

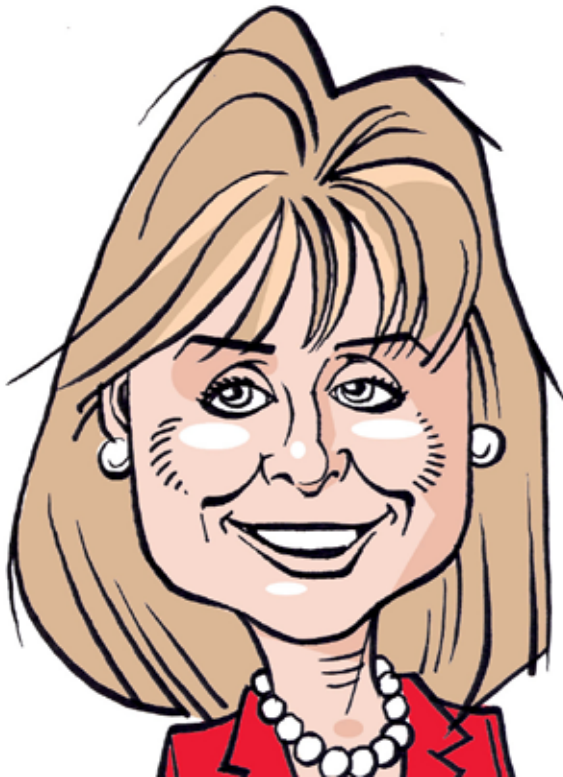
THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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All About Mary

Fallin Fatigue Creates Surprisingly Competitive Governor's Race



BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

If Las Vegas were to lay odds on the 2014 Oklahoma governor's race, incumbent Republican Mary Fallin would be viewed as a prohibitive favorite.

She's never lost a race during her quarter-century political career. She's the darling of the state's biggest campaign donors. And she's seeking re-election at a time when the GOP controls every statewide elected office.

Yet, Fallin's re-election is hardly a *fait accompli*. Check the polls: While she leads in every one, her support languishes below 50%.

Is a Brad Henry-style upset in the making?

Most political analysts say no. But there is no denying the fact state Rep. Joe Dorman, the Democratic nominee, has run a far stronger campaign than expected – almost certainly buoyed by Fallin's

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CAMPAIGN 2014

A Special Report

Pages 18-25

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OUR MOTTO

To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

OUR CREDO

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

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

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Observations

Fowl Play

Leave it to U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe to build a political fund-raiser around animal cruelty.

Last month's Pigeon Shoot – in which 1,000 live pigeons were tossed into the air to be shot at close range by the senator and his donors – represents a new low even for Inhofe, whose callous disregard for the planet and anyone but his big corporate donors makes him our Washington delegation's most polarizing figure.

We're neither anti-hunting [though it's not our hobby] nor anti-gun [though we believe current laws are far too lax]. But we fail to see the sport in an event where pigeons have no chance at avoiding buckshot – the equivalent of shooting fish in a barrel.

Inhofe didn't have the courage to step into the public eye and defend his cruelty – instead dispatching his campaign manager to do his dirty work. His defense, in a nutshell: The National Rifle Association blesses pigeon shoots as a "longstanding shooting sports tradition." Since when is the NRA the arbiter of good taste and common decency?

Kudos to the Illinois-based animal rights group SHARK – Showing Animals Respect and Kindness – for capturing the massacre on video. It exposes Inhofe's lack of morality in the starkest imagery imaginable.

It's unclear if the Pigeon Shoot is illegal under Oklahoma law. If it is, Inhofe should be prosecuted – immediately. If it's not, then matters must be left to the court of public opinion. The verdict there should be swift: It's time for Inhofe's political career to end – before he does any more damage to Oklahoma's reputation.

Pyrrhic Victory

Attorney General Scott Pruitt and the Legislature's theocrats won Round One in the legal skirmish over the state Capitol's Ten Command-

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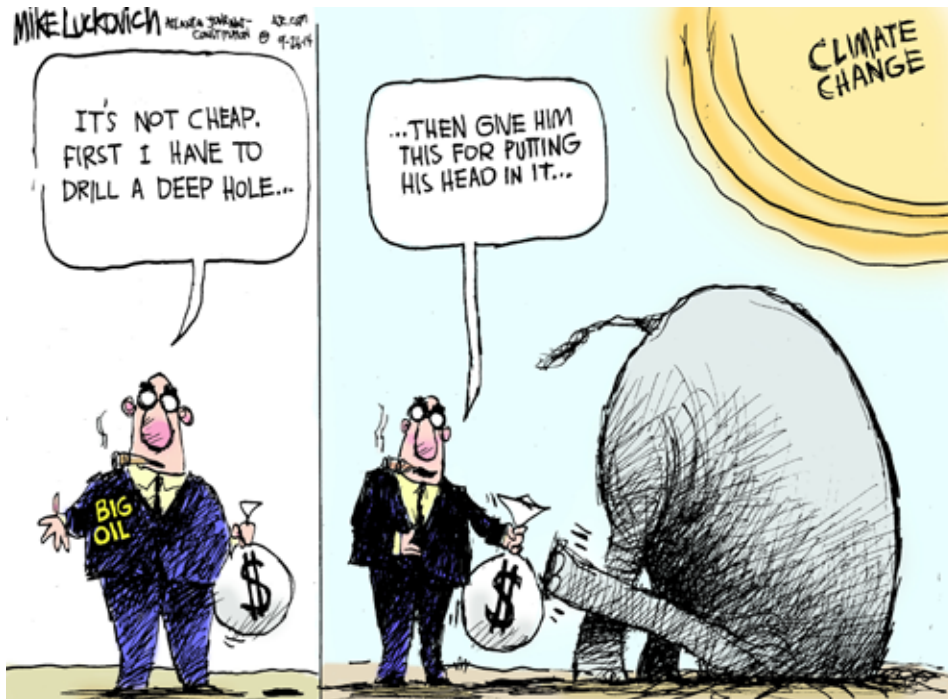
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ObserverScope



Sen. Jim Inhofe's TV ads depict him as "salt of the earth." A more apt description for the world's foremost climate denier would be "a boil on the ass of the earth."

Dart: To the supposedly non-partisan State Chamber, inviting National Republican Senatorial Committee chair, Kansas Sen. Jerry Moran, to headline a discussion of business issues. Anyone doubt where he stands on Dodd-Frank or so-called "government over-reach"?

The Legislature's GOP majority can't escape blame for Janet Barresi's reign of error. It expanded the superintendent's powers four years ago in knee-jerk reaction to her dust-up with the Brad Henry-appointed state board.

Laurel: To state Rep. Mike Shelton, D-OKC, pledging to pursue a hike in subminimum wage for workers who rely on tips. It won't go anywhere in GOP-dominated Legislature but it keeps spotlight on a key working class issue.

"Let's face it, Fox, you'll miss me when I'm gone. It'll be harder to convince the American people that Hillary was born in Kenya." – President Obama at 2014 White House Correspondents Dinner

Dart: To the Republican Governor's Association, for fact-challenged TV ads claiming Gov. Mary Fallin stood up to President Obama on Common Core. She was for it long before she was against it – an election year switcheroo.

Most of today's cattle rustlers are meth addicts cashing in on high beef prices. Last year 1,000 head were reported stolen; this year, so far, 650. – Oklahoma Department of Agriculture

Laurel: To OKC attorney Doug Parr, honored with the Sierra Club's Karen Silkwood Activist Award, for representing 30 Keystone XL pipeline protesters pro bono. All criminal charges were dismissed or reduced to a fine, save one – it goes to trial Oct. 23 in Atoka County.

Wow! State Rep. Jeannie McDaniel set a new national record in her age group at Cleveland's Northcoast 24 Endurance Run – covering 54 miles in 12 hours.

Dart: To Gov. Mary Fallin and state GOP leaders, refusing to expand Medicaid. State hospitals expect to lose \$4 billion-plus in reimbursements between 2013-22, imperiling rural health care.

Our dear friend and staunch Observer supporter Eli Grayson will be honored Oct. 18 with the third annual Muscogee [Creek] Nation Hall of Fame Award. Bravo!

Laurel: To Sen. Tom Coburn, R-OK, preparing a final [before he retires] exhaustive report on Robin Hood-in-reverse tax breaks that do nothing but help the rich get richer. It's due out late this year.

Odds are one in 213 an Oklahoma driver will collide with a deer in the next 12 months – a 3% drop from last year. Oklahoma ranks 32nd nationally for most deer collisions. – State Farm

Dart: To ex-Gov. Frank Keating, blaming "the teachers union" for state's poor academic rankings. If OEA and others were so powerful, Oklahoma wouldn't have imposed the nation's deepest budget cuts the last five years nor would teacher salaries be among nation's lowest.

Political activist David Glover says GOP Senate nominee James Lankford combines the face of Howdy Doody with the voice of Darth Vader.

Laurel: To Oklahoma tribes raising minimum wage above the \$7.25 per hour federal floor – acknowledging the economic realities of OK's working poor. Your serve, state lawmakers.

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Letters



Editor, The Observer:

Bombing and sending U.S. advisers is proposed in response to ISIS in Iraq. I'm telling Congress and the White House, "Not another war in the Middle East." We tried that, and it backfired.

The two wars of that era brought only destruction in Iraq and Afghanistan, and resentments against the U.S. around the world. When the Iraq War was launched, taxes were cut instead of raised to pay for it. No surprise that debts in the trillions resulted.

Now, Dick Cheney wants to do it again. Before the Iraq invasion, Cheney told Tim Russert on "Meet the Press" that American troops would be welcomed as liberators and the war would be over in weeks. Why the national media still seek Cheney's opinion is mysterious.

President Obama is dead wrong on this issue, and must hear from the people, "Just say no to war."

Nathaniel Batchelder
Oklahoma City

Editor's Note: Nathaniel Batchelder is director of The Peace House in Oklahoma City - www.PeaceHouseOK.org

Editor, The Observer:

Indeed it is a rare day when the editors of the Oklahoma Observer makes a glaring error in their published articles, but in this case I feel duty-bound to correct it. In a recent Observerscope, you give a Dart to Sen. Rob Standridge, Rep. Jason Nelson and Rep. Tom Newell for their continual promotion of the Cadillac-driving-welfare-queen stereotype.

You state, "Their public fawning over wingnut pundit Star Parker's 'welfare reform' ideas is so last century." Please forgive me, but if your intentions are to be 100% accurate, the better phrase ought to be: the ideas are "so last millennium."

Al Lindley
Oklahoma City

Editor's Note: Al Lindley is a former Democratic state representative who served from 1996-2008.

Editor, The Observer:

On Sept. 11, Sen. Jim Inhofe voted to continue Citizens United. That's the U.S. Supreme Court's recent ruling that said it's OK for corporations and unions to spend

unlimited amounts of money on ads calling for the election or defeat of individual candidates. In other words, to open the floodgates for money in politics. That means that billionaires like casino-magnate Sheldon Adelson or the big-oil Koch brothers can "buy" candidates and elections, thus destroying our democracy.

Specifically, Inhofe voted with other Republicans to filibuster an amendment to overturn Citizens United. A filibuster, in this case, means that 60 votes would be needed to overturn Citizens United. The vote was 54 [52 Democrats plus two Independents] in favor and 42 [Republicans] against, falling short of the 60 votes needed to defeat the filibuster and proceed to a final vote in the Senate to overturn Citizens United. Sen. Tom Coburn did not vote.

Without the filibuster, the amendment would have passed with 54 votes.

It will be our turn on Nov. 4 to vote for or against Sen. Jim Inhofe who will be on our ballot. I know how I'm voting!

Wanda Jo Stapleton
Oklahoma City

Editor's Note: Wanda Jo Stapleton is a former Democratic state representative who served from 1986-96.

Editor, The Observer:

History records Samuel Johnson saying that patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel.

We're told terrorist acts are the work of cowards, especially so when innocent women and children are the targets, which begs the question: Are all men guilty and suitable targets for terrorism? Let me store that question away for another time.

What are we to make of elected officials with degrees in the law who make arguments that marriage equality puts children at risk?

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Enough Is Enough

It's way past time for Oklahoma's political and business leaders to speak forcefully against the anti-Muslim hate speech state Rep. John Bennett keeps spewing.

The mean-spirited, broad-brush demagoguery is fanning suspicion about 35,000 Oklahomans whose faith tradition happens to be different than his, leaving some Muslims concerned they could become targets of religion-inspired bigotry and violence.

Bennett, a Sallisaw Republican, shined a spotlight on his ignorance in a Sept. 3 Facebook post that urged readers to be "wary of the individuals who claim to be 'Muslim American.'" At a subsequent Town Hall meeting in Sallisaw, he called Islam "a cancer in our nation that needs to be cut out."

Equally insulting were state GOP Chairman Dave Weston defended Bennett's remarks: "If we as Americans were ruled by Islam, then Christians and Jews like you and I could only keep practicing our faith if we paid a protection tax. But if you're a Christian or Jewish and don't immediately convert to Islam, they immediately decapitate you."

The Oklahoma chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations joined with social justice groups to decry the bigotry. And the state's NAACP president, Anthony Douglas, demanded Bennett resign.

Unfortunately, the voters in House District 2 have twice given Bennett a megaphone to spew his vitriol. He clearly isn't exiting the public stage any time soon, despite Douglas' call.

Regrettably, Oklahoma has a long, sordid history of elected leaders spewing hate, bigotry and crackpot theories.

Gov. Alfalfa Bill Murray was rabidly anti-Semitic and pro-eugenics. State Rep. John Monks used an ethnic slur to deride Chinese. And state Rep. Sally Kern declared homosexuality to be a greater threat to America than terrorism.

What's especially disheartening is that many of Oklahoma's political and civic leaders haven't learned the lessons of history – that hate speech can, and does, lead to violence.

It's only been five years, for example, since Dr.

George Tiller was gunned down in his Wichita, KS church by anti-abortion zealot Scott Roeden, whose warped sense of morality was no doubt shaped by his involvement with groups like the Sovereign Citizen Movement and Operation Rescue that are known for their vitriolic rhetoric.

Yet, we haven't heard a word from the State Chamber, which maintains a symbiotic relationship with the Republican Party, or from the state's powerful oil and gas interests which no doubt employ Muslims and partner with Muslim-owned companies.

House Speaker Jeff Hickman and Gov. Mary Fallin both sidestepped the firestorm – the governor choosing to stress that America values free speech and free religion.

"I expect Oklahomans to exercise those freedoms peacefully, as they have done in the past," she told the Oklahoman.

It's a free country, of course. Bennett is welcome to display his inanity for all to see. But isn't anyone in a position of political or corporate power going to stand up and set the record straight: Oklahoma is not an intolerant backwater full of John Bennetts?

Here's the problem: There are so many John Bennetts now serving in the Oklahoma Legislature – by some estimates, two dozen or so in the House alone – that Fallin, Hickman and Senate President Brian Bingman are careful about crossing them.

They inhabit seats of power because too many good-hearted, sensible Oklahomans don't bother to vote, giving the parallel-universe, on-the-political-fringe crowd outsized influence on Election Day.

Hickman isn't entirely wrong when he says he can't control what Bennett posts on Facebook. What Bennett says and does away from the House floor are his and his constituents' business. Mostly.

But Hickman and common-sense House Republicans – who ought to be concerned that their party's image is soiled by such bigotry – are not without tools to curb Bennett's worst excesses.

The speaker, after all, determines committee as-

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Good Schools, Bad Schools

This Best of Frosty column first appeared in the Aug. 25, 2009 edition of The Oklahoma Observer.

The national School Boards Association's Council of Urban Boards of Education has released findings of a major research study, "Where We Teach," that surveyed how teachers and administrators feel about their school environments.

A majority of urban teachers and building administrators hold high expectations for students and care whether students are successful.

Surprisingly, at least to me, is that only a third of teachers and nearly 16% of administrators agree that students at their schools are not motivated to learn.

Nearly 25% of teachers also agree that most students at their school would not be successful at a community college or university. Only 7% of administrators agreed with that statement.

In my extensive travels in Oklahoma, rural educators I encounter are happy teaching and wouldn't do anything else.

That may explain why rural Oklahoma schools graduate a higher percentage and have a higher percentage that go on to college or CareerTech.

I'm not putting down Tulsa and Oklahoma City schools. They include some of the best schools in

Oklahoma, but they also include some that are miserable failures – graduating as few as 43% of students.

The survey's findings are grouped under eight areas: bullying; expectations of success; influence of race; professional climate; professional development; parental involvement; safety; and trust, respect, and ethos of caring.

Among the major findings is that while most teachers and administrators in the survey believe they can deter bullying in their schools, the majority believes that bullying still goes on at least once a month.

Bullying remains an endemic problem, leading many fatherless students to join gangs for protection.

Also, the survey revealed that student race still influences expectations and success. Over half of teachers disagree that students will be successful in their school based on race.

In Oklahoma, only 57% of blacks graduate, only 52.7% of Hispanics. The white graduation rate is 75% – below the national average of 77.9%.

Oklahoma does a remarkable job considering that we're 47th in what we spend on a student's education and 48th in teacher salaries.

My dream?

To give the Legislature and the governor an ACT test.

21st Century Gettysburg Address

This Best of Frosty column first appeared in the Feb. 25, 2008 edition of The Oklahoma Observer.

Seven score and many years ago our fathers did not bring forth on this continent a new theocracy, conceived in bigotry and dedicated to the proposition that only members of the Christian Coalition are created equal.

We have witnessed a great transformation, testing whether that Bush ilk or any group so conceived and so transformed should long endure.

We are encouraged by a looming election of that transformation. We refuse to dedicate a portion of that election to rightwingers lest we lose peace, hon-

or, and equality. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

We cannot safely disregard what Bush has done here. The world will little note nor long remember their constitutional subversion unless we let it.

In a larger sense, it is for us the thinking to be here dedicated to the great tasks remaining before us – to support, not condemn, public education; to support families, even poor families; to fund all social programs for the children; to keep libraries free; to get Bush government out of our hair and out of our bedrooms; to legislate fair taxes not tax shelters for the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

Citizen Fricker Leaves The Newsroom

BY RAY PEARCEY

More than once, over the span of the last year or so, I have wanted to unfriend my buddy, Richard L. Fricker.

