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Turning The Tide?

*Despite Starvation Budgets And Union-Busting,
Pro-Education Forces Are Winning Some
Key Battles In GOP-Dominated Legislature*



BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

It was no coincidence that five days before this year's pro-education rally, state senators voted to strip teachers of their right to pay union dues through payroll deduction.

As Republican Sen. Ralph Shortey put it so succinctly, it was a "poke in the eye" – an unmistakable message that underpaid, overworked educators are neither to be seen nor heard.

With lopsided control of both houses and the governor's office, Oklahoma's GOP leadership calculated it finally had everything in place to cripple the teachers' unions and remake schools into corporate profit centers.

What they didn't expect was that a long-splintered educational establishment would reunite and a long-slumbering electorate would awaken – the two groups deploying 21st Century technology and social media to organize an old-fashioned, grass-roots movement to save and improve public schools.

Equally significant: The state's Republican school superintendent

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To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

OUR CREDO

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

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

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Observations

Cynical

The spirit of Donald Segretti lives at the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs.

In what amounted to a Nixonian dirty trick, the so-called think tank dispatched orange-shirted minions to last month's public school rally at the state Capitol to distribute decals with this message: *Eliminate the income tax for teachers.*

Dozens, if not hundreds, of teachers and common education supporters blithely stuck the decals on their shirts, becoming unwitting victims of an ideological prank – the equivalent of wearing a dunce cap, for all to see.

Let us explain: The Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, the progeny of the Koch Brothers and other John Birch-style radicals and the ideological twins of the American Legislative Exchange Council [ALEC], despises public education. They tirelessly promote vouchers and so-called "school choice" – indeed, almost any policy that would cripple common schools as we know them.

Among their latest schemes is a plan to eliminate some, if not all, of the state income tax for Oklahoma's underpaid teachers. They promote this as a means to "reward" teachers with higher take-home pay during lean budget times and encourage more to enter the profession.

Sounds good, right? As OCPA's president, Michael Carnuccio, wrote in a recent Journal Record column, the state already has "eliminated the personal income tax for aerospace engineers, retirees, others on Social Security, and on some capital gains." Why not teachers?

Here's the problem: According to an Oklahoma Tax Commission analysis dated Mar. 19, it would cost the state treasury about \$50.7 million in fiscal year 2016 if lawmakers exempted the first \$40,000 in income earned by teachers.

That is money that otherwise could be spent on public education. Money that is needed to hire teachers in the first place.

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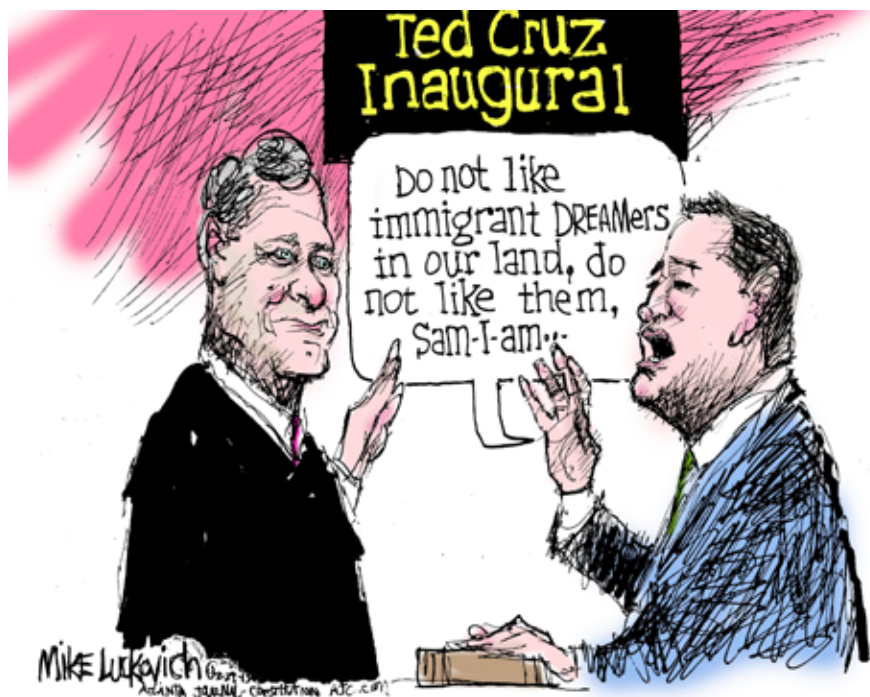
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Laurel: To Tulsa geologist Bob Jackman, the first to publicly expose [October 2014 Observer] the pressure Big Oil exerted to silence scientists that linked injection wells to the state's earthquake swarms.

