must find accountability for what we have seen.

Engelwoodreview.org

# Nix on Six

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# OBAMA

From Page One

homa – even in what was long considered solidly Democratic territory.

It was not uncommon for party leaders in rural counties to refuse to help the campaign, some openly asserting that neither they, their family members nor friends would be voting for “that n-----.”

This year Democratic phone canvassers encountered some of the same bigotry. One respondent expressed a willingness to vote for a black woman, but not a black man.

In a recent Facebook post, veteran Democratic strategist Brent Wilcox noted that he just thought things were bad when President Clinton sought re-election in 1996.

“We didn’t have Facebook back then, but Okies did know how to use the telephone,” he wrote. “I remember hanging up on so many self-proclaimed ‘Christians’ who had no problem spreading lies, cursing and shouting hate-filled rants on the telephone.”

“Back then most of the time I had

no idea who was on the other end of the phone. Today these same types of people are on Facebook – many of them on my own friends’ list. But this time there is another disgusting trait many display – hate for the black man in the White House.”

Wilcox speaks for many liberals and progressives in Oklahoma when he writes that “what really gets my gall up about so many of these Facebook friends is that one minute they’re posting beautiful pictures proclaiming their love for Christ and then the next minute they’re posting a link to some lie-filled, hate-filled, bigotry-filled post by someone like Rush Limbaugh [who flunked out of four colleges, failed in four marriages and was charged for doctor shopping for prescription drugs].

“How is it that ‘Christians’ are supporting a ticket that worships Ayn Rand, a self-avowed atheist, who hated the small, poor people? How is it that ‘Christians’ are supporting a ticket that believes corporations are

people? How is it that ‘Christians’ support these ‘corporate-people’ who are destroying our home – Earth – that was given to us by the Creator?”

One of the great ironies of the anti-Obama sentiment in Oklahoma is that he is arguably the state’s closest connection ever to the presidency.

There are some who believe former Vice President Al Gore is a distant relative of Depression-era Oklahoma U.S. Sen. Thomas P. Gore, but that family connection is in dispute.

There is no question, however, that Obama’s mother’s family resided in Oklahoma before migrating to Kansas and eventually Hawaii, where the future president was born.

Even more ironic is that Obama – were he not African American and a Democrat – would probably be celebrated in Oklahoma as the embodiment of the American dream.

“A lot of what he accomplished, he accomplished on his own which is really hard for people to grasp,” says OSU’s Darcy. “They end up asking,

who is behind him? What right did he have to go an Ivy League school and accomplish all these things? He did it on merit, not because his family had a lot of money and connections.

“He’s this mysterious phenomenon that’s really a 21st Century global phenomenon. He doesn’t fit into the narrative that our leadership has had in the past.”

That is something that Oklahomans better get used to. This is no longer your father’s 20th Century America. This is a 21st Century, tightly-connected, increasingly cosmopolitan world in which an American president can be born of an African man and a Kansas woman and have a half-brother living in China.

It’s a new frontier that may be difficult for some to accept, but it’s inevitable. And some day, Oklahomans will wonder what all the fuss was about in their home state when America elected its first black president.

That day can’t get here soon enough.

# NASTY

From Page 8

In addition to the forgoing, the Chamber has funded a drive to approve SQ 766, which will be on the ballot and is intended to overturn the 2009 decision by the Oklahoma Supreme Court dealing with the taxation of intangible personal property.

A TV ad that began running recently accused “activist judges” who ruled in Southwestern Bell Telephone Co. v. Oklahoma State Board of Equalization that Bell’s intangible property in Oklahoma was not exempt from taxation.

**THE DECISION RELIED** upon standard statutory interpretation rules in finding that the 1972 amendment of Article 10, Section 6A of the Oklahoma Constitution mandating the taxation of intangible personal property. The Court ruled that SWB failed to demonstrate that it was entitled to an exemption for its intangible property. Nothing spectacular or unusual, in my view, but it apparently set off a fire storm in the business community, and inside the Oklahoma Republican Party.