And I don't just mean expelling him from my Facebook world, but Richard was like the refrain in the old Eagles' song, you see – you could “always check out of hotel Richard, but you could never leave.”

Richard died on Sept. 12, after a brief illness, at 69.

Fricker was a public citizen of the first rank and the closest that we had, in T-Town, to the old muckraking, big bark journalistic tradition.

Physically, he bore a real resemblance to Richard Attenborough, the recently deceased gifted actor/filmmaker. But Richard F. was a lot more cantankerous than the characters that Attenborough typically played late in his life, including most famously, the genial entrepreneur/business tycoon in Jurassic Park.

Richard could be impossibly compassionate one day and nosey, intrusive as hell the next. He's was one of the few friends who would routinely ask me “where” I was in our phone chats; sometimes when I was in his personal orbit, he'd asked me who I was talking to after I completed a phone call – one of the biggest no-no's in our “post privacy” world.

Remember this, though: He was a fevered concatenation. He could drive his closest friends batty but he was a devout husband and father. And even though he was not a wealthy person, RLF was a sometimes above board, most times not visible donor to T-Town artists, writers, musicians and other fascinating, but temporarily hapless denizens in our realm.

Richard was a soccer freak, a former Texan, a proud if righteously conflicted Vietnam vet, a Spanish speaker, and a journalist of the most resilient, investigative variety. He was a print journalist “plus” his entire working life: he sparked up at a small town daily after being honorably discharged from the U.S. Navy in the '70's as a radar operative, Petty Officer third class. In addition to his print craft, he did episodic radio news for local, national and international outlets, including the Mutual Network, BBC, and CBC, and helped shepherd a handful of documentary films shot in Tulsa.

The man was a fighter, a big proponent of using state and national freedom of information legislation, and posing white knuckle, totally audacious ques-



Richard L. Fricker, right, with Observer Founding Editor Frosty Troy at the 2013 Frosty Fest in OKC

tions in press conferences and in private exchanges with politicians and other bigwigs.

And brother Fricker was a fierce partisan for civil liberties and human rights, an in-print and in-your-face foe of racism and an unassailable enemy of police brutality, cop obfuscation and corruption. He regarded raw privilege, and arbitrary authority, as the highest sins.

While he was old-school in many ways, he also wrote a signal piece for the very first issue of Wired magazine in 1992. Readers will recall that Wired, for over a decade, was the unrivaled repository of everything that was super cool, techno hip and on the edge.

Richard's Wired story on the now little-remembered firm INSLAW, and it's strange troubles, was a remarkable pioneering scope out of a murky, predatory connection between the U.S. Justice Department and the well placed, but tiny software/tech company.

INSLAW was a small programming and algorithm systems outfit that had conjured some agile code called PROMIS – for stapling together dozens of disparate government databases to track illegal domestic throw downs and U.S. criminal operatives.

The Feds, Richard surmised, wanted to redeploy the firm's cross agency, interactive database application

for intelligence and defense work and transnational drug interdiction – but the Feds were not all that cool about paying INSLAW for this new task set.

The INSLAW story was arguably one of the first about the strange, still morphing nexus between information tech, software engineering, intellectual property and the limitless data requirements of our justice system and the American intelligence community.

And while the government's rebuttals and claims of misrepresentation in Richard's story were as voluminous as fans at a World Cup champion after-party, a federal judge later awarded \$8.6 million to the minuscule INSLAW, having decided that DOJ and the U.S. intelligence community did, in fact, steal, as Richard had claimed in his path-breaking story, their assets.

Richard was also one of the senior writers for *The Oklahoma Observer*, a statewide, monthly political and commentary magazine. The *Observer*, as Editor Arnold Hamilton will tell anyone, is a neon platform for "afflicting the comfortable, while comforting the afflicted."

In recent months, Richard, via *The Observer*, has assailed Oklahoma Gov. Mary Fallin for ignoring the Oklahoma Supreme Court, for her outsized maneuvering to deprive Oklahomans of federal ObamaCare benefits and for overseeing a botched state execution that has pulsed a wave of revulsion across the country and a ginned up re-look at capital punishment.

And while some politics writers were willing to let soon-to-retire U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn, R-OK, go by the wayside, Richard wrote a profoundly unflattering and unfailingly accurate rendition of the many questionable votes on civil liberties, unemployment, gender matters, labor, and retrenchment of the federal social net that was core to Coburn's legacy.

ABA STORIES

Richard did extensive coverage of the so-called Abello controversy, one that won him the 1989 American Business Editor's award for best investigative writing, the first of two he secured from work he did for the American Bar Association Journal.

The Abello controversy centered around a Colombian character with lots of dubious assets, associates and a grim history, who was actually extracted from Latin America and tried in Tulsa during the '90s.

Richard's fact-based conjecture was that while Abello was certainly a participant in cocaine, heroin and other illegal drug trafficking, he was nowhere near the outsized figure that the Bush Administration claimed.

In a 1990 commentary, James Warren, of the *Chicago Tribune* wrote:

"... The piece [Fricker's] leaves the distinct impression that the U.S. allegation that Abello was a high-ranking member of the Medellin cartel was hogwash and that he was railroaded, in part because the U.S. refused to let many potential defense witnesses come to the courtroom in Tulsa from Colombia ..."

Richard often said he was particularly proud of an-

other ABA story, *Reasonable Doubts*, a many-tiered narrative about Adolph Munson, who spent 12 years on Oklahoma's death row for a murder he had no connection to.

Over the course of a tumultuous investigative foray, Richard secured info previously hidden by the authorities. His energetic rummaging was transformative – Munson was re-tried and acquitted.

And while most of Richard's works were domestic pieces, often targeted at misconduct in policing, law enforcement, government misbehavior and the hypocritical deeds of Oklahoma political officials, he managed to get out of the country and do an international story from time to time.

The most notable, *Emerging Law in Palestine*, was a story spawned by his '93 trip to the Middle East with then-ABA Journal Editor Gary Hengstler, shortly after the signing of an arguably unprecedented codicil between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization.

In the piece, Richard conveys some prescient impressions that bedevil us today. Even as the Israeli government and the PLO were executing fresh peace documents, the foundations of the agreements were disintegrating, abetted by bitter dissents within Israel and the Palestinian cadre.

Sadly, the then-new Oslo compact was in meltdown even while getting underway, producing the same twilight cast, ever conflict laden landscape that readers can sample by pressing CNN on their cable controller this week.

And this transnational dust-up story was far from unique: Richard would joyously savage any institution, politico or movement that he thought was hypocritical, anti-democratic, not transparent or simply a danger to the republic.

LAST WORKS

Richard was also contributor, this past 60 weeks, to *The Oklahoma Eagle* – a nearly 100-year-old weekly publication that I manage. He wrote about policing, courts, law-enforcement in the metro area, did several great film reviews, assisted with M.J. Denman's fabulous weekly soccer piece, and with Arnold Hamilton's permission, helped *The Eagle* to republish a passel of articles from *The Oklahoma Observer*.

Richard also contributed an article, some months ago, to Tulsa's newest alt-weekly journal, *The Tulsa Voice*, and he was in the midst of negotiating an expanded role at *The Voice* – including extended coverage of local soccer – one of his torrid obsessions.

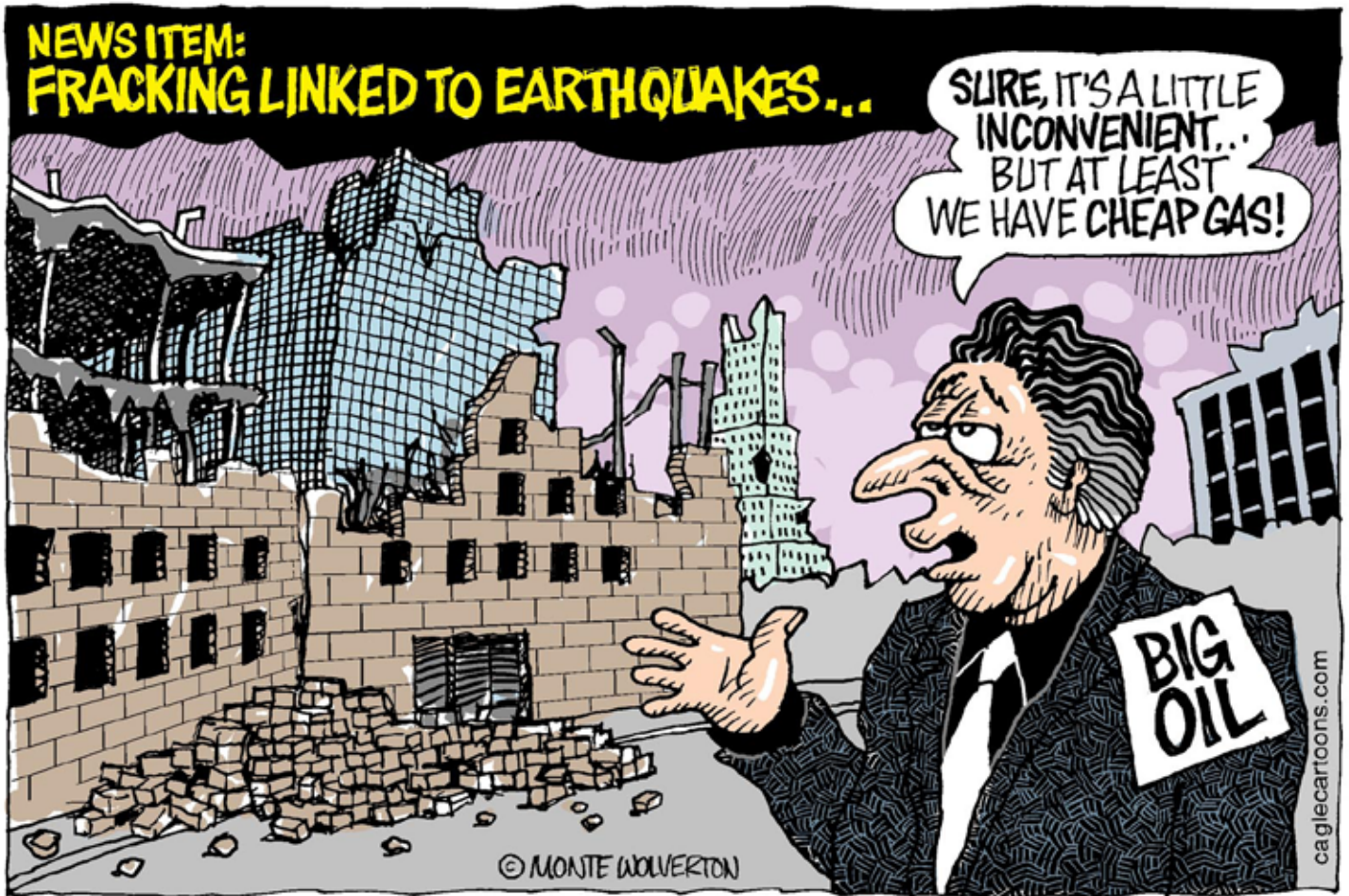
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We can't do without Richard in Oklahoma. We'll have to find a way to regenerate his spirit, his ethical antenna, his outlook, his energy and, yes, his sometimes a-social, but productive mien.

I'm betting he is ruminating on the deficiencies of this piece even now; he is probably monitoring my work – somehow. He was so damn noseey. ■

Ray Pearcey is editor of The Oklahoma Eagle and a columnist for The Tulsa Voice.

Hamm-Made Earthquakes



BY BOB JACKMAN

Last month, Austin Holland, the Oklahoma Geological Survey's state seismologist, spoke at the Osage Nation's oil and gas summit on "Recent Oklahoma Earthquakes."

Holland's speech focused on technical evidence regarding the rapid increase of seismicity [earthquakes] in Oklahoma. However, he skillfully left doubt in the audience's mind whether his lack of conclusions are what they heard!

It was similar to Bernard Shaw's line about economists: "If all of this seismologist's explanations on the causes of Oklahoma's earthquakes were laid end to end – he would never reached a conclusion!"

During Holland's question and answer session – and afterwards in the lobby – we had several exchanges. I pressed him hard on our major differences of what is causing Oklahoma's frightening increase in earthquakes, which is scaring the hell out of central and north central Oklahoma's 500,000 citizens.

Frustrated, he blurted out: "You don't understand – Harold Hamm and others will not allow me to say certain things."

Holland never includes in his speeches the many expert, peer-reviewed findings that – without exception – place blame for Oklahoma's recent swarm of earthquakes on one thing: "It's high volume disposal wells, stupid."

He also never discusses why proven solutions used successfully in other oil and gas producing states do stop or slow earthquakes.

Why not?

"At first in my public talks I mentioned solutions," Holland said, "but was told to stop talking about them."

"Who told you to stop?" I asked.

He chose not to comment.

Then, he continued: "You don't understand the politics of my position. The Oklahoma Geological Survey is funded by the University of Oklahoma which receives from the state of Oklahoma only 10% of its budget. The rest comes from the wealthy, especially big oil producers – donors like Harold Hamm."

Conclusion: Billionaire Hamm and others obviously have applied political pressure to certain officials, in-

cluding Oklahoma Corporation Commissioners who have responsibility over Oklahoma's runaway, rising-magnitude earthquakes through their oversight of disposal wells.

Censoring the state's Seismologist has prevented public and press from being informed on earthquakes, the true causes of which are petroleum wastewater and saltwater disposal wells. These high-volume wells, byproducts of horizontal drilling and fracking, give birth to homeowners experiencing earthquake bumps and bangs in the night, then awakening to growing interior cracks.

But big oil keeps everyone ignorant of proven solutions.

Oklahoma's big oil powers must be afraid that if the causes of man-made induced earthquakes become known, it might force Hamm and other producers to transport wastewater byproducts from their oil and

gas production wells down the road to technically safer disposal wells – at higher costs to them.

Have Hamm and like-minded others effectively neutered the public's seismicity safety net?

Are they guilty of creating and maintaining a public nuisance?

Here's the rest of the story: OU and Oklahoma State University are public institutions, but due to the Legislature's "never-met-school-funding-I-liked" attitude – resulting in continual deep funding cuts to public education – it's now estimated OU and OSU are 85% funded by private wealthy donors – especially big oil.

So did researchers' findings bother big oil? Our public higher education institutions are now semi-private schools. Is there a connection between interference in earthquake research and several top scientists there retiring? ■

Bob Jackman is a Tulsa-based geologist.

It's The Real Thing

BY DAVID PERRYMAN

The old pop box in Hubert and Louise Nicholson's General Store sat square in the middle of the building. It was accessible to nearly every customer who came to town to trade because nickel bottles of soda were in high demand.

Before my time, Hubert or Bo, the store's butcher, kept the pop iced down, but in the years predating my memory, an old black electrical line had been dropped from the ceiling to run the metal cooler. Inside the box with a sliding top and bottle opener on the side were what seemed like a hundred different flavors of ice cold soft drinks.

As a little guy, I was a fan of Grapette, Nehi Orange and Dad's Root Beer. Despite it being around since 1886, Coca-Cola was not on my radar. Then in 1969, not long before I got a job in that same store, stocking among other things, that same pop box, Coca-Cola adopted the slogan, "Coke ... It's the Real Thing."

Not many years later, after nearly a century of using the same secret recipe, Coca-Cola's corporate office decided that "the Real Thing" was no longer good enough and attempted to replace it with the sweeter, milder taste of the "New Coke."

Public outcry was swift and loud; in less than 90 days Coke resumed production of the "real" Coke and ultimately phased out the failed new product that promised "sweeter" rewards.

Oklahoma is at a crossroads. Funding issues have crippled core services. Budgets have been slashed and tax credits are handed out like candy at a parade. Political rhetoric abounds at the State Capitol. No solutions are forthcoming. As a result, Oklahoma and real Oklahomans suffer.

The working poor in Oklahoma have no health in-

surance. Oklahoma's Infant Mortality Rate is 25% higher than the national average according to information on the Oklahoma State Department of Health website. Alarming, an Oklahoma baby is 61% more likely to die from a birth defect than the average American baby. Those are real babies.

The Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement rates are dropping and those in Oklahoma who can are doing nothing to offset the lost hospital revenue. Rural hospitals are operating in the red and laying off employees. Those are real people.

Mental health services are lacking and there is no improvement on the horizon. Nate Robson with Oklahoma Watch reported recently that the suicide rate for Oklahomans is 24.9 people per 100,000 residents between 24 and 65 years of age – nearly twice the national rate of 12.7. Those are real citizens.

Males make up four out of every five suicide deaths in Oklahoma. Dosomething.org reports that nearly 70% of them are depressed and are not receiving the emotional help they need. Those are real men.

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, since 2008, the inflation adjusted per K-12 spending in Oklahoma through 2014 has decreased 22.8%. Our children are lagging farther and farther behind and we blame everyone except those who have the ability to treat our children fairly. Ironically, the other state enjoying an oil boom, North Dakota has increased that same spending by 27.2%. Oklahoma's kids are just as real as North Dakota's kids.

National Education Association statistics show that Oklahoma teachers rank 41st in starting pay and 46th in average pay. No wonder well-trained teachers are leaving Oklahoma's classrooms in droves for bet-

ter pay in other states. Many who stay in Oklahoma to try to raise their children live below the poverty level and qualify for government assistance. Those are real families.

Corrections officers working undermanned shifts for substandard wages in overcrowded prisons are just the tip of the iceberg. Unprotected and underpaid law enforcement personnel are undertrained because they are on year long waiting lists for CLEET even though state law says that they must be certified within six months of hire. Those are real employees.

Enough

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

signments. Whose bills are heard. Whether a House member's office is a broom closet far from the floor or a spacious room with a view. Indeed, whether a member is even recognized to speak on the House floor.

More immediately, Hickman and Co. must take away Bennett's megaphone – dissolve the so-called Counterterrorism Caucus. Make it clear no such thing exists any longer. And no more anti-Muslim news releases financed by taxpayers, via the House Media Division.

This is risky business for Hickman. Speakers can be deposed if enough of their caucus members get a mad-on. But it's even riskier for the state when its leaders refuse to repudiate such demonizing.