OKC pollster Chris Wilson has signed on as "director of research and analytics" for Republican Sen. Ted Cruz's quixotic presidential campaign. Better get paid up front.

Dart: To the Legislature's lock-step Republicans, refusing to delay a .25% income tax cut despite a \$611 million budget hole. Repeat after us: *When you're in a hole, stop digging ...*

Oxymoron: Oklahoma Sen. James Lankford and Arkansas Sen. Tom Cotton are members of the Senate Select Committee on *Intelligence*.

Back in public service: Former state Sen. Kenneth Corn is Anadarko's new city manager. Seems only yesterday, as an OU student, he was state's youngest elected House member.

Laurel: To former House Speaker Kris Steele, R-Shawnee, a tireless advocate for criminal justice reform. Punitive policies are destroying lives and bankrupting the state, but lawmakers are slow to enact changes. They fear being labeled "soft on crime."

It's shameful state leaders fail to appreciate value in keeping and preserving the circa 1902 Oklahoma State Capital Publishing Co. building in Guthrie. Placed on state's "underutilized property list" in 2012, it now is offered for sale or lease.

The Central Oklahoma Labor Federation will honor Observer Editor Arnold Hamilton with its 2015 Friend of Labor Award at its Apr. 24 Labor and Friends Banquet. The award is named for Observer Founding Editor Frosty Troy.

Dart: To OU Professor David Deming, still fighting the old *America: Love It or Leave It*, John Birch-era wars. Deming is torqued another OU prof would dare label Old Glory a symbol of racism. It's called Free Speech.

Sad fact: Oklahoma ranks 44th in per capita number of primary care physicians, meaning residents in 63 of state's 77 counties lack access to the health care they need.

Dart: To Rep. Tom Newell, R-Seminole, and Sen. Nathan Dahm, R-Broken Arrow, authors of the measure to eliminate payroll deduction as a means for teachers to pay their union dues. Remember those names come election time.

Our good friend, Dr. Robin Myers, launches his latest book, *Spiritual Defiance*, with an Apr. 27 signing at OKC's Full Circle Book. The event begins at 6:30 p.m.

Sen. Clark Jolley, R-Edmond, pulled his voucher bill, blaming misinformation spread about it. No, what got people riled up was the truth about SB 609.

We note the passing of longtime Observer reader Dr. O.R. Jenkins, who served two decades in administration and another 14 as an adjunct professor at Redlands Community College.

Perspective? The unfinished American Indian Cultural Center and Museum in OKC sits idle for a third year. It took the state 85 years to finish the Capitol – the dome wasn't added until 2002.

While the carbon crowd fights renewables in Oklahoma, a new report projects wind power could support 600,000 jobs by 2050 in such industries as construction, transportation and manufacturing. – U.S. Department of Energy

Congratulations to Sapulpa High seniors Lindsey Dennison and Christina French, winners of 2015 Willene Wright Scholarships, named for the longtime Creek County Democratic Party chair.

Letters



Editor, The Observer:

In 1978, I presided over a meeting of the OU Student Congress, which voted [myself included] to grant recognition to a student organization, the Gay Peoples Union.

This action was actively opposed by the student body, the OU President William Banowsky, and the OU Regents. Banowsky was later applauded by the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma for his stand, and the convention passed a resolution claiming "homosexuality is clearly contrary to the biblical lifestyle."

I find the parallels to current events to be both alarming and hilarious. It appears that for President Boren and much of the student body, the operation of the university is not disrupted by modern social or cultural problems, but by the antics of teenagers. As in the recent past, OU can expect to be successfully sued for its pandering.

In Boren's view, furthering the educational goals of the university does not involve protecting the teachings of the Bible or the Constitution, but in protecting the only source of moral authority the

university accepts – the OU football team.

