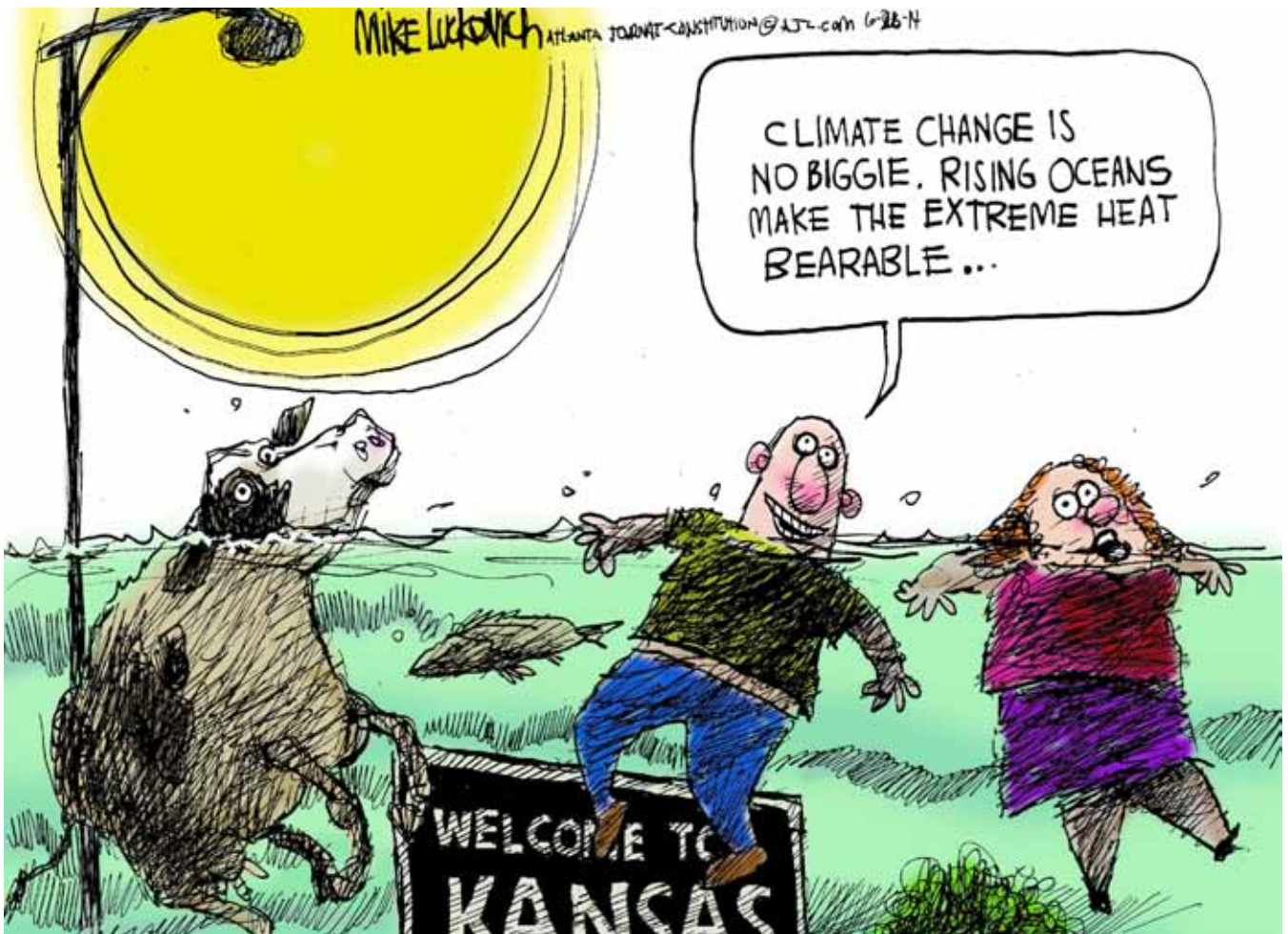


THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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Shake, Rattle & Broil



*As Oklahoma Suffers Earthquakes,
Drought And Mercury
Contaminated Lakes,
Where Are Policymakers
With Solutions?*

– Pages 22-28

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VOLUME 46, NO. 7

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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

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Observations

Hobby Lobby

The U.S. Supreme Court's shameful Hobby Lobby ruling is an ice-water-to-the-face reminder that elections have consequences.

The five male justices decreeing "corporations are people, my friend" are appointees of Republican presidents whose politics ranged from far right to reactionary right.

Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush railed incessantly about "activist" judges, yet it is their high-court majority that epitomizes the worst of judicial activism.

In the Citizens United and McCutcheon cases, for example, the justices sharply tilted the political playing field in favor of wealthy ideologues, unleashing the flood of Dark Money that swamped the recent Oklahoma primary.

And now, they empowered America's deep-pocketed theocrats – like Hobby Lobby's Green family – to impose their religious values on those they employ, all in the name of religious liberty.

Whose liberty? What the high court majority, the Greens and many of Oklahoma's top elected officials fail – or refuse – to grasp is that freedom of religion includes freedom *from* religion.

The Greens' businesses are not religious institutions [which enjoy exemptions under the Affordable Care Act's contraception provisions]. They are corporations. But in the age of Corporate Personhood, evidently, legal constructs can have – and exercise – religious beliefs.

Corporations have ... souls?

Now that the Greens can invoke their faith to excise contraception from their corporate-backed health care plans, what's next?

A Jehovah's Witness who would deny his company's employees coverage for blood transfusions? A Christian Scientist who would demand her company's workers commit to 30 days of prayer before doctor visits would be covered?

If the court's latest ruling is taken to its logical conclusion, pacifists

CONTINUED ON PAGE 43

THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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Revolving Door: Outgoing Speaker Pro Tem Mike Jackson, R-Enid, is latest to cash in on his legislative experience/title. He's joining the lobbying juggernaut known as the State Chamber.

Laurel: To Dr. Barbara Santee and Dr. Martha Skeeters, honored with the Oklahoma Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice's 2014 Judy Halpern Faith and Freedom Award – to be presented July 10 at Temple Israel in Tulsa.

Tickets for the Oklahoma Observer Democracy Foundation's second annual Frosty Fest – Aug. 21 at Tulsa's Circle Cinema, featuring U.S. Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, D-ND – are going fast. See back cover for details.

Dart: To ex-Rep. Cleta Deatherage Mitchell, Democrat-turned-Wingnut who's become Fox News' go-to "expert" on faux IRS conspiracies. She never lets the facts stand in the way of a good [anti-government] story.

When George W. Bush's White House lost 22 million e-mails, Rep. Darrell Issa, the House GOP's Investigator-in-Chief, gave Bush a pass, blaming IBM. When the IRS lost two years of Lois Lerner's e-mails, it was Obama's Watergate.

Laurel: To former state Rep. Kevin Cox, D-OKC, donating his legislative black caucus files to the Oklahoma Historical Society. Cox served longer [1980-2004] than any African-American elected official in Oklahoma.

Dart: To Gov. Mary Fallin, playing politics with Medicaid expansion. She'd rather sacrifice the health of the state's poor than risk enraging the GOP's unhinged far right – even though she's a prohibitive favorite for re-election.

For the 11th consecutive year, U.S. postal carriers collected more than 72 million pounds of food this spring to help restock food banks, pantries and shelters nationwide. Bravo!

Laurel: To Enid News & Eagle's Dale Denwalt, whose excellent reporting found 1,253 educators re-registered this year as Republicans – most, undoubtedly, anxious to vote against Superintendent Janet Barresi.

The Daily Disappointment solidifies its spot in the journalism Bush Leagues – no mention in its pre-primary endorsement of Janet Barresi that editorial writer Ray Carter's wife, Jennifer, was a Barresi campaign consultant and the superintendent's former chief of staff.

Dart: To AG Scott Pruitt, hailing U.S. Supreme Court's "freedom of speech" ruling on buffer zones at abortion clinics, yet silent on 2013 Oklahoma law that blocks protests two hours before/after and within 1,000 feet of funerals.

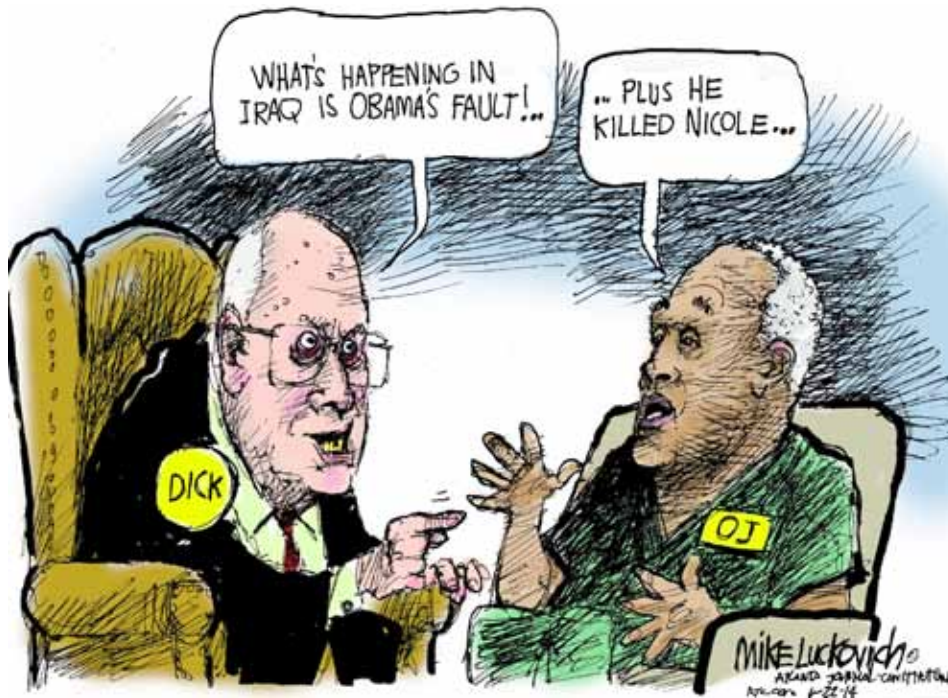
Remote Area Medical Oklahoma expects to serve more than 1,500 at its annual free clinic Aug. 16-17 at OKC's State Fair Park. For more information or to volunteer, contact Tres Savage at Savage@RAMOK.org or 405.410.5411. RAM especially needs dental and eye professionals to help.

Laurel: To OSU, one of five universities chosen by NASA to compete in Exploration Habitat Academic Challenge aimed at developing a food-producing greenhouse for long-term space missions. OSU is only school to be selected each year since the challenge began five years ago.

We mourn the passing of Mike Krawczyk, whose brilliant political cartoons graced The Observer's pages for decades. No one caricatured ex-Gov. Frank Keating's bulbous dome better. Zerk – as we called him – was just 64.

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Letters



Editor, The Observer:

Do you find it ironic that just a few months after opening a "salt"-water disposal well east of Bray that we had an earthquake? Why do "they" need more study when this is evidence? Think this needs more investigation?

Judy Hawkins
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

In my almost five decades of watching the Oklahoma Legislature in action have I ever seen such inaction. It took Herculean effort to pass the mundane and minimum effort to pass the insane. I hope we kept the receipt because we deserve a full refund on the purchase price of this defective set.

Carl O. Owen III
Moore

Editor, The Observer:

In one of Mark Twain's tales, he told of how concerned he was that God's creatures did not seem to be able to get along together, so he said to get matters in hand, "I built a cage and in it I put a dog and a cat. And after a little training, I got

the dog and cat to the point where they lived peacefully together. Then I introduced a pig, a goat, a kangaroo, some birds and a monkey. And, after a few adjustments, they learned to live in harmony. So encouraged was I by such successes that I added an Irish Catholic, a Presbyterian, a Jew, a Muslim and a Buddhist, along with a Baptist missionary ... And in a very short while, there wasn't a single living thing left in the cage."

So relevant today. I wonder if we started with a Republican dog and a Democratic cat ...

Nadine Jewell
Enid

Editor, The Observer:

The question always comes up as to why we need annual public Pride events. I think we can have our own private as well as public Pride events weekly if not daily in our own lives.

We must speak up about the injustice of paying taxes and not receiving the benefits and privileges attached to those taxes. We must vote every time and call to complain when our elected officials from mayor and City Council on up

to Congressional representatives and senators drop the ball and rely on stereotypes to score a news cycle sound bite at our expense.

We have to have pride because much of the time our existence in society is viewed as an embarrassment at best and detrimental, worthy of severe punishment, at worst.

Laws are changing, attitudes are evolving, education is happening, because many of us have taken responsibility to demonstrate we gay people have constructive employment all across the spectrum, pay taxes, have stable relationships, and volunteer in our neighborhoods. We are as needed and valuable a part of our society as any straight person is.

We must take responsibility for our own public relations in the way we conduct ourselves as we move the equality ball down the court. It makes no difference if we wear jeans and sneakers at our jobs or suits and ties. We're all links in the chain of community.

James Nimmo
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

After reviewing the pundits on Congressman Cantor's misfortune, an event which brought no sorrow to Rancho Fricardo, I would opine it was not immigration reform that proved his undoing. The congressman appears to have forgotten the golden rule, "All politics is local."

Richard L. Fricker
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

You were way too easy on James Lankford [May, Observerscope] with regard to the "whoppers" in his TV ads as "wannabe" senator. I know the text on "bearing false witness." Likewise, I know Jesus' damnation on those who call their brother a liar, but I'm not sure I've actually heard the entirety of one of his commercials. For, by the end

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Round One



The morning after the primary, I drove to northwestern Oklahoma, near Ringwood, to visit with dozens of public school teachers attending an Oklahoma Education Association meeting.

To say there was electricity in the air would be an epic understatement.

"I know why you're so excited this morning," I began, mischievously. Pause. "That Corporation Commission race last night was a real barn-burner."

The high spirits, of course, had nothing to do with former Speaker Todd Hiett's defeat of outgoing state Sen. Cliff Branan for a seat on the three-member panel that regulates oil, gas and utilities, among others.

No, the celebration was all about the dethroning of state Superintendent Janet Barresi, who finished a miserable third in a three-candidate Republican primary.

I've covered politics for 34 years in three states – Oklahoma, Texas and California – and I can't recall a more reviled incumbent.

How despised? Barresi finished last in a three-candidate primary that included a controversial former high school football coach.

Insult to injury: In her 2010 and 2014 campaigns, Barresi spent \$2 million plus of her own money on what became a one-and-done career as an elected official.

Teachers, administrators, parents and public education advocates haven't been this energized since Gov. Henry Bellmon steered his brilliant HB 1017 reforms through a reluctant Legislature nearly a quarter century ago.

More than 25,000 turned out for a rally on the Capitol steps in late March, demanding lawmakers and Gov. Mary Fallin end the lip service and make real commitments to building a world-class system of public education.

In the run-up to the June 24 primary, more than 1,200 teachers re-registered as Republicans – most, presumably, to vote against Barresi.

Barresi, though, was an easy target. She had a rare – and politically fatal – gift: an ability to create more

enemies than friends just by walking into a room.

She was widely viewed as arrogant. High-handed. A bully.

Knocking Barresi out in the primary was satisfying – but it's only the beginning of what must be a long, arduous battle against anti-public ed forces motivated by financial and religious interests.

Remember what happened the day after the big Capitol rally? Senators, in effect, gave public ed the finger, advancing yet another income tax cut that would further starve vital state services.

Oklahoma schools already are staggering beneath the nation's deepest budget cuts the last five years – at a time they're serving 40,000 more students.

Even worse, lawmakers embraced a corporate welfare scheme breathtaking by even Oklahoma standards: They let the fat cats – Devon, Continental and Chesapeake – set their own tax rate.

By approving a preposterously low 2% tax for the first three years on horizontal drilling, lawmakers played a reverse Robin Hood role – they stole hundreds of millions in tax revenue from school kids and gave it to their wealthy political benefactors.

For the record: North Dakota, where the Bakken is arguably the nation's hottest energy play, has an effective 11.5% tax rate on oil. Continental, for one, isn't fleeing North Dakota kicking and screaming over the higher tax rate.

The GOP's spin on education funding would be a hoot, if the consequences of their policies weren't so dire.

Rep. Scott Martin, R-Norman, the House budget chair, claims lawmakers hiked K-12 funding about \$200 million in the last two years.

As OKPolicy notes, it is true that FY 2015 funding will be \$122 million more than FY 2013 – but half the increase went to increased health care costs and education reform measures.

Here's the bottom line: K-12 funding next year will still be \$44.9 million below what it was in FY 2009.

The Legislature actually had a chance to prove its commitment to public education ... but whiffed.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7



The Story Of Rose

This Best of Frosty column first appeared in the June 10, 2010 edition of The Oklahoma Observer.

I have no idea who sent me this but it is worth passing along:

The first day of class our professor introduced himself and challenged us to get to know someone we didn't already know. I stood up to look around when a gentle hand touched my shoulder.

I turned around to find a wrinkled, little old lady beaming up at me with a smile that lit up her entire being.

She said, "Hi, handsome. My name is Rose. I'm 87 years old. Can I give you a hug?"

I laughed and enthusiastically responded, "Of course you may!" and she gave me a giant squeeze.

"Why are you in college at such a young, innocent age?" I asked.

She jokingly replied, "I'm here to meet a rich husband, get married, and have a couple of kids ..."

"No seriously," I asked. I was curious what may have motivated her to be taking on this challenge at her age.

"I always dreamed of having a college education and now I'm getting one!" she told me.

After class we walked to the student union building and, sharing a cup of coffee, we talked.

We became instant friends. Every day for the next three months we would leave class together and talk nonstop. I was always mesmerized listening to this "time machine" as she shared her wisdom and experience with me.

Over the course of the year, Rose became a campus icon and she easily made friends wherever she went. She loved to dress up and she reveled in the attention bestowed upon her from the other students. She was living it up.

At the end of the semester we invited Rose to speak at our football banquet. I'll never forget what she taught us. She was introduced and stepped up to the podium.

She began, "We do not stop playing because we are old; we grow old because we stop playing.

"There are only four secrets to staying young, being happy, and achieving success. You have to laugh and find humor every day. You've got to have a dream. When you lose your dreams, you die.

"We have so many people walking around who are dead and don't even know it!

"There is a huge difference between growing older and growing up.

"If you are 19 years old and lie in bed for one full year and don't do one productive thing, you will turn 20 years old. If I am 87 years old and stay in bed for a year and never do anything I will turn 88.

"Anybody can grow older. That doesn't take any talent or ability. The idea is to grow up by always finding opportunity in change. Have no regrets.

"The elderly usually don't have regrets for what we did, but rather for things we did not do. The only people who fear death are those with regrets."

She concluded her speech by courageously singing "The Rose."

She challenged each of us to study the lyrics and live them out in our daily lives. At the year's end, Rose finished the college degree she had begun all those months ago.

One week after graduation Rose died peacefully in her sleep.

Over 2,000 college students attended her funeral in tribute to the wonderful woman who taught by example that it's never too late to be all you can possibly be.

When you finish reading this, please send this peaceful word of advice to your friends and family, they'll really enjoy it!

These words have been passed along in loving memory of Rose.

Remember, growing older is mandatory. Growing up is optional. We make a Living by what we get. We make a Life by what we give.

God promises a safe landing, not a calm passage. If God brings you to it, He will bring you through it.

Good friends are like stars ... You don't always see them, but you know they are always there. ■

What June's Primaries Wrought

News: Nine state House and two state Senate Republicans survived Tea Party challenges in the June primary.

Comment: The GOP establishment may be tempted to declare the [wing]nuts are roasted but that would be wishful thinking.

The 11 lawmakers won big – smallest victory margin was a landslide 56.4% by Midwest City Rep. Charlie Joyner – because of the power of incumbency, not because Republican primary voters opted en masse to repudiate the Tin Foil Hatters.

The corporate-dominated GOP Powers-That-Be should be more worried about open seats when the likes of Joyner, Tulsa Rep. Weldon Watson and Senate President Pro Tem Brian Bingman are forced out by term limits.

The uber right is proving itself a force in low-turn-out Republican primaries – and the GOP nomination is often tantamount to victory. Once elected, they're almost impossible to dislodge [see corporatists' unsuccessful attempts over the years to knock out state Rep. Mike Reynolds, R-OKC].

Worse, some wingnuts aren't even being challenged electorally, no matter how ineffective or how much they embarrass their constituents [see Rep. John Bennett, R-Sallisaw].