It is worth remembering that Hickman inherited this mess. Bennett's "counterterrorism" platform was a "gift" from former House Speaker T.W. Shannon – a political payback to wingnuts whose support was essential to Shannon's narrow victory over Hickman in a previous speaker's race.

Hickman, no doubt, wants caucus harmony, but surely there are more than enough GOP House members that would have his back, recognizing the danger of leaving hate speech unchecked.

While we wait for the state's business and political elite to speak out, CAIR-OK and other groups have been busy protesting Bennett's and Weston's remarks [across from state GOP headquarters] and repudiating the radical terror group ISIS [a demonstration outside Penn Square Mall].

"His [Bennett's] track record is clear," said Adam Soltani, CAIR-OK's executive director. "He has agenda of hate and a fear of Islam."

At a Capitol news conference, Douglas said Bennett's resignation is required because his anti-Muslim comments show he no longer can effectively represent all his constituents.

"How are you going to be a representative representing your district and yet you put fear in the hearts of your neighbors that live in the district?" Douglas said.

It is true that only about 35,000 Muslims live in Oklahoma, but they are engaged civically. They might

When Coca-Cola changed its recipe, people became engaged and let their voices be heard. Today, real families, real kids, real babies and real employees struggle and some don't make it while thousands of people fail to register and fail to vote and ultimately fail to have their voices heard. How much more important is our future than a soft drink? This is real with real consequences. ■

David Perryman, a Chickasha Democrat, represents District 56 in the Oklahoma House of Representatives

not have the numbers to significantly influence most statewide races, but they could prove the difference in hotly-contested legislative races.

As Sheryl Siddiqui, spokeswoman for the Islamic Council of Oklahoma, put it, "Oklahoma Muslims belong to all political parties here, and we vote and we pay taxes and we serve our communities.

"I would say to those two leaders, Mr. Westin and Rep. Bennett, if you can't tell a criminal from a law-abiding citizen, then you have a problem that threatens the safety of every Muslim and every other Oklahoman standing next to us in the grocery line, at the library, on the soccer field. God help you."

Republican leaders also may wish to study demographic trends – particularly what millennials are thinking. For the most part, they don't judge on a person's religion, race, or sexual preference. They care whether you're a nice person or a jerk. Period.

Being linked to the hate spewed by Bennett isn't good for the GOP's long-term health. ■

Gettysburg

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

wealthy; to remind our fellow citizens that the heart of America is middle-class workers; to reform non-violent prisoners; to ensure that all unstable radicals and televangelists have unfettered and immediate access to exit visas; to fight discrimination against any race, group or religion; and to perpetually defend our individual freedoms.

We take increased devotion to these just causes, and we highly resolve that this nation under a loving God shall have a new birth of liberalism, and that government of the rich, by the rich, for the rich shall perish from the earth. ■

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FLATLINE

Funding Cuts Threaten State's Community Health Centers

BY CARLY PUTNAM

Last winter, Oklahoma's community health centers [CHCs] received some unwelcome news. A state fund for covering uncompensated care had run dry seven months early.

Community health centers, which are among the very few places that low-income Oklahomans can get care regardless of ability to pay, struggled to cut costs without cutting essential services until the state fiscal year ended in July.

This year, CHCs calculated that they would need \$9 million to cover fiscal year 2015 uncompensated costs. But by the time the budgetary dust settled, CHCs were allocated just \$2.55 million – less than

one-third of what they'd asked for, and even less than the \$3.12 million FY 2014 funding that ran out before half the year was over.

It's not enough.

In 2013, CHCs in Oklahoma provided care to 162,871 people – a 20% increase since 2011 alone. Four in 10 were uninsured, and 68% were at or below the federal poverty level. Three in 10 were children. These are not people who typically have other options when seeking medical care.

Without funding to provide uncompensated care, providers have eliminated or severely restricted dental services and mental health care – already harm-

ing patient health. They are now considering more drastic measures – such as limiting clinic hours or closing satellite locations – that will completely eliminate access to affordable health care for many Oklahomans.

John Silva, CEO of Morton Comprehensive Health Systems, says that the state's CHCs are in survival mode, struggling to preserve their commitment to medically underserved populations while staying in business.

"You can only cut expenses so far while remaining viable," he said.

Eighty percent of Morton's costs are salaries, so it's very hard to cut costs further without layoffs.

"If this continues for 24 months," Silva said, "I

CHCs are highly efficient care providers that consistently outperform other providers in their health care bang for the buck. But when funding cuts force CHCs to cut hours and services, CHCs become less effective at delivering care to all of their patients.

The shrinking uncompensated care fund is just one part of a disturbing trend of Oklahoma whittling away the health care safety net.

Earlier this year, the state hiked Medicaid copayments to the federal maximum and cut Medicaid provider reimbursements. Meanwhile, the state has continued to refuse to accept a massive infusion of federal funds to extend health coverage to low-income Oklahomans.

Accepting the funds would save the state more than

"The biggest demand is urban," VarietyCare CEO Lou Carmichael said. "But the biggest need is rural."

doubt you'll see [any of us] left standing."

One option Morton is considering is a cap on uninsured enrollment, which could keep them afloat but would leave hanging Oklahomans who don't make the cut.

Closing sites is a last resort, but one they may have to consider. If it comes to that, Silva says, the state's smaller CHCs won't survive: a CHC that has six or eight locations may be able to downsize to two or three, but a health center with only one or two locations has no downsizing options.

VarietyCare, another Oklahoma CHC, already closed a location in Tipton, a small town in southwest Oklahoma. VarietyCare CEO Lou Carmichael described that as the "least-painful option."

"The biggest demand is urban," she said. "But the biggest need is rural."

The Tulsa-based Community Health Connections has shut down behavioral health services, cut dental services down to two days a week, and released a care provider and administrator.

"We cannot sustain this hemorrhaging of cash," said Community Health Connection CEO Jim McCarthy.

Closing clinics and limiting services is undoing many investments Oklahoma had made to improve public health. Oklahoma specifically invested in growing the number of community health centers, and the number of patients seen at these facilities has increased by more than 50% since 2007.

The cuts to uncompensated care threaten to undermine that investment – and damage the health of the thousands of Oklahomans who have come to rely on CHCs for essential care.

The impact of undermining community health centers' solvency goes beyond the uninsured. For example, CHCs reducing their hours of operation and eliminating dental services impact all patients.

\$200 million in uncompensated care costs alone over the next decade. Yet even as we refuse this help, we're digging our uncompensated care hole deeper. ■

Carly Putnam is a policy analyst for the institute. An earlier version of this essay appeared on the OK-Policy blog. You can sign up for OK Policy's e-mail alerts and daily news digest at <http://okpolicy.org>.

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"HIGHER EDUCATION"

Ask Not What College Can Do For You, Ask What College Can Do For Your Country

BY DAVID R. MORGAN

In September, a group called College Factual released its 2015 rankings for all colleges in the country based on a series of objective criteria. Its rankings are by no means the only such effort to measure the quality of institutions of higher education. College Factual claims to have created measures that are more objective than its better known counterparts, notably the annual rankings by U.S. News and World Report.

The College Factual rankings " ... are based on a pure and distinct focus on data, says Bill Phelan,

co-founder and CEO of College Factual ... The group heavily emphasizes such output measures as freshmen retention rate, six-year graduation rate, and student default rate," but also includes average test scores [e.g., ACT].

Below, we'll compare the College Factual [CF] rankings with those from U.S. News [USN] for certain institutions. [Both sets of rankings deal only with undergraduate education and are for 2014-15.]

The U.S. News rankings are clearly more subjective than those of CF. For example, USN bases 22.5% of its

ranking on academic reputation; 22.5% on retention, and 20% on faculty resources [e.g., faculty salaries]. The academic reputation indicator is based on questionnaire responses from administrators and faculty.

The CF measures are more outcome focused: [1] student body caliber [average test scores]; [2] educational resources [per pupil expenditures]; [3] degree completion [freshmen retention rate; six-year graduation rate]; and [4] post-graduation earnings. None of these indicators are based on reputation.

The basic purpose of all such rankings regardless of methodology is to assist prospective students and their parents to find and compare colleges that are best suited for each individual student.

Typically, one would initially focus on the colleges in one's state or in the region. But first we might look at the Top 10 colleges according to both systems [2015]:

College Factual	U.S. News
1. U. of Pennsylvania	Princeton
2. Yale	Harvard
3. Duke	Yale
4. Harvard	Columbia
5. M.I.T.	Stanford*
6. Brown	U. of Chicago*
7. Stanford	M.I.T.
8. Princeton	Duke*
9. Dartmouth	U. of Penn*
10. Notre Dame	Cal Tech

At a quick glance, no major differences appear except in the rankings of Penn [1st vs. 9th] and the unexpected CF ranking of Notre Dame at 10th. That institution ranks only 16th by USN.

COMPARING BIG 12 INSTITUTIONS

I realize that the "Big 12" is only an athletic conference, but it still makes sense to use it for comparing its universities. We could merely use schools from neighboring states to Oklahoma, but where would we draw the line [include Arkansas and New Mexico and leave out Iowa State]? I think the Big 12 makes a more logical group to examine.

None of these 10 [the Big 12 now includes only 10 schools] rank in the top 50 in either set of rankings. The closest nearby highly ranked schools are Washington University [CF 16] and Rice [CF 30].

College Factual	U.S. News
121. Texas	53. Texas
160. TCU	71. Baylor
192. Baylor	76. TCU
245. Iowa St.	106. Iowa St.*
270. OU	106. OU *
298. Kansas	106. Kansas*
396. Texas Tech	142. Kansas St.
425. Kansas St.	145. OSU
444. OSU	156 Texas Tech
1,355. W. Virginia	168. W. Virginia

The most obvious difference in the two sets of rankings is the far larger numbers found in the College Factual rankings. The reason is fairly simple. Whereas CF includes all institutions together [total

of 1,394], USN divides its schools into two ranked groups – national universities [N=201] and liberal arts colleges [N=181]. Otherwise, the two ranked groups above are quite similar.

Just to provide an idea of what schools rank highly among the group of liberal arts colleges, here is the top five according to USN [the CF ranking is shown in parentheses]:

1.	Williams College	[42]
2.	Amherst	[13]
3.	Swarthmore	[38]
4.	Wellesley	[79]
5.	Bowdoin*	[76]
5.	Pomona*	[22]

The inclusion of a fairly good-sized group of liberal arts institutions in the CF rankings pushes the larger public colleges downward.

Location also matters: the liberal arts group is found heavily on the east and west coasts. For example, 64 of the CF list of best colleges comes from one state – Massachusetts.

Just a few more comparisons of local interest before I sum up. In Oklahoma, the best ranked CF school is the University of Tulsa at 88th. Oklahoma City University at 540 is the fourth best state school [behind Tulsa, OU and OSU] The University of Central Oklahoma ranks 1,336.

HOW USEFUL?

The best-known system of ranking institutions of higher education is the list compiled by U.S. News. As noted above, it places considerable emphasis on the reputation of the college.

We can find several other rankings, of course. For example, College Factual compiles lists of the best colleges for the money, best for veterans, most diverse, and best for sports.

One other set of rankings is worth a brief mention because it differs significantly from the other two we've been considering. And more importantly, the editors claim their rankings are likely to be much closer to the sort of new federal rating system the Obama Administration is considering. This is the second annual ranking found in the magazine Washington Monthly [WM].

Instead of identifying the most prestigious or the "best" colleges, WM basically asks, "What are colleges doing for the country?" – rather than for the individual. The magazine compiles its list based on three broad criteria – social mobility, research, and public service.

Briefly, "social mobility" includes such items as net price of attending that institution and percentage of students receiving Pell Grants. "Research" is measured by five variables such as total research expenditures, and number of science and engineering PhDs awarded. "Service" includes five indicators including size-adjusted number of alumni serving in the Peace Corps and percentage of students who serve in ROTC.

The subsequent WM ranking of national universities differs greatly from the two rankings measuring

quality. Here are the Top 10 schools under this alternative scheme:

1. Univ. of California-San Diego
2. Univ. of California-Riverside
3. Univ. of California-Berkeley
4. Texas A&M
5. Univ. of California-Los Angeles [UCLA]
6. Stanford
7. Univ. of Washington
8. Univ. of Texas-El Paso
9. Case Western Reserve
10. Harvard

Obviously, several of the above group are highly prestigious, e.g., Stanford and Harvard. Otherwise, the top group includes other institutions far down on the list of high status schools.

So, it's difficult to know what to make of Washington Monthly's rankings. Little doubt, if the federal government gets in the college ranking business, the variables included will surely take account of more than prestige and would incorporate almost all objective measures.

One can make a powerful argument that this whole

business of assessing college quality flows naturally from the bedrock concept of the American dream. On an individual level, our culture assumes that people can and should improve their lives as much as possible. Going to college is a major way for individuals to enhance their place in the world. On the other hand, as a nation we aspire to keep the country strong partly by relying on education as an essential value and an antidote to all sorts of critical problems.

Probably we need both types of measures of what colleges are supposed to do.

Prospective undergraduate students and their parents will always be interested in the prestige of the schools they're considering. For that purpose, I would favor the sort of indicators found in the College Factual methodology. Coming up with a way of taking account of what colleges might do for the country would be much harder and more controversial.

Still, such a ranking would benefit those who worry that institutions of higher education should do more to justify their high and growing costs. ■

David R. Morgan is a retired University of Oklahoma political science professor.

Trust The Teachers

BY SHARON MARTIN

It starts with an attitude. Pick out the worst behavior one can find, or the lowest performing school, and let it stand for the nation's education system. Say the system needs fixing [and there is always something that does]. There ... now you are ready to knock down the schoolhouse walls and start with something new. Never mind that the new is unproven and expensive.

The oligarchs have been trying to get their hands on education money for a long time. They've managed to get chunks of it with overpriced textbooks and endless tests. They've pushed for publicly funded private schools, especially virtual schools where there is little oversight and big potential for profit. Despite evidence to the contrary, an awful lot of people have been gulled into thinking this is good for them.

Here's what's good for students and this country:

- Qualified teachers
- Safe, comfortable school buildings
- Research-based, teacher-created standards
- Libraries and librarians
- Classes with 14 to 18 students
- Pull-out programs and specialists for the kids who need more
- Respect all around
- Real professional development
- Time for teachers to work together

Is this cheap? No, but it's cheaper than either ignorance or profit-driven schemes. Common sense will tell you that when you need to make a profit, either

it's going to cost more or you're going to get less.

What's the role of technology? It has its place, but it won't replace teachers.

As a reading specialist, I can listen to a child read aloud from a list of words and short passages. Within a few minutes, I have a pretty good picture about the child's fluency, decoding skills, and vocabulary. A few questions later, I have a handle on the child's comprehension skills. It is time intensive, but it works. And with manageable class sizes, it's an ongoing process.

There's a computer test that will do all this for me. I can test a whole class at once in the school's computer lab. Print off reams of paper and pore over the results, but I still need to listen to the kids read. Really. If you don't hear the child read, you just don't know what's going on.

Nothing will replace qualified teachers. Computers don't build community or foster intelligent discussion. One look at online comments proves the point.

Patriots should see it as a solemn duty to invest in public schools. Tax dollars should educate children, not enrich shareholders. Successful education builds lifelong learners and strengthens the country. This, not profits, is what education should be about. *Sharon Martin lives in Oilton, OK and is a regular contributor to The Oklahoma Observer*

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Common Sense After Common Core

BY GEORGIA SPARKS

Removing Common Core from Oklahoma education without an alternate plan in place means that education in Oklahoma could lose control of a great deal of money. Since money is always in short supply here, there could be significant cuts in services which the children living here need. This means that the careless passing of bills in our Legislature which have not been thoroughly researched will hurt our children.

I suggest that Oklahomans contact their legislator and let them know that Oklahomans want their children to be educated so that when they graduate they do not need remedial classes in order to attend an institution of higher learning. It is unacceptable for Oklahoma to rank at the bottom of the 50 states.

Any time the consolidation of our needlessly large number of school districts is mentioned, politicians afraid of the next election kick the problem on down the road. There is absolutely no reason for there to be more school districts in Oklahoma than there are in Texas. If every little village or town in Oklahoma cannot bear not to have a school, we might do like West Virginia has done and designate countywide school districts, in which the schools are left, but the administration of the schools could be handled by far fewer well-paid school superintendents. Since all schools now have telephones and computers, one superintendent could handle several small districts.

Also, if every town must have a school, at least high schools could be consolidated. I attended very small schools, so I graduated without the science and math I needed to have a wider choice of career possibili-

ties. Therefore, I am not in favor of retaining small inadequate schools for sentimental reasons.

Local control is another area in which Oklahomans seem unusually concerned. I taught in Oklahoma for 33 years. In that time, there was never a time in which even one person attempted to stop the saying of the Pledge of Allegiance or even mentioned prayer in school. I taught science and was never challenged on teaching the history of the earth and the development of animal life. We discussed the biblical "seven days" of creation and discussed the use of the word "day" as representing an unknown period of time rather than one earth day. Who is to know how long one of God's days might be? The children and I discussed scientific theory and religious belief and decided that it did not need to be conflicting. What was important was understanding the way the earth developed, not when. Public school is not the place to discuss or practice religion. My school left that to the parents and all of us were happy.

I firmly believe that public schools need administrators whose main training and experience has been in public schools. People who are mostly involved in private or charter schools have a different way of looking at the needs and problems of schools. Someone who has taught in public schools has had different experiences from those who have mostly taught in private schools.

When you vote for a state school superintendent, choose the person who is best suited to work with public schools. ■

Georgia Sparks lives in Edmond.

Punch Lines

These great questions and answers are from the days when Hollywood Squares game show responses were spontaneous, not scripted.

Peter Marshall was the host asking the questions, of course.

Q. Paul, what is a good reason for pounding meat?

A. Paul Lynde: Loneliness!

Q. Do female frogs croak?

A. Paul Lynde: If you hold their little heads under water long enough.

Q. True or False, a pea can last as long as 5,000 years.

A. George Gobel: Boy, it sure seems that way sometimes.

Q. According to Cosmopolitan, if you meet a stranger at a party and you think that he is attractive, is it OK to come out and ask him if he's married?