Del Bauman
Norman

Editor, The Observer:

People have said that they were not surprised by the bigotry of the members of that OU fraternity.

Why? Well, these spoiled children of position learned bigotry at home. Probably, but they may have been reinforced by members of the Oklahoma Legislature who engage in gay-bashing, the denigration of religion and race-baiting.

I wonder what homes the votes for many of those legislators come from?

Jeff Hamilton
Midwest City

Editor's Note: Jeff Hamilton is a former Democratic state representative who served from 1984-94.

Editor, The Observer:

In his 42nd year as a public official, David Boren made a rookie mistake.

This Rhodes Scholar who has been a state representative, governor, U.S. senator and for 21 years president of the University of Okla-

homa should have known better when he got the bad news.

A video of his students chanting a racist song had gone viral on social media.

Boren should have just issued a simple statement saying freedom of speech trumps their racism.

Further, he should have added that OU faculty and students have a First Amendment right to speak free of his censorship even if their speech is offensive and stupid like the segregationist Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity song.

Instead, Boren panicked and organized a public rally and demonstrations against racism that turned a one-day story into a week-long repeating of the video on cable television news.

Free speech died at OU on Mar. 10 when Boren expelled two fraternity members who led the chanting on a bus.

A university is supposed to be a laboratory in which all ideas are expressed and debated.

Who wants to go to an institution like OU where mum is the word? You either have free speech or you don't.

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner
Wagoner

Editor, The Observer:

Hopefully, this will qualify as a Laurel to Tarka Energy of Norman, OK. Tarka Energy agreed to purchase a \$25,000 generator and pay the \$5,773.76 for the installation for the recently built monolithic Dome-Saferoom at Pawnee Public Schools.

The saferoom offers near absolute protection as a tornado shelter for the entire student body and is also made available to the citizens of Pawnee.

Thanks to Tarka Energy LLC, the saferoom is now self-dependent during power outages and disaster. The City Council and EMT's will be presented the keys to the building at an open house planned

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Ode To Joy



It's been less three months since she took office, but it's not too soon to say I was wrong about Joy Hofmeister.

I heard from more than a few of our readers last fall, insisting I'd missed the mark when asserting Hofmeister, policy-wise, was Janet Barresi with a smile.

They were convinced the public schools advocate they'd worked with in the Tulsa area would be the same Hofmeister leading a State Department of Education crippled by Barresi's reign of error.

I had doubts. Not about her sincerity, but about whether she would willingly, publicly, *forcefully* buck her party's hard-right opposition to common education.

It's in their DNA, after all – some driven by religious beliefs, others by profit, many by pure hatred for the teachers' unions.

Moreover, the anti-public ed cabal is reinforced by the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs [OCPA] and its wealthy supporters, as well as the Oklahoman's uber right editorial page.

Would Hofmeister push back against Gov. Mary Fallin's hand-picked State Board, with its privatizers and voucher schemers?

Would she truly fight for more school funding, risking the wrath of Republican legislative leaders trapped between anti-government ideologues and the realities of a \$611 million budget hole?

Would she be able to unite and energize teachers, administrators, patrons and students irate over the nation's deepest education spending cuts?

So far, the answers are yes, yes, yes:

- Hofmeister literally dropped the gavel recently on State Board members Amy Ford and Bill Price, cutting them off as they demanded power to set the board's agenda.

An irate Ford threatened to "vote down every issue" until she gets her way. Ford and Price, a former U.S. attorney and failed GOP gubernatorial nominee, are Barresi loyalists clearly seeking to usurp the popular new superintendent's power.

Republicans created this mess after a dust-up at Barresi's first board meeting four years ago. When the board, full of former Democratic Gov. Brad Henry's appointees, challenged Barresi's demand she be allowed to hire her campaign manager in the department's No. 2 position, GOP lawmakers rushed through a bill that gave Gov. Fallin the at-will authority to appoint all new board members and strengthened the superintendent's power.

At the time, The Observer warned that Republicans would regret legislating-by-pique. It didn't take long for them to realize their mistake, as Barresi's disastrous regime unraveled.