News: Democratic U.S. Senate front-runner Connie Johnson is forced into an Aug. 26 runoff against 79-year-old famous-name candidate Jim Rogers.

Comment: What the hell are Democratic primary voters thinking? Neither Rogers nor Patrick Michael Hayes were serious candidates, yet polled a combined 56.2% of the vote.

The race against Republican nominee James Lankford – who won the primary without a runoff despite an avalanche of Dark Money ads against him – will be tough enough in Red State Oklahoma.

It is even more challenging when the only credible candidate is forced to fight for her political life just to secure the nomination, squandering precious resources better deployed in the general election campaign.

Round One

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

Rep. Lee Denney, R-Cushing, and Sen. James Halligan, R-Stillwater, authored a measure that would have taken about \$60 million a year off-the-top of the state kitty to bolster K-12 schools.

But the anti-public ed cabal – some want religious-based [indoctrination?] education, others want for-profit schools – finally killed it in a House-Senate conference committee.

It's possible some Democrats simply disagree with Johnson on capital punishment [she wants it abolished], marijuana decriminalization [she favors it] or reproductive rights [she believes women should be able to decide individually what's best for them].

It's also possible some Democrats – the kind who actively opposed Barack Obama in the last two presidential elections – can't abide the idea of a black woman in power. We can only hope such 19th Century thinking is indeed on the wane.

News: Former House Speaker T.W. Shannon draws less than 35% of the GOP primary vote in the race to succeed retiring U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn.

Comment: Most pundits think Shannon has a bright future politically. Don't bet on it.

No doubt he'll try again – when senile ... oops! ... senior Sen. Jim Inhofe or Fourth District U.S. Rep. Tom Cole decides to retire.

But what recommends him? He was endorsed by Sarah Palin and Ted Cruz. Didn't help this time. That he was state House Speaker for one year? Speakers typically make more enemies than friends.

Never say never in politics, but the better bet is Shannon accepts a cushy Chicksaw Nation job or some other high-paying post, playing his politics as a special interest influencer, not as an elected official.

News: Third District GOP congressional candidate Timothy Ray Murray thinks incumbent Rep. Frank Lucas is dead and was replaced by a look-alike. In Murray's world, the real Lucas was executed – along with other members of Congress – in Ukraine.

Comment: First, what to make of the 3,442 Republican primary voters that colored in the box next to Murray's name? Should their voting privileges be revoked?

Second, Lucas' office actually dignified the conspiracy jabber by denying the allegations and adding that Lucas never has visited Ukraine?

Third, Murray is too dense to realize Lucas actually is an automaton. The Farm Bureau and State Chamber are behind the curtain, winding him up every day then unleashing him to do their bidding. ■

I can hear the "government" school haters now: All you ever talk about is money – as if more money would guarantee better educational outcomes. The truth is, we in Oklahoma don't know whether it would. We're currently 49th in per pupil spending. And we've never funded public education at near the level of states that produce the best academic outcomes.

How about we give it a try – at least, just once? ■

Dissecting Barresi's Defeat

BY JOHN THOMPSON

Of course I'm celebrating the overwhelming defeat of Chief for Change Janet Barresi in the Republican primary. Oklahoma State Superintendent Barresi embodies the brass-knuckled, scorched earth corporate reform that has driven young children to cry and vomit, and older students to drop out of school.

Her opponent, Joy Hofmeister, condemned both the "toxic" environment created by high-stakes testing and the politics of destruction that Barresi exemplifies. Barresi lost by a margin of nearly 3-1.

As reported by the Tulsa World's Andrea Eger, a video has now been released showing Barresi's tirade at a Department of Education "Summer Convening" event. Barresi told teachers:

Anybody that has any question what we're doing, read Nehemiah. Open up your Bibles and read Nehemiah. I want you to put on your breast plate and I want you to fight off the enemy at the same time you're rebuilding the wall. Because there's a lot of people, a lot of enemies are going to try to creep up the back of your neck and say you can't do it, it can't be done. Do me a favor and tell 'em to go to hell.

Honestly, though, I'm saddened that education policy disputes sank to this level. Fifteen years ago, I served with Barresi in a bipartisan reform coalition known as MAPS for Kids. Before it was derailed by NCLB, MAPS was significantly improving our city's schools. Barresi started an excellent charter school just a block from my house. It is *not* a high-challenge school like the school it replaced. But, by bringing in high-performing students from outlying areas, it sure raised property values in our neighborhood.

The worst of Oklahoma's test and punish policies were adopted before Barresi took office. They were the result of an offer from Arne Duncan that we couldn't refuse. When I first showed test data to some of Barresi's people, they immediately realized that the value-added evaluations that the state accepted in order to compete for the Race to the Top were bound to create a train wreck.

My first real introduction to Common Core came during discussions with some of Barresi's staff. She touted the standards as an alternative to teach-to-the-test bubble-in malpractice. Back then, it seemed impossible that any adult would contemplate the replacement of NCLB tests with high-stakes Common Core tests. Who would have seriously considered the idea that Common Core tests could be used as graduation tests or third grade reading tests required for promotion to the fourth grade?

And everyone who I talked to in her administration seemed to understand that it was nutty to try to plug Common Core test results into value-added models

used to evaluate teachers.

The A-F School Report Card, which Barresi borrowed from Jeb Bush, was another fiasco. Barresi held firm to the quest for a single number to serve as a single grade regardless of the type of school. A joint Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University research team wrote a withering appraisal of the report card, but made some simple practical suggestions for salvaging it. Sensible criticisms of the report card were rejected as efforts to evade accountability.

Then in a matter of a few months, the Barresi Administration collapsed. The turning point, it seemed to me, was the refusal to bend on the issue of retaining third graders who did not pass the state's error-riddled test. Barresi was one of the few who remained unbothered by stressed-out children being taught by the high-stakes tests to hate and fear school.

As pushback came from all corners, Barresi responded the way that other Chiefs for Change have. She was dismissive of anyone who questioned the righteousness of her theories. Those who brought up implementation problems were condemned for their "low expectations." And that is the lesson that should not be lost on other reformers.

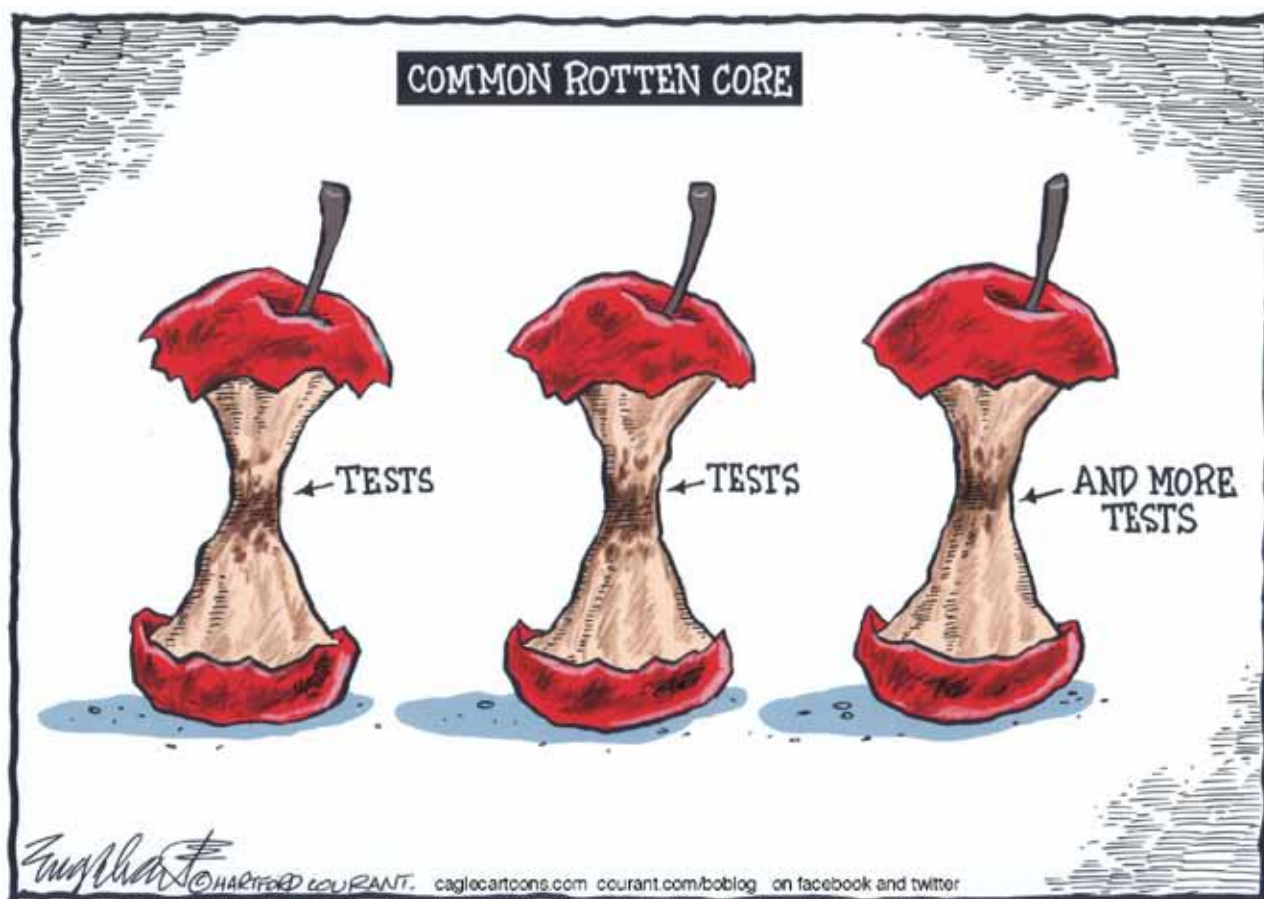
Barresi seems convinced that her opponents are morally bankrupt. But is she any more self-righteous than many other Chiefs for Change? She is abrasive. But it was not Barresi, herself, who brought down her administration.

Barresi's defeat was mostly the result of the national reform overreach of 2009, and the next few months. During the first part of the Obama Administration, Oklahoma and many other states adopted the full test-driven agenda. All at once, reformers got everything on their wish list.

Gleeful non-educators didn't notice the mutually contradictory nature of so many parts of their grandiose schemes. It was one thing to turn their theories into law. Implementing their policies was another matter.

Even if Chiefs for Change had been diplomatic, modest, and willing to embrace the complexity of the democratic process, they still would be finding themselves in some tight situations as their ideals met reality. But, given the arrogance that tends to accompany corporate reform, I expect a lot more Chiefs will be following Barresi to defeat. ■

Dr. John Thompson, an education writer whose essays appear regularly at The Huffington Post, currently is working on a book about his experiences teaching for two decades in the inner city of OKC. He has a doctorate from Rutgers University and is the author of Closing the Frontier: Radical Responses in Oklahoma Politics.



Common Core's Repeal: Why We're Not Celebrating – Yet

BY CHRISTIE PARADISE AND CLAUDIA SWISHER

Common Core is repealed! Yay!
Common Core is repealed! Oh, dear.
Common Core is repealed! Now what?
The two teachers collaborating here represent other educators ... we know most of our colleagues immediately went to the third response: Now what?

We saw all these responses and more in the days after Gov. Mary Fallin vetoed HB 3399. There's an old curse, "May you live in interesting times." Man, have we been cursed.

The authors of this essay have forged a strong friendship based on some strong differences in political leanings. Often we are in agreement, and equally as often we are not. If you look at the facts, we should really not get along. But instead of focusing on those facts, we have spent years talking, listening to each other respectfully and with open hearts and minds, and over that time, we have learned much from each other.

As educators, we both see the rush to repeal as a

mistake which will leave schools and teachers with more questions than answers, more doubts than reassurances.

We see this issue with schoolteachers' eyes. The eyes of teachers who have the obligation to provide quality lessons regardless of the quality of the standards. The eyes of teachers who are accountable to our students and their parents. The eyes of teachers who feel the responsibility for reaching every child, no matter where they come from, and for helping them love learning.

We have watched social media activity and want to share other educators' concerns. Educators will be charged with making standards work, with educating students for "college and career," with preparing them for high stakes assessments.

We share these concerns with the hope of furthering conversation and finding common ground. We know there are less than two months on the calendar before students return to classrooms. Until they have the expectation that teachers will be ready to teach.

Some teachers are wondering what they'll be teaching next year ... not just the grade, but the standards, the objectives.

Teachers are deeply practical folks. We want to know how to plan, what to plan for. We want the certainty that we're going in the right direction. But at the moment we are in an alphabet soup of "what the heck?"

"Not a laughing matter but kind of funny that we teachers were asking each other the same question at the beginning of the school year last year. PASS? OAS? CCSS? The last I read was that we are back to PASS."

"OK, yeah! Fallin signed 3399. But my question is ... if we are to use our current PASS over the next two years, WHAT will our OCCTs look like in the spring? Don't we have a contract with Measured Progress already for Common Core-like tests? I am thrilled Common Core is tabled, but WHAT am I suppose to prepare my students for in the Spring 2015? Anybody? Please Help!"

"So, what does this mean in my classroom? Will it change anything at all?"

What will our policymakers say to these teachers? Remember, less than two months and classrooms are filled with kids ready to learn. Also, summer is a teacher's time to plan for the next year. Lesson plans are being made, curriculum is being studied.

For teachers changing subjects or grade levels, this is the only time they have to prepare before they are surrounded by students who rely on them to know what they are doing.

Are they supposed to spend their [unpaid] summer time and effort getting ready for PASS, but to be tested like OAS? Teach PASS and be tested like PASS? Or should they bide their time and save their money, knowing all of this will change in two years? Those two years that are vital for our students, the only two years they will spend in those grades.

Another concern we have seen deals with the changing of content from one grade level to another when changing from PASS to CCSS and back. For example, if Grade 5 was responsible for teaching fractions under PASS, but it moved to Grade 4 in CCSS, a school transitioning to CCSS would have taught it this last year in fourth grade. Now that we are back with PASS, that same skill will be a fifth grade skill.

Do you teach those kids the same content again because the standards changed? Do you invest your time and money in resources that are more advanced, knowing they will only be used this year?

Other teachers voiced deep frustration at the time, effort, and money they and their districts have invested in the past four years, getting ready for a CCSS party that will never happen. They feel betrayed. They'd done what was expected of them, got on board with CCSS, prepared, collaborated. Now everything changes. With very little time to change directions.

"You know this whole education system is a com-

plete mess! What's ironic is that four years ago when we started working our tail ends off by aligning our curriculum to Common Core and having tons of meetings, and spending countless hours figuring out how and what to teach ... I said the words, "this is all a waste of time because it will never come to fruition." People said, "Oh it's happening!" Well, I'm saying it ... I told you so! What a complete mess!"

"I have been going to trainings and doing research for four years preparing for this. Back to square one. Will we have these standards before school starts or back to PASS? What will the test be like? We changed our entire organization of language arts for next year so that each teacher teaches English and reading in a block to better accommodate CCSS. If it is back to PASS, we are better off staying split like we were before."

"Well, I'm soooooo glad I spent so much money on Common Core resource books ... And I get to do it again when we get new standards! Yea ... not. But in all seriousness, I hope people realize the real problem was not with the standards as a whole, it's with the how and why of the assessment process. Of course, this is my opinion and I'm giving it free of charge."

"Though I don't love them, the CCSS for High School English are not impossible or inappropriate. [The CC testing, however, is a completely different story!] I'm obviously not qualified to comment on other grade levels or subject areas, but we have been transitioning to these standards since they were adopted. MILLIONS of dollars [and COUNTLESS hours] have been spent throughout this process."

"Now, we go back to the standards we abandoned years ago, then re-transition to OAS ... or whatever they will be called next [and they will most likely be VERY similar to CCSS]."

"So many school districts spent money on new books and training for teachers also. I want to know how the state is going to pay for these, once again, 'new standards' to be written and researched."

"And yet again, Fallin and Barresi cause millions of dollars of problems, years more of uncertainty for Oklahoma schools, and more years of discontinuity for the children who are being taught during this time."

All these frustrations come from teachers' deep commitment to their students. Teachers want to do the right thing. They want to contribute to a positive learning experience. They think first of kids and how to teach them.

"Be careful of what you ask for, it can and probably will get worse. The main concern I have what is best for the student. This is not a race to see who can come up with the hardest test, to show who is the best in the U.S. How about we measure growth. Keep in mind research shows that no measurable gains can be made for three full years after implementing a new program. Again, three years before you begin to see growth."

"I have complete faith in teachers to keep teaching what students need to know to be successful, but it frustrates me that my own children will go through HALF of their PK-12 education without clear standards for their teachers to focus on! When will our students and their education become more important than political games?"

"I hope the people who asked for this get what they wanted, because what they did was put the state legislators 100% in control over what the children in our schools will be learning. They have made politics the number one factor for setting curriculum."

HB 3399 was passed and signed after schools had dismissed for the summer. Children have left for vacation; teachers have cleaned up their rooms and turned in their keys. But HB 3399 now changed everything for those teachers and those students, only 2½ months before they reunite. The responses we shared here are those first "how will this affect me and my classroom and my students" thoughts.

Many of these issues/questions/concerns could have been addressed with a more gradual change both to and from CCSS. Underlying these first thoughts, however, is the law itself, and our leaders' public comments. Do we really know what it says, beyond

waving a magic wand and making CCSS disappear in Oklahoma? Are there surprises waiting for us? ■
Christie Paradise is an elementary teacher [10 years in the classroom] that has taught third, fourth and fifth grades. She has been involved in Oklahoma's adoption of CCSS as part of the Oklahoma Educator Leader Cadre [ELC]. She neither supports nor opposes CCSS and feels that any needed changes could have been done through the normal revision process for state standards. Her biggest disappointment in the last few years has been that many politicians do not share that willingness to collaborate with teachers, parents and administrators. This has resulted in bills that may be good intentioned but are poorly implemented and cause chaos in the school system. Claudia Swisher retired before CCSS would be an issue in her classroom. But as a 39-year teacher, she has seen the appearance and disappearance of many reforms that were going to be "the answer." She loved being in the middle of innovations in the classroom, and would have worked to make CCSS applicable for her students. But she's grateful she's on the sidelines for this reform effort. Her concerns with CCSS include the fact classroom teachers were not allowed to participate in writing the standards, only "responding" to them after they were written.

Lies, Politics Torpedo Common Core

BY VIC HUTCHISON

On June 5, Gov. Mary Fallin signed HB 3399, a dangerous bill that not only stopped Common Core teaching standards, but also allows any legislator to question any teaching standard. The latter is possibly unconstitutional, based on separation of powers, and already faces a legal challenge.

In late June, a group of five school teachers, three parents of public school students and four State Board of Education members filed suit arguing the law gives lawmakers too much power in drafting new replacement standards.

HB 3399 was perhaps the most divisive bill of the session and engendered massive opposition from many groups, including Oklahomans for Excellence in Science Education, Oklahoma Science Teachers Association, Oklahoma Business & Education Coalition, Oklahoma PTA, Oklahoma Council of Teachers of Math, Stand for Children Oklahoma, United Suburban Schools Association, ExpectMoreOK.org, State Chamber, Collaborative for Student Success, and others.