For what it is worth, I will vote against SQ 766. However, I write here about an issue that is much more important: The chamber’s campaign to intimidate our appellate court judges. I, for one, know that judges can be intimidated, and that the intimidation, whether real or imagined, can influence them.

For one thing, when a lawyer gives up his or her practice and assumes the role of a judge, he or she gives up the economic security that they enjoyed in their practice or prior jobs. The potential loss of their “jobs” is of concern to them.

**GENERALLY SPEAKING, DISTRICT COURT** judges almost always get re-elected but not always. Tom Gillert defeated a sitting Tulsa County district judge with the financial help of the Tulsa medical community, at the instigation of Joe Best. The other Tulsa County district judges got the message.

As far as appellate court judges are concerned, I cannot remember an appellate court judge being voted out of office as a result of “No” votes on a retention ballot. I am sure that there may have been an instance when some appellate court judge got the boot, but I don’t know of one. I believe, however, that they fear losing their jobs as a result of a concerted effort to vote them out of office.

The rating system instigated by the State Chamber and Oklahoma Civil Justice Council is clearly intended to intimidate them into being “business friendly.”

While I do not practice much law anymore, I have one significant case currently pending in the Oklahoma Court of Appeals. The plaintiffs in Cox v. City of Tulsa challenged the constitutionality of a special assessment district created by the Tulsa City Council in 2008 to pay for the construction of a minor league

baseball stadium downtown.

My clients asserted that the collection of the assessment from them to pay for a general public improvement constituted an unconstitutional taking of their property without just compensation.

**YOU CAN IMAGINE HOW** I reacted when the Tulsa World recently published an article and an opinion about how terrible it was that my clients were appealing an adverse decision by the assigned Tulsa County district judge. My reaction was that the Tulsa World was using the power possessed by it to intimidate the Court of Appeals and, ultimately, the Oklahoma Supreme Court.

I believed and continue to believe that my clients have the better end of the argument based on the law and the facts. I am less secure on the politics.

Having the Tulsa World badmouth my clients a year after the case was submitted on appeal was disconcerting.

I write to you today to urge you to defend our judges from the Chamber’s intimidation campaign. It is time to speak up or potentially find yourself and your clients on the wrong end of a lawsuit not because of the facts or the law, but because of the politics.

– The author is editor of publisher of MoreLaw.com

# LETTERS

From Page 4

“My family pleads with you to give the death penalty.”

Jurors did just that. DeRosa’s lawyers appealed, claiming he was denied a fair trial by such a “hyper-emotional plea for revenge.”

A three-judge federal appeals court panel excused the plea as “harmless error” but Judge Carlos F. Lucero dissented.

“I would halt the Oklahoma prosecutors’ systematic abuse of the federal Constitution,” Lucero wrote.

“Capital defendants in Oklahoma

are not provided due process rights guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment as a matter of state law and policy. Much of the unconstitutional testimony in these cases is shockingly prejudicial.”

State law permits victim impact evidence. Perhaps judges should consider the advice of Enid lawyer Stephen Jones: “The justice in a society is not measured by how it treats its best citizens but how it treats its worst.”

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner Wagoner

## Oklahoma Friends Meetings (Quakers)

*Friends believe there is that of God in everyone. They cannot prove this, but when they act as if it were true, their trust is justified.*

– Author unknown

### MEETING FOR WORSHIP SCHEDULE AND CONTACTS

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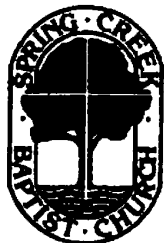
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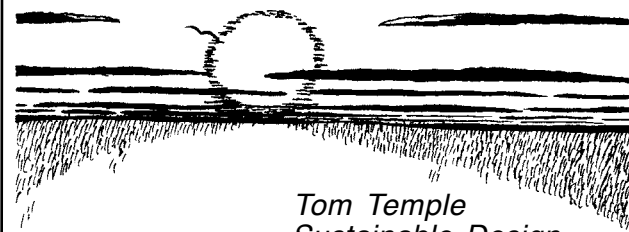
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