So, what will Fallin do now? Ignore the dispute? Side with Hofmeister? Back her appointees, Ford and Price?

- Hofmeister headlined the Mar. 30 pro-public education rally on the Capitol's south steps and didn't mince words about her goals: Over the next five years, she wants teacher pay increased to the regional average – it's currently \$3,200 below – and the school year extended to the national average.

Interestingly, the same day, a House committee backed Hofmeister on one of her disputes with Ford, Price and the State Board, shelving SB 301 that would have required school officials to report allegations of employee misconduct to the state board.

Under the bill – which Ford requested – the State Board would have been given the authority to hire its own investigator to review the allegations, a clear case of empire-building that makes you wonder whether Ford and Co. already had someone in mind to hire.

- Hofmeister was greeted with boisterous cheering that exceeded any gubernatorial inaugural I've attended in Oklahoma over the years – a sure sign she has the confidence, for the moment at least, of the state's pro-public education constituency.

She also lit into what she described as the "blame teachers first crowd" – hello, OCPA and State Chamber – saying, "you're on the wrong side of history" and "out of touch" with the vast majority of Okla-

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 many 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.

Joy

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homans, 87% of whom expressed support for higher teacher salaries in a recent poll.

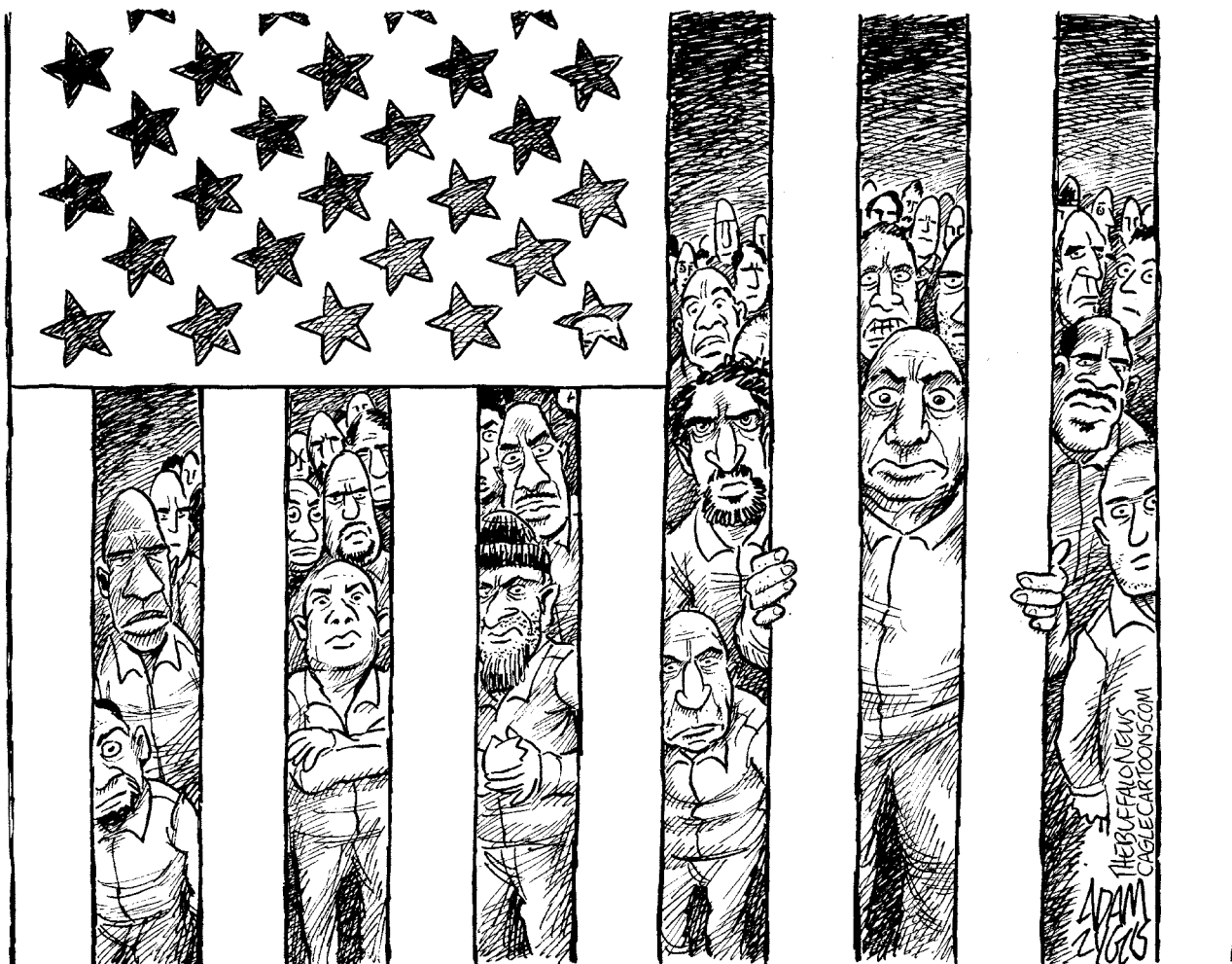
Hofmeister also wisely elevated the debate above partisan sniping: "It's not about party. It's not about Democrats. It's not about Republicans. ... Our children don't have a party affiliation."