Two retired Air Force generals, former commanders at Tinker Air Force Base, held a press conference urging Gov. Fallin to veto HB 3399. Two former Georgia governors, who supported the development of Common Core, published a column in the June 4 Oklahoman entitled *Oklahoma should keep education reform effort*. Numerous messages were sent to the

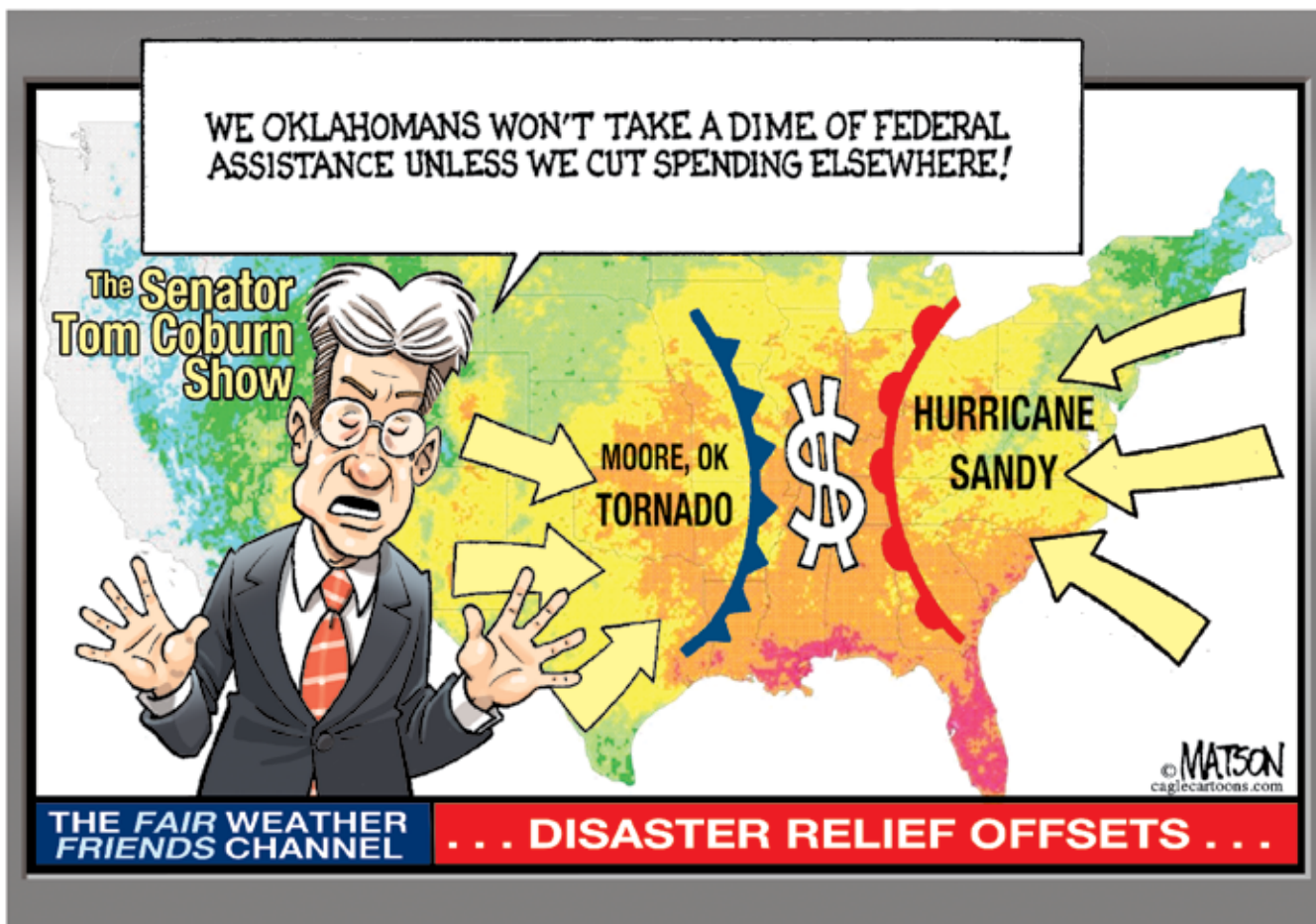
governor's office by individuals.

I often disagree with the editorials in the major Oklahoma City newspaper, but they got this one right: The Oklahoman on May 24 had a lead editorial titled *Critical thinking lacking in academic standards bill* [the same editorial on their web site is titled *Academic Standards Require Better Process Than Oklahoma Lawmakers Proposing*].

The editorial addressed HB 3399 that, among other things, would deny Common Core. The item states, "this is the latest, and goofiest, development to come out of our efforts to repeal Common Core standards in Oklahoma. ... However, the legislation exempts adoption of those academic from the state's Administrative Procedures Act. That law allows legislative review of agency rules, but typically requires lawmakers to simply accept or reject rules."

The portion of the bill that allows interference by legislators follows: "The Legislature may review any rules pertaining to the subject matter standards contained in this act and by concurrent resolution may either amend such rules or return those rules to the rule making authority with instructions. Nothing in this section shall abrogate any right of the Legislature contained in the Administrative Procedures Act. Should said rules not be approved by the Legislature,

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Dr. No's Real Legacy

BY RICHARD L. FRICKER

"Course I'm respectable. I'm old. Politicians, ugly buildings, and whores all get respectable if they last long enough." – Actor-director John Huston, *Chinatown* [1974]

I was reminded of this classic line as the nation braced for a tsunami of campaign rhetoric, claims, disinformation and downright lies.

Not by any candidate, rather by Oklahoma's Republican Sen. Dr. Tom Coburn as he exits the political arena two years before his term expires. His public assertion is he is not retiring for health reasons [this is his third bout with cancer].

His departure triggered a special election in which Sen. Coburn, while not exactly endorsing 5th District U.S. Rep. James Lankford as his replacement, lashed out against primary opponent state Rep. T.W. Shannon, former House Speaker and Tea Party favorite, and his conservative dark money PAC supporters.

Coburn said, "I see this political economy in its very worst form with misleading advertisements and allegations against candidates. The current political advertisements by groups such as Senate Conserva-

tives Fund and Oklahomans for a Conservative Future supporting T.W. Shannon have crossed an important line – they simply aren't truthful and they mischaracterize James Lankford's service in Congress."

The senator concludes, "Trust is absolutely paramount in our republic."

State newspapers lauded Coburn's courage in standing against dark money and for truth. But it might have served the American people better had this epiphany occurred a little earlier in Coburn's 20-year career of elected service.

Coburn's comments recalled his April 23, 2007 Tulsa Press Club speech blasting single-payer insurance. The senator cited several sources of information.

I checked his U.S., Health Canada and U.K citations. At the very kindest, none of his citations held water. None. This was duly reported at Consortium-news.com.

A few weeks later, in a similar speech, before one of Tulsa's Rotary Clubs, Coburn had juxtaposed Canada and the U.K from his Press Club outing.

This wasn't Coburn's only brush with the forces he so recently decried. Remember the teen lesbians of Coalgate, OK?

In 2004, during his first Senate campaign against then Democrat Congressman Brad Carson [who occupied the 2nd District seat Coburn had held for three terms] Coburn told a gathering in Coalgate, "lesbianism is so rampant in some of the schools in south-east Oklahoma that they'll only let one girl go to the bathroom. Now think about it. Think about that issue. How is it that that's happened to us?" [Daily Kos]

Joe McCulley, Coalgate school superintendent responded, "He knows something I don't know. We have not identified anything like that. We have not had to deal with any issues on that subject – ever."

Teen lesbians were not Coburn's first gay target. As a freshman congressman in 1994 he had learned from Newt Gingrich the effectiveness of hitting soft targets with the "Guns, God and Gays" political mantra.

He left Congress in 2000 after three terms, as promised under his self-imposed term limit philosophy. He spent the off years criticizing Congress for its spending, liberalism, sluggishness and disorganization.

During his first six years in Washington, Congressman Coburn went so far as to attempt to block aid to his own state for tornado victims. This would not be the last time Coburn looked upon victims as a fiscal irritant.

As time drew near for this Senate run President George W. Bush provided him a high profile appointment as chair of the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS. Coburn had already joined the HIV/AIDS debate in Congress by proposing a ban on anonymous testing in 1997. He also wanted the names of persons testing positive reported to local health agencies and withholding of funds for agencies and states failing to comply.

At a Republican gathering in early 2004, as Advisory Council chair, he spoke not about the HIV/AIDS epidemic, but gays. According to Robert Schlesinger writing for Salon, the Senate hopeful said, "The gay community has infiltrated the very centers of power in every area across this country, and they wield extreme power ... That agenda is the greatest threat to our freedom that we face today."

Four years later a fellow Republican, state Rep. Sally Kern, R-Oklahoma City, used almost identical verbiage calling homosexuality, "the biggest threat our nation has, even more so than terrorism or Islam." [ThinkProgress.org]

Kern incurred the wrath of the gay community and its supporters. Ironically, Coburn was nowhere to be found – he did not rise to Kern's defense.

Coburn had no reason to aid Kern; his open attack on gays had won the 2004 election with 53% of the vote. In the process of electing Coburn Okies also passed a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. Coburn was on a roll.

Rep. Kern could handle the traffic. Who was going

to aid of a bunch of gay Okies? It took 10 years but Federal Judge Terence Kern declared the marriage ban Coburn rode into office unconstitutional. Judge Kern was appointed to the bench in 1994, the same year Coburn won his first election to Congress.

In denouncing Shannon's dark money advertisements Coburn cited Lankford as having "absolute integrity." I tried reconciling those words with Coburn's "anonymous hold," a device allowing senators to stall legislation without identifying themselves.

Coburn was notorious for its use – thus the moniker "Dr. No."

Coburn used his hold privilege nearly 80 times. Coburn used the hold privilege, for example, on legislation to fund breast cancer research and medical benefits to veterans. [Huffington Post]

When outed, his only explanation was that enough money was already being spent on these projects. The question would be: why did he hide what he was doing?

Coburn's hometown, Muskogee, is host to one of Oklahoma's only two VA hospitals. Perhaps it would have been too embarrassing to tell vets they weren't worth the money? In similar fashion even a gun toting, gay bashin', God fearin' conservative gets cranky when you tell him his constituent just isn't worth the money.

A Coburn strong point is his ability to dollar value almost anything, even sex with another man's wife. He acted as liaison – some say bagman – between Doug Hampton and Sen. John Ensign, R-NV, in 2009 when Ensign, Coburn's roommate, got caught bedding Hampton's wife Cindy.

An experienced gynecologist, Coburn supervised negotiations to pay Hampton for Sen. Ensign's indiscretions. The Senate Ethics Committee report noted, "The cost of that plan was closer to the \$3 million range. Senator Coburn responded by stating that 'okay, that's what I had in mind and I think is fair' and said he would take the figure to the Ensigns." [Politico]

While \$3 million may sound ambitious to the average Jack and Jill for an extra marital romp, Coburn takes care of his own. We're talking U.S. senator [Ensign] and daughter [Cindy Hampton] of a man who owns a couple of casinos. Translation: funding.

Dr. No knows.

Other Coburn adventures include his anonymous hold on the \$1.15 billion aide package to Haiti. Clark Matthews, co-founder of, and contributor to, the satirical Oklahoma City blog The Lost Ogle, wrote, "Senator Coburn put an anonymous hold on the distribution of the funds over concerns that up to 0.438% of that funding bothered him. Of course, I guess I can understand the hold since that money would only be helping a bunch of people who aren't Americans with their blackness and speaking of the French. Why would you expect him to show any empathy?"

Given Coburn's legislative style it is understandable why he would be dismayed over the behavior of the Shannon campaign misrepresenting issues. Just wonder why he wasn't dismayed back in 1994 when the NRA, tobacco lobby and cattle interests ran advertisements against 2nd District Congressman Mike Synar whose seat Coburn wanted.

Synar was a progressive congressman who had served the district since 1978. Smelling blood in the water as the 1994 election approached, conservative lobby groups ran ads against Synar while Coburn waited in the wings. Synar was defeated by a retired school superintendent who subsequently lost to Coburn's well-financed and crafted campaign.

While it wasn't called "dark money" at that time, it could well be considered one of the first experiments in campaign engineering using non-candidate funds. And it worked.

Given Coburn's experience, it is easy to see how he is inclined to say, "The truth is, I don't much care for political campaigns. They are dominated by career politicians and their operatives who have created a perverse but lucrative professional political industry."

Coburn has had 20 years and five campaigns to ferret out his observations. He has also had that time to

build a vast network of minions, lackeys and beholders. So, when the retiring senator signals his preference, the tentacles move and things happen as they did in the Oklahoma GOP primary.

Former speaker Shannon is out of a job. Congressman, and Coburn favorite, Lankford took the seven-candidate outing with 57% of the vote. He will face the winner of the Aug. 26 Democratic primary for his mentor's seat.

Langford acknowledged Coburn's political reach election night: "The legacy he has laid down for our state and our nation is a long shadow. His are shoes that cannot possibly be filled, but it is a responsibility we have to take on." [Tulsa World]

Well, the ballots are in, the counting's done, we move to August runoffs. Out in the somewhere of a sunny Oklahoma morning I see Huston and Jack Nicholson sharing a lunch of whole cooked fish.

I ask, of no one in particular, just how old and ugly does a building have to be? ■

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Common Core

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the subject matter standards shall remain as before promulgation."

On May 27, the law firm of Fellers Snyder, on behalf of the National Association of School Boards, sent a letter to Gov. Fallin that details the constitutional problems in HB 3399. The letter does not dispute the ability of the Legislature to opt out of Common Core, but points out the manner in which HB 3399 is designed is "constitutionally infirm." In 2010 the Legislature approved pursuing Common Core, with strong support, especially from Republicans. A legislator at the time told me that the Republicans then thought Common Core was really special.

In 2014 the Republican-dominated Legislature and the governor reversed earlier stands. In January, Fallin praised the standards and defended them from political attacks in a speech at a meeting of the National Governors Association in Washington. At the time, she said: "It is driven and implemented by those states that choose to participate. It is also not a federal curriculum; in fact, it's not a curriculum at all. Local educators and school districts will still design the best lesson plans, will choose appropriate textbooks, and will drive classroom learning."

Unfortunately, throughout the recent debacle on HB 3399 most conservative legislators and the governor listed falsehoods for their reasons to support HB 3399, claiming that Common Core was a federal action, always adding a negative about President

Obama being involved.

Common Core was not in any way due to presidential action. Common Core was developed under the initiative of the National Governors Association [Gov. Fallin is chair] and the Council of Chief State School Officers. Common Core is *not* a federal project; it was worked on by groups in more than 40 states.

According to ASCD [formerly the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development], during the development of Common Core over the past four years all states except Alaska, Nebraska, Texas, and Virginia had approved Common Core.

With the passage of HB 3399, new standards will have to be developed by 2016, costing the state huge amounts of time from many citizens and large sums of money that could be used for better purposes.

Not likely, but the Oklahoma Legislature should revisit Common Core and adopt it, allowing the State Board of Education, with input from educational associates, to revise the standards of Common Core to meet Oklahoma requirements, but based on the rigorous requirements of the original Common Core.

In the meantime, Oklahoma is stuck with the outdated and inadequate teaching standards known as Priority Academic Student Skills [PASS]. ■

Vic Hutchison is George Lynn Cross Research Professor of Biology Emeritus at the University of Oklahoma and a founder of Oklahomans for Excellence in Science Education.



"IT'S A LAND WHERE A BODY IS NEVER TAXED AND JOB CREATORS IS GROWN ON TREES...
COURSE, WE MAY HAFTER DUMP GRANNY TA LESSEN THE DRAG ON GITTEN THERE."

SHELL GAME

Funding Grabs Create Shortfalls For Many Agencies

BY DAVID BLATT

Faced with a nearly \$200 million shortfall in building the FY 2015 budget, legislative leaders and Gov. Mary Fallin had three basic choices.

They could have simply cut spending, slashing deeply across all areas of government. This would have left unaddressed critical needs for schools, state employees, the child welfare system, and others, and forced massive cuts on our health care system.

They could have filled the budget hole by curbing tax breaks and closing tax loopholes. This would have strengthened our faltering tax system over the long term but would have antagonized powerful beneficiaries of tax preferences and anti-tax hardliners.

Instead of either of these tough options, they went

for the seemingly easier one of balancing the budget by scrounging together whatever money they could find in state funds, even if they were only one-time revenues and even if the money was collected for other purposes than supporting general state operations.

The \$7.193 billion total budget included \$292 million in one-time revenue – of which \$191 million was transferred from nearly 30 different agency revolving funds and other state funds [the remainder came from cash reserves].

These one-time dollars allowed for additional funding for certain budget priorities, mitigated the severity of cuts for many agencies, and led to next year's overall budget remaining at almost the same level as

this year. But digging into agency funds raises some serious concerns.

In June, OK Policy broke the story of how the General Appropriations bill includes \$7.9 million that was intended for the Oklahoma Promise scholarship program, also known as OHLAP [Oklahoma Higher Learning Access Program]. Not only does this maneuver risk breaking a promise to provide scholarships to all eligible Oklahoma students next year, it may also have violated state law.

These concerns led Gov. Fallin to postpone the scheduled meeting of the board tasked with allocating these funds until a solution can be found.

We have now spoken with directors and top staff at several other agencies that had their revolving funds tapped for millions of dollars to help balance the FY 2015 budget. In almost all cases, these actions appear to have created significant concerns for the agencies whose funds were tapped:

- The Oklahoma State Department of Health [OSDH] had \$5 million taken from the Trauma Care Assistance Fund.

To mitigate the impact on trauma care providers, OSDH is looking to reduce funding to six federally-qualified health centers, the major community-based providers of care for the uninsured in Oklahoma, by up to \$1.381 million in FY 2015. This would be a 40% reduction from their FY 2014 funding at a time when some of these providers are already facing critical funding shortfalls. They may also reduce support for the cord blood bank by \$500,000.

While this will still leave a \$3 million shortfall in payments to trauma care providers in FY 2015, the agency is seeking ways to limit the size and severity of cuts. The Health Department must also absorb a \$2.28 million, or 3.6%, appropriations cut.

- The Oklahoma Center for Advancement of Science and Technology [OCAST] had \$4 million taken out of two revolving funds on top of a \$1 million [5.5%] cut in appropriations. The two revolving funds, which are funded through the agency's appropriated dollars, help universities, foundations, and businesses fund high-tech research that will benefit Oklahoma's economy.

The funding grabs will mean fewer contracts can be awarded in FY 2015. The director of i2E, Scott Meacham, states that, "As a result of this loss of seed funding, four to eight new companies will not get started in Oklahoma and new innovations that could have been funded by OARS [Oklahoma Applied Research Support] won't be."

- The Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission had \$3 million taken from its revolving fund. The loss of funding will affect the agency's Capital Improvement Program that specifies the capital projects to be done at public airports across the state for three years.

The Aeronautics Commission, a non-appropriated agency, is funded entirely from excise taxes assessed on the purchase of new and used aircrafts and aircraft registration and license fees. Because aircraft

sales are dependent on the state's economic health, the agency tries to keep at least one year's operating funds in reserve, but this transfer leaves the fund below that threshold.

- The Oklahoma Department of Transportation [ODOT] had \$17.5 million taken from the Weigh Station Improvement Revolving Fund. The loss of this funding will affect scheduled capital improvements for weigh stations on Oklahoma's highways.

Although there may be instances where revolving funds have grown to untenable levels, we learned that in almost all cases, agencies were not consulted in these decisions or provided an opportunity to meet with budget-makers to account for their revolving fund balances or explain the consequences if funds were transferred out.

Like the Regents for Higher Education on the OHLAP funds, many agencies only seem to have learned that their funds were up for grabs after the General Appropriations bill was passed.

The lawmakers behind this year's budget deal seem to have put most of their energy into avoiding hard choices. They showed no political courage to fix a faltering tax system. They also refuse to honestly lay out the funding cuts that not fixing the tax system will require.

The result is economic disruption and uncertainty that will do serious damage to our state's prosperity. *David Blatt is executive director of the Oklahoma Policy Institute. An earlier version of this essay appeared on the OKPolicy blog. You can sign up for OK Policy's e-mail alerts and daily news digest at <http://okpolicy.org>* ■

Adventure Race Benefits Legal Aid

All runners and endurance athletes, as well as community supporters, are encouraged to participate in the Running Wild adventure race Sept. 20 on the Kee Ranch near Mooreland. The 3.75-mile race – with both natural and man-made obstacles – will benefit Woodward's Legal Aid office.

The race originally was scheduled for June 14 but wildfires scorched the property and forced rescheduling of the race, said local attorney Jamie Kee.

Kee is working with other area attorneys, church and community leaders to raise funds to hire another family law attorney for the Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma's Woodward office to help low-income families in the area.

To register for the race or for other information, visit www.RunningWildRace.com or call race co-chairpersons Erin Kirksey at 405.694.6481, Richard Kirksey at 405.630.7743 or Jamie Kee at 580.767.9043. Early registration is \$50.



What Lawmakers Didn't Do To End Our Prison Crisis

BY GENE PERRY

For years, observers have warned of an emerging crisis in Oklahoma's criminal justice system. With state prisons and county jails packed full and staffing levels falling to the worst in the whole nation, Oklahoma has put the safety of both prisoners and correctional officers at risk.

Our options to prevent a tragedy were to reduce incarceration and ease pressure on the system or to spend what is necessary to ensure safety. For years, lawmakers did neither, and the tragedies we've been warned about are now piling up.