A. Rose Marie: No. Wait until morning.

Q. Which of your five senses tends to diminish as you get older?

A. Charley Weaver: My sense of decency.

Q. In Hawaiian, does it take more than three words to say "I Love You"?

A. Vincent Price: No, you can say it with a pineapple and a twenty.

Q. What are "Do It," "I Can Help," and "I Can't Get Enough"?

A. George Gobel: I don't know, but it's coming from the next apartment.

Q. As you grow older, do you tend to gesture more or less with your hands while talking?

A. Rose Marie: You ask me one more growing old question Peter, and I'll give you a gesture you'll never forget.

Q. Paul, why do Hell's Angels wear leather?

A. Paul Lynde: Because chiffon wrinkles too easily.



Oklahoma's Broken Democracy

BY DAVID BLATT

In late August, Oklahoma voters went to the polls for primary runoff elections. Well, a few voters went to the polls.

Average turnout was a paltry 18.1%. In 11 of the 16 runoff contests, fewer than one in five registered voters cast a ballot to select their party's nominee. In the two statewide Democratic primaries for Superintendent of Public Instruction and U.S. senator, turnout was less than 11%.

Pitiful turnout in primaries is an extreme example of a broader breakdown of democratic participation in Oklahoma.

Earlier this year, Oklahoma was ranked 47th among the states for electoral performance in a study by the Pew Charitable Trusts. On a majority of indicators in the study, including voter registration, turnout, voting wait time, and registration or absentee ballot problems, Oklahoma ranked among the bottom third of states.

How is our electoral system broken? Let us count the ways:

First, Oklahoma has low voter registration.

Oklahoma's voter registration rate – the percentage registered to vote among the total eligible adult population – was 76.9% in 2012, down four percentage points from 2008 and fourth lowest among the states for which the Pew study had data. This means that almost one out of four eligible adults is not even registered to vote. In 23 states, at least 85% of eligible voters are registered.

Voter registration in Oklahoma has remained almost flat for decades, even as the state population grows.

As of January 2014, Oklahoma had 1,978,812 registered voters, an increase of just .6% compared to 1994 [1,966,273 registered voters] and of 2% compared to 2004 [1,938,377 registered voters]. During the corresponding two decade period [1993-2013],

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Oklahoma's total population grew by some 650,000 people, or 20%.

Compared to 1994, the number of registered Democrats has fallen by 29%, while registration has increased by 30% for Republicans and by 306% for Independents.

Even among Oklahomans who are registered to vote, a relatively low percentage actually turns out for elections. Oklahoma's voter turnout in the 2012 presidential election was just 49%, third worst behind only Hawaii and West Virginia. Turnout was down seven percentage points compared to the previous presidential election in 2008.

in the party primaries. Among incumbent legislators seeking re-election, 50 of 83 in the House managed not to draw an opponent, while seven of 15 incumbent senators drew no opposition.

Among nine positions for statewide offices, three incumbents were unopposed in 2014 and two offices were settled in the Republican primary, leaving just four offices to be decided by the voters in November. Only in Congressional races will a clear majority of voters actually get a chance to cast a ballot this fall – both Senate seats and four out of five House seats drew candidates from both parties, as well as independent candidates in most cases.

In too many cases, voters don't even have more a contested race to weigh in on. A basic democratic precept is that voters have the opportunity to choose their elected representatives from at least two candidates. In Oklahoma, that standard is being missed with alarming regularity.

In the last gubernatorial election year, 2010, turnout was 39%, which placed Oklahoma 40th in the nation. It is likely that turnout this November will be significantly lower than 39%, given the recent declines in voting and registration seen from the Pew data, and the fact that there are few competitive statewide and Congressional races.

In primary elections, turnout falls even lower. In June, there were 44 legislative primary races – 32 for the House [24 Republican primaries and eight Democratic primaries] and 12 for the Senate [eight Republican and four Democratic].

In the Republican primaries, just over 30% of registered party voters cast ballots, while in the Democratic primaries, turnout was about 22%. We then saw a further overall drop of almost 33% between the initial primary and the runoff in those races where no candidate received 50% of the vote in June.

In too many cases, voters don't even have more a contested race to weigh in on. A basic democratic precept is that voters have the opportunity to choose their elected representatives from at least two candidates. In Oklahoma, that standard is being missed with alarming regularity.

This year, voters will have a choice of general election candidates in only 37 of 101 House seats and 13 of 25 Senate seats. In the Senate, eight candidates ran unopposed and four seats were settled in the party primaries. In the House, 50 candidates won election in unopposed seats while 14 seats were settled

Perhaps as a result of all this, the Oklahoma Legislature does not look like Oklahoma. In particular, women and minorities, with the exception of Native Americans, are considerably underrepresented.

In 2013, just four of 48 Senators and 16 of 101 House members in the state legislature were women. This ranked Oklahoma third from the bottom – behind only South Carolina and Louisiana – in female representation. Since 2009, the number of female legislators has increased by four. Oklahoma currently has no women in Congress [this is unlikely to change in November], while four of 11 current statewide officeholders are women [that number may decrease by one or two after November].

The Legislature currently has six African-American members and one Hispanic member, the first in state history. If the Legislature reflected these groups' share of the overall state population, there would be 11 African-American and 15 Hispanic legislators. Asians make up 2% of the state population, but there has never been an Asian member of the Legislature.

One bright spot is that Native Americans are well represented in the Legislature. In 2013, the bipartisan House Native American Caucus included 26 members, up from 19 in the previous Legislature. ■ *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>*

‘Building A State, Not A Party’ Is Recipe For Failure



BY BEN SHERRER

Following the defeat of Freda Deskin in the Democratic runoff for state Superintendent of Public Instruction, I asked her in an e-mail if she would endorse John Cox. She replied, “I will not be endorsing either candidate. Thanks[.]”

How disappointing that the individual endorsed by Brad and Kim Henry, David Walters, Barry Switzer, and the editorial board of the Tulsa World won’t pay it forward to support John Cox. This got me to thinking ...

The actions of Freda Deskin follow a failed model that has been adopted by Democrats in recent years. Even Gov. Henry has been quoted as saying, “I’m not building a party – I’m building a state.”

That makes a good sound bite. But it’s a politically self-preserving mindset that is harmful to the team.

Gov. Henry’s election is what gave me the confidence to run for a seat in the Legislature. In fact, I’m exactly the type of Democrat that has allowed myself

to be lured into a trance of moderate bipartisanship that sounds good – but fails to produce any significantly measurable results at the ballot box.

After 10 years in the minority [now a 72-29 minority where I serve in the state House], I see the flaw in our failure to build our party. In fact, I now think party-building is the difference in the rise of the Republican Party and the decline in the Democratic Party.

And by the way, in reference to “our failure,” I’m speaking of Democratic elected officials and candidates for office. We elected folks have distanced ourselves from the party when we should have stayed the course to build the party.

A few years ago, I lamented the plight of we elected Democrats to Keith McArtor, former chair of the Tulsa County Democrats. He asked me about my role in the Mayes County Democratic Party. I told him that I attended about half the meetings – they were good folks but, as a practical matter, might not be able to

get any given candidate elected or defeated.

Keith's words to me: "That's your fault, Ben. You can never make a mistake by deciding to lead."

He went on to tell me that Oklahoma's Republican Congressional delegation routinely flies back for local Republican Party functions as priority events and they do so without shame or fear that they'll be labeled partisan.

Keith is right. My county Democrats are great people that I have not properly supported and inspired.

Building the party and building the state, in fact, are not mutually exclusive. Just ask a Republican.

It goes without saying the building of our state does not happen without the inclusion and consideration of people of all political persuasions. But at our core, as Democrats, is a way of governing that brings the greatest benefit to the greatest number of people – plain and simple.

The future of common sense politics in Oklahoma depends upon the rebuilding of the Democratic Party in Oklahoma and our ability to put real people into the policy equation.

Rep. Joe Dorman's strong run for governor gives us a new glimmer of hope. His strong campaign is a rallying point for Democrats that will definitely help Democrats down the ballot.

And if the House Democrats can just pick up five seats this election cycle we will have the ability to kill an emergency clause or cause/prevent a veto override.

Democrats could at least have a negotiating point – however small it might be.

We Democrats don't like to talk in terms of parti-

sanship and building our team. It makes us uncomfortable because we like to think we can just get along with everyone. And for the most part we can. Even in the Legislature, most issues aren't of a partisan nature.

But there is a reality to the notion that if the team isn't built up and supported, it will weaken and wither.

Contrary to the Republican way, where partisanship and loyalty to party are of prime importance, we Democrats put our majority position on cruise control about three decades ago and let our party identity slip into oblivion. Instead, we tried to "get along" and build the state.

All the while the Republican Party took care of creating our public identity for us – an identity that has been whittled down and framed to about three things that don't even need to be mentioned.

In just 10 years, things that generations fought for are being gradually peeled away or weakened [education, healthcare, public pensions, worker protections].

But I digress. Deskin's refusal to support Democrat John Cox is Exhibit A for what must be changed in our mindset and practice.

Elected Democratic officials, Democratic candidates, and registered Democrats in Oklahoma must embrace the core beliefs that made our party great for people: bringing the greatest benefit and opportunity to the greatest number of people. ■

Ben Sherrer, a Choteau Democrat, represents District 8 in the Oklahoma House of Representatives.

Reasons To Vote Republican

BY VERN TURNER

Thirteen years ago, I was teaching school in Colorado Springs. I had my planning period the first hour of the day. When I went down to the office for something I noted a hush and everyone crowded around TV screens.

That's when I learned what happened on Sept. 11, 2001. All faculty, staff and students were in complete shock from those horrific events and normal lessons were abandoned for discussion and venting.

My wife and I had tickets to see Yoyo Ma, the great cellist, that evening in the city concert hall. As show time approached and everyone was seated, the accompanying orchestra broke into a rousing version of The Star-Spangled Banner. The entire audience leaped to its feet and sang it. There were few, if any dry eyes that night. I don't even remember the concert.

On Sept. 11, 2014, the Republicans in the U.S. Senate refused to vote for an amendment to overturn the egregious Supreme Court "decisions" that allow corporate corruption to poison the election processes in our "democratic" republic.

In Scotland, 97% of the electorate turned out to vote on independence from England. *Ninety-seven percent.* We will struggle to get to 50% this coming November.

Great Britain doesn't allow corporations to overly influence the voice of the people. We do. The most impactful organization favoring corruption is the Republican Party. Oh, the Democrats dip their snout in the trough sufficiently to create a Congress that refuses to do anything favoring the general public. This is what not voting gets us.

Recently, our president announced that we would

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be taking on yet another terrorist group in the Middle East, the leaders of which came from Sadaam Hussein's former military hierarchy.

You might recall that it was the Bush/Cheney lackey Paul Bremer who was ordered to "de-Baath" Iraq as part of the disastrous "occupation" after our unprovoked invasion. Nice work, guys. Now the old generals are leading more crazy killers to create more instability in the region.

Will the gifts from the Bush Administration ever stop giving?

No, isolationism won't work, the oil price stability is too important for that. Instead we will expend even more treasure, resources and lives to ensure that those "American interests" are preserved. Since our military uses almost as much oil as the rest of our society, it's almost like our soldiers and airmen have to protect their source of mother's milk.

It's not that I don't get all that, it's just that the terrible, horrible, incompetent foreign policy of the Bush years has led the world to this blood-stained place with no end in sight.

Then there are the other reasons for our citizens to absolutely get out and vote:

1. If you are a woman and want to be paid less than a man doing the same work, vote Republican.

2. If you are a woman and want your reproductive rights to be dictated by politicians, vote Republican.

3. If you want to see Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and education become privatized and more expensive, vote Republican.

4. If you want still more tax breaks for the wealthy and corporations so that they end up paying almost no tax, and allowed to send more jobs overseas, vote Republican.

5. If you accept offshore tax havens for the rich and corporations, and don't mind paying higher tax rates

than they do to make up the difference, vote Republican.

6. If you are a woman and don't want legal protection from domestic violence, vote Republican.

7. If you have children, can't afford private schools and continue to send them to deteriorating and unsafe schools, vote Republican.

8. If you are not a Christian, but don't mind having Christian dogma thrust upon you by your representatives and your children's school systems, vote Republican.

9. If you want to lose your deposit insurance, unemployment insurance, food assistance and minimum wage, vote Republican.

The point is that if you're not paying attention or are too lazy to learn about your politics and candidates, you deserve what you get.

When enough people eschew their civic duty in this way, the society is left to the oligarchs who want it *all* ... including your job, house, health care, and any hope for improving your lot in life. They fail to understand that in a consumer-based economy where the consumers have no money, the economy – and the country – fails.

If you don't like how things are going, *vote. This year. In November. Get registered* if you are among the 30% of eligible Americans remaining unregistered. Do these things, because the viability of your nation depends on it. ■

Vern Turner is a regular contributor to The Oklahoma Observer. He lives in Marble Falls, TX, where he writes a regular column for the River Cities Daily Tribune. He is the author of three books – A Worm in the Apple: The Inside Story of Public Schools, The Voters Guide to National Salvation and Killing the Dream: America's Flirtation With Third World Status – all available through Amazon.com.

Taking Our Country Back

BY SHARON MARTIN

Have you ever contemplated the real reason libertarianism can't replace democracy? Live and let live is a good idea, unless someone is starving, unless companies are dumping their wastes into common waters, unless you don't have a job that provides health insurance. Unless you are out of the fold.

Capitalism by itself fares no better. Free enterprise spurs innovation and motivates entrepreneurship and invention. Without a social safety net and strong labor movement, however, a handful of people end up with all the assets.

No pure-ism works. No one philosophy can encom-

pass all the needs of creation. This is why I vote Democrat.

Democrats are seldom all on the same page of the music at the same time. They might not even be singing from the same songbook.

But there is a melody that runs through every chorus: people matter.

The only reason Republicans, including the libertarian wing, can possibly win elections is because they find an easily repeated chorus to stir up their voters: Christian nation, right to open carry [it says it right there in the Constitution!], no taxes [on rich folk]. Never mind that most of this is bunkum.

Election Won't Resolve Much

BY LEE H. HAMILTON

Members of Congress are home now, campaigning for the upcoming elections. Their messages are all over the map, and for a good reason: they have very little to brag about.

The Congress that just recessed until after the elections makes the 80th – the one that Harry Truman blasted as “do-nothing” – look like a paragon of productivity.

This year's members did manage to avoid a shutdown, but that's about all. Congressional leaders spent the better part of the year avoiding tough votes.

They didn't pass an annual budget. They made no pretense of weighing U.S. policy against ISIS or, really, any other foreign or defense policy issue. They didn't tackle immigration reform, climate change, tax reform, the minimum wage, or domestic surveillance. They passed fewer bills than any other Congress in 60 years.

In the 3½ months between the beginning of August and mid-November, they'll have been in session all of 10 days.

Small wonder that voters are in a sour mood when it comes to Washington. They want to see our elected leaders tackling issues that confront the country. They want less partisanship. They don't understand government's frequent failures, and crave more competence. On every front, the people they've elected have disappointed them.

This may be why there is no dominant theme in this year's elections: voters seem more focused on a variety of issues than on one dominant issue. Apathy is high and we are headed for low voter turnout, even by the standards of mid-term elections. Voter outrage at Congress is not translating into a message of rejecting incumbents.

This has made the tone of the election rather

interesting. Candidates appear to have picked up on voters' dislike of mean-spirited campaigning, and for the most part are showing restraint. The deeply partisan politics we saw in 2010 and 2012 has abated. Where a couple of years ago there was heated talk of storming the gates in Washington and potentially shutting the government down, that kind of campaigning is just a memory this year.

Candidates may not be embracing Washington, but they're not attacking it as they once did. There's even talk of bipartisanship and building bridges, sentiments that were nearly invisible in recent years.

Given President Obama's lack of popularity, there's a general sense among members of the political class that Republicans have an edge in the election and may well take over the Senate. Yet even if the Senate majority changes hands, it will do so only narrowly. A party needs 60 votes there to accomplish much of anything, so whoever controls the Senate will be able to maneuver only on the margins; resolving tough issues head-on will be difficult, maybe impossible. The dysfunction and lack of productivity that have become defining characteristics of Congress in recent years are likely to continue.

In short, whatever happens on Election Day this year, it's unlikely that much will change in its wake. This may hardly be the most important election of our lifetimes, but the business that Congress left unfinished is still waiting. The nation needs an elected leadership capable of rolling up its sleeves and meeting our challenges head-on right now, not a few years hence.

Former U.S. Rep. Lee Hamilton is director of the Center on Congress at Indiana University.

Libertarians have some attractive ideas – legalize pot, reject the corporate/military state. But don't come to the libertarians for sympathy, health care, or assistance. They buy into the no-taxes, debt-is-out-of-control bull that makes them indistinguishable from the GOP.

Neither the Republicans nor the Libertarians know the difference between expenditure and investment.

So, welcome to the Democratic Party.

Every party attracts thieves and opportunists. That's why we must have campaign finance reform. Dems can't win without trying to match the big spenders in other parties. Even those who cry for public financing

of elections can't win without spending much of their time fundraising.

Fix this first. Then, we work on educating voters about the real issues.

Those issues? We pay our fair share of taxes. We do our fair share of work. We receive our fair share in the resources.

What if we all voted our own self-interest? What if we all voted? What if we put the needs of the people first?

That, my friends, is how we get our country back. *Sharon Martin lives in Oilton, OK and is a regular contributor to The Oklahoma Observer.*



Battle For The Mansion: Joe Dorman vs. Mary Fallin

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

first-term missteps, including this year's flip-flop on Common Core.

But there are critical differences between 2002 – when Henry upset the GOP's golden boy, NFL Hall of Famer-turned-U.S. Rep. Steve Largent – and the 2014 Fallin-Dorman race.

Most significantly, Henry won an open seat – he didn't knock off an incumbent, typically a tall task barring scandal. And Oklahoma's voting patterns have changed – 100,000 more straight-party Republican than Democratic votes when Fallin won four years ago.

Still, the governor's sub-50% support in polls – whether surveys culled for registered or likely voters – suggests Fallin Fatigue may be in full swing.