Earlier this year, I wrote that Hofmeister "doesn't have the luxury of focusing solely on curriculum and testing" or other academic-centric issues. "She also must become the undisputed champion of Oklaho-

ma's schools, rallying taxpayers to invest in public education like never before."

Everyone I talked to at the rally – *everyone* – gave Hofmeister excellent marks for her first months in office.

If she and her allies can rally rank-and-file Oklahomans to demand legislators treat public education as an investment in the state's future, not a cost, Hofmeister will no doubt be regarded as one of the state's most important and successful superintendents ever.



'LAND OF THE FREE'

What Oklahoma's Punitive Prison System Delivers

BY BO COX

Editor's Note: This is a condensed version of remarks delivered last month at a criminal justice reform rally at the state Capitol, sponsored by Oklahoma CURE [Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants]. The entire speech can be found at www.okobserver.net.

I almost passed on this opportunity to speak because, frankly, I doubt any good will come of it. I have lost a lot of faith in the government to carry out any business except that which benefits those with power and money. And, as we all know, people with power and money don't know the justice system like the people without power and money know the justice system.

In Oklahoma, solutions that actually work seem to die early deaths, silenced by folks dedicated to using prisons for political and financial gain.

Criminal justice decisions – if you truly want a system that serves the public – should be made using evidence-based practices that include risk-assessment tools that far more accurately predict future behavior than does the current system in place in Oklahoma, where we classify prisoners as either violent offenders or non-violent offenders based solely upon their conviction.

It is an anger-based system and, as understandable as it is to be angry at people who commit crimes, it is not an approach with an end in sight.

I have seen Oklahoma Corrections work. I know firsthand that prison can work; prison is where my life was changed.

The first thing you gotta know is that this wasn't just any prison. At this prison, during my first week there, we attended a chalkboard talk led by the warden, Jack Cowley.

First, he drew a horizontal line across the board and pointed to the space above the line.

"Up here," he said in his southwestern Oklahoma drawl, "is the real world. You've proven you can't live there."

"Down here," he continued, "is prison. This is where you will either learn to stay here or live in the real world."

Prison, Jack told us, has traditionally been a place where people learn to do one thing: time. That's not a bad thing, he went on to say, if all you were going to do was spend the rest of your life in prison.

The other side of that coin is that learning how to do time did nothing to prepare people to succeed on the outside. His far-fetched philosophy was that if he made prisons as much like the real world as possible then he increased people's chances of making it in the real world.

Yes, I thought he was a bit dreamy but a year or so later I saw him in an HBO Documentary and he looked straight into the camera and said that he had a unique job, one where if he did his job well he'd work himself out of a job.

In that fertile atmosphere – one that was criticized by most corrections experts – I found the strength and the space to change my life and begin to grow up.

Now, if you know Oklahoma corrections, you also know Jack wasn't invited to stay because, at least the way I see it, while they tell you they want a solution, they really don't. Believe me, business as usual, when it comes to corrections and criminal justice in Oklahoma, is just fine like it is ... for those who have something to gain with keeping up the status quo.