In a Tulsa World editorial, Oklahoma Corrections Professionals director Sean Wallace listed a few of those tragedies: "a female case manager was brutally assaulted in her office, another was taken hostage with a knife to her throat, an inmate was murdered for the first time in the history of the James Crabtree

Correctional Center, a national report was released showing the state's all-female prison in McCloud has the highest rate of reported sexual assaults in the nation, two officers were critically injured in a traffic accident after their state vehicle broke down."

Meanwhile, the Oklahoman reports there have been multiple incidents of corrections officers being injured or killed because they fell asleep behind the wheel while working brutally long hours.

It's clear that crisis we have been warned about is here. So what are lawmakers doing about it? A run-down of major bills affecting criminal justice this year shows that the answer, unfortunately, is almost nothing:

MORE MANDATORY MINIMUMS

A significant driver of Oklahoma's high incarceration rates is harsh mandatory minimum sentencing for many non-violent crimes. Oklahoma has at least

122 mandatory minimum sentences for even less serious crimes like possessing small amounts of marijuana [two years for second offense] and shoplifting inexpensive items [two years for third offense].

Early in the session, one bill [HB 2608] proposed to reduce a life without parole mandatory minimum sentence for drug trafficking.

While presenting in committee, the bill's sponsor Rep. Cory Williams, D-Stillwater, said the current sentence is so extreme that it has led to "jury nullification," where a jury refuses to convict a defendant they believe to be guilty because the sentence would be unjust.

Rep. William's bill would not have taken out the mandatory minimum altogether, nor would it have ended the option to sentence someone to life with parole if the crime calls for that. The bill simply added the option to sentence defendants in a range from 20 years up to life without parole.

HB 2608 was approved unanimously in the House, but it ultimately failed because it was never given a hearing in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Lawmakers did approve HB 2589, which added the prescription drugs morphine, oxycodone, hydrocodone, and benzodiazepine to the list of drugs that can bring charges of trafficking.

The Legislature also made into law HB 2353, which allows a person convicted of human trafficking to be sentenced to life in prison [the mandatory minimum is five years for trafficking an adult and 15 years for trafficking a minor].

The bill also adds human trafficking to Oklahoma's "85% crimes," which means persons convicted of this crime must serve at least 85% of their term before being considered for parole or earning any good time credits for early release.

Although crimes charged as human trafficking certainly can involve terrible actions which deserve very long prison sentences, Oklahoma statutes define human trafficking in a way that could be applied to almost anyone who plays a part in managing or benefiting financially from prostitution, as well as anyone who transports undocumented immigrants to a workplace.

Another bill approved by the Legislature, HB 2349, creates a new mandatory minimum sentence of three years for anyone convicted of a crime related to possessing or distributing child pornography. For a second offense, it creates a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years.

Prior to these laws, nothing prevented judges and juries from giving convicted criminals long sentences for serious crimes. Mandatory minimums may sound tough on the campaign trail, but the real effect is to make our justice system overly rigid and ill-suited to reaching a fair outcome.

To get around an unjust system, prosecutors may decline to file charges or juries may refuse to rule against a defendant they believe to be guilty, because they know the punishment would go far beyond what

the details of the crime would merit.

Some crimes go unpunished while others receive sentences far beyond what is most effective for public safety or justice.

POST-RELEASE REFORMS BLOCKED

A report released last month by the Pew Charitable Trusts showed that Oklahoma ranks fourth worst in the nation for releasing offenders directly to the streets after their prison terms without any supervision or services. In 2012, the state released a majority of inmates [55.9%] to the streets without supervision, which is more than twice the national average [21.5%].

Pew warned that longer prison terms without post-release supervision was both more costly for states and more dangerous to public safety, because it increases the likelihood that ex-felons will commit another crime and end up back in prison.

Pew found that policy changes that mandate longer sentences without possibility of parole are behind the low levels of post-release supervision.

In Oklahoma, the biggest driver of this are the "85%" requirements for a growing list of offenses. One bill this session tried to address the problem – HB 2732 – the "Correctional Officer Safety Act," would have allowed 85% of offenders to earn credits toward early parole during the 85% portion of their sentence. The requirement that they serve 85% would not go away; this reform would simply give corrections officers a tool to reward prisoners who behave appropriately and make efforts to reform themselves while in prison, as well as providing more time for supervised release of offenders who show signs of reforming while in prison.

This reform was one of the recommendations made by the justice reinvestment study for Oklahoma. It was stripped from the original justice reinvestment bill, in one of the early signs that this reform effort was doomed.

This year, HB 2732 met the same fate. After Rep. Scott Biggs, R-Chickasha, called the bill "soft on crime" on the House floor, the House voted it down 26-62.

ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION

One positive bill that made it through the Legislature and was approved by Gov. Mary Fallin was SB 1278. The bill establishes the "Criminal Justice Pay for Success Revolving Fund." It allows Oklahoma to enter into a contract with a private program that diverts offenders from going to prison or helps them re-enter society after leaving prison.

The private group must provide at least \$2 million in capital to fund the program initially, and they will be reimbursed based on predefined outcomes of offenders successfully reentering society without falling back into drug use or crime.

SB 1278 was designed with a specific program in mind – the Women in Recovery program funded through the George Kaiser Family Foundation.

Women in Recovery is an intensive outpatient treat-

ment program that serves as an alternative to prison for non-violent female offenders. The program offers drug treatment, counseling for recovery from domestic abuse, help with a job search or pursuing a GED, life skills workshops, and more. Women stay under supervision with GPS ankle monitors while in the program, which lasts 18 to 24 months.

Women in Recovery has shown good results in helping women escape addiction and trauma, but the program serves a limited number of women and is only available in Tulsa County. The new funding stream and willingness of the state to grow this program is a welcome development.

However, it is a drop in the bucket compared to Oklahoma's huge shortage in drug and mental health treatment services. An extra \$2 million going to this program won't make up for the nearly \$20 million in cuts to programs planned for next year by the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance

Abuse Services, because Oklahoma did not fund the agency to make up for a reduced federal matching rate.

IS THERE ANY HOPE FOR CHANGE?

At the end of session, Rep. Bobby Cleveland, R-Slaughterville, announced he would hold an interim study on sentencing reform and "smart on crime" alternatives to incarceration. He wrote, "The Legislature must stop pretending to be tough on crime and start using common sense to fix the system."

Rep. Cleveland's effort is welcome, and the need for action is urgent. We can only hope that this latest push for criminal justice reform turns out better than the last one. ■

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

Oklahoma's Terrible Mistake On Medicaid Expansion

BY DAVID R. MORGAN

Much to the consternation of the nation's conservatives, ObamaCare is now working. Despite the disastrous roll out, over eight million people have signed up for coverage, which the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office says is enough to ensure the program's survival.

Polls still show that more people dislike ObamaCare than support it. No doubt, some of the naysayers think the program doesn't go far enough. However, when questioned about the individual components of the Affordable Care Act [ObamaCare], strong majorities favor most of the provisions of this health insurance program.

According to a mid-March Kaiser survey, 80% supported the extension of dependent coverage; 79% liked the closing of the Medicare prescription "doughnut hole;" and 74% favored Medicaid expansion [Attn: Gov. Fallin].

The only major requirement people don't like is the individual mandate [compelling individuals without insurance to pay for coverage] at only 35% approval.

But the individual mandate is a basic requirement for creating effective universal insurance coverage. Any program that covers everyone must include some provision forcing people to participate. Such a system cannot be sustained if individuals can avoid paying until they need insurance protection.

We can identify only two ways to cover everyone: [1] require an individual mandate; or [2] create a single-payer plan that is tax supported, such as Medicare or

a Canadian-style system. Although favored by most progressives, a single-payer plan was considered to be a political nonstarter.

By the way, a single-payer plan is not socialized medicine. It is tax supported, but health care providers are not government employees. Again, think of a Medicare system that covers everyone.

WHO'S AFFECTED BY OBAMACARE?

First, most people are untouched by this health insurance program. The poll numbers vary with some 69% to 80% of respondents saying that ObamaCare won't impinge on them. Most of these folks are covered by employer-based health insurance. Then, we have the older folks who receive Medicare. And those who were previously on Medicaid [for low-income Americans] are not affected.

Under the Affordable Care Act, states could provide Medicaid coverage for most of their low-income citizens who earn too much to qualify for existing Medicaid. Some 20 states have rejected this step, however, including Oklahoma. In a typical 5-4 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to force states to provide this extra coverage under Medicaid, arguing that such action would amount to coercion of the states.

REJECTING NEW MEDICAID COVERAGE

Most of the states that have turned down the offer for more Medicaid coverage are the ones who need it most, typically southern or lower-income northern plains states. For example, under the Commonwealth Fund's recent analysis, Oklahoma ranks 50th of 51 states and the District of Columbia in overall health

care systems.

According to the Oklahoma Policy Institute, Oklahoma now has about 625,000 residents [about 17% of the state] who are uninsured. Medicaid enlargement, under ObamaCare, would make some 130,000-190,000 adults in this group eligible for coverage.

We might note that ObamaCare requires the federal government to pay all the extra cost of additional Medicaid coverage for the first three years and 90% thereafter. But Gov. Fallin claims the additional extension of Medicaid would cost the state too much money.

Two additional points here. There's little doubt that the expansion of Medicaid in Oklahoma would save millions in uncompensated care for the uninsured. And studies of other states that did opt to cover more low-income residents show real health benefits as well. Oregon, for example, found that about 40% of those newly insured were less likely to experience a decline in their health over the following six months [Oklahoma Policy Institute].

In short, a November 2012 report from the Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured concludes that accepting federal funds to expand Medicaid "would involve modest state costs while generating enormous economic and health benefits."

It seems pretty clear that Oklahoma is making a big mistake by refusing federal dollars to provide coverage for residents who are currently ineligible for Medicaid.

BUSINESS UNDER OBAMACARE

Businesses fare especially well under the Affordable Care Act. The best estimate is that the program will compel only about 4% of businesses to change their behavior. About 96% of U.S. firms fall into one of the exempt categories [basically too small to be affected].

In fact, businesses with 25 or fewer employees are

eligible for a tax credit that will reduce their health insurance costs by about 35%. That figure rises to 50% in 2015.

THE POLITICS SURROUNDING OBAMACARE

Not surprisingly, views on ObamaCare are strongly influenced by politics. An April 2014 Gallup survey reveals that party identification is the best predictor of support for the massive changes brought on by this new law.

Republicans are 17 times more likely than Democrats to oppose ObamaCare. In response to a question about whether the law has helped or hurt them, 39% of Republicans said "hurt" them or their family compared to only 7% of Democrats.

Wouldn't this massive new insurance program add to the nation's deficit? The Congressional Budget Office says the answer is no. Over time, it should reduce deficits, according to that federal office.

To repeat, more people oppose ObamaCare than favor it. Still of those opposed, 30% say officials should "make the law work as well as possible." Only 19% of those who responded want the law to fail [Pew Research Center].

The Affordable Care Act represents an enormous change in how the country provides health insurance. [Remember we're taking about health "insurance," not health "care."] No wonder it's so controversial. But you can understand a lot about what people think about this program by knowing their political views.

Certainly, ObamaCare is not perfect, but polls show that most people want it improved not repealed. So, responsible politicians should devote their energies to identifying weaknesses that need fixing rather than fulminating against a program so closely identified with a president Republicans and conservatives love to hate. ■

David R. Morgan is retired from the University of Oklahoma political science department.

Tulsa Teen Helps Empower Girls To Change World

BY KATE MCCOLLUM

A light shifts to the podium, and the focus advances to an audience waiting patiently in anticipation of my words. I speak to the audience as an advocate, a leader fighting for a cause, and with a story to share.

The story is that of girls around the world who are denied opportunities based solely on their gender, and how one courageous campaign is working to empower girls who can change the world. That campaign is Girl Up, a "For Girls, By Girls" campaign of the United Nations Foundation that encourages girls to use their strong leadership potential to raise funds

and awareness for UN programs that invest in adolescent girls across the globe.

Upon hearing about the hardships that many girls around the world face, I invested in the cause of Girl Up. I started the process of forming a Girl Up Club at my high school. I found girls to join forces with me, I found a club sponsor that shared the same passion I did, and in the spring of 2013 I founded the RISE Girl Up Club.

By ensuring that adolescent girls are educated, safe, healthy, counted, and positioned to be the next generation of leaders, Girl Up is investing in the whole

girl. Through grassroots support and the more than 400 Girl Up clubs across the world, supporters work on four different levels to support the UN programs that help girls globally.

Girl Up clubs in the U.S. raise funds to directly support UN programs that invest in girls, raise awareness about issues in their community and school, serve through volunteer work, and advocate for girls. By hosting fundraising events, holding forums or pep rallies, and speaking to communities about the issues, Girl Up clubs are advocating for change.

Advocacy is a unique and important component of the organization that empowers girls to believe in their ability to make change – an aspect I believe makes this campaign extraordinary. Through advocacy efforts, girls are coming together to fight for imperative steps towards lasting change.

Girls across the nation are speaking to their representatives as constituents, advocating for why we need to invest in adolescent girls. By scheduling in-district meetings to speak with their congressmen, or hosting letter writing campaigns, girls are demanding to be heard.

Currently, Girl Up clubs are supporting the Girls Count Act of 2013. Every year, 51 million children are not registered at birth, and most of these children are girls.

Without proper birth documentation, girls face difficulty in obtaining health care, legal protection, and they are invisible to the government.

The act provides for U.S. foreign policy to ensure that developing nations prioritize the documentation of girls.

Our club recently had the honor of meeting with Oklahoma Congressman Jim Bridenstine's staff to share why we feel this piece of legislation is imperative for global development, and why it should be a priority for the U.S.

Efforts such as this and those of other Girl Up clubs, members, and their supporters to raise awareness about this issue is an important part of the legislative advocacy program of the campaign.

Throughout the year our Girl Up club also worked to hold fundraising and awareness activities to further the cause of Girl Up. We often hold pancake breakfasts or sell t-shirts to raise funds.

We successfully screened the documentary film *Girl Rising* at Tulsa's Circle Cinema to a sold-out theater. We held a summit in which over 40 girls in the Tulsa area attended leadership and empowerment workshops, and most recently we held a powder puff football fundraiser that attracted over 400 spectators and raised over \$3,000.

My Girl Up experience culminated in my nomination and eventual selection to represent the Girl Up Campaign as one of 20 National Teen Advisors. In this role, I have the honor of working with some of the nation's most dedicated, intelligent, and passionate girls who hold the same enthusiasm for girls' rights as I do.



Kate McCollum

[Photo courtesy TulsaKids/Rachel Coward]

I have the chance to be an advocate for girls' rights, to speak on behalf of an incredible organization, and help to represent the cause of Girl Up.

This extraordinary opportunity has allowed me to expand my capacity to be a leader, to raise awareness, and bring about change.

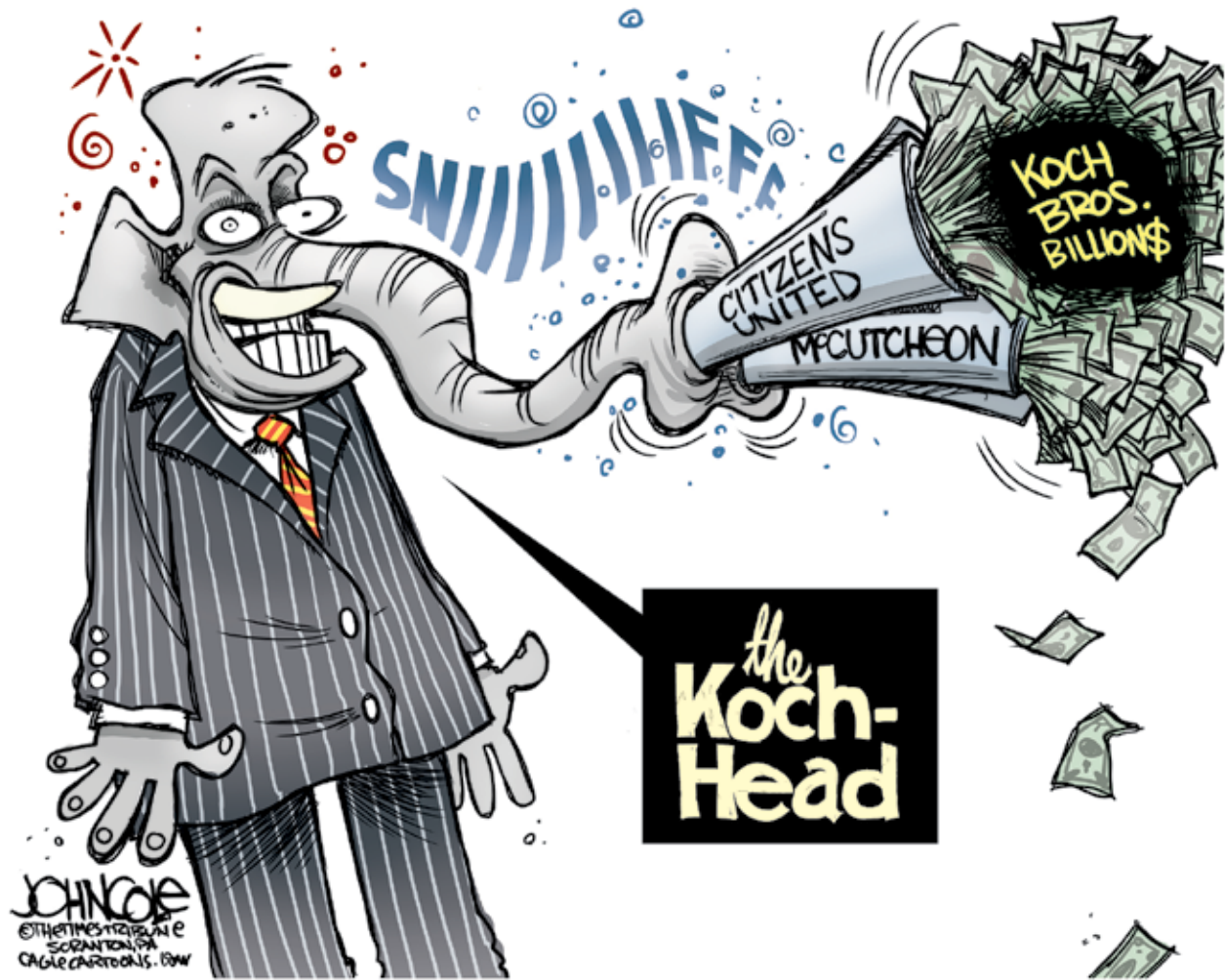
This organization has not only done amazing work for adolescent girls in the developing world, but I've witnessed the way it can also empower girls locally and help them realize that they can make a difference.

I am amazed at the campaign's ability to make a difference for adolescent girls across the world, as well as its ability to help girls to discover their potential to be change makers.

I gained invaluable experiences from Girl Up that have shaped my perspective and my capacity to be a leader. From the beginning of my experience, I have been astounded by the ability of girls to make a difference, and by how my own actions can bring about change.

I did not realize I could make a difference, until I did. ■

Kate McCollum, 18, is a 2014 graduate of Tulsa's Booker T. Washington High School. She plans to attend St. Louis University this fall, focusing on women's and gender studies and sociology.



Nickles Teams Up With Koch Brothers To Attack Wind Power

BY JOSEPH H. CARTER SR.

After 24 years representing Oklahoma in the U.S. Senate, Republican Don Nickles' fame and fortune have flared internationally and financially. Dubiously, Oklahoma's choice now has been dubbed a "big name" lobbyist by The New York Times under a headline that reads: *The Koch Cycle of Endless Cash*.

The Nickles Group LLC was founded in 2005 shortly after the Ponca City native left Congress with full retirement benefits. Nine years later The Times writes: "he takes in up to \$8 million a year from big firms like Exxon Mobil, General Motors and Walmart."

What triggered the Times June 14 editorial was the addition of a Koch group, sponsored by two of the four billionaire Wichita, KS brothers whose political donations "have inflated with cash" many extreme right wing candidates and causes.

Nickles' political career certainly was far right and his lobbying business is slanted toward big business and international cartels. He is a perfect fit for the Koch's pocket. After all, Ponca City is only minutes away from Wichita.

Exactly what the Nickles Group will do for Koch money was not stated "in a registration form," but The Times editorial claims that the Kansas brothers "are using their fortunes to lobby Congress against any limits in their ability to buy elections."

But, then, Don Nickles' political victories, work, philosophy and sources of income always have been puzzles.