Here are some likely culprits:

LONGEVITY

Fallin was first elected to the state House in 1990, a time when there were so few Republicans, they could

caucus in a phone booth.

Four years later, she won the first of three four-year terms as Oklahoma lieutenant governor, then served four years in Congress before winning the 2010 gubernatorial race.

Twenty-four years is a long time in the public eye. She's suffered her share of personal bruises – especially a nasty divorce – and the usual political ones that come from waging eight, often highly-partisan campaigns.

Her tenure as governor included some very public spats with news organizations and bloggers seeking access under the Open Records Act to communications and records she sought to keep private – stirring criticism that she only paid lip service to a belief in government transparency.

Even the Oklahoma's right wing editorial page chided Fallin for withholding 31 documents that – when she finally released them – created less of a stir than

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the fact she kept invoking “executive privilege.”

Despite campaign ads that show her hugging tornado victims and proclaiming “no one cares more about Oklahoma,” Fallin is not the most outgoing, sociable candidate around – often appearing ill-at-ease when mingling with constituents.

Moreover, Oklahoma has its share of rednecks – some no doubt suspicious about a woman serving in what traditionally has been a man’s job.

FLIP FLOPPING

Fallin’s first term featured several high-profile about-faces on key policy issues – winning her enmity of hard-core Tea Party types, among other “true believing” right wingers.

In August, for example, she apparently accepted – then reneged on – an invitation to attend the Garvin County Republican Party’s Bean Feed after it became public that the program included a discussion of “some things that you may not know” about the Ku Klux Klan.

Early in her administration, she first accepted, then rejected a \$54 million federal grant to help set up a state health insurance exchange under ObamaCare.

She’s run against the Affordable Care Act ever since – but her flip-flop left the clear impression that she knuckled under to pressure from noisy far right elements in her party.

This year, Fallin reversed course on what arguably was the legislative session’s most contentious issue: Common Core.

The education standards were developed by the nation’s governors – and Fallin supported them when she was in Congress and for the first 3½ years of her gubernatorial reign.

Her support for Common Core waned after the Legislature – dominated by members of her party – overwhelmingly overrode her veto of legislation easing the third grade reading requirement.

By then, it was apparent the GOP caucus’ wingnuts had come to believe Common Core was an Obama plot – a federal takeover of Oklahoma’s public education system. Never mind that the standards were developed by the states and were supported by Oklahoma’s top corporate interests ... it had become politically toxic.

So she opted not to veto the bill that repealed Common Core, even though Oklahoma has nothing in place that meets acceptable national standards for progress. As a result, the state lost its No Child Left Behind waiver – another Obama plot! – and is in danger of losing control over hundreds of millions in federal education funds.

Even so, ads supporting Fallin’s re-election – financed by the Republican Governors’ Association – portray her as standing up to Obama on Common Core. Even the most casual observer of Oklahoma

politics surely finds that laughable.

BARRESI FACTOR

State Superintendent Janet Barresi’s political career was cut short last June when she finished third in the GOP primary – the most despised statewide elected official in recent memory.

But anecdotal evidence suggests Barresi and Fallin are inexorably linked in the public’s mind – mostly because both supported the controversial higher academic standards.

Indeed, it is not uncommon, in conversation with parents and teachers, to discover they hold Fallin as much responsible for the educational chaos the last four years as Barresi.

Those paying closer attention also will remember that Fallin worked with Republican lawmakers to expand Barresi’s powers after a dust-up with the Henry-appointed State Board of Education just after she took office.

Fallin also benefited in the power grab: New governors now have authority to remake the state board at their pleasure – they don’t have to wait for board terms to expire to name replacements.

Where does this leave Dorman, a moderate-conservative in the Henry mold?

With a chance ... a chance to do something no one thought possible when Democrats were searching madly for someone – anyone – credible enough to be the party’s standard-bearer.

Much will depend on Republican complacency.

If the GOP again enjoys a 100,000 straight party vote advantage, Dorman doesn’t have a prayer. If enough voters think it’s time for a change – and aren’t buying the nonsense that Dorman is a liberal – Oklahoma could witness one of the more remarkable upsets in state history.

Stay tuned. 🗳️

For up-to-the minute coverage of Campaign 2014, visit The Oklahoma Observer on-line at ...

www.okobserver.net





REVOLVING DOOR

Why Cozy Wall Street-Washington Back-Scratching Is So Dangerous

BY ELIZABETH WARREN

When former House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, R-VA, took a job with the investment bank Moelis & Co. last month, shortly after resigning his congressional seat, he became the latest example of the tight-knit relationship between Wall Street and Washington.

In an interview, I called this out for what it is: another sign that the revolving door still spins freely in Washington.

Cantor had little experience in financial services, and the value of people like him to Wall Street firms is influence peddling, plain and simple.

Wall Street's outsized influence in our nation's cap-

ital is something I've talked about for a long time – long before I even thought about running for office. But where I see a problem – an infestation, really – a lot of others in Washington, both Democrats and Republicans, seem to see government working just fine.

So when former Congressman Anthony Weiner – a Democrat from New York – dismissed my concerns, it was business as usual. Identifying himself as a liberal, Weiner called my criticism of the revolving door culture “overblown” and “petty.”

Let's start with some facts.

The Cantor move to Wall Street is not some isolated incident. Just look at the influence of one mega-bank

– Citigroup – on our government. Starting with former Citigroup CEO Robert Rubin, three of the last four Treasury secretaries under Democratic presidents held high-paying jobs at Citigroup either before or after serving at Treasury – and the fourth was offered, but declined, Citigroup’s CEO position. Directors of the National Economic Council and Office of Management and Budget, the current vice chairman of the Federal Reserve and the U.S. trade representative, also pulled in millions from Citigroup.

That’s what the revolving door looks like at just one Too Big to Fail Bank. What about others?

The influence of Goldman Sachs in Washington has been much documented. JPMorgan? Shortly before the Cantor episode, another former member of Congress – Democrat Melissa Bean – took the same senior job at JPMorgan Chase previously held by Democrat Bill Daley before his recent service as White House Chief of Staff. Yes – this is just a single position at JPMorgan Chase, evidently reserved for the latest politician ready to cash in on Wall Street.

I could go on – and I will. Soon after they crashed the economy and got tens of billions of dollars in taxpayer bailouts, the biggest Wall Street banks started lobbying Congress to head off any serious financial regulation.

Public Citizen and the Center for Responsive Politics found that in 2009 alone, the financial services sector employed 1,447 former federal employees to carry out their lobbying efforts, swarming all over Congress. And who were their top lobbyists? Members of Congress – in fact, 73 former members of Congress.

According to a report by the Institute for America’s Future, by the following year, the six biggest banks employed 243 lobbyists who once worked in the federal government, including 33 who had worked as chiefs of staff for members of Congress and 54 who had worked as staffers for the banking oversight committees in the Senate or the House.

The point here is simple: Eric Cantor isn’t the exception – he’s the rule. The ties between Washington and Wall Street run deep.

When former congressmen call, when a senator’s ex-chief of staff is on the line, when someone who worked on the Banking Committee for years calls, it’s hard to ignore them. Relationships matter, and anyone who doubts that Wall Street’s outsized influence in Washington has watered down our government’s policies toward still-too big-to-fail banks isn’t paying attention.

It is dangerous when key economic positions in our government fall under the control of a small group like the Citigroup clique. Groupthink can become a serious issue – old ideas stay around after they’re useful, and new ideas too often don’t get a fair hearing.

Small, tight-knit groups also tend to consolidate their power over time using the hiring process in ways that undermine the public interest. Too often,

people get jobs based on who they know – not what they know.

And too often, the dominant group is confident that not just insiders, but their insiders, are best for the key jobs. The Citigroup clique, for example, includes some effective public servants, but as a whole it has also crowded out others who would have brought different and valuable perspectives to their service.

There is one thing Anthony Weiner and I agree on: there are a lot of smart, hard-working people in the financial industry. In fact, when I worked to set up the new Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, we hired some of them.

Private sector experience shouldn’t disqualify someone from federal employment, but we can agree on that and still acknowledge the extent to which it defies probability that so many of the very best people chosen for top policymaking positions in Washington all happened to have had high paying jobs on Wall Street.

There are experienced and innovative people throughout the private and public sectors who are more than qualified for these jobs, and that’s just a fact.

Let’s be honest – the revolving door is only part of a larger problem. There’s also a huge imbalance in advocacy resources.

During the debate over Wall Street reform, the big banks spent more than \$1 million a day lobbying against new regulations. That’s a lot of lobbying.

And according to the Center for Responsive Politics, the “financial sector is far and away the largest source of campaign contributions to federal candidates and parties,” contributing nearly \$300 million to candidates, parties and political action committees in the past two years.

When you put all this together – all the influence peddling and campaign contributions and lobbying imbalances – what you have is a really big mess. Or, to be more specific, you have large financial institutions that are dramatically bigger today than they were in 2008 back when we all called them “Too Big to Fail” – you remember, back in the context of the biggest financial crisis since the Great Depression caused by – you guessed it – many of the same participants in the Washington to Wall Street revolving door we’re talking about.

If we want Washington to work better for families, we need to limit Wall Street’s outsized influence on economic policymaking. It’s bad for the country when so many people on Wall Street continually angle for key economic policymaking jobs, and so many people in key economic policymaking jobs angle for jobs on Wall Street.

The government is supposed to work for everyone, not just those who can hire armies of lawyers, lobbyists, and former [and future] government officials. *Oklahoma City born and raised Elizabeth Warren represents Massachusetts in the U.S. Senate.* ■

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A Climate Of Resentment

BY HARRY T. COOK

Is it possible, I wonder, to die of resentment? Can resentment magnified, as it is among so many citizens of the planet just now, be a disease? Can resentment kill the one who lives and breathes it?

One looks toward the Middle East and there sees resentment at a high and dangerous pitch as Islamists of various strains rise up against perceived oppressors and against each other. Shiite and Sunni duke it out to the death.

The Israel-Hamas struggle likewise partakes in such a contest. Better to die than to give in. Resentment from smoldering to blazing is the dominant currency.

It is a mistake to ignore the parallels between the rage expressed by Tea Party-type zealots – rage, for instance, against America’s first African-American president because he is African-American, is a Democrat and is not playing the role of the corner shoe-

shine boy – and the rage being acted out by such militias as ISIS on the makeshift battlefields of Syria and Iraq.

The resentment inherent in any version of that rage has to do at some level with religious conviction – which is always a potentially dangerous disposition. Belief in a deity and its supposed will and law cannot possibly be based on fact, therefore dogma unfiltered by reason carries the day – and often to extreme ends.

Whether or not there is at the ground of being an intelligent and even benevolent power is not an appropriate topic for debate because the concept is beyond the realm of human knowledge. Data for it there is not. Yet millions of people have believed there exists such a power and have called it by various names. Millions more scoff at the idea of deity.

About 80 years ago, H.L. Mencken published an essay called “Memorial Service” in which he wrote: “Where is the graveyard of dead gods? What linger-

ing mourner waters their mounds? There was a day when Jupiter was the king of the gods. Any man who doubted his puissance was ipso facto a barbarian and an ignoramus. But where in all the world is there a man who worships Jupiter today?"

Mencken goes on to catalogue 186 other deities, including Yahweh. In his peroration, Mencken wrote: "You may think I spoof. That I invent the names. I do not. Ask the rector to lend you any good treatise on comparative religion. You will find them all listed. They were gods of the highest standing and dignity – gods of civilized peoples – worshiped and believed in by millions. All were theoretically omnipotent, omniscient, and immortal. And all are dead."

Mencken cannot be gainsaid on this point. Deities come and go, precisely because they are inventions of human imagination. Not that imagination is a bad thing. It is one of the priceless gifts Homo sapiens may claim, and – who knows? – somewhere on up the evolutionary path imagination may yield actual data and prove believers right – or some of them, leaving others seething with anger. But we are not there yet. Deities still are entirely of human creation and thus dangerous as outlets of command and control.

The feuding Islamists of all stripes read Qu'ran and take from it what they decide is the will of its deity, Allah, and ride off with scimitars, bombs, grenades and all manner of military ordnance to maim and kill in the name of their god. Their resentment against the West, against America, against anything that denies their fragile dignity plays out in violence and mayhem. Israel's official resentment leads its leaders to an all-or-nothing place with its Arab citizens.

The gun-loving right-wingers of civic life in America are not that much different where resentment is concerned. If one pays close attention to Tea Party rhetoric and that of similar factions, the deity of Christianity is frequently referenced, as in the lament that "our God-given liberties" are being taken away, not by an external force but by the government – thus

setting a constitutional entity at all-or-nothing odds with one particular religion.

Even though in the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson made oblique reference to "Nature's God" and the endowment of human beings by a "Creator with certain unalienable Rights," it was not the deity of a particular religion or religious expression to which he alluded. Jefferson, if he was anything, was a deist. Deism is more an idea than a belief, viz. that some power brought forth the universe and then retired.

As for the mention at the end of the Declaration of "the protection of divine Providence," it is a fact that Jefferson did not write those words. They were appended to the document by the Continental Congress at the insistence of its super-religious Puritan members who were not about to sponsor a revolution without their god at hand. Jefferson himself is noted for saying that while there must have been something like "a fabricator of all things ... of the nature of this being we know nothing."

How far we have strayed here in America from that kind of wisdom. Piety now runs amok among the resentful whose fanaticism, religious and otherwise, drives the politics of all too many elections, the enactment of all too many laws and the ambitions of all too many who hunger and thirst to run the show in this country their way.

Personally, I'd like to see a bit more light between such movements as ISIS and American politics in terms of behavior and aspiration. The glimmer I see today is narrower than I remember and seems to be getting even narrower.

The late essayist Christopher Hitchens had a point when he so bluntly wrote, "God Is Not Great" – at least the god posited by extremists on any lunatic fringe, who somehow live immersed in the boiling oil of resentment and seem to love every minute of it. ■
Harry T. Cook is an Episcopal priest, journalist and author living in Michigan.

Republican Blame Game

BY JOE CONASON

Minutes after President Barack Obama concluded his strong and sensible address explaining how he intends to destroy the terrorist organization the Islamic State, Republicans popped up on television like political snipers.

He should have kept a "residual force" in Iraq, complained Sen. John McCain, R-AZ, and he is to blame for the Islamic State's advances. He sounds just like George W. Bush, gloated former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, and he is reluctantly enacting the advice of Dick Cheney.

None of those remarks was accurate, but the false-

hoods revealed once more the irrepressible Republican impulse to slur a Democratic president – even when the nation faces a serious security threat. In this instance, as the president attempts to unite us and bring together a broad coalition of allies, their behavior is worse than inappropriate. Indeed, were the roles reversed, the Republicans would surely describe such conduct as unpatriotic.

When the roles actually were reversed, as the anniversary of 9/11 might remind us, Democrats rallied immediately behind President Bush and his plan to attack the Taliban and al-Qaida. Even while Republicans scurried to lay blame on former President Bill

Clinton, the loyal Democratic opposition stifled obvious questions about why the Bush White House had done so little to thwart those who had just attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. As American troops went into Afghanistan, those questions would, years later, await the 9/11 Commission [which Bush and Cheney furtively attempted to derail].

Dissent is always to be valued and protected in America, but the instant Republican attacks on Obama's speech scarcely qualify as principled criticism. After all, the president is already hitting the Islamic State with airstrikes, as most Americans now believe he must, and has vowed to extirpate that barbaric and blasphemous gang.

Unless the Republicans want to urge a wholesale reinvasion of Iraq – which they know would be politically suicidal – there isn't much for them to dispute in the president's announced strategy.

Substantive debate over tactics and strategy isn't what Republicans want anymore. Rather than contribute constructively to the policy process, they blather on and on about mistakes and gaffes that can be marked against the president.

Some of those alleged errors, such as his decision against arming the Syrian opposition, are matters for serious argument.

Others – such as McCain's contention that we should have left a “residual force” in Iraq, preventing

the rise of the Islamic State – are not.

As noted here months ago – when the Arizona Republican made the same claim – both the Iraqi government and the American public clearly wanted U.S. troops out of that country. Nouri al-Maliki, the divisive Shiite sectarian then leading Iraq, refused to provide legal immunity to U.S. troops. That triggered the status of forces agreement signed by President Bush in December 2008, which required a complete withdrawal by Jan. 1, 2012.

Would a remnant force of U.S. troops have stopped the rise of a new Sunni insurgency, led by jihadi, under the divisive al-Maliki regime? That seems a doubtful assertion, no matter how often or how angrily McCain says so.

What seems considerably less arguable, however, is a simpler thesis: Without the invasion of Iraq, the Islamic State would never have been spawned.

The neoconservatives who promoted that ruinous adventure have loftily advised us all not to reargue the decision to overthrow Saddam Hussein and occupy Iraq. Their desire to avoid accountability for a historic blunder – still costing so many lives and so much treasure – is understandable, if not quite honorable. But if they want amnesty for themselves, they might stop trying to frame President Obama for the awful consequences of their misconduct. ■

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College Debt Ruining Lives Of Older Americans

BY STEVEN ROSENFELD

Growing numbers of older Americans who have defaulted on government student loans are finding the federal government is taking a big slice of their monthly Social Security check to get paid back, according to a new congressional study.

“A significant number of older Americans still have student loans debt from financing their own college education,” said Sen. Bill Nelson, D-FL, Senate Special Committee on Aging chair, opening a recent hearing on the trend. “What happens to these folks when they hit retirement age is frightening. Those in default on their loans can see their Social Security checks garnished, leaving them with retirement income that leaves them well below the federal poverty line.”

“Furthermore, unlike other types of debt, defaulted student loan debt can lead to reductions in federal payments, including federal tax refunds,” said Benjamin Veghte, the research director at Social Security

Works, which advocates for protecting and expanding the program, in an analysis of the Government Accountability Office study. “Student loan debt poses a significant threat to economic security in old age, both because such debt limits the ability to set aside savings, and because defaulted loans may result in substantially reduced Social Security benefits.”

The GAO's figures are striking. There are 706,000 Americans 65 and older who have student loan debt ranging from \$6,000 to \$17,500, which is 3 percent of that age group. “While those 65 and older account for a small fraction of the total amount of outstanding federal student debt, the outstanding federal student debt for this age group grew from about \$2.8 billion in 2005 to about \$18.2 billion in 2013,” GAO found.