The day I got out I walked across a parking lot that had tripled in size since I'd arrived at that particular prison over a decade earlier. As I made the long walk to my wife's car, the thought occurred to me that this was a growing body and that it couldn't afford to not grow. In fact, growth was necessary for the survival of the folks who worked there.

I'm not even talking about the people who take money from private prison lobbyists and then sit in rooms and make public policy; I'm not talking about corrupt prison guards; I'm talking about good, decent people who happen to work in prison and still believe in people's capacity for change on their better days. Yes, even those people, whether they are conscious of it or not, need prisons to continue to grow because their livelihood depends on it.

Growth, not reduction, is built in to the system.

Let me tell you about several peers of mine – all violent offenders – who are useful and productive

members of society. These people are out and in your community and not only are you not at risk, your community is better with people like them in it.

They include a statewide prison minister, a licensed professional counselor who also happens to be executive director of a substance abuse treatment center, a man who works helping others transition from difficult stations in life, a manager of a retail business and five business owners.

Six of these people are parents; all are spouses. Several volunteer in the community, church and/or local jails or prisons, trying to give back what was given to them.

None of them, including the person speaking to you, would stand a chance of release in today's Oklahoma.

How many more are there, patiently awaiting a chance? I want to tell you about one. Michael Gibson. Gibby, as he's affectionately known, went to prison for a terrible, violent and senseless crime in 1969, when he was 18 years old. That's right, when Gibby went to prison, Richard Nixon was our president, gas cost 35 cents a gallon and Oklahoma had roughly 2,000 people in prison.

Gibby will be the first to tell you he should've been in prison, even for a long time. In fact, he was one of the first men to model personal responsibility for me, a young man who had yet to learn how to step up to the consequences of his actions and say, "I did it."

Fifteen years ago, as I started my own parole process and began to be asked questions like "why do you deserve to get out?" one of the things that became painfully obvious was that I didn't. The young man who had spent his entire adolescence and early adulthood sidestepping any responsibility for his actions had become able to wrap his mind around the fact that he had given up his right to deserve release.

What I had grown to understand was that I was seeking forgiveness, mercy and another chance. Out of all the people who helped me grow into the person I am today, none of them are any more influential in that growth than Gibby.

I've got a thousand Gibby stories but one of my favorites is about how, one Christmas Eve, he saw a guy who had just arrived in prison and was sitting in the middle of the day room with his bad haircut and dazed look. Gibby went up to him and asked the obvious, "Just get here, kid?"

Of course, this startled the guy; you could tell it was his first time and he'd heard the stories.

"Yeah." He was terrified.

"Well, welcome. Don't worry; it'll get better."

He immediately went around the entire unit, cell to cell, and gathered stuff for the young man – toiletries, snacks, clean socks – until he had a huge cardboard box full of these items.

I can't even begin to describe the look on the kid's face when a bunch of us, led by Gibby, dragged that box out to the table he was sitting on and told him

CONTINUED ON PAGE 47



For Once, It May Be Wise To Emulate – Gasp! – Kansas

BY CARLY PUTNAM

It's no secret that Kansas' budget is in crisis. Following years of tax cuts and fiscal mismanagement, the state finds itself in a \$600 million budget shortfall. The state is scrambling to fill the gap, including across-the-board budget reductions and further cuts to public schools that the Kansas Supreme Court has already ruled are constitutionally underfunded.

If you think this sounds familiar, you're right. Oklahoma is in a similar situation – a \$611 million budget hole, agencies facing devastating budget cuts, and a public education system badly in need of an infusion of funds.

However, unlike Oklahoma, Gov. Sam Brownback and the Kansas Legislature are showing signs of being willing to consider the full range of options avail-

able to them. This includes boosting the state budget by working with the federal government to expand health coverage to the state's low-income uninsured.

The Affordable Care Act gives states the option to use federal funds to expand health coverage to low-income residents. The federal government covers 100% of the costs of expansion until 2016, before phasing down to 90% in 2020 and all years after that.

Thus far, 37 states and Washington, DC have chosen to move forward with expansion. Some have done so by expanding eligibility for their Medicaid programs, while others have negotiated with the federal government to build more customized programs for their states.

If Kansas