According to the nation's largest newspaper, Nickles as a lobbyist is credited with stopping the "Close Big Oil Tax Loopholes Act," a Democratic bill designed to plug a \$21 billion loophole "in order to re-

duce the deficit.”

On the other side of the puzzle, the editorial says Nickles lobbied for Koch interests on “issues related to the wind energy production tax credit.” Earlier this year Nickles even sent a letter to the Times attacking renewal of the wind power tax exemption on grounds it would “cost American taxpayers \$13 billion.” In the letter, Nickles neglected to mention the \$21 billion oil loophole.

The new Koch retainer isn’t a \$13 billion vs. \$21 billion kind of issue.

Rather, The Times editorial says: “This is a perfect illustration of the cumulative power of cash in today’s Washington. Members of Congress get elected with substantial help from check writers like the Kochs and others. Once there, they do the bidding of former members paid by the Kochs to preserve their business interests and fight off campaign-finance reforms.”

So Don Nickles, who easily knocked off opponents to win both a state Senate and a U.S. Senate seat, has an uncanny history.

The late Jack Zink of Tulsa, who lost the Republican primary runoff election in 1980 to Nickles, said he and Nickles both attended a GOP candidate training school where instructors urged candidates to hitch their campaigns to the rising Christian right political movement led by Protestants.

A mainstream Christian [Episcopalian], Zink related to this writer that “I told Don that I couldn’t do that.” Zink said Nickles, a cradle Roman Catholic, said, “Well I can.”

As history shows, the ploy worked just like the GOP strategist predicted. Nickles beat Zink then rode the Ronald Reagan shirtdtail into office as the youngest ever U.S. Senator.

Content as a radical right wing social and fiscal conservative, the affable Nickles rose within the Republican leadership and even was on the short-list to be Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole’s vice presidential choice.

In contrast with former House Speaker Carl Albert – who told this writer that he refused big dollar corporate directorships and lobbying offers because “they only wanted to buy my title” – Nickles moved happily and rapidly from the role of senator to lobbyist.

High dollar directorships quickly abounded for Nickles who had used wooden nickles as campaign gimmicks and whose private sector roles previously were operating a husband-wife Stillwater janitorial service and as the titular head of a machine shop his grandfather founded in Ponca City.

Nickles has served as a director of both Chesapeake Energy of Oklahoma City and Valero Energy Corp. of France. Clients listed include Intellectual Venture, Walmart, COMPETE, AT&T, Comcast, Eli Lilly and Co., Exxon Mobil, Monsanto and Orbitz.

“Nickles created a front group, the Copyright Alliance in 2007,” reports Source Watch, “staffed by Nickles personnel, and follows an advocacy agenda

Editor’s Note

Nickles’ ties to the Koch Brothers is personal, as well. His former longtime state director, Mark Nichols, is now vice-president for government and public affairs for Koch Industries. Nichols, also raised in Ponca City, previously headed the Koch-backed OKC-based think-tank [?] known as the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs.

similar to that of Nickles’ telecom clients.” A registration form shows Nickles’ “management consulting services” firm with 10 to 19 employees.

A \$5,000 donor document lists Stacey Hughes, Arlington, VA; W. Douglas Badger, Columbia, MD; Hazen C. Marshall, Alexandria, VA, and Cynthia C. Merifield, Arlington, VA, all showing occupation as “The Nickles Group LLC.” Don Nickles of McLean, VA is twice listed as giving \$5,000.

Source Watch describes Nickles as “a conservative Republican from Oklahoma and alumni of ALEC ... responsible for deregulation of natural gas, repealing the 1980s windfall profits tax, repealing ergonomics regulation and sponsoring the Defense of Marriage Act. Sen. Nickles was a member of ‘The Family,’ an association of conservative Christian lawmakers ... and received campaign contributions from the Koch Brothers in the 1990s, through Triad Management Services.”

Joseph H. Carter Sr. was reared in west Tulsa in the 1930-50s era. He is author of Never Met A Man I Didn’t Like: The Life and Writings of Will Rogers [HarperCollins] and The Quotable Will Rogers [Gibbs Smith Publishers].

Cell Etiquette

After a tiring day, a commuter settled down in his seat and closed his eyes. As the train rolled out of the station, the woman sitting next to him pulled out her mobile phone and began talking in a loud voice:

“Hi sweetheart, it’s Erica, I’m on the train. Yes, I know it’s the 6:30 and not the 4:30, but I had a long meeting.

“No, honey, not with that guy from the accounts office, it was with the boss.

“No sweetheart, you’re the only one in my life.

“Yes, I’m sure, cross my heart.”

Fifteen minutes later, she was still talking loudly.

When the young man sitting next to her had enough, he leaned over and said into the phone, “Erica, hang up the phone and come back to bed.”

Erica doesn’t use her mobile phone in public any longer.

– Thanks to Larry and Judy Maupin for this gem

Lapdog Legislature Clouds Environmental Future



Dust storm in Oklahoma's Panhandle in January 2014. Photo courtesy Cimarron County Conservation District.

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

Last January, in Cimarron County, billowing dust darkened the daytime skies like the Dirty '30s.

In the first six months of the year, Oklahoma suffered more 3.0 and larger earthquakes than California.

April was catastrophically dry, June far wetter than normal.

High mercury levels in waterways near – or in the wind-blown path of – coal-fired power plants yield warnings not to eat lake fish.

Signs are everywhere that things are amiss environmentally in Oklahoma, yet the state's elected policymakers march blissfully in lockstep with climate deniers, apocalyptic dreamers, and well-heeled carbon barons.

Rather than regulate to ensure a healthy balance between, say, clean air and corporate profits, Oklahoma lawmakers this year made things worse – imposing a utility-protecting surcharge on renewable, environmentally-friendly solar energy.

Senior U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe remains the nation's foremost climate change denier, for which he has been handsomely rewarded over the years with hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from oil and gas interests.

And the two Republican candidates for Corporation Commission this year even warred over which would be the bigger champion of an oil and gas industry

they would be charged with regulating.

As former Gov. David Walters recently put it, Oklahoma is an “anti-renewable oasis.”

It's easy to see why the Republican-dominated Capitol snaps to attention every time an energy baron or utility titan blows the dog whistle: One in six Oklahoma jobs – nearly 350,000 – are linked directly or indirectly to oil and gas.

The addition of nearly 12,000 new jobs in oil and gas since 2009 enables Gov. Mary Fallin and other GOP standard-bearers to depict Oklahoma's economy as far stronger than it actually is.

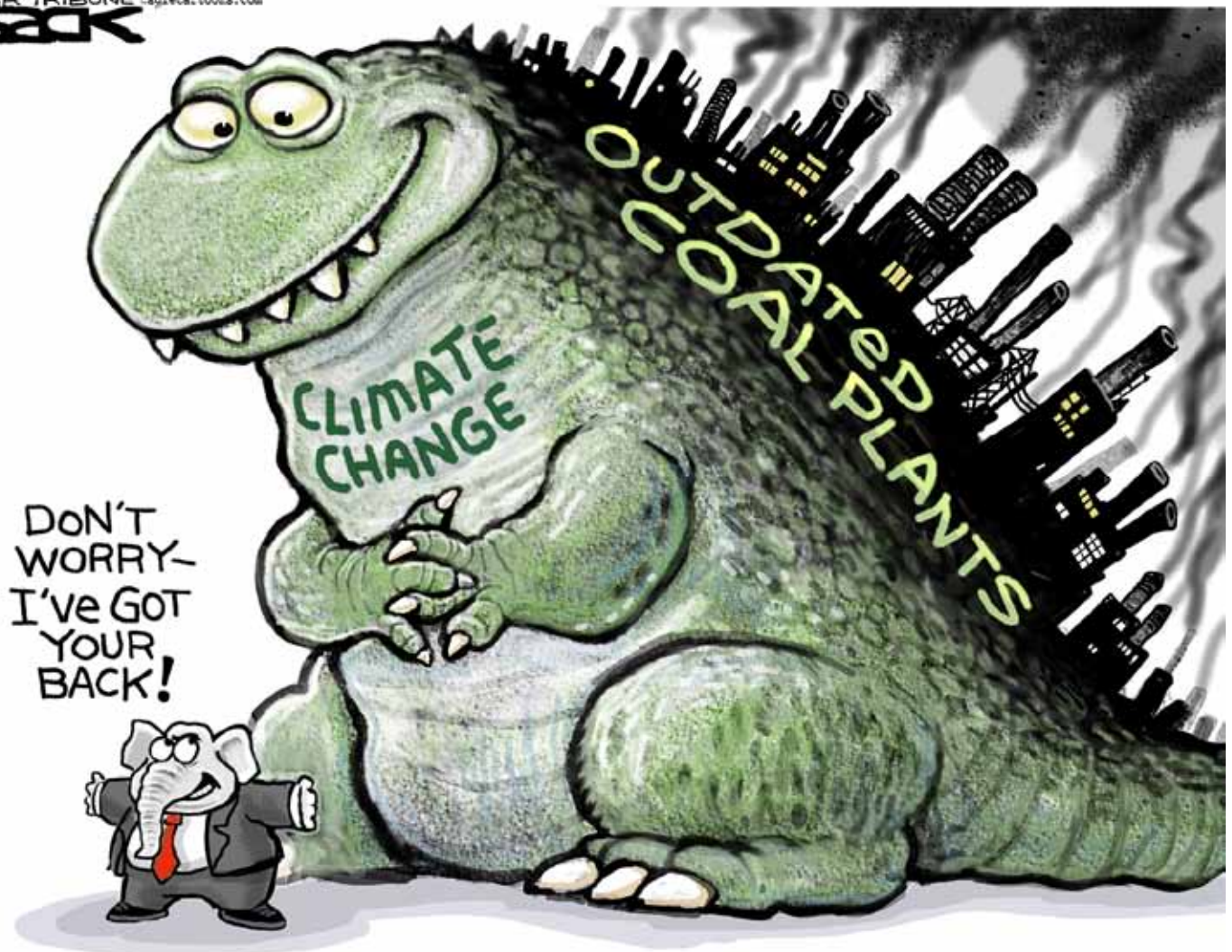
As former Gov. George Nigh and lawmakers that endured the 1980s energy bust know well, what goes up in the oil and gas patch eventually comes down – way down – often with cataclysmic consequences to the state's economy and vital public services.

Today's Republicans are behaving similarly to late '70s and early '80s Democrats – ignoring energy's history of boom-bust, cutting taxes, giving oil and gas operators huge incentives and dismissing environmental concerns.

The general public, though, is taking notice.

In late June, Republican state Reps. Jason Murphey of Guthrie and Lewis Moore of Arcadia hosted a Town Hall meeting in Edmond for residents concerned about the spike in earthquakes.

Most such community events are lightly attended. Not this one. The parking lot at Waterloo Road Baptist



Church was packed. Cars and trucks parked on every nearby green patch. Inside it was standing room only.

If bumper stickers were any indication, it was a political melting pot – Tea Party-types seated alongside Obama supporters – all waiting to hear from the Oklahoma Geological Survey and Oklahoma Corporation Commission whether fracking or other enhanced drilling was to blame for causing their homes to shake, rattle and crack at a rate that outpaces California.

After nearly an hour of facts, figures and slide-shows, the audience grew increasingly restless. They

weren't dazzled by the presentation. They wanted answers. And they weren't getting them from officials whose agencies have financial ties to the oil and gas industry – either through taxes or research grants or both.

“When it starts affecting wealthy areas filled with

CONTINUED ON PAGE 47



Elect

DR. DONALD SMITH

HOUSE DISTRICT 100

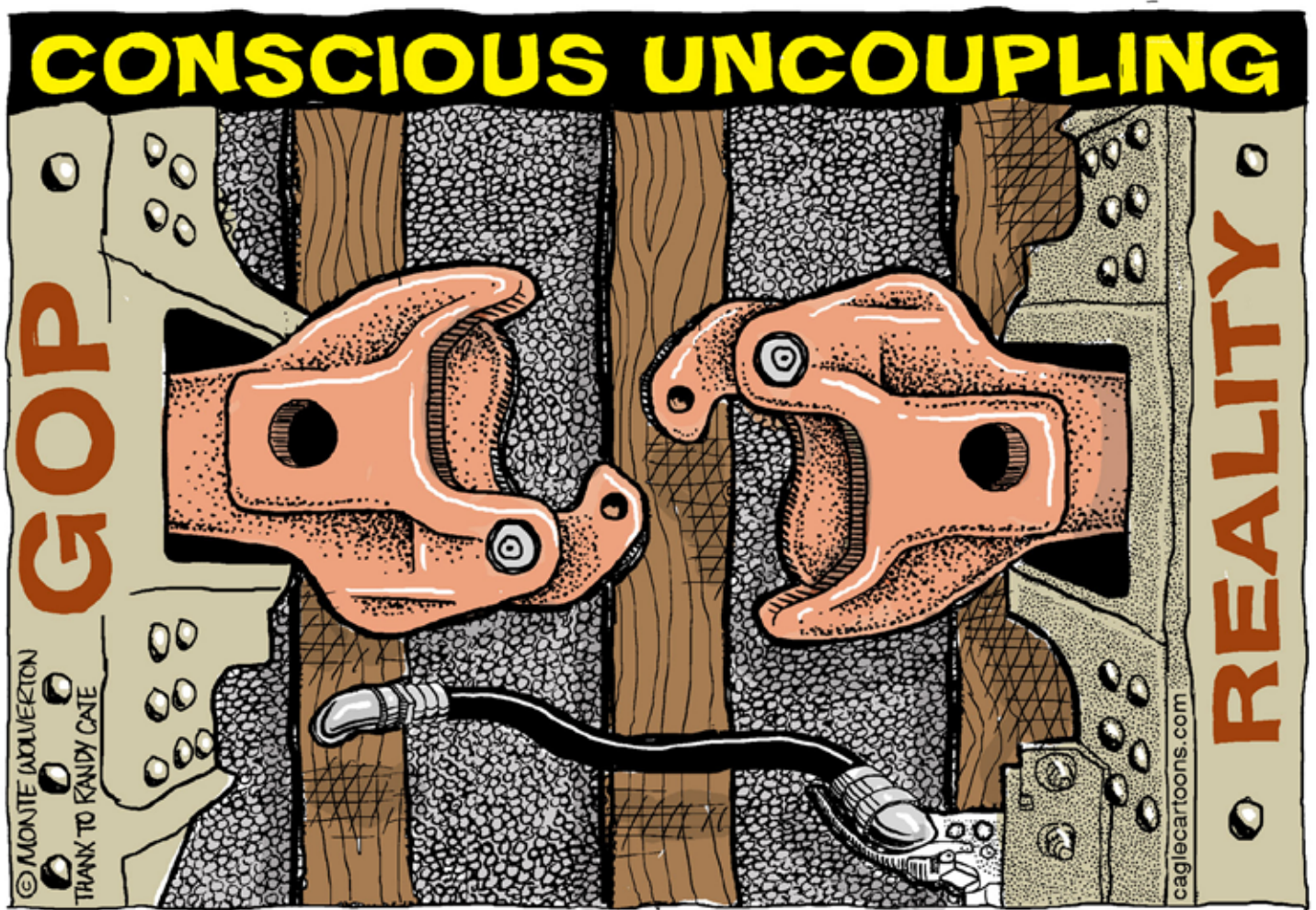
DEMOCRAT

VETERAN

U.S. AIR FORCE

okroadrunner@cox.net

- PAID FOR BY DON SMITH FOR HOUSE -



Why Does The Right Embrace Ignorance As A Virtue?

BY AMANDA MARCOTTE

Spouting off about stuff you know nothing about is traditionally considered unwise. But as the Republican war on science intensifies, ignorance has started to become not only less of a handicap, but a point of pride.

In the face of expertise and facts, being belligerently ignorant – and offended that anyone dare suggest ignorance is less desirable than knowledge – has become the go-to position for many conservative politicians and pundits.

Sadly, it's a strategy that's working, making it harder every day for liberals to argue the value of evidence and reason over wishful thinking and unblinking prejudice.

The strategy of holding out ignorance to be the equivalent of expertise and simply daring your opponents to try to do anything about it was epitomized recently in the Ohio Legislature.

Republican state legislator John Becker introduced a bill that would ban all insurance plans in the state from covering abortion. It was a horribly misogynist and intrusive bill, but Becker didn't stop at just trying to outlaw abortion coverage. He also insisted that IUDs, the most effective contraception available, be outlawed from insurance coverage. His reasoning was that he believes IUDs cause abortion, because he believes they work by killing fertilized eggs.

He is, of course, factually wrong in multiple ways.

An "abortion" is a procedure that stops a pregnancy, and if a fertilized egg fails to implant – and about half fail to implant, regardless of a woman's choices – then you were never pregnant in the first place and therefore cannot get an abortion. But it's also factually wrong that IUDs work by killing fertilized eggs. Like nearly all other forms of contraception, IUDs work by preventing sperm from meeting egg.

When confronted with the facts, Rep. Becker just blew them off. "This is just a personal view," he said. "I'm not a medical doctor."

Well then, sir, by all means. Let your random "view" pulled directly out of your hiney supersede the actual opinions of people who are considering the evidence before drawing conclusions.

But for modern Republicans, being downright proud of their ignorance has become a badge of honor, a way to demonstrate loyalty to the right-wing cause while also sticking it to those liberal pinheads who think there's some kind of value in knowing what they're talking about before offering an opinion.

This mentality, in its modern form, can be traced back to the Bush White House. In 2004, Ron Suskind of the New York Times interviewed an unnamed Bush official who famously pooh-poohed what he believed

on the right when talking about climate change: Dismissively wave away the scientific consensus and spout ignorance in the most condescending tone possible, as if nothing could be sillier than those scientists with their interests in facts and research. Miller repeatedly dismissed decades of scientific research showing the reality of global warming as "foolish."

Then he went above and beyond the call of duty, really showing off how proud he was to know so very little.

"Then why did the dinosaurs go extinct? Were there men that were causing – were there cars running around at that point, that were causing global warming? No," he said, full of contempt for people who aren't nearly as stupid as he is.

If Miller wasn't such a major idiot, he would know that, in fact, the death of the dinosaurs was caused

[F]or modern Republicans, being downright proud of their ignorance has become a badge of honor, a way to demonstrate loyalty to the right-wing cause while also sticking it to those liberal pinheads who think there's some kind of value in knowing what they're talking about before offering an opinion.

to be the shortcomings of journalists who insist that the truth matters more than fantasy:

The aide said that guys like me were 'in what we call the reality-based community,' which he defined as people who "believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality." I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. "That's not the way the world really works anymore," he continued. "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality."

The sense that you could stick it to the liberals by being utterly indifferent to reality actually grew worse on the right after Bush left office, starting with the adoption of Sarah Palin as a right-wing hero. Palin represents this new era of treating the truth like it's a horrible force of oppression trying to squelch conservative America. Subsequently, any utterance from her mouth is far more likely to be a blatant and aggressive falsehood than anything resembling fact.

The thing is, shameless lying and ignorance work surprisingly well as debate tactics. It's hard to argue with someone who not only has signaled that he doesn't care what the truth is but is downright proud of how little he actually knows. Such a person is not amenable to being educated. Once the pretense of really caring one way or another about what is right and what is wrong has been abandoned, all avenue of discourse is shut down.

Take Rep. Jeff Miller's recent appearance on MSNBC. It was a performance that has become standard

by an outside force that disrupted the Earth's atmosphere; not cars, but a meteor that hit the planet with such impact it caused a massive cooling and then – wait for it – major global warming effect that wiped out 70% of the species on the planet.

It's one of the major reasons we know that outside forces, whether meteors or cars, that have major impact on the planet's atmosphere can create temperature changes that permanently affect life on this planet.

The problem here is that someone who is not only so catastrophically wrong but downright proud of being an ignoramus is not going to actually bother to listen to an explanation like that. That's why the wall of ignorance is such a powerful rhetorical tool.

When you have nothing but contempt for the facts, attempts to educate you will only make your pride in your own ignorance grow stronger. The more you try to educate the proudly ignorant, the dumber they get.

At the end of the day, the problem is one of identity. The conservative identity is one of being opposed to everything liberal, to the point of despising anything even associated with liberalism.

As liberalism has increasingly been aligned with the values of empiricism and reason, the incentives for conservatives to reject empiricism and reason multiply.