Of the people age 65 and older who have defaulted on this debt—meaning they were a year or more late in payments—55,000 saw their Social Security benefits garnered in 2013, a five-fold increase since 2002. The older a debtor was, the greater likelihood that

they would see a cut in their Social Security benefits.

"In 2013, just 12 percent of federal student loans held by those aged 25 to 49 were in default, compared to 27 percent of loans held by those aged 65 to 74, and over half of loans held by those aged 75 and older," Veghte said. "Social Security benefits are already quite modest (the average benefit for a retired worker in 2013 was just \$15,526), and more than a third (36 percent) of beneficiaries rely on Social Security for 90 percent or more of their income. Those who default on their or their children's (in the case of co-signing) student loans are likely to number among this vulnerable group of beneficiaries who rely on Social Security for virtually all of their income."

In other words, seniors who defaulted on student loans face falling deeper into poverty. In 2013, the average monthly Social Security check was \$1,293. However, that sum can be reduced to \$750 a month, a 42 percent cut, by the government to collect on the student loans. The reason that post-penalty monthly benefit isn't higher, GAO said, was because it has not been indexed for inflation since 1998, when Congress last addressed this issue.

"Take the case of Janet Lee Dupree, a 72-year-old Ocala, Florida, resident," Sen. Nelson said. "In the early 1970s, she took out a \$3,000 loan to finance her undergraduate degree. While she recognizes that she didn't pay the original loan when she should have, she has now paid thousands of dollars on this loan and today owes \$15,000 due to compound interest and penalties. She is in poor health and will never be able to pay off this sum, especially because all she can afford is the \$50 the government takes out of her Social Security check every month."

Nelson's remarks underscore the punitive interest rate penalties that face borrowers of any age who default on student debt. This debt cannot be written off by filing for bankruptcy. "Student loan debt is typically discharged only when a borrower dies or is totally and permanently disabled," Veghte said.

The GAO did not clearly say what real-life issues were behind the defaults, other than noting that most of the Social Security recipients whose benefits were garnered had been receiving disability benefits before they reached age 65—meaning they could not work. There could be many scenarios where people took out loans for themselves or family members. But the bottom line is they are not able to pay them back.

"We were unable to get data on when loans originated from the Education Department so we were unable to delve into the question that you asked," said GAO director Charles A. Jeszeck in an e-mail asking about the causes. "About all we can say for sure is that about 80 percent of the loans were for the borrower's own education... A key variable to answering your question is knowing the origination dates of each person's loan."

"There is no information about when these Social Security recipients borrowed," said Stu Kantor, an Urban Institute spokesman. "So it is likely that

many of them borrowed a long time ago and haven't paid and the debt has accumulated, with interest and penalties added. There is no way to determine what earnings these people have had over time. You can't assume that they went back for [educational] training late in their careers."

"Possible stories include people becoming disabled at any time after they borrowed; people not finding good jobs after they borrowed, whether they borrowed early in life or late; people just not paying because they have had other priorities," Kantor said. "I think the only reasonable inference is that most of the people do not have current capacity to earn much, so expecting them to pay now is unreasonable and likely to cause significant hardship. Probably not for all of them, but for many of them."

However, what appeared more certain to Social Security Works' Veghte was that the trend of seniors defaulting on student loans was likely to continue—and to rise.

"The cost of higher education has doubled over the past two decades, meaning that more Americans are unable to afford a higher education without taking on debt," he said. "Not only does this affect a growing number of retirees today, it has substantial implications for younger generations as well. As these generations mature, we can expect the share of seniors burdened by student loans to continue to rise." ■

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What The Quakers Say Matters

10. Talk to Iran
9. Make our economy work for everyone
8. Fix broken immigration system
7. Eliminate nuclear weapons
6. Protect the earth
5. Mass incarceration must end
4. Get money out of politics
3. Invest in peace-building
2. Cut Pentagon spending
1. End the endless war

This is how I'll decide my votes for U.S. House and U.S. Senate. I am a Catholic in 100% agreement with my church.

— *Al Engel, Oklahoma City*

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245 Second St. NE
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800-630-1330



GOP Nightmare Reveals Secret Corporate Donors

Some people have a myriad of recurring nightmares about being publicly embarrassed, such as rising to give a speech and realizing you know nothing about the topic – then realizing you’re naked.

You might be surprised to learn though, that corporations also have such nightmares. OK, corporations aren’t really people, no matter what the Supreme Court fabulists claim, so they can’t dream, but their top executives can, and several recently suffered the same chilling hallucination. Only, it wasn’t a dream ... it was real.

Perhaps you think that corporations use their campaign donations to buy privileged access to state and national policymakers. Perhaps you even think that their political money actually buys those politicians – after all, they do deliver the public policies the corporate donors want. Perhaps you think this whole monetized political system is corrupt, anti-democratic, and ... well, stinky.

You would, of course, be right about all of the above. As Lily Tomlin has put it, “No matter how cynical you get, it’s almost impossible to keep up.”

The corporate purchase of Washington is pretty widely reported, but – keep up now – for the kleptocratic stinkiness fast consuming our statehouses as well. The Republican Governor’s Association has devised a layaway purchase plan allowing brand-name corporations to make secret donations of \$100,000 or more a year to the RGA in support of the corporate-friendly agenda of various GOP governors. And a lot of execs have been buying.

These are chieftains of brand-name corporate giants who have secretly funneled millions of their shareholders’ dollars into the “dark money” vault of the Republican Governors Association. In turn, the RGA channels the political cash into the campaigns of assorted right-wing governors.

This underground pipeline has been a dream come true for corporations, for it lets them elect anti-consumer, anti-worker, anti-environment governors without having to let their customers or shareholders

know they’re doing it.

But – oops! – the RGA made a coding error in its database of dark money donors. So in September, a mess of the GOP’s secret-money corporations were suddenly exposed, standing buck-naked in front of customers, employees, stockholders and others who were startled and angered to learn that the companies they supported were working against their interests.

A lifelong champion of political money reform, Fred Wertheimer, put it this way: “This is a classic example of how corporations are trying to use secret money hidden from the American people to buy influence, and how the Governors Association is selling it.”

Feed the RGA’s political-favor-meter with \$250,000 a year [as Coca-Cola, the Koch brothers, and others do], and the association cynically anoints your corporation with the ironic title of “Statesman,” opening up gubernatorial doors throughout the country.

Well, sniff the participants, the money buys nothing but “access” to policymakers. But wait – when was that access put on the auction block? Shouldn’t everyone have access to our public officials? Of course, but call your governor and see if you can even get an office intern to call back.

If you’re an RGA corporate “Statesman,” however, you could get a tete-a-tete with Rick Perry, the recently indicted governor of Texas, or a private breakfast with Bob McDonnell, the now-convicted former governor of Virginia. See, membership in the corrupt club has its privileges.

Now let’s call the roll of some of the privileged corporate dreamers that were pulling the wool over our eyes, hoping we would slumber in ignorance: Aetna, Aflac, Blue Cross, Coca-Cola, Comcast, Exxon Mobil, Hewlett-Packard, Koch Industries, Microsoft, Novartis, Pfizer, Shell Oil, United Health, Verizon, Walgreens and Wal-Mart.

The corporate donors to this previously secret scheme of plutocratic rule says it’s OK, for they also give money to Democrats. Oh, bipartisan corruption – that makes me feel so much better, how about you?

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Wall Street Speculators Wall Off Young Farmers

We know from the childhood song that Old McDonald had a farm – but *e-i-e-i-o* – look who’s got his farm now!

It’s groups like American Farmland and Farmland Partners. These aren’t dirt farmers wearing overalls and brogans, but Wall Street hucksters in Armani suits and Gucci loafers. The latest fast-buck fad for high-roller investment trusts, hedge funds and venture capital speculators is “farming.”

Not that these dude ranch dandies are actually plowing and planting. No, no – these are soft-hands people, buying up farmlands with billions of rich investors’ dollars, and then tilling the tax laws and threshing the farmers who do the real cultivation.

For example, American Farmland Company – which owns 16 farms – is a combine of the largest real estate empire in New York City, two Florida sugar barons, a wealth management outfit, and the real estate brokerage arm of insurance giant Prudential.

None of these nouveau sodbusters has a speck of dirt under its fingernails, but they’ve figured out how to work the land without touching it and still harvest a sweet profit.

The founder of this scheme says, “It’s like gold, but better, because there is this cash flow.”

Cash flow? Yes, farmers are charged rent to till the Wall Streeters’ land. Then the financiers get a prime cut of any profits from the crops that the farmers produce. Also, the combine is set up as a real estate investment trust, providing an enormous tax break for the Wall Street plowboys. And, of course, there’s the mega-pay the moneyed elites will reap when they convert their scheme into securities for sale on the stock exchange.

The rich few get richer, farmers are turned into tenant laborers, and the farms are switched to high-profit crops that require heavy pesticide dosages and soak up scarce water resources. What a deal!

The fact of the matter is that gabillionaires who invest in hedge funds generally have the ethical and aesthetic sensibilities of dirt clods. They don’t care whether the fund managers put their money into toxic derivatives or skunk pelt futures – as long as the investment pays a super-fat return.

But since Wall Street’s 2008 crash revealed that so

many of these investment schemes were based on nothing more than financial cobwebs and fairy dust, some of the clods began seeking hedge funds that would put their money into something more tangible and down to earth. And this is how Wall Street discovered dirt. More specifically, farmland.

Such money handlers as BlackRock [the world’s largest asset manager] and multi-billionaire money manager George Soros now offer big pieces of America’s heartland as an asset that faraway super-rich penthouse dwellers can own and till for mega profits.

As a result, ag professors report that their farmbelt conferences on land economics – which have normally drawn an audience of farmers and local farm lenders – are dominated these days by Wall Street speculators. Moreover, seminars on investing in American farmland are being held in such financial centers as Dubai and Singapore.

But this Wall Street land rush is as flimsy as the debt-derivatives fad proved to be, for it’s not based on economic realities. While crop prices are at record highs today, the painful historic record is that they will plummet tomorrow, destroying the cash flow that makes the hedge fund investment in land work.

Then, of course, the gabillionaires will rush to shed their overalls. But – who will line up to buy the land? Certainly not real farmers, who can’t afford the inflated Wall Street price. And especially not young people who want to farm, but find it hard to locate affordable land.

America desperately needs this next generation of food producers, yet we’re letting Wall Street speculators literally wall the land they need. To learn more, contact the National Young Farmers Coalition: www.youngfarmers.org. – *Jim Hightower*

America’s Natural Politics

My father, W.F. “High” Hightower, was a populist. Only, he didn’t know it. Didn’t know the word, much less the history or anything about populism’s democratic ethos. My father was not philosophical, but he had a phrase that he used to express the gist of his political beliefs: “Everybody does better when *everybody* does better.”

Before the populists of the late 1800s gave its instinctive rebelliousness a name, it had long been established as a defining trait of our national character: The 1776 rebellion was not only against King George III’s government but against the corporate tyranny of such British monopolists as the East India Trading

Company.

The establishment certainly doesn't celebrate the populist spirit, and our educational system avoids bothering students with our vibrant, human story of constant battles, big and small, mounted by "little people" against ... well, against the establishment.

The Keepers of the Corporate Order take care to avoid even a suggestion that there is an important political pattern – a historic continuum – that connects Thomas Paine's radical democracy writings in the late 1700s to Shays' Rebellion in 1786, to strikes by mill women and carpenters in the early 1800s, to Jefferson's 1825 warning about the rising aristocracy of banks and corporations "riding and ruling over the plundered ploughman," to the launching of the women's suffrage movement at Seneca Falls in 1848, to the maverick Texans who outlawed banks in their 1845 state constitution, to the bloody and ultimately successful grassroots struggle for the abolition of slavery, and to the populist movement itself, plus the myriad rebellions that followed right into our present day.

WHAT POPULISM IS NOT: An empty word for lazy reporters to attach to any angry spasm of popular discontent. [And it's damn sure not Sarah Palin and today's clique of Koch-funded, corporate-hugging, Tea Party Republicans.]

WHAT IT IS: For some 238 years, it has been the chief political impulse in America's body politic – determinedly democratic, vigilantly resistant to the oppressive power of corporations and Wall Street, committed to grassroots percolate-up economics, and firmly rooted in my old daddy's concept of "Everybodyness," recognizing that we're all in this together.

Although it was organized into a formal movement for only about 25 years, Populism has had an outsized, long-term, and ongoing impact on our culture, public policies, economic structure and governing systems.

Even though its name is rarely used and its history largely hidden, and neither major party will embrace it [much less become it], there are many more people today whose inherent political instincts are populist, rather than conservative or liberal.

Yet the pundits and politicians frame our choices in terms of that narrow con-lib ideological spectrum, ignoring the fact that most of us are neither, or a bit of both. Our nation's true political spectrum is not right to left, but top to bottom. People can locate themselves along this vertical rich-to-poor spread, for this is not a theoretical positioning: It's based on our real-world experience with money and power. This is America's real politics.

Today's workaday majority can plainly see that a privileged few at the top are separating their fortunes as fast as they can from the well-being of the rest of us. We've also seen that after the 2008 economic collapse, both major parties rushed to wipe the fevered brows of the pampered few with our tax dollars and

did little about the crash in wages, income, wealth and economic power of the bottom 90%.

Six years later, Congress continues to ignore the ongoing destruction of the middle class and the unconscionable rise in poverty – unless you count last year's cuts to food stamp funding and jobless benefits as "doing something."

Our system of representative government has, in a word, collapsed. Most Congress critters are not even trying anymore – not listening to the people, not even knowing any regular folks, and not representing their interests. But what we also have is a ripening political opportunity for a revitalized, 21st Century populist movement.

Every day, there are populist uprisings, both large and small, all across this country. Towns taking on Big Oil frackers, cities raising the minimum wage, fast-food workers demanding a living wage, states taking on GMO labeling, Moral Monday, Truthful Tuesday, and other movements spreading across the South to fight for social justice. These are just a few examples of the budding populist movement that is striving to make everybody do better. – *Jim Hightower*

Help Wash Formaldehyde Out Of Baby's Hair

In the U.S. alone, the cosmetics industry pulls in some \$70 billion a year in sales of what's commonly called "makeup." But lipstick, blush, mascara, etc. are not the only kind of makeup the cosmetic giants are peddling.

For years, their lobbyists, lawyers and PR agents have been making up facts, stories, half-truths and whole lies to keep lawmakers and regulators from banning various cancer-causing, hormone-disrupting and otherwise destructive ingredients that their products contain.

One especially nasty example of this is the continuing campaign by L'Oreal, Revlon and the industry's Personal Care Products Council to keep allowing formaldehyde in everything from baby wipes to hair straighteners.

Back in 1981, the National Toxicology Program, an interagency scientific panel, first listed this noxious chemical as a likely human carcinogen. A volcano of outrage erupted from cosmetic makers, which buried the NTP findings in a suffocating ash pile of denials, attacks and false facts. But the toxicologists, pushed

by consumer and environmental groups, kept doing even deeper research, and in 2011, NTP listed formaldehyde as “known to be a human carcinogen.”

That should have been that, but corporate lobbyists got their congressional puppets to stall, making up more lies to assail NTP for flawed research and for interfering in private business. However, the prestigious National Academy of Science has been reviewing that research and has now unequivocally endorsed NTP’s findings – even adding that new research shows that formaldehyde may cause a much wider array of cancers than previously known.

So, after 33 years, the health of babies finally wins one over cosmetic profiteers, right? Not quite yet. Incredibly, the products of Revlon and L’Oreal still contain cancer-causing formaldehyde, and both of the greed-headed giants continue to balk at necessary reforms.

But who says we’re not making progress in our battle against the senseless, destructive and deadly greed of corporate profiteers? Look at the big change won earlier this year when the labels on Johnson’s Baby Shampoo announced: “Improved Formula.”

This popular Johnson & Johnson baby product has long been advertised with the comforting slogan, “No More Tears,” for the shampoo’s ingredients don’t sting a tiny tot’s eyes. That’s nice, but many mommies and daddies have become more concerned about another ingredient in those soapy suds the corporation has not advertised: Formaldehyde. This toxic chemical, which can cause several cancers including leukemia, is contained in thousands of consumer items, including carpets, nail polish and, yes, soaps, lotions and dozens of other baby products.

But – O, progress! Johnson’s “improved” baby shampoo qualifies for a new advertising slogan: “Now With No Formaldehyde!” You’ll see no such bragging, however, for even though the consumer marketing giant is taking the big, beneficial step of getting this carcinogen out of all of its baby products, the corporation continues to assert that the amount of poison in a bottle of shampoo is harmless. But, as the head of the Environmental Working Group put it: “Why is there a carcinogen in their shampoo? When in doubt, take it out.”

Bingo! And let’s note that J&J is not taking formaldehyde out as an act of corporate benevolence, but because a tenacious, informed grassroots coalition called Campaign for Safe Cosmetics has rallied consumers, scientists and family advocates to demand it. As Johnson’s head of consumer product development conceded, “This [health concern] lands right at the heart and soul of what Johnson & Johnson is all about, so we had to take this very seriously.”

So, three cheers for Johnson & Johnson for finally doing the right thing. But Revlon, L’Oreal and other giants, however, are not removing formaldehyde, so we must keep pushing. To help, go to Campaign for safe Cosmetics www.SafeCosmetics.org. – *Jim Hightower*

Peltier Turns 70 In Prison

BY SILJA J.A. TALVI

Last month, Leonard Peltier spent his 70th birthday in pain and isolation. Prisoner # 89637-132 is exactly where the FBI wants him: locked up in one of America’s largest federal supermaximum prisons in Coleman, FL.

One of America’s longest-suffering political prisoners, Peltier is an Anishinabe-Lakota Native American who has wrongfully spent nearly 40 years in prison for the alleged murder of two, armed FBI agents in a shoot-out on the impoverished Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in 1975.

Peltier was brought up on murder charges on the word of a young Indian woman whom he had never met. That woman, Myrtle Poor Bear, retracted her testimony in 2000, issuing a public statement to explain that her testimony was forced after months of abuse and intimidation at the hands of FBI agents.