To be a "conservative" increasingly means taking a contemptuous view of reality. And so the proudly ignorant grow more belligerent, day after day. 🍷

© Alternet

Efforts To Disprove Science Comical

BY EVAN McMURRY

What happens when you're part of a religious and political movement whose ideology is contradicted by well-established science? You've gotta get creative. Here are the five most ridiculous explanations religious conservatives have conjured up to outflank science, from gay armies to magic birds to the existence of the Loch Ness Monster.

1. Climate Change isn't happening, but if it is that's fine because it means Jesus is coming.

Who's not worried about climate change? Pastor and conservative radio host Matthew Hagee, who thinks the extreme weather and melting polar caps are not signs of man's deleterious effect on the environment but rather augurs of Jesus' impending return.

"The Bible says that whenever we approach the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, that there would be strange weather patterns," Hagee said. "Do we believe what an environmentalist group says and choose to live in a world where we're attempting to make everything as clean in the air as possible, or do we believe what the Bible says, that these things were going to happen and that rather than try to clean up all of the air and solve all of the problems of the world by eliminating factories, we should start to tell people about Jesus Christ who is to return?"

Hagee isn't the only one who turns to the Bible when the sea levels rise. At a hearing in 2009, Illinois Rep. John Shimkus quoted passages from Genesis promising God would "never again" flood the earth following that whole Noah misadventure [the flood, not the movie]. "Man will not destroy this earth, this earth will not be destroyed by a flood," Shimkus said. "I believe the word of god to be infallible." That solves that.

Of course, these guys are just a congressman and a radio host. But to see how high up the GOP their beliefs have climbed, look no further than 2016 contender Marco Rubio. Every time Rubio feels the need to shore up his base, he hits the climate change button: Recently he told ABC News' Jon Karl that he didn't believe climate change was manmade, dismissing the "notions" of scientists who had proven otherwise.

2. Creationism, dinosaurs, and the Loch Ness Monster.

Rubio had previously disputed to GQ the age of the earth [he quickly backtracked and admitted the earth's age had been established at 4.5 billion], a necessary two-step given his creationist base. But creationism runs into a problem, most succinctly voiced by Bill Hicks' one word rebuttal: dinosaurs.

Kentucky's Creationist Museum presents the tab-

leau of human-dinosaur simultaneity thusly: "Adam and Eve live in the Garden of Eden. Children play and dinosaurs roam near Eden's Rivers." Quite the interspecies paleo-harmony!

[That's hardly where the Creationist Museum ends with the creative science, which ranges from how God de-poisons frogs once in the museum to how Adam and Eve's children could procreate without incestuous consequences to their DNA.]

But that's not the oddest dinosaur dodge. For that, you'll have to go to Louisiana, where privately-run Christian schools were so eager to disprove evolution and indoctrinate schoolchildren to the idea that humans and dinosaurs shared the earth that they tried to teach the Loch Ness Monster as a real, extant dinosaur.

"Are dinosaurs alive today?" the proposed textbooks asked. "Scientists are becoming more convinced of their existence ... Have you heard of the Loch Ness Monster in Scotland? 'Nessie' for short has been recorded on sonar from a small submarine, described by eyewitnesses, and photographed by others. Nessie appears to be a plesiosaur."

The textbooks were struck down by the courts as unconstitutional. In this case, that may have just been the polite way of saying "you're out of your mind."

3. Neil deGrasse Tyson.

Neil deGrasse Tyson's show *Cosmos* has driven the right bonkers. Episodes ranging from evolution to the Big Bang to climate change to birds raised hackles on the right, as he weekly dropped time-tested scientific theories like anvils on creationist fables.

What did they do about it? Every week creationists attempted to counter Tyson's science only to wind up showcasing the weakness of their own theories. Take *Answers in Genesis*' Ken Ham's attempt to rebut the episode about life beginning without God, a response that took a whole month to formulate: "Abiogenesis has never been observed in experimental biology and violates the most fundamental law in biology, the law of biogenesis," he said with his own emphasis. "Nevertheless, the authors of the review are confident there was a naturalistic chemical origin for life."

As AlterNet's Dan Arel points out, Ham couldn't have picked a more self-refuting argument if he'd tried, which he probably did. "To claim abiogenesis has not been observed [an honest statement], and then to say this proves their creation story is something that would raise the eyebrows of a first-grader," he wrote.

That's only the start. Just a few weeks later, creationists were outraged over Tyson's episode on elec-

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Is U.S.-Iranian Alliance Possible?

BY NATHANIEL BATCHELDER

Congress and the American people have many reasons to cheer the progress of U.S. negotiations with Iran. Both nations have much to gain from a successful outcome and improved relations.

The conflicts threatening Iraq and tensions with Russia underscore the value of pursuing positive relations with Iran. The possibility of a U.S.-Iranian alliance would benefit the whole Middle East. Is this possible?

Since the inauguration last summer of new Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, Iran has displayed a totally new openness to improved relations with the U.S. Iranians elected Rouhani because they were frustrated by the confrontational strutting of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, whose belligerent rhetoric undermined Iranian credibility, emboldened U.S. hawks, and made Israel nervous.

President Rouhani and his Foreign Minister Javad Zarif strongly desire increased trade and tourism based on respect and mutual benefit. They have both

staked their future on improved relations with western nations.

In January, the U.S. and Iran agreed to a six-month period of negotiations on Iran's nuclear program. A prerequisite was Iranian compliance with several preconditions, which Iran is meeting. Iran agreed to increased access for inspectors with the International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA] to sensitive sites, and this was done.

The IAEA has increased the numbers of inspection teams in Iran and numbers of inspectors on each team. Iran is providing information about its uranium enrichment program, which it has always avowed is purely for energy and medical purposes. Iran has also reduced its uranium enrichment capabilities, confirmed by the IAEA.

The six-month period of negotiations will conclude in mid-July, at which time an agreement or treaty may be announced, or the negotiations period may be extended. Either way, it is good news for all sides that Iran and the U.S. are on the road to better relations.

Amid the attacks of the ISIS group in Iraq, and increased tensions with Russia over the Ukraine, an emerging harmony between the U.S. and Iran could change the political equation.

As a neighbor to Iraq, Iran could potentially get involved opposing ISIS to stabilize Iraq. And, should tensions with Russia worsen, Iran's oil and natural gas reserves could replace Russia's exports to Europe. Iran also wants to import beef and wheat from the U.S., a benefit to ranchers and farmers in states like Oklahoma.

There are skeptical factions in the U.S. and Iran concerning the negotiations who are suspicious of "the other side." Israel has historically believed that Iran was secretly preparing to build an atomic weapon, and takes the position that Iran must abandon all uranium enrichment, even that permitted by international treaties for their nuclear power plants. At various times the Israeli government and its supporters

have advocated military strikes on Iran's enrichment facilities. They should all be satisfied by reports from the IAEA inspectors that there is no evidence of Iran wanting an atomic weapon.

Iran is a cultured nation, three times the area of Iraq, with a population of 80 million people – almost three times the population of Iraq or Saudi Arabia. Iran is home to one of the world's oldest continuous civilizations, with urban settlements dating back to 4,000 B.C. Iran also has a formidable modern military, which could serve the interests for Middle East stability, if our nations worked together.

The compelling benefits to the U.S., Iran, and the Middle East, of a positive outcome to the negotiations are clear. Let all sides encourage and celebrate this progress. ■

Nathaniel Batchelder is director of the Peace House in Oklahoma City and a member of Americans Against The Next War.

Chelsea Manning Speaks – But Who Listened?

BY PETER HART

U.S. Army whistleblower Chelsea Manning wrote a remarkable piece for the Sunday New York Times [6.15.14], one of the most prestigious venues in the corporate media. It represents an extraordinarily clear statement from someone who is certainly one of the country's most important political prisoners.

But was anyone else in the media listening?

Manning is serving a 35-year prison sentence for sharing intelligence documents with the website WikiLeaks. The revelations have made news around the world, providing a glimpse into the U.S. military's own assessments of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and a glimpse at various U.S. diplomatic efforts.

Manning's Times op-ed makes three important claims.

First, she explains that the U.S. military intelligence aided Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki's repression of political dissent:

I received orders to investigate 15 individuals whom the federal police had arrested on suspicion of printing "anti-Iraqi literature." I learned that these individuals had absolutely no ties to terrorism; they were publishing a scholarly critique of Mr. Maliki's administration. I forwarded this finding to the officer in command in eastern Baghdad. He responded that he didn't need this information; instead, I should assist the federal police in locating more "anti-Iraqi" print shops.

Given that Maliki's misrule is very much a part of current commentary about the state of that country,

it is important and newsworthy that Manning is saying the U.S. military aided those efforts.

She also explained that U.S. news reports about Iraq were very different from internal assessments:

Among the many daily reports I received via e-mail while working in Iraq in 2009 and 2010 was an internal public affairs briefing that listed recently published news articles about the American mission in Iraq. One of my regular tasks was to provide, for the public affairs summary read by the command in eastern Baghdad, a single-sentence description of each issue covered, complementing our analysis with local intelligence.

The more I made these daily comparisons between the news back in the States and the military and diplomatic reports available to me as an analyst, the more aware I became of the disparity. In contrast to the solid, nuanced briefings we created on the ground, the news available to the public was flooded with foggy speculation and simplifications.

She also shed light on the embedding process in Iraq:

Unsurprisingly, reporters who have established relationships with the military are more likely to be granted access.

Less well known is that journalists whom military contractors rate as likely to produce "favorable" coverage, based on their past reporting, also get preference. This outsourced "favorability" rating assigned to each applicant is used to screen out those judged likely to produce critical coverage.

As a whole, this represents one of the most noteworthy and comprehensive explanations of Manning's actions.

But the U.S. media didn't seem to think so. According to a search of the Nexis news database, Manning's op-ed received scant coverage. There were three mentions on CNN on June 15, one of which was a discussion with Pentagon correspondent Barbara Starr on the show *New Day Sunday*.

Starr said there was "a lot of validity" to Manning's argument about how coverage of the war did not always present the "full picture" – but that this was only in the early part of the war: "I think there's a

good case to be made that journalistic life moved on very rapidly from that potential assertion." Manning was, for the record, writing about events in 2010.

Beyond that, Manning's news just wasn't treated as news. In the abstract, journalists often profess a great deal of admiration for whistleblowers, and value the service such individuals provide to the news media. Indeed, Manning's disclosures are still referenced regularly by journalists, clear evidence that the information she shared with WikiLeaks was vital.

But, as with the scant coverage of her trial, big media don't seem to have a use for telling her story. ■

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Science

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 28

tricity. How could electricity be so objectionable? Tyson explained how birds navigate the globe by using electromagnetic waves, which their brains were evolutionarily developed to sense. Creationists caviled that Tyson had "assumed" the evolutionary developments, then offered their own pseudo-explanation: "God did indeed equip birds and many other animals with a seemingly uncanny ability to navigate." No assumptions there.

Of course, this is all a mask for the creationists' real goal for Tyson's *Cosmos*: they want in. Tyson's show is popular, acclaimed, and beloved; creationists know what they're missing when their nonsense theories aren't included, and carping from the sidelines is their way of skimming a bit of Tyson's glow.

4. AIDS has been weaponized to doom heterosexual culture.

HIV/AIDS seems particularly lodged in the darker regions of the conservative movement. But modern conservatives have had trouble maintaining the idea that the disease was a moral verdict upon homosexual decadence after the eradication in the public's mind of the myth of AIDS as "the gay disease."

Thus a theory gradually mutated among fringe conservatives that AIDS had become "weaponized" as a way for gays to infect and dominate heterosexual culture.

The idea has been bandied about since the early '80s, but refuses to go entirely away. Its staying power is best evidenced by new Wyoming lawmaker Troy Mader, who recently stood by a book he published at the advent of the AIDS epidemic in which he claimed that gays were intentionally infecting straight people with the HIV virus, while secretly-gay members of Congress worked in the dead of night to pass pro-gay legislation. Mader quoted from an even more radical text that called the alleged gay efforts a mass "national suicide" deliberately perpetrated upon the United States.

Pat Robertson saw proof of this cabal scurrying about the Bay Area. "You know what they do in San Francisco, some in the gay community there they

want to get people so if they got [AIDS] they'll have a ring, you shake hands, and the ring's got a little thing where you cut your finger," he said on his television show, not in the mid-'80s, but last summer. "Really. It's that kind of vicious stuff, which would be the equivalent of murder."

5. Gay parents are worse than straight parents [if you lie].

Every once in a while conservatives get tired of coming off as wacky or bizarre in their responses to science, and try to affect serious scientific findings. How do they do it? Largely by making them up.

Such was the case with a study supposedly concluding that same-sex parents were worse for children than straight parents. Previous scholarship had found little difference between the two households, especially when controlling for factors like socioeconomic status. That was no good to the conservative think tank the Heritage Foundation, which gave a University of Texas-Austin professor over \$750,000 to conduct further research on the subject.

Lo and behold, Professor Mark Regnerus found the evidence Heritage was looking for. In fact, he did such a good job that the study was submitted for publication, and accepted a few weeks later, before researchers had even finished collecting the data, thanks to one of the study's leaders sitting on the board of the journal.

Why the hurry? They wanted it done in time to be submitted before the Supreme Court heard cases regarding the constitutionality of same-sex marriage prohibitions.

Needless to say, the peer review was rushed, and an internal audit of the process has dismissed the results. Even Regnerus himself has admitted that the study was far from a collection of data and analysis of same-sex couples versus heterosexual couples, as he failed to control for the stability of the couples, thus giving him the results he'd sought. Of course, this study has been cited time and again by conservative groups. That is, after all, why they paid for it. ■

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The Militarization Of 'Officer Friendly'



Let's check our weaponry: 93,000 machine guns – check! – 533 planes and helicopters – check! 180,000 magazine cartridges – check! 44,000 night-vision goggles – check! 432 mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles – check! OK, let's roll!

Only, this is not the U.S. military getting ready to head into battle in a foreign land. It's our local police departments patrolling our cities, towns and college campuses.

Remember "Officer Friendly," the beat cops who were known as "peace officers" and were counted on to uphold our domestic laws, detect and investigate crimes, and be a helpful, non-threatening presence in our communities? The friendlies have largely been transformed into militarized forces, literally armed with and garbed in war gear and indoctrinated in military psychology, rather than the ethic of community policing.

From 1776 forward, Americans have wisely opposed having soldiers do police work on our soil, but in recent years, Pentagon chiefs have teamed up with police chiefs to circumvent that prohibition. How? Simply by militarizing police departments.

Twenty years ago, Congress created the military transfer program, providing federal grants so chiefs of police and sheriffs could buy surplus firepower from the Pentagon. Through those grants, in a stunningly short time, our local police forces have become high-octane, macho-military units, possessing a large armory of Pentagon freebies ranging from 30-ton tanks to rifle silencers.

For ordinary police work, they've gone from peace-keeping beats to way over-the-top SWAT team aggression that's unleashed on the citizenry tens of thousands of times a year.

For example, a gung-ho Florida SWAT team raided area barbershops in 2010 to stop the horror of "barbering without a license." And masked police in Louisiana launched a military raid on a nightclub in order to perform a liquor-law inspection.

These were barbers and bartenders, not al-Qaeda or the Taliban.

Militarization is a dangerous and ultimately deadly perversion of the honorable purpose of policing – and

it is out of control. The New York Times notes that 38 states have received silencers to use in surreptitious raids.

A sheriff in a North Dakota rural county with only 11,000 people told a Times reporter that he saw no need for silencers. When it was pointed out that his department had received 40 of them from the Pentagon, he was clearly baffled, saying: "I don't recall approving them."

From Salinas, CA, to Ohio State University, the Pentagon has been shipping massive amounts of surplus war equipment to our local gendarmes. This reflects a fundamental rewiring of the mindset now guiding neighborhood policing.

Police chiefs today commonly send out squads brandishing heavy arms and garbed in riot gear for peaceful situations. Recruiting videos now feature high-adrenaline clips of SWAT-team officers dressed in black, hurling flash grenades into a home, and then storming the house, firing automatic weapons.

Who wants anyone recruited by that video working their neighborhood?

As a city councilman in rural Wisconsin commented when told his police were getting a 9-foot-tall armored vehicle: "Somebody has to be the first to say, 'Why are we doing this?'" The New York Times reports that the town's police chief responded that, "There's always a possibility of violence." Really? Who threatens us with such mayhem that every burg needs a war-zone armory and a commando mentality?

Astonishingly, a sheriff's spokesman in suburban Indianapolis offered this answer: Veterans. The sheriff's department needed a mine-resistant armored vehicle, he explained, to defend itself against U.S. veterans returning from the Afghanistan war. War veterans, he said, "have the ability and knowledge to build [homemade bombs] and to defeat law enforcement techniques."

That way of thinking is lame, loopy, insulting, shameful and just plain stupid. Maybe he just forgot to pack his brain when he left for work that day. But I'm afraid it's a window into the altered mindset of police chiefs and trainers. ■

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What Job Creation Numbers Don't Tell Us

Have you noticed “the powers that be” employ an entirely different standard for measuring the health of America’s job market than they use for the stock market?

They’re currently telling us that, “The job market is improving.” What do they mean? Simply that the economy is generating an increase in the number of jobs available for workers. But when they say, “The stock market is improving,” they don’t mean that the number of stocks available to investors is on the rise. Instead, they’re measuring the price, the value of the stocks. And isn’t value what really counts in both cases? Quality over quantity.

Employment rose by 217,000 jobs in the month of May, according to the latest jobs report – and that brought us up to 8.7 million. That is how many new jobs the American economy has generated since the “Great Recession” officially ended in 2009 – and it also happens to be the number of jobs that were lost because of that recession. You can break out the champagne, for the American economy is back, baby – all of the lost jobs have been recovered!

You say you don’t feel “recovered”? Well, it’s true that the U.S. population has kept growing since the crash, so about 15 million more working-age people have entered the job market, meaning America still has millions more people looking for work than it has jobs. And it’s true that long-term unemployment is a growing crisis, especially for middle-aged job seekers who’ve gone one, two or more years without even getting an interview, much less an offer – so they’ve dropped out of the market and are not counted as unemployed. Also, there are millions of young people who are squeezed out of this so-called recovery – the effective unemployment rate for 18- to 29-year-olds is above 15%, more than double the national rate of 6.3%.

But take heart, people, for economists are telling us that full employment may be right around the corner. Is that because Congress is finally going to pass a national jobs program to get America working again? Or could it be that corporate chieftains are going to bring home some of the trillions of dollars they’ve stashed in offshore tax havens to invest in new products and other job-creating initiatives here in the USA?

No, no – don’t be silly. Economists are upbeat because they’ve decided to redefine “full” employment by – *hocus pocus!* – simply declaring that having 6% of our people out of work is acceptable as the new

normal. And you thought American ingenuity was dead.

Now, let’s move on to the value of those jobs that have economists doing a happy dance. As a worker, you don’t merely want to know that 217,000 new jobs are on the market; you want to know what they’re worth – do they pay living wages, do they come with benefits, are they just part-time and temporary, do they include union rights, what are the working conditions, etc.? In other words, are these jobs ... or scams?

So, it’s interesting that the recent news of job market “improvement” doesn’t mention that of the 10 occupation categories projecting the greatest growth in the next eight years, only one pays a middle-class wage. Four pay barely above poverty level and five pay beneath it, including fast-food workers, retail sales staff, health aids and janitors. The job expected to have the highest number of openings is “personal care aide” – taking care of aging baby boomers in their houses or in nursing homes. The median salary of an aide is under \$20,000. They enjoy no benefits, and about 40% of them must rely on food stamps and Medicaid to make ends meet, plus many are in the “shadow economy,” vulnerable to being cheated on the already miserly wages.

To measure the job market by quantity – with no regard for quality – is to devalue workers themselves. Creating 217,000 new jobs is not a sign of economic health if each worker needs two or three of those jobs to patch together a barebones living – and millions more are left with no work at all. – *Jim Hightower* ■

Bold Shift In Minimum Wage Debate

At last, our political leaders in Washington are taking action for low-wage workers and the middle class, striking a bold blow for America’s historic values of economic fairness and common good.

Gosh, I hope you don’t think I meant Washington, DC! No, no – the same old corporate mentality of stiffing workers and stripping any semblance of ethics from the work ethic still rules in that plutocratic roost. Rather than Washington, DC, it’s Washington state I’m talking about, specifically the progressive forces of Seattle who’ve just produced a landmark \$15-an-hour minimum wage.

Instead of just talking about the widening gap of inequality and wishing our do-nothing Congress might give a damn about the millions of hard-working Americans being knocked down, the good people

of Seattle are providing some much-needed national leadership.

"We did it – workers did this," said Kshama Sawant. She has been a leader of Occupy Seattle, and then became the tenacious, articulate leader of a large grassroots coalition of low-wage workers called "15 Now." Last year, Sawant was elected to the City Council by putting the case for the \$15 wage floor directly to the voters.

In addition, Mayor Ed Murray campaigned last year for raising the minimum to \$15 – indexed to inflation. Having won, he pulled together a 24-member working group of both labor and business interests this year, and they spent the last four months working together to hammer out details of the local ordinance. On June 2, all nine city council members voted unanimously to adopt it.

Achieving this was not exactly a breeze, for the forces of corporate avarice always pull out all the stops to defeat any move to improve the lot of ordinary working families. When it comes to raising the minimum wage to at least a bare level of human decency, pulling out all the stops invariably includes corporate PR deceptions, such as pretending that helping workers would put an intolerable squeeze on little mom-and-pop stores.

But wait – who are those large guys looming in the shadows, back behind mom and pop, carefully guarding the cash register?

Why, they're multibillion-dollar, brand-name chains. These corporate behemoths – not mom and pop – are the chief exploiters of millions of low-wage American workers.

They're rank profiteers, constantly lobbying in Congress, states and cities to hold down wages, benefits and hope – even as they wallow in record profits and shell out exorbitant, multimillion-dollar paychecks

to their top executives.

Sure enough, when the people of Seattle agreed to raise the minimum pay in their fair city to \$15 an hour, an outfit called the International Franchise Association wept crocodile tears for local small business owners, pledging to unleash a pack of lawyers to sue the city, hoping a federal judge will nullify the will of local voters and overturn the "unfair" wage law.

Don't look now, but IAF is not local and does not represent mom and pop. It's a Washington, DC, lobbying consortium made up of franchised corporate chains intent on keeping America's wage floor beneath the poverty level.

The chairman of IAF's executive committee is a McDonald's executive. Its board of directors sparkles with a Who's Who of super-wealthy corporations, including Coca Cola, Marriott Hotels, Dunkin Donuts, Pepsi Food Services, Taco Bell and just about every other fast-food chain you can think of.

Excuse me if I don't weep over the "tragedy" of them finally being made to pay honest wages.

While our thoroughly corporatized Congress continues to side with such low-wage exploiters, cities and states across the country are standing up for America's workaday majority and the common good. Paying a fair wage is not a matter of corporate accounting, but a measure of our wealthy society's moral character.

The political fight is far from over, but the good people of Seattle have done all of us a big favor by moving the wage debate from the miserly, self-centered turf of the corporate bottom line to the moral high ground of social justice, where it really belongs.

Seattle is just the start of this movement, so let's keep it going. For more information on the spreading \$15-an-hour movement, visit www.15now.org. ■

– Jim Hightower

Can Progressives Learn From Eric Cantor's Defeat?

BY RALPH NADER

The stunning upset defeat of the House Majority Leader, Rep. Eric Cantor, R-VA, by Professor David Brat, an economist from Randolph-Macon College, in June's Republican Primary has several takeaways for progressives besides envy and shame over why they do not directly take on the corporate Democrats.

First, among all the reasons for Cantor's fall, there were the ones encapsulated in The Nation's John Nichols' description of Brat as an "anti-corporate conservative."

Repeatedly, Brat said he was for "free enterprise" but against "crony capitalist programs that benefit

the rich and powerful." David Brat pointed out that Cantor and the Republican establishment have "been paying way too much attention to Wall Street and not enough to Main Street."

Brat supported "the end of bulk phone and e-mail data collection by the NSA" and other government agencies on constitutional grounds.

Professor Brat attacked the Wall Street investment bankers who nearly "broke the financial system," adding the applause line: "these guys should have gone to jail. Instead of going to jail, where did they go? They went to Eric Cantor's Rolodex."

An advocate of ethical capitalism, with religious-

Christian overtones, Brat went after the deal-making in Washington, such as Cantor's close relationships with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Business Roundtable. He especially berated Cantor for weakening the proposed bill to ban insider trading by members of Congress by exempting their family members and spouses.

He chastised Cantor on immigration, taking advantage of the latter's wavering appeal to voters who believe that large corporations, represented by Cantor, want a never-ending supply of cheap foreign labor to hold wages down. On the other hand, Brat opposes a minimum wage on libertarian grounds.

In addition, Brat, described as a "commanding orator who mixes

fieri rhetoric with academic references and self-deprecating humor," wants a balanced-budget amendment, a "fair or flat tax," and is opposed to federal educational programs such as No Child Left Behind.

Brat is a mixed bag for progressives. But in that mix is a clear populist challenge by Main Street against Wall Street and by ordinary people against the corporate government with subsidies and bailouts that the Left calls corporate welfare and the Right calls crony capitalism.

Therein lies the potential for a winning majority alliance between Left and Right as my new book, *Unstoppable: The Emerging Left-Right Alliance to Dismantle the Corporate State*, relates in realistic detail.

Second, Brat spent about \$230,000 to Eric Cantor's \$5.7 million. However, Brat more than made up for the money deficit with energy, focused barbs and the shoe-leather of his committed followers.

On election night, Brat made the point that progressives would do well to heed, as they obsess over big money in politics: "Dollars don't vote," he said, "people do."

Interestingly, Tea Party forces and donors claim they thought Cantor was so unbeatable that they didn't even fund Brat even though he had two national radio talk show hosts speaking well of him.

Can't progressives find that kind of energy with their many broader issues and larger support base? Can't they find capable so-called "nobodies" with hidden talent to become publically heralded champions?

There are fresh voices everywhere who can take on the corporate Democrats, like the Clintons, who work with Wall Streeters and espouse crony capitalism and with neocons to advance militarism abroad, along with corporate-managed, job destroying trade agreements and off-shore tax havens?

Unfortunately, the driving energy of progressives, including the dissipating Occupy Wall Street effort,



is not showing up in the electoral arena. The political energy, the policy disputes and the competitive contests are among the Republicans, not the Democrats, observed the astute political commentator and former Clinton White House aide, Bill Curry.

The third lesson from the decisive Cantor upset is not to embrace the political attitude that calls for settling, from the outset, for the least-of-the-worst choices. Progressives have expressed and harbored strong criticisms of the Democratic Party establishment and their adoption of corporatist policies, but election cycle after election cycle, fearful of the Republican bad guys, they signal to the Democrat incumbents that the least-of-the-worst is acceptable.

Like the liberals they often consort with, progressives do not ask "Why not the best?" with the plan that they will either win or at least pull their party away from the relentless 24/7 grip of big-time corporatism.

The final takeaway from this fascinating Virginia contest in the 7th Congressional District near Richmond was that Cantor's tactics backfired. The more Cantor spent on TV, radio, billboard ads and mailings, the more Brat became known and the more people were reminded that Washington and Wall Street really do not care about people on Main Street.

That is truly the nub of a Left-Right alliance. In recent decades, pollsters would sometimes pose a variation of the question: "Do you believe that X candidate or Y party or Z in Washington cares about people like you?" The responses revealed a sizable majority of people, regardless of their ideological or political labels, said "no."

With the interest of the public, the community and the country in the forefront, those "nos" can become "yeses" for a long-overdue rejuvenated and just society driven by reality and edified by its ideals. ■

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In Will's Footsteps

Joseph H. Carter Sr. and Michelle Lefebvre-Carter recently traced Oklahoma icon Will Rogers' remarkable journey 112 years ago to South Africa

TOP: Author Joseph H. Carter Sr. surveys the Cape Town waterfront.

BELOW: Will Rogers during his work with Texas Jack's Wild West Show. From left: Texas Jack, Mrs. Texas Jack, an unidentified rider, and Rogers. [Photo courtesy Will Rogers Memorial Museum, Claremore.]

PAGE 37: A giraffe in majestic Kruger National Park.

Launched with a spectacular four-day safari in the Kruger National Park, the first week of our trek focused on sprawling, growling Johannesburg [called Joburg] and the incredible shanty-town Soweto where families live in 10-by-10 tin roof shacks without electricity, water or toilets.

Like many “third world” countries, South Africa struggles with poverty and joblessness. It is battling racism, population explosion and high unemployment plus crime. We think the good folks will overcome the challenges.

An overnight bus ride transformed our trek into a glamorous week at glowing Cape Town followed by luxury ocean view tourism east of Port Elizabeth along the lush, sub-tropical Garden Route.

We attempted to retrace Will Rogers’ 1902 life in the Nepal Region with eye-opening adventures in the undulating Zulu countryside from Durban to Mooi River then historic Ladysmith, where Oklahoma’s favorite son first became a professional showman. We had a room at Umhlanga Rocks with a spectacular view of the Indian Ocean and bikini-clad beach down below.

Compared with our expansive safari in the Serengeti of Tanzania during 2012, The Kruger was an up-close to wildlife episode. We were alone with a talented guide named Clive Alborough [fifth generation from London] who felt defeated because he was unable to lead us to a leopard. Within two hours inside Kruger, we had encountered four of “The Big Five.” We were overwhelmed, delighted and fulfilled. Clive’s e-mail address reflects his pride: big5withclive@gmail.com. He only could find four of the ‘Big Five.’

The protection and health of wildlife at The Kruger, and in other habitats, is equally admirable. Clive’s rule: stay inside the vehicle. Baboons look like some of Joe’s non-biting distant relatives. Clive warned they will rip off your hand for a sandwich, saying, “You can get another sandwich, but not a new hand.”

Seeing a dynamic, growing country was impressive. Democracy in South Africa is 20 years along with black folks generally in charge of the political system, although there were charges of corruption. Then there is wealth [money]. The old-line Dutch/British called Afrikaans rather obviously hold the big economic cards. But our ATM card worked fine at Barclays banks.

People here seem to act racially prudent and respectful of the potential power of the folks who make up 90% of the population – the black majority. Most everyone seemingly is listening to the lessons of tolerance, forgiveness and patience by the late Nelson Mandela.

While they are only five or so generations from aboriginal existence, we witnessed hundreds of black school children walking to classes in starched, clean uniforms. Yet, many blacks live in shanties without utilities. They seem to have discovered education as the key to wealth and are vocal about it. The road to equality probably will be long as a study of the continent’s economy says “African middle class” earn \$2 to \$4 per day.”

Today many, many blacks live in tin-roof hovels and without cars; they walk to work because public transit is poor. For us, as travelers, the tab for many good dinners with drinks generally was about 200 Rands [US \$20]. Tips earn a smile and a “thank you.”

South Africa is a polite society. South Africa is an economically easy place for modest travel budgets. South Africa is a “buyer’s market” for tourism.

In all of our hotels, the faucet water was fine to drink. The three-



star rooms were clean and comfortable and service was great. In mid-summer, air conditioning was not necessary. Temperatures were in the 80s with cool nights and ocean breezes. While there were repeated crime warnings, we never felt endangered but played it safe. In South Africa, unemployment among blacks is reported at 50%, but just under 1% among white folks.

We hired a young black driver with car for a visit to the archeological museum and a “genuine” native village, the Lese-di Cultural Village, with actors in grass skirts. Our driver was born and reared in a thatched roof tribal home next to Kruger Park. He spoke softly but in good English. When quizzed, he said he also was fluent in Afrikaner [a form of Dutch], his and one other tribe’s languages. Four! We college dudes struggle with Spanish.

In general, newspapers we read featured fire-brand, fearless stories by investigative reporters – something we revere.

The legacy of the late President Nelson Mandela permeates the country and its people of many races. We discerned that without his message of peace, forgiveness and brotherhood being so widely, wisely and richly endorsed, South Africa could be in flames like is happening elsewhere.

Instead, while racism is not absent, common respect seems to prevail in a place where apartheid, indenture of Indians and even slavery for blacks once were lawful. We predict increased greatness in this multi-race, multi-culture land that values democracy and is rich in resources and ambitious, hard-working people.

A highlight of our trip was to drop-by Mandela's home where Winnie Mandela still lives. It is justly swarmed with admirers of all races.

Here's how it went: We left Miami at 9 p.m. on a Sunday in mid-January, and via London, landed in Joburg at 7 a.m. on Tuesday, then taking a rest at the Birchwood Hotel. We toured the city even going into a small tin-roof shack that was a family home in Soweta. It was neat but overcrowded. We walked through the grim prison on Constitution Hill where Gandhi and Mandela and other political prisoners once had been shackled.

Clive arrived the next morning for our half-day drive to the entrance of the 4.8 million acre Kruger National Park, home of 147 species of animals. We spent a night in a bush lodge room facing the Sabie River. The rent [US \$70] included dinner and breakfast. On the opposing bank we watched Nile Crocodiles and elephant herd share water.

The next morning, we began our four-days inside the Kruger National Park lodged in comfortable cabins. The country's tragic problem is poachers who kill elephants and rhinos for their tusks that are sold in Asia. Another problem would have been if the baboons had gotten inside our vehicle. The park is very well managed.

Back in Joburg, Clive accompanied us to the rail station to buy sleeper car train tickets to Cape Town. Bluntly, the agent suggested we would be better served and would see the countryside better by Greyhound bus. We relented. Following a luxury overnight in charming Waybury House, a bed and breakfast, the next day we took Greyhound on an 880-mile expedition through deserts, hills, prairies, wine country farms and medium size towns from Johannesburg to Cape Town. After sleeping on recliner bus seats, we registered at aptly named "Hotel on St. George's" at Riebeeck on St. George's Mall.

We often and easily walked to the luxurious waterfront and wandered through the colorful markets. We visited The Cape of Good Hope, the Southern tip of the continent where the chilly Atlantic and the warm Indian Oceans meet spectacularly as home to great

aqua life. We saw the lively African penguin colony – up close, but not enough to be bitten.

At Cape Town's Groote Schuur Hospital on July 28, 1958, Dr. Christiaan Barnard transplanted the first human heart. We visited the preserved operating rooms where life-like mannequins now hover over operating tables dramatizing the historic event. A seasoned "scrub nurse" was our graphic tour guide. The diseased, replaced heart was exhibited in a jar. [Barnard's patient died of pneumonia 18 days after the implant.]

While gaining worldwide fame and spending some time at Oklahoma City's Baptist Hospital, Barnard gained a playboy reputation but died alone of an asthma attack.

Meandering along the yacht-lined Victoria and Alfred Waterfront, South Africa's most visited hot spot, enjoying succulent sea food such as was served at the Den Anker Belgian seaside restaurant. We encountered Manuel Aguilar Serrato, a gregarious 2007 graduate of Northeastern Oklahoma A&M who now represents an international cosmetic firm but still claims his favorite restaurant is Shebangs at Monkey Island. Small world.

We toured Robben Island, where later-to-be President Mandela spent 18 of the 27 years as a political prisoner. Our tour guide was a fellow convict who graphically outlined the sorry legacy without expressing bitterness. Political activism sometimes lacks suitable rewards, we figure, but Mandela's legacy grows brightly and is a lesson to all.

Flying to Port Elizabeth, we rented a car despite knowing that driving was in the left lanes in British tradition. With ease and without incident, Michelle was our skilled driver and Joe navigated our exploration of the lush, sub-tropical "Garden Route" along the Indian Ocean shore. Our hotel was an hour's drive west of Port Elizabeth at Beacon Island.

Far offshore in the Indian Ocean, we fished with very modest catches. While motoring rapidly we suddenly were amid a pod of some 500 [that number supplied by our fishing boat skipper] dolphins flipping, jumping and twirling out of the water all around us. Quickly, Joe shot some photos trying to capture Michelle watching the incredible show. Then we left the happy pod. We figure the seemingly laughing dolphin ate our dinner.

Michelle drove high into the forested mountains that bank the Indian Ocean onto even dirt roads opened for logging trucks. It was a dazzling scene of memorable beauty but potentially dangerous driving. We retreated but kept memories. Our meals were taken in various, local mid-town restaurants where folks were happy and noisy. Food was much like what we eat in the U.S.

We meandered along the Indian Ocean highway to the laid-back sparkling towns of Krysna and George. We toured an outstanding railroad museum that reflected South Africa's long history of great steam en-

gine power. Another side trip was to a deep canyon with a high swinging cable bridge we walked across after hiking up the steep seashore mountain. The jungle, gushing river below and the landscape were incredible.

Flying to Durban, we again rented a car to explore the Zulu tribal area called “Natal” where sugar cane fields stretch for miles with villages dotted among the “valley of a thousand hills,” home of the once warring Zulu tribe. During this week, we spent many hours in the National Library of South Africa, various archives and at the lovely Killie Campbell library and museum seeking clues about Will Rogers’ stay here in 1902-03.

Will Rogers in 1902 reported the Zulu were “wild looking people ... all have rings, chains and all kinds

the Royal Hotel, a true relic. In our stay, we attempted to discern the war-torn scene that Will Rogers experienced 112 years ago. Four different wars had raged in the area.

Ladysmith had just endured a harrowing 147-day siege where Dutch artillery bombarded British troops. Civilians and troops starved for food and water. The combat ended short weeks before Will Rogers arrived and he wrote vividly about the battle scars and graveyards. It was here that Will Rogers saw first-hand the folly of war. An expansive town museum recounts the terror and tragedies of the siege.

We scrounged several museums and delightful libraries and archives for clues about the era and events that were factors in Will Rogers’ astute awareness of mankind’s miseries, opportunities and prom-

At age 23, Will Rogers was an old hand at cattle drives and round-ups. While Will Rogers undoubtedly was “cowboy up” horseback, he wrote home about the Zulus chasing cattle while afoot.

of old scrap iron in their ears and nose. Lots of them have horns tied on their heads ... ”

We found that while many remain impoverished, blacks have adopted contemporary, conservative western dress and customs. Many women wear their hair in designer styles carefully coiffured. We saw a bare breast only on a postcard.

Even in February’s mid-summer [the equivalent of our August], the landscape was green and the grasses were lush because of ample rains fed by ocean breezes. The sugar cane harvest was about to start providing hot fieldwork that brings temporary employment.

We visited the ornate, expansive farm “Greenfields Farm” near Mooi River built in the late 1890s by a controversial Irishman named James Piccione. He was Will Rogers’ boss whose farm was assessed at \$35 million in 1902.

Still as regal as Will Rogers described in letters home, Greenfields remains a working cattle farm but the fancy horse stalls now have been converted into offices for a farm implement firm run by the current farm owner, affable Adam Kethro.

We enjoyed a long talk with Kethro about the farm’s history and presented him with a Will Rogers biography. We shared in his delicious beef jerky, called “Biltong,” made from his own grass-fed cattle. Surely, Will Rogers ate Biltong 112 years ago but from 1902 Piccione cattle.

Will Rogers broke horses here for Piccione and the British cavalry then quit to start other trail driving jobs.

At Ladysmith, where Will Rogers got his start in show business as a performer in “Texas Jack’s Wild West Show” in 1902, we spent a night at

ises.

Returning to room at Umhlanga Sands hotel, we saw up to two dozen ships at anchor awaiting turns at the Port of Durban, where Will Rogers had arrived sea sick on a steamer loaded with Argentine livestock.

No doubt, the expensive horses were shipped inland by rail and Will Rogers drove cattle overland, uphill for 100 miles to Greenfields farm near Mooi River, from sea level to 4,560 feet elevation. At age 23, Will Rogers was an old hand at cattle drives and round-ups. While Will Rogers undoubtedly was “cowboy up” horseback, he wrote home about the Zulus chasing cattle while afoot.

Durban now is a teeming metropolis but we feel that we somewhat captured the spirit and flair of the remarkable, historic 1902-03 era of Will Rogers’ side trip from Oologah, OK [oops, Indian Territory] around the south half of Planet Earth.

Then we flew to Joburg where we toured the remarkable Maropeng archeological museum in the “Cradle of Humankind” where the bones of folks who lived eons ago have been excavated and studied showing that humans derived from common ancestors. After a quick drive through the capital of Pretoria, we ended our trip.

We flew in a Boeing 747 to London and a Boeing 777 to the U.S. – safe, satisfied, greatly enriched and enlightened. ■

Michelle Lefebvre-Carter and Joseph H. Carter Sr. are directors emeritus of the Will Rogers Memorial Commission. Joe is author of Never Met A Man I Didn’t Like: The Life and Writings of Will Rogers [HarperCollins] and The Quotable Will Rogers [Gibbs Smith Publishers].

Piketty Sharpens Focus On Income Inequality

CAPITAL IN THE 21ST CENTURY

By Thomas Piketty

Harvard University Press

696 pages, \$39.95

BY JOHN R. WOOD

Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the 21st Century* is an academically-inclined manuscript for non-experts. Its message and academic backing on the political economy has made it fly off shelves like none other in decades from the prestigious Harvard Press – more than 150,000 copies so far.

However, it's not surprising that reviews of it seem somewhat superficial. From reading the book, I doubt just anyone would want to trudge through the 532 pages of political-economic information that pervades it. And yet, if you take your time, the book is highly readable and worthwhile.

The gist of *Capital* is certainly simple: Basically, the returns of capital [r] are rising faster than economic growth [g], especially in regard to labor. The wealthy, with their large investments, are getting wealthier while everyone else, whose incomes are based mainly on their labor, is essentially either barely maintaining, or falling ever further behind.

Unfortunately, history tells us that instability will result from this increasing inequality, he argues, a pace likely expanding to unsustainable levels – both politically and economically – unless the government creates a redistribution of income and wealth toward the lower echelons of society.

Another economics professor agrees these levels are unsustainable. According to UC-Berkeley's Emmanuel Saez, his research has found that U.S. income inequality has been increasing steadily since the 1970s, and now has reached levels not seen since 1928. Interesting enough, I also find that Piketty's general assertions about inequality are backed up by PolitiFact and others, which check out as true that the top 400 richest Americans “have more wealth than half of all Americans combined.”

In response, Piketty promotes a progressive graduated wealth tax to invest in education, health care, and retirement. While such a proposal may place a rather sour taste in decision-maker's mouths, he

thinks that the public might support some sort of change because more and more people are becoming aware and consequently critical of the gap between the rich and the poor.

Piketty's book might be at the right place at the right time. To illustrate, a June Bloomberg National Poll asked: “Do you have a sense that the gap between the rich and everyone else is getting bigger, staying about the same, or getting smaller compared to 10 years ago?” Sixty-seven percent felt that the gap was actually getting bigger, but only 20% said it was staying the same and only 9% said they think it is certainly getting smaller.

Most people, it seems, feel the rich are getting richer at their expense.

Praise has been heaped on this New York Times bestselling book. Paul Krugman, writing in the New York Review of Books, argues Piketty's ideas will “change both the way we think about society and the way we do economics.”

What makes this book so compelling beyond its conclusions is that it is the most comprehensive look at the history of the political economy to date, with a combination of more than 200 years of empirical data on inequality.

These findings took so long to hit the mainstream conscience for three main reasons. First, he says, the data has been too historic for economists and too economic for historians. On top of this, information technology is at a place today where it is possible to finally compile and analyze mountains of data.

What's more, Piketty is critical of his own profession. Economists have not really been interested in the questions of inequality and are trained to look at data more theoretically, not empirically or historically as he has done. Essentially, economists have not been able to see the forest for the trees.

However, the book is not merely academic, at least concerning its importance and message. *Capital's* significant proposition is that inequality is not an

accident at all; instead, concentration of wealth is a characteristic of the nature of capitalism itself. “[C]apitalism automatically generates arbitrary and unsustainable inequalities that radically undermine the meritocratic values on which democratic societies are based.”

This tendency, though, can be upturned only through intervention by the state. Piketty urges that capitalism can then be reformed as it threatens the democratic order.

Often, economists assume inequality does not matter, that its natural and “superior abilities ... are the source of everything that is great and useful ... ” As a result, extreme inequalities are justified “to defend the privileges of the winners without much consideration for the loser, much less for the facts, and without any real effort to verify whether this very convenient principle can actually explain the changes we observe.”

Basically, Piketty is taking the view of the losers – to check the facts and see if they really explain where we are today. This is not unlike Howard Zinn’s *People’s History of the United States*, where he writes through the eyes of the common people rather than political and economic elites, a view seldom taken.

Since returns on capital outstrip returns on growth, Piketty says that essentially the rich get richer because the rich are able to create laws in their favor.

More specifically, you have a compression of inequality where the rate of return on wealth in the form of investments are typically 3% to 4%, but growth via labor is only 1%. This might not seem like a big difference, but over decades these differences are huge.

Piketty describes this principle as the “Law of Cumulative Growth.” Small differences can make huge differences, which reminds me of Chaos theory where the flaps of a butterfly wings can create cascading and rather large effects, such as a tornado on the other side of the world – the Butterfly Effect.

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Piketty says this is a “central thesis” of his tome: what seems to be a small difference between returns on capital and “rate of growth can in the long run have powerful and destabilizing effects on the structure and dynamics of social inequality.”

This was obvious through the last 200 years, but there was an exception that economists point to as if it were the rule, but it’s only the exception. Piketty points to the period between the post-war 1945 to about 1970, a time of amazing growth and yet incomes

at the bottom and the top actually converged and the progressive income tax was always more than 70% on taxable income above \$400,000. This time became exceptional due to both wars World War I and World War II as well as the Depression.

What happened in this era was a recovery from a rather large destruction of private wealth with low returns. In this postwar period, Europe and other places had to catch up, which translated in accelerated economic growth and fast population growth.

However, Piketty's finds this not the case for the previous two centuries; instead, the natural state of capital does not tend to follow the tenets of trickle-down theory, but actually concentrate in the hands of the very few. Today, the uppermost hundredth of 1% of U.S. taxpayers [16,000 people] have a shared net worth of \$6 trillion – as much as the bottom two-thirds of the population. That's a concentration of wealth not seen since right before the Depression.

Such a message is vindication for the Left and a nightmarish, upside down world for the Right.

Egalitarianism seems to be only a remnant of the post-war period and rather unnatural anytime else, which is a message that undermines the Right's notion that capitalism is the only way and is really all about equality of everyone if they just work hard enough.

The book also backs up the idea that there is a time for government intervention to right capitalistic market failures.

This book offers fresh air for the Left that has made the Right rather queasy – example: the Wall Street Journal's name-calling critique of *Capital* is titled: *Thomas Piketty Revives Marx for the 21st Century*. A couple days later Rush Limbaugh chimes in with *The Left is Giddy Over New Marxist Book*.

Both critiques emphasize Piketty's focus on his idea for the implementation of a global progressive tax on net wealth as the best option to keep inequality at bay and how this is a redistribution of wealth. Such a tax is not at all Marxist or Fascist; instead, it is characteristic of well-regulated capitalism.

As Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes said in 1937, "Taxes are what we pay for civilized society."

Piketty argues that such tax implementation would not be politically feasible, and just utopian, unless

the U.S. and European Union, which represent half of the world's economic output, would support it.

Piketty proposed that a global progressive tax would cover all real assets such as natural resources, land, factories, houses, office buildings, software, and patents, as well as stocks and bonds, representing a financial interest in those assets. More specifically, his tax would be initially trivial, rising to a level as high as 5% to 10% annually for fortunes numbering in the billions.

The proceeds of this tax, in Piketty's view, should not fund a government's expansion; for example, he says, "The state's great leap forward has already taken place: there will be no second leap – not like the first one, in any event."

Another critique is one about Piketty's data. The Financial Times' Economics Editor, Chris Giles argued there are "unexplained errors" in the book's data, specifically in regards to wealth inequality increases since the 1970s. In response, Piketty said that Saez and Zucman's recent work called *The Distribution of U.S. Wealth, Capital Income and Returns since 1913* endorses his conclusions about the rise in wealth inequality. In fact, these authors reveal even larger increases in U.S. inequality than he does in his book.

I think the criticism of his work is interesting, as he places much of his data online for scrutiny at <http://piketty.pse.ens.fr/en/capital21c2>. You are going to find critiques of any book, but putting it out there for anyone to see shows he's being honest with his work. In fact, seldom do authors post this much access to their work; it should be done more in this century by many authors.

Most of the critique is largely ideological as a reaction to the mere idea of redistribution of wealth – surprising in a world where most distribution of wealth runs upward.

For example, according to IRS and CBO figures, from 1980 to 2006, the 1% nearly tripled their share of after-tax income. In addition, the Economic Policy Institute notes that in 1983 the nation's poorest 47% of America owned nearly 2.5% of the nation's wealth [\$15,000 per family average], but in 2009 the same economic grouping possessed zero wealth, meaning their debts exceeded their assets.

What's more, tax policy experts have found that nearly two-thirds of \$1 trillion in individual "tax ex-

penditures" – tax subsidies from special deductions, exemptions, exclusions, credits, capital gains, and loopholes – exclusively reaches to the top taxpayer quintile.

Piketty's book may be utopian, but it's a work that has come at the right time to make us think about the real gap between rich and poor in our country and worldwide. ■

John R. Wood, PhD, is a political science professor at Rose State College.

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
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- Author unknown

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Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

could withhold a portion of their income tax equal to their share of any war effort. Those who don't "believe" in cars could opt not to pay highway taxes. And those who have no "faith" in government could quit paying taxes altogether.

Can any good come from the court's latest ruling?

First, it could hasten the day when America joins the 21st Century and the rest of the industrialized world with single-payer health care. The employer-based health system is increasingly unworkable and unsustainable.

The only way to ensure freedom of – and from – religion when it comes to medical care is a single-payer system that allows individuals to access it according to his or her conscience.

Second, the Supreme Court may have given Democrats a gift for 2016 – a stark reminder that elections indeed have consequences.

Given the ages of most justices, the next administration likely will fill at least one, if not more, vacancies. Do Americans want a high court filled with ideologues – the model of recent Republican administrations? Or do they want justices committed to reason, to fairness, to equality for all, not just the wealthy elites?

The actions of a high court whose majority is driven by uber-right orthodoxy make the 2016 presidential election all the more important.

Gun Culture

Ten Missouri school districts have paid \$17,500 each for a private contractor to train staff members to carry firearms in the schoolhouse this fall.

The teachers – and one bookkeeper – are being touted as the educational equivalent of undercover air marshals.

They not only will be on their district's payroll, but also receive extra pay as employees of Shield Solutions, the firm that provided them the weapons training.

This is straight out of the NRA playbook: The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun. And it is bad public policy.

How about we do everything we can to reduce the number of firearms on school property instead?

We can only imagine the potential carnage if a student overpowers a gun-toting teacher or otherwise comes into possession of a firearm that normally wouldn't be on campus.

This isn't the Wild West. This is the 21st Century. Modern society. It's a national disgrace that there have been 74 school shootings since Newtown, CT

in 2012.

It is way past time to tighten gun laws and expand mental health services.

And it is past time for our leaders to know it's not anti-Second Amendment to be pro-school safety.

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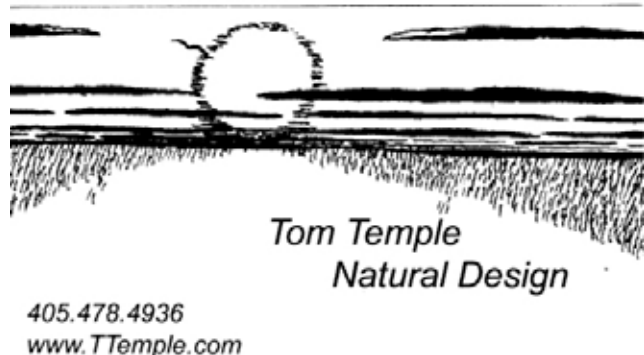
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Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Dart: To OKC City Council, offering a \$3.5 million taxpayer-funded incentive to lure sporting goods chain Cabela to the state capital. It's corporate welfare at its worst – and totally unnecessary.

For the record, the GOP-dominated Legislature ducked when it had a chance to limit special interest influence. It allowed \$100 limit that each lobbyist could spend annually wining, dining and feting each lawmaker to be replaced by a new \$500 limit. New rule we'd like to see: Lawmakers required to wear patches on their suits bearing logos of their corporate sponsors – a la NASCAR.

We were saddened to learn of the passing of long-time Observer subscriber Mackenzie Thompson, driving force behind downtown OKC's Skyline Urban Ministry that serves poor and outcast. A United Methodist minister, Mac served churches in Midwest City, Jenks, Blanchard, Enid, Sand Springs and OKC. He was 86.

Laurel: To U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan, who – when asked about Gov. Mary Fallin's flip-flop on Common Core – said: "So what changed? Politics changed." We don't agree with Duncan on much but he was spot-on explaining Fallin's veto of HB 3399.

In a desperate attempt to remain Republican relevant, George Will now spouts knuckle-dragging far-right rhetoric. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch dumped his column after he argued sexual assault victims on college campuses enjoy privileged status.

Health alert: New study reveals your doctor's stethoscope is a hot spot for MRSA, the drug-resistant bacteria plaguing hospitals. – Prevention

U.S. records 334 cases of measles so far this year, most in two decades. Health experts say more people are refusing vaccinations – many evidently falling for hysteria about possible dangers [unproven].

The Lexington-Purcell bridge is back open after emergency repairs, but nationally 252 million cars each day cross structurally deficient bridges. More than 4,200 Oklahoma bridges are on the list. – Governing magazine

Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

of his second sentence I'm yelling at the TV screen: "Liar, Liar, Liar!" And I, like Lankford, am also a [at least Southern Baptist-licensed] minister.

Still, I couldn't help hearing him invoke "the Constitution" in defense of his diatribes about the Affordable Care Act. [I will never utter the slanderous name he and others of the Tea Party ilk use to bias "red-neck bigots" against the health plan.] Somehow Mr. Lankford must think he is the arbiter of the Constitution, not the Supreme Court. Since the Court upheld the Affordable Care Act, it is protected by the Constitution. So, Lankford himself becomes the violator when he impugns "The Act."

But mostly I enjoy the paradox implied in Joe Conason's closing quotation [May issue, page 42], generally attributed to Albert Einstein: "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, and expecting a different result." Apparently the benighted minister overlooks the words of the great physicist. By actually boasting that he compulsively voted unsuccessfully to overturn [at least parts of] the Affordable Care Act "more than 40 times," he flies the banner of insanity over his own voting record!

Richard D. Kahoe, PhD
Woodward

Editor, The Observer:

This is a letter I sent President Obama:

Dear President Obama,

President Kennedy wrote, "The life of the arts, far from being an interruption, a distraction in the life of a nation, are close to the center of a nation's purpose – and a test of the quality of a nation's civilization."

The Fulbright Program is at the very center of our humanity. It represents the best of who we are as a nation and as a species. The Fulbright Program embodies our aspirations to "make visible the reality of hope."

I am a World War II veteran, wounded in France, and awarded the Purple Heart. The French government is about to honor me with their Knight of the Legion of Honor [Chevalier Legion D'Honneur] medal. The French nation is grateful to Americans who fought, died, or were wounded on French soil.

After the war I was educated under provisions of the GI Bill. Later as a university professor I was awarded three Fulbright awards to Korea, India, and Nigeria. In each case, I was able to film document the work-



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ing processes of artisans in clay and the social and religious context in which they labored. The documentaries are used as part of education through the ceramic arts in universities and museums throughout the nation and world.

After seeing my documentary, "Massive Terra-Cotta Horse Construction of South India," an Indian official wrote, "You have done what we should have done."

Every cultural exchange program creates lifelong friends around the world, and contributes to the image of America as a great nation, not because of great wealth or military might, but because of cultural contributions, ability to generate new ideas, and its ability to create a better world.

As a Fulbrighter with wife and children, we were observed to be ambassadors and exemplars of America. For each Fulbright awarded, my wife, a pianist, volunteered her "sunbeam personality," her piano performance, and her music teaching skills.

Please do not consider cuts to the funding of the Fulbright Program, instead consider the dividends of an enhanced world image. A refusal to cut Fulbright funding will be seen by future historians as one reason [among others] to view you as one of America's greatest transformational presidents.

Ron duBois
Stillwater

Editor, The Observer:

A[nother] stray thought occurred recently: might it be nice if some enterprising DA or AG worked up a case against [his highness] La-pee-air and his NRA serfdom for aiding and/or abetting in some of the mass killings that are continuing on about a weekly basis?

There is an unintended consequence that the Second Amendment-ers may want to consider, namely that at some point, if these senseless murders continue, *The People* may just rise up in protest enough that some action will be taken and we actually will have our guns confiscated. Being a retired "professional gun owner," I don't cherish the thought of having my "hawg laigs" taken away.

It's a bit of a stretch I suppose but this resurrects another bit of nostalgia. Back in my days of being gainfully employed, we chided the local firefighters for having the best part-time job ever devised: 24 [hours] on – 24 off, 24 on – 24 off, three or four cycles like that then three days off, then four or five cycles and five days off – or some such schedule. There was no offense intended and none was taken and their response was usually something like "tough stuff [or whatever]; if we wanted to work that kind of schedule we could join the fire department."

Well, folks, I'm here to tell ya' the firefighters couldn't even light, much less hold, the candles of the professional politicians, those paragons of truth, justice, and the American Way. The only thing they do that even resembles work is make phone calls to raise money for their re-election campaigns.

What other group of employees do you know that sets their own work schedules, benefits packages, pay scales, regular pay raises, health care perks, etc.? What do you suppose Walmart would do if their workers tried something like that?

We need to devise a method of evaluating the performance of the PP's [pun intended] at all levels, and hold the pay, benefits, and their feet to the fire, and force them to make government work for everybody, not just themselves.

"They" always refer to "the takers" as feeding at the public trough or on one of those famous hogs with thousands of teats; that would only apply to those who were able to elbow their way in, between some congressional types.

One of these days there will be something good to write about, someone who actually cares about *The People* and actually accomplishes something beneficial.

Tom Ellis
Okeene

Editor, The Observer:

The Tulsa's Annual Water Quality Report-2014 that was included in Tulsa's recent water bills clearly confirms that the fluorosilicic acid chemical that is be-

ing dripped into our drinking water is actually just a toxic industrial waste chemical that is a "discharge from fertilizer and aluminum factories."

The chemical analysis of this industrial waste documents that this fluorosilicic acid is a soup contaminated with numerous toxic elements including arsenic at levels approaching 50 parts per million.

Those fluoride "expert" dentists who, from high on their pedestal, praise water fluoridation as being "safe and beneficial and of value" are actually grossly miseducated by way of what was intentionally omitted from their dental school education. There has never been a controlled experiment that documents that tooth decay rates have anything to do with water fluoridation.

To all of you pro-fluoride dentists who are naysayers to pure water I make you this challenge: I will surrender my dental license to the first dentist who can provide one copy of any controlled experiment with the U.S. Public Health Service recommended fluorides and water at USPHS recommended parts per million that shows that poisonous fluorides are [as published as fact by promoters of fluoridation] safe, beneficial and will cause no future body harm.

Jim Maxey, DDS
Tulsa

Environment

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Republican evangelicals, they start to wake up to the realization that environmentalism actually matters for everyone," notes David Ocamb, director of the Oklahoma Chapter of the Sierra Club.

It wasn't a partisan shot. He points out that "some of the best presidents on environmental issues were Republicans" – citing Teddy Roosevelt, Richard Nixon and George H.W. Bush.

So at a time when other states and countries are working overtime to reduce their carbon footprints and encourage growth of renewable energy, Oklahoma sits firmly in the energy industry's hip pocket.

The GOP-dominated Legislature treats the oil and gas barons as their bosses, allowing the big guns [Chesapeake, Devon and Continental] to set their own drilling tax rates this year, rates significantly lower than other energy producing states.

Another key player: the Koch Brothers and their political arm, the American Legislative Exchange Council. The billionaires were behind the utility industry/fossil-fuel producers scheme to impose a surcharge on solar energy, so draconian than not even ultra-conservative Kansas – the Kochs' home state – would approve it.

Oklahoma is blessed with lots of sun and wind – the energy sources and economic engines of the future. Unfortunately, money talks. And when it comes to the Oklahoma Legislature, the Kochs and their ALEC brethren own the biggest checkbooks.

About the only good thing that could be said about the 2014 session from an environmental standpoint is that lawmakers killed a proposed moratorium on wind farms in eastern Oklahoma – Senate President Pro Tem Brian Bingman carrying water for one of his well-heeled constituents.

"The best thing the Legislature did for the environment this year is adjourn and get out of town," says Ocamb.

"Although they were not able to successfully pass all of the awful legislation that was proposed, they certainly effectively failed to pass any common sense solutions to address the ongoing drought, encourage local farmers producing locally grown food, and help Oklahoma utilize her renewable energy potential like our neighbors to the south, Texas, are currently doing."

When will Oklahomans demand more of their policymakers? ■

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