Despite international outcry and an abundance of evidence that the FBI coerced, harassed, and manipulated testimony as well as ballistics evidence at Peltier’s trial in 1977 – and the FBI’s subsequent admission that they have no idea who was actually responsible for the deaths – Peltier has been denied parole repeatedly.

In prison, Peltier has endured beatings, deprivation of medical care, inadequate nutrition, and a callous disregard for his failing health. Peltier is dying a slow, isolated death, over 2,000 miles away from his family.

He has already suffered a stroke that left him nearly blind in one eye. He has had a heart attack, has a severely inflamed prostate condition, and diabetes. He is barely able to walk because of untreated bone spurs in his feet, has difficulty eating because of an ever-worsening jaw condition that began after a prison beating.

Because he is not eligible for parole again until the year 2024, Amnesty International and numerous human and civil rights organizations have called for President Obama to release Peltier on medical and humanitarian grounds.

But like the presidents before him, Obama is wedded to the U.S. intelligence empire.

The FBI has exerted tremendous political pressure, year after year, to make sure that Peltier stays in prison as a symbol of its victory over the American Indian Movement. In essence, Peltier represents everything that the FBI has tried to

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Social Media No Longer Just Free Expression 'Toy Box'

BY GENE POLICINSKI

Time to take social media out of the freedom of expression “toy box.” Serious issues and serious work now abound in this relatively young method by which we not only exchange information, but also to rally to causes and hold public officials accountable.

Just a few years ago, scarcely a few percent of Americans turned to Twitter, Facebook and the like for real news and issues. The medium was dismissed as the stuff of gossip, personal notes and largely meaningless personal snapshots. And, OK, fascination with the “selfie” persists today.

But from controversy in Ferguson, MO, to tragedies in the Middle East to the flap over hacked nude photos of celebrities to serious debate over domestic abuse and pro athletes, social media is driving public discussion and debate that is the essence of First Amendment freedoms.

The passion of public protest [in other words, the

freedoms of assembly and petition], was extended and multiplied in Ferguson, where street demonstrations over the shooting death of Michael Brown instantly reached a world audience – and may well have been eclipsed in impact by virtual protests.

A photo posted on Aug. 13 of more than 200 Howard University students with their hands and arms in the air, accompanied by the Twitter hashtag “#dontshoot,” became an iconic expression online, and prompted hundreds of posts of similar poses – and thousands of comments.

Even as what many saw as a stereotypical and negative photo of Brown was released by authorities – showing his hands making what some claimed was a gang sign – thousands posted online photos at “#iftheygunnedmedown,” showing two images of the same person side-by-side, one playing to a violent image but the other showing innocent scenes, often with family members and young children.

The ISIS thugs chose to use social media to post horrific videos of their brutal slayings of two U.S. journalists and a British aid worker, and they reportedly also make sophisticated use of the online medium to recruit others to their ranks. In effect, these terrorists used “freedom of speech” for vile purposes.

Even what is not on social media gets attention: Using their own free expression rights to determine what content will appear in their sites, social media operations made decisions to remove and prevent re-posting of the ISIS murder videos, and took quick action to prevent the spread of purloined nude photos of several celebrities.

All just new aspects of an age-old question for editors and broadcasters: What to do with graphic, disturbing and or vulgar images that are in the news?

The question of “what to show” has dogged editors and others since Civil War photographer Mathew Brady’s photographs of battlefield corpses at Antietam were displayed in New York in 1862. A newspaper photographer smuggled an “ankle camera” into the 1928 execution of Ruth Snyder in Sing Sing’s electric chair – the first known photo of death by electrocution – and kicked off a debate that remains active today over such photos.

The Ferguson protest may well find a historical niche as the moment when virtual protest took the foreground over actual demonstrations, and when

the response from online communities proved to have wider impact than what came from those on the scene. And not only did the Howard and “don’t shoot” prove more effective, they have been immediate, reached audiences around the world, and didn’t allow those bent on violence – as one peaceful demonstrator on the streets of Ferguson said – to “hijack our voices.”

In 2007, an Internet milestone was reached at Virginia Tech University, where a gunman shot and killed 32 people. In the hours after that tragedy, major news outlets set up so-called Twitter and Facebook desks, and solicited cell phone photos and video from non-journalists – believed to be the first time this was done on a major story by so many news organizations. In that instance, it was freedom of the press that found a new, technological expression.

Taking to the public square or streets to protest carries its own special impact, with a history that dates back to the colonial era. And face-to-face debate still counts, even in presidential elections.

But in a world now so tightly interconnected through social media, free speech, protest and petition may well have the most impact when done online – and even at 140 characters at a time. ■

Gene Policinski is chief operating officer of the Newseum Institute and senior vice president of the Institute’s First Amendment Center.

Mysteries Of Inequality Only A Mystery To Elites

BY DEAN BAKER

Developing explanations for the growth in inequality over the last three decades has been a huge growth industry in economics and policy circles. Many economists have made their careers with a novel explanation of how the natural development of technology and the market has concentrated income and wealth in the top 1%.

It’s even better if you can show that inequality hasn’t risen. While the explanations that blame inequality on technology can get complicated, there were three items in the last week that painted the picture very clearly for the rest of us.

First, we got new data from the Federal Reserve Board and the Census Bureau, both of which showed that typical families are still seeing very little benefit from the recovery to date. The Fed released the 2013 Survey of Consumer Finance which showed median family wealth was still below the 2010 level in spite of the run-up in the stock market.

The Census Bureau released its annual data on income, poverty, and health insurance coverage. While there was some good news on the latter two, median income remained flat. The story in both the Fed and Census analysis remains the same; those at the top continue to get the bulk of the benefits from economic growth.

The other two items tell us why this is not a surprise. First, we had a meeting of the Federal Reserve Board in which they discussed when they should start raising interest rates. There was a bit of good news for the nation’s workers as Janet Yellen, the Fed chair, continued to hold sway with her policy of maintaining the Fed’s zero interest rate policy.

However the bad news is that many members of the Fed’s Open Market Committee [FOMC] already are pushing for the Fed to pull the trigger and start raising interest rates. Furthermore, others have indicated that they are prepared to join the trigger happy group

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Nuclear Power's Insanities – Taxpayer-Guaranteed

BY RALPH NADER

The Nuclear Energy Institute [NEI] – the corporate lobbyist in Washington, DC for the disintegrating atomic power industry – doesn't have to worry about repercussions from the negative impacts of nuclear power. For nuclear power is a government/taxpayer-guaranteed boondoggle whose staggering costs, incurred and deferred, are absorbed by American taxpayers via a supine government regulatory and subsidy apparatus.

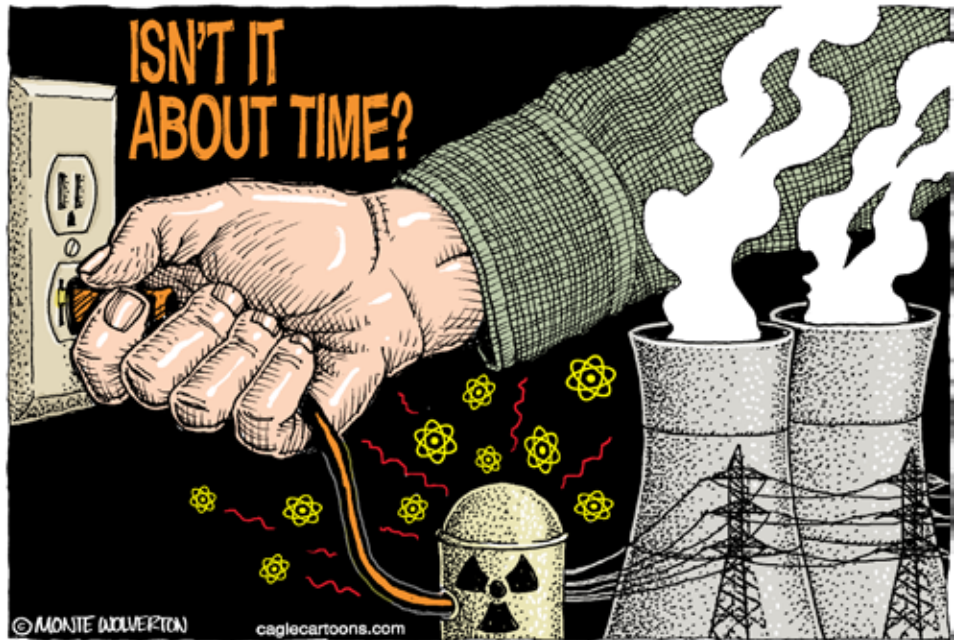
So if you go to work at the NEI and you read about the absence of any permanent radioactive waste storage site, no problem, the government/taxpayers are responsible for transporting and safeguarding that lethal garbage for centuries.

If your reactors experience ever larger cost overruns and delays, as is now happening with two new reactors in South Carolina, no problem, the supine state regulatory commissions will just pass the bill on to consumers, despite the fact that consumers receive no electricity from these unfinished plants.

If these plants, and two others in Georgia under construction, experience financial squeezes from Wall Street, no problem, a supine Congress has already passed ample taxpayer loan guarantees that make Uncle Sam [you the taxpayer] bear the cost of the risk.

If there were to be an accident such as the one that happened in Fukushima, Japan, no problem, under the Price-Anderson Act, the government/taxpayers bear the cost of the vast amount of damage from any nuclear power plant meltdown. To put this cost into perspective, a report by the Atomic Energy Commission about fifty years ago estimated that a class nine meltdown could make an area “the size of Pennsylvania” uninhabitable.

Why do we stand for such a doomsday technology all over America that is uneconomic, uninsurable, unsafe, unnecessary [it can't compete with energy conservation and renewable energies], unevacuable (try evacuating the greater New York City area from a disaster at the two Indian Point plants 30 miles from Manhattan) and unprotectable (either from sabotage or earthquake)?



David Freeman, the famous energy engineer and lawyer, who has run four giant utilities [the Tennessee Valley Authority, the SMUD complex – where he closed the Rancho Seco Nuclear Plant – the New York Power Authority and the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power] sums up the history of nuclear power this way: “Nuclear power, promoted as too cheap to meter, turned out to be too expensive to use, the road to nuclear proliferation, and the creator of radioactive trash that has no place to go.” Right wing conservative/libertarians call it extreme “crony capitalism.”

Nuclear power plants are shutting down. In 2013, four reactors shut down: Crystal River 3, Kewaunee, San Onofre 2 and San Onofre 3. Now, Michael Peck, a senior federal nuclear expert, is urging that the last nuke plant left in California, Diablo Canyon, be shut down until the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's regulators can demonstrate that the two reactors at this site can withstand shaking from three nearby earthquake faults.

Meanwhile, the human, environmental and economic disasters at Japan's Fukushima Daiichi power plants keep metastasizing. Scientists are producing studies that show serious biological effects [genetic damage and mutation rates] of radiation on plant, insect and bird life in and around the large, cordoned off, uninhabitable area surrounding these closed down reactors. The giant politically-influential electric utility company underestimated the likelihood of

a powerful earthquake and tsunami.

In the early 1970s, the industry and its governmental patrons were expecting 1,000 nuclear plants – 100 of them along the California coast – to be operating by the year 2000. Instead, a little more than a hundred were built nationwide. In reality, as of 2014, there are only 100 operable reactors, many of which are aging.

The pitfalls are real and numerous. In addition to growing public opposition, and lower-priced natural gas attracting electric utilities, there are the ever-present, sky-rocketing costs and delays of construction, repair and the question of where to store nuclear waste. These costs are what make Wall Street

Inequality

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as soon as there is any evidence of wage growth. Yellen as chair has the most important voice, but if she loses the support of the rest of the FOMC, interest rates will rise.

There should be no doubt what that means. The purpose of the Fed's raising interest rates is to slow the economy to keep people from getting jobs. By keeping the unemployment rate up, the FOMC will be reducing workers' bargaining power and keeping them from getting pay increases. This disproportionately hurts those at the bottom of the income distribution, but puts downward pressure on the wages of most workers.

In other words, we have the central bank of the United States acting deliberately to keep workers from getting pay increases. They justify their actions over concerns about inflation, but we need not take these seriously. Who knows what they believe, but the real world risk of a dangerous inflationary spiral ranks alongside the risk of attacks by Martians. It ain't going to happen and they should know this.

Of course high unemployment is not the only policy that has kept wages down over the last three decades. Trade policy has also been designed for this purpose. Our manufacturing workers have to compete with low paid workers in the developing world; our doctors are protected from this competition. The downward pressure on the wages of ordinary workers is worsened by our high dollar policy which puts domestic workers at an even greater disadvantage.

Government policy has also made it almost impossible for workers to organize unions. And of course we have let the minimum wage fall way behind the cost of living and even further behind productivity.

The other item in the news recently was the anniversary of the collapse of Lehman and the beginning of the bailout. This is the other essential part of the picture. While the government is prepared to act to keep wages from rising, when the Wall Street banks effectively put themselves into bankruptcy, the government was very quick to come to the rescue. Both the Fed and the Treasury Department made it their

financiers turn their backs on nuclear power unless the industry can ram more tens of billions of dollars in government/taxpayer loan guarantees through Congress.

And what is all this nuclear technology, from the uranium mines to the nuclear plants to the still absent waste storage dumps for? To boil water!

These are the tragic follies when the corporate masters and their political minions, who are ready and willing to guarantee taxpayer funding, have no "skin in the game." This kind of staggering power without responsibility is indeed radioactive. ■

Nader.org

central mission to keep the Wall Streeters alive. As former Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner said repeatedly in his autobiography, there would be no more Lehmans.

So that's the basic story in the simplest possible terms. The government openly acts to ensure that wages don't rise and also to protect Wall Street high flyers who managed to sink their banks with their bad bets. Maybe an economist will win a Nobel prize for figuring out why inequality is increasing. ■

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Peltier

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35

repress and silence for decades on end.

Throughout the 1960s and early 70s, the FBI's COINTELPRO program specifically targeted the American Indian Movement – among many other political organizations – for annihilation.

Peltier is a direct casualty of the ongoing American war on political dissidents. Despite his circumstances, he has transcended hopelessness by becoming a prolific poet, author, painter and peace activist. His resilience and grace in the face of such suffering is an inspiration to us all.

We cannot let Peltier die in prison. This victory cannot be handed over to the forces of darkness that want to extinguish his spirit.

Silja J.A. Talvi is an award-winning investigative journalist and author who fled the U.S. after becoming the target of police and intelligence agency harassment while researching a book on supermax confinement. She has lived in Finland since 2011 and has recently authored a new book on immigrants and refugees. Talvi is the author of Women Behind Bars: The Crisis of Women in the U.S. Prison System [Seal/Perseus 2007].

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Getting Women 'Off The Sidelines'

OFF THE SIDELINES

Raise Your Voice, Change The World

By Kirsten Gillibrand

Random House Publishing Group

224 pages, \$26

BY WANDA JO STAPLETON

Kirsten Gillibrand, although only 48 years old, is a prominent and powerful U.S. senator from upstate New York. In addition she's the mother of two young boys [Theo and Henry] and the wife of Jonathan, a supportive and encouraging partner who recognizes her worth.

In her book, *Off the Sidelines*, Gillibrand says that women should "get off the sidelines" because the health of our democracy depends on more women speaking out and leading, for example, in the struggle for paid maternity leave and paid family sick leave; even Afghanistan and Pakistan have these!

Furthermore, she asks "what about affordable child care, universal pre-K, and equal pay for equal work?" Finally, she declares that if women were better represented in national politics we wouldn't be spending so much time debating contraception.

Gillibrand, a lawyer, chose to run for office herself when she found that working in a law firm was a "grind" because it was not fulfilling. So she chose to follow her childhood dream and become involved in politics.

In 2006, she ran for Congress from the 20th Congressional District of upstate New York, and after a hard-fought campaign, she won. In 2009, she resigned from her House seat when the New York Governor appointed her to fill the U.S. Senate seat left vacant by Hillary Rodham Clinton – who accepted the position of Secretary of State as part of President Barack

Obama's newly formed cabinet.

STANDING UP FOR FIRST RESPONDERS

As a U.S. senator, Gillibrand got "off the sidelines" herself when she stood up for the 9/11 first responders who suffered lasting health effects from their service around "Ground Zero." That's the area around the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City that collapsed because of a terrorist attack. These first responders were becoming sick and some were dying from the toxins they had inhaled while rescuing victims and cleaning up after the towers collapsed.

Gillibrand filed the "9/11 Healthcare Bill" to help the first responders pay for medical care. Opponents thought this was an entitlement bill for New Yorkers who lived in a wealthy state. However, when first responders came in busloads, walked the Senate office halls, and told their stories, Gillibrand's bill passed unanimously!

TAKING ON DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Gillibrand got "off the sidelines" again when she took on the Department of Defense for the way the military handles sexual assault within its ranks. According to the Department's own report, there were an estimated 26,000 [!] cases of sexual assault in 2012. Problem was that the military commanders were all powerful. These generals could say whether or not to

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Imagining Our Dark, Stormy Future

**THIS CHANGES
EVERYTHING**
*Capitalism vs.
The Climate*
By Naomi Klein
Simon & Schuster
576 pages, \$30

BY EMILY JOHNSTON

If Naomi Klein did not exist, we would have to invent her.

With her new book on climate change, *This Changes Everything*, she lays out a nearly bullet-proof argument, not only about what we have to do to save ourselves, but also – perhaps more essentially – about why it’s reasonable to believe that we might in fact do these things.

Others – including Bill McKibben and Paul Gilding – have covered similar territory, but with all due respect to both of them, the more optimistic portions of their books have never been so persuasive to this particular worried reader.

If you generally avoid reading about climate change [out of paralysis, fear or grief], read this book. If you do read about it, but feel overwhelmed and unsure that there’s any hope, or what hope would even look like in the context of a biosphere in crisis, read this book.

If you think climate change is something you can think about later – after getting even with the mortgage or the credit cards, maybe, or when you’re not work-

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ing so much, or when the kids are older, read this book. And if, like me, you ran clean out of the ability to distance yourself from this issue years ago, and you plunged into climate activism of one sort or another [though the fear and grief have not gone away], then you, es-

pecially, should read this book.

It's no secret to most people who follow the news that the science is about as dire as it can be: Life as we know it has, at best, decades left on its clock [and that's for the lucky ones in wealthy countries]. To most people who follow

the news carefully [and trust the scientific method], that's been clear for a longish while.

To those of us who have been helplessly in love with the natural world all our lives – never losing a child's wonder at its beauties, familiar and strange – it has always been a painful as well as a profoundly regenerative love because it's been clear for a long time how badly we as a species have behaved, even when we meant well.

What hasn't been clear is how we might emerge from this catastrophe.

On my review copy of the book, the first two sentences on the back are, "Forget everything you think you know about global warming. The really inconvenient truth is that it's not about carbon – it's about capitalism."

This provocation may turn off a lot of people who would appreciate the book itself: While capitalism is without question one of the roots of both our climate predicament and our failure to work our way out of it so far, the crisis also actually is about the carbon, just as lung cancer is about the smoking, not just the forces that conspired to encourage us to smoke [the essential difference, of course, is that smoking is not necessary to partaking in the modern world, and using fossil fuel still is; nevertheless, the focus on root causes must go hand in hand with a focus on the actual, immediate cause].

But Klein isn't an ideologue, and she takes no prisoners from right or left – especially the environmental left – in her assessment of why we haven't managed to change course, though we've known about the dangers of climate change for decades.

Klein's even-tempered assault on capitalism has two parts [her assault on socialism and communism consists mostly of the first of these two]:

First, that its "extractivist" worldview [in which the planet's mountain ecosystems have no value other than the "lumber" and coal within them, for example – never mind that they provide vast amounts of oxygen and water filtration for us, let alone their sui generis value] has so distanced us from the natural world [and so commodified it] that we've entirely lost sight of our deeply dependent and symbiotic relationship with it.

And second, that "a belief system that vilifies collective action and declares war on all corporate regu-

lation and all things public simply cannot be reconciled with a problem that demands collective action on an unprecedented scale and a dramatic reining in of the market forces that are largely responsible for creating and deepening the crisis." [p. 41]

The business models of neither Louis Vuitton nor Walmart are compatible with life on earth, and we can be attached to a worldview that insists that they are, or we can save our sorry selves: We can't have it both ways.

The irony is, as Klein makes abundantly clear, the climate change "deniers" are much more aware of this fact than most of the rest of us; knowing that an understanding of the likely arc of climate change will subvert everything they've fought for [low taxes, nonexistent or toothless regulation, a world in which low, low prices trump even the most baseline attention to the natural world or human rights], they've fought shamelessly, and all too effectively, to undermine or eviscerate that understanding.

They know what the threat means, in other words, and it's high time we joined them in that knowledge. We have two choices – A, we can fundamentally change our relationship to the natural world [primarily, our consumerism], or B, we can disintegrate into a Mad Max future, in which we hang on as long as possible to our "way of life" while the rest of the world suffers profoundly [until we do, too]. That's it. Which will you choose?

Another irony that Klein makes painfully clear is that for a not inconsiderable period of time, milder responses would have worked. If we had – say, in the 1980s – cut subsidies to fossil fuel companies, while investing heavily in clean energy and subsidizing clean-energy choices in the developing world [thus allowing them to leapfrog dirty energy entirely, while still growing and modernizing], we would not be in as acute a crisis now.

And we knew enough to do that, and it was clearly what morality demanded, because we'd been using dirty energy to grow ever since the Industrial Revolution; nearly everything about our "success" has been enabled by the crutch of cheap fossil fuels [not to mention slavery and near-slavery], so it's plainly not reasonable to expect other countries not to follow us down this path unless we're willing to help substantially.

Klein makes a strong case for the fact that instead – enamored of Reagan-era business-centered policies – many environmentalists decided to be less confrontational, and to speak more about "partnering" with business ... and then got had. Roundly.

Ironically – again – this resulted in where we are now, which demands vastly more powerful changes to the system than would have

Oklahoma Friends Meetings (Quakers)

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

- Author unknown

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Call 918.569.4803.

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Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

ments monument.

Before they celebrate too much, they would be wise to remember an old adage: *be careful for what you wish, you just might get it.*

State District Judge Thomas Prince's dismissal of the constitutional challenge was just step one in what almost certainly will be a long journey. Next stop: the Oklahoma Supreme Court.

In the meantime, a similar – but separate – federal challenge to the monument is set for trial next spring in U.S. District Court in OKC.

No matter how the cases play out, Pruitt and state Reps. Mike Ritze and John Bennett, just to name a few, are likely to discover their opening round victory was Pyrrhic.

If higher courts ultimately allow the monument to remain – buying the specious argument it is “historical” not “religious” – state officials will have little choice but to welcome other privately funded monuments to the Capitol grounds.

Can you imagine Pruitt and Co.'s horror if a Satanic monument is erected on public land? Or something reflecting the “history” of Hinduism, Islam or Buddhism?

If, however, higher courts determine it is a violation of the state or federal constitutions – or both – Prince's ruling will look all the more like the political decision of a judge who didn't want that tar baby of a case in his Bible Belt courtroom in the midst of his re-election campaign.

Can you imagine Pruitt and Co.'s apoplexy if the monument is ordered removed?

Other than pure politics or religious zealotry, it's still difficult to fathom why Oklahoma's elected leaders felt compelled to erect the Ten Commandments' monument on the Capitol grounds two years ago.

Does anyone really doubt that Christianity is the dominant religion in Oklahoma? Does anyone really believe a public display of the Ten Commandments is going to reduce the murder rate or otherwise improve rank-and-file behavior?

What it yielded was predictable: Litigation that is costing taxpayers precious resources that could be spent in classrooms or on rebuilding decrepit bridges.

Such nincompoopery is hardly new, of course. Nearly two-dozen laws enacted since 2003 have been declared unconstitutional. In many cases, lawmakers were warned – repeatedly – the measures would not stand up in court, but they approved them anyway ... figuring most voters were too ignorant to know they were being played.

To “true believers” in the Legislature, however, the placement of a Ten Commandments' monument on the Capitol grounds was a significant step toward

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reclaiming what they contend was the Founding Fathers' dream of creating a Christian nation.

Except, of course, that wasn't the Founders' dream, but rather a rewriting of history by the extreme Christian right. The Founders were devoted to both freedom of – and freedom from – religion.

A bumper sticker distributed by the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty puts it best: *Separation of Church & State is Good for Both.*



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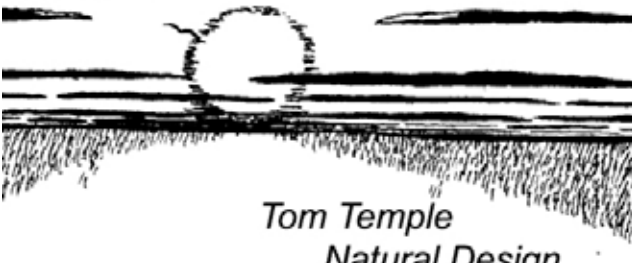
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Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Shell Game: AG Scott Pruitt is asked to rule on legality of Legislature yanking \$3 million from OK Aeronautics Commission's revolving fund to balance state budget.

Dart: To outgoing Superintendent Janet Barresi, publicly referring to state Board member Leo Baxter as a "son of a bitch." A fine example for Oklahoma's youth.

Mark your calendar: Cimarron Alliance's 2014 LGBT Equality Month Gala is Oct. 24 at OKC's Remington Park. For tickets, visit equalityokc.org/gala.

Laurel: To Osage Nation, boycotting FedEx for its financial ties to the Washington Redskins. Chief Geoffrey M. Standing Bear says the tribe will avoid FedEx until the NFL team drops its insulting name.

We've been impressed with much of what we've seen so far from new OKC Superintendent Rob Neu. He called out Lege for repealing Common Core without a plausible backup, jeopardizing state control over hundreds of millions in federal funding.

Since 2000, NFL players have been arrested 83 times for domestic violence. Calls to National Domestic Abuse Hotline jumped 84% since video of Ray Rice's knockout punch was released Sept. 8. – Time

Joseph A. Fox is interim director of Oklahoma Public Employees Retirement System, succeeding Tom Spencer. Fox is former state House legal counsel and served as ex-Speaker Larry Adair's general counsel.

Breath of Fresh Air: 6,600 premature deaths could be avoided each year if EPA's Clean Power Plan is approved, sharply reducing carbon and other power plant pollution by 2030. It also would prevent as many as 150,000 asthma attacks annually in children. Visit ConsumersUnion.org/energy for details.

It's not your imagination: primetime cable news is a white man's world. Eighty-four percent of 1,015 guests appearing on CNN, Fox and MSNBC during a five-week period were white – 72% were men. Only 5% of guests were women of color and 3% were Latino. – Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting

Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

The Ninth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals will soon be hearing oral arguments in marriage-equality cases from Hawaii, Idaho, and Nevada where the defenders of discrimination are using the protection of children as their shield defending the common garden variety of prejudice thrown at same-gender couples.

What are we to make of this quote:

“A child’s formative years are benefited by the presence of both a mother and a father,” attorneys for the Coalition for the Protection of Marriage wrote in court filings in the Nevada case. “The man-woman marriage institution vindicates the child’s interest in knowing and being raised by her own natural mother and father.”

Two very important sharp points punch holes is this defense of discrimination:

1. What about single parent households? Should those children be removed from the home?

Just when do the “formative years” end? I’m well into middle age, yet I’m still being “formed” by my parents.

2. What about adopted children who do not know and may never know who their “natural parents” are?

“Vindicate” is an odd choice of word to use generically to “defend” children. Isn’t it more likely the use of “vindicate” is wishful thinking of the discrimination defenders to justify their own personal attitude toward civil equality for gay and lesbians?

One very good piece of news is that the three judge panel hearing these marriage equality cases have already made previous written rulings concerning gay equality in Prop 8 from California, eligibility of gay people to serve on juries, and the unconstitutionality of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell.

James Nimmo
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Following the defeat of Freda Deskin, I asked her in an e-mail if she would endorse John Cox. She replied, “I will not be endorsing either candidate. Thanks[.]”

How disappointing that the individual endorsed by Gov. and Kim Henry, David Walters, Barry Switzer, and the editorial board of the Tulsa World won’t pay it forward to support John Cox.

John Cox is clearly the best candidate in this race and deserves to win. I’ve held a general belief that a defeated primary or runoff Democrat ought to pick up



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*Only a fool would try to deprive working
men and women of the right to join the union
of their choice. —Dwight D. Eisenhower*

the pieces and support their opponent for the overall good.

But with the shellacking Deskin took, even with those big endorsements, maybe her refusal to support Cox is somehow a blessing in disguise.

Ben Sherrer
Chouteau

Editor’s Note: Ben Sherrer, a Chouteau Democrat, represents District 8 in the Oklahoma House of Representatives.

been necessary in 1980.

Last fall, Klein caught some flak for a Salon interview in which she conflated tragically flawed choices by the Environmental Defense Fund and the Nature Conservancy with an overall “denialism” by big environmental groups regarding the political repercussions of climate change.

At the time, I was so irritated by this that I didn’t bother to read the Salon article: mea culpa. But if her frustration made her paint with too broad a brush, and if her disdain for cap-and-trade made her a little less even-handed than she might have been, those flaws seem greatly tempered in the book, and her essential point is inarguable: Fundamental changes in our systems are necessary if we are to save ourselves. Period.

Even if you don’t agree with her, the possibility is so inspiring that it seems well worth fighting for, given that our other option is to watch the world descend into ever more tragedy, along with ever more xenophobia, militarization and “disaster capitalism” in the face of recurring catastrophes and their result-

ing refugees.

Why does she believe this? In no small part, because of the number, energy and large-heartedness of the anti-extraction movements that have sprung up both continent-wide and worldwide – movements often focused on the local catastrophes inherent in fossil fuel extraction, but also keenly aware of the climate consequences of the same [I came to this, as to many things, backwards – scared out of my political remove by the climate crisis, I then learned a great deal about extraction’s costs to frontline communities].

These movements, while sometimes small, are filled with deeply resolute people who have never before done anything like what they’re now perfectly willing to do: “I’ve never considered myself a bunny hugger,” Klein quotes one rancher in the anti-Keystone XL fight as saying, “but I guess if that’s what I’ve got to be called now, I’m OK with it” [p. 313].

The beauty of the internet, Klein makes clear, is that even when these fights are small or in remote places, people can and do learn from one another and take comfort from the knowledge that their struggles are part of a much larger picture – and all of these people are very clear that picture is nothing less than the struggle for survival.

Most of all, she speaks eloquently about the First Nations and Native American Idle No More movement, and the way in which embattled indigenous communities have led the rest of us on these issues. [p. 379]

While there is much that is outrageous or instructive that is inevitably missing here [one of many reasons you should read the book], above all it seems important to stress its moral core. Klein is very clear about what isn’t still possible – we’re not getting out of this anymore, no matter what we do.

But her response to that reality is neither nihilism nor a false cheer nor even elegy; it’s a deep belief in the capacity of people to act from their best selves, and in the power of solidarity.

“In the hot and stormy future we have already made inevitable through our past emissions,” she writes, “an unshakable belief in the equal rights of all people and a capacity for deep compassion will be the only things standing between civilization and barbarism.” [p. 462].

Most of us, I suspect, know this in our bones – it’s one of the reasons we’re so afraid of this crisis, with its very real threats of famine, drought and unthinkable numbers of refugees.

Perhaps most importantly, Klein is persuasive that win or lose, our efforts to shift the world enough to save ourselves [and much else] are morally and spiritually regenerative, and that we must reimagine the narrative of the possible, and write a new ending to

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the half-finished liberation movements of abolition, civil rights, feminism and indigenous sovereignty, which were always as much about economic justice as about voting rights, and that in attempting to do so, we discover [or rediscover] our own values.

My take on the climate work that I do has long been, basically, that this is how I want to go down: trying to do the right thing, however hopeless it seems – fighting, in a way, for the continued existence of a single homely species or two among the millions that are

Sidelines

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 40

prosecute a case. They could even throw out a jury verdict after a perpetrator was convicted.

Men and women told stories of being raped by their peers and superiors and how afterwards the military had disregarded them or blamed them for the crimes.

For example, Stacey Thompson. A sergeant spiked her drink, raped her, and left her on the street at 4 a.m. When she reported the attack, the sergeant's friends retaliated against her, telling investigators that Stacey used drugs. The investigators then called her a liar, reassigned her, and eventually kicked her out of the military with an other-than-honorable discharge.

Victims of sexual assault said the government needed to take prosecution of sexual assault cases out of the military's chain of command. Gillibrand introduced legislation to do just that. She worked

disappearing.

The beauty of this book is that suddenly, imagining a different world – tragically diminished in some ways, yes, but deeply inspiring in others – doesn't seem quite so much like an act of fantasy. ■

Emily Johnston is a Seattle poet, essayist, and activist whose first book of poetry, Her Animals, will be published in early spring 2015 by Hummingbird Press.

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hard lobbying the senators and got support from 55 of them.

Meanwhile, the commanding generals fought hard to protect the status quo and keep their power. Because Gillibrand's bill was filibustered, she needed 60 votes for passage, so she was five votes short.

After the vote, many said, "You couldn't have done more!" or "Next time." And there will be a next time, she declared: "Not fighting means the greatest failure of all. Men and women are getting brutally raped ... we cannot sit idly by."

Meanwhile, the philosophy that sustains her is knowing that "if all you can do, is all you can do, then all you can do is enough." ■

Wanda Jo Stapleton is a former Democratic state representative who represented south Oklahoma City from 1986-96.

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14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: September 2014
15. Extent and Nature of Circulation:
 - a. Total No. Copies [Net Press Run]: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 months: 3,827.
 - b. Paid and/or Requested Circulation:
 - [1] Paid/Requested Outside-County Mail Subscription stated on Form 3541. Average No. Copies Each issue during preceding 12 months: 2,640 – No. Copies of Single Issue published nearest to filing date: 2,518.
 - [2] Paid In-County Subscriptions: Average No. Copies Each issue during preceding 12 months: 924 – No. Copies of Single issue published nearest to filing date: 898.

[3] Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Non-USPS Paid Distribution: 0

[4] Other Classes mailed through the USPS: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 0 – No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 0

c. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation [Sum of 15b. [1], [2], [3], and [4]. Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 3,564. Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 3,416.

d. Free or Nominal Rate Distribution [By Mail and Outside the Mail]:

[1] Free or Nominal Rate Outside-County Copies included on PS Form 3541: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 14. Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 14.

[2] Free or Nominal Rate In-County included on PS Form 3541: Average No. Copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 27. No. Copies of Single issue published nearest filing date: 27.

[3] Free or Nominal Rate Copies Mailed at Other Classes Through the USPS: Not applicable.

[4] Free or Nominal Rate Distribution Outside the Mail: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 50. No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 0.

e. Total Free or Nominal Rate Distribution Outside the Mail (Sum of 15d [1], [2], [3] and [4]): Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 91. Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 41.

f. Total Distribution (Sum of 15d and 15e): Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 months: 3,655. Actual No. Copies of Single Issue published Nearest to Filing Date: 3,457.

g. Copies Not Distributed: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 months: 172. Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 0.

h. Total [Sum of 15f and 15g]: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 months: 3,827. Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 3,457.

i. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation [15c divided by 15f x 100]: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 97.5%. Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 98.8%.

16. Publication of Statement of Ownership required. Will be printed in the October 2013 issue of this publication.

17. Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner: Beverly Hamilton, Publisher. Date: 9-30-14.

I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanctions [including fines and imprisonment] and/or civil sanctions [including civil penalties].

Fall Peace Festival



Celebrate Peace & Justice

Saturday, November 8, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**Civic Center Hall of Mirrors, 201 N. Walker, OKC
Free Admission**

**Booths and Tables of Social Justice Organizations
Live Music and Entertainment All Day
Supervised Children's Area**

Holiday Shopping Opportunities

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

**Sponsors include: The Peace House ☺ Peace Education Institute ☺
Social Justice Committee First Unitarian Church ☺ Bob Lemon ☺ Oklahoma Observer**

PEACEHOUSEOK.ORG ☺ PEACEEDUCATIONINSTITUTE.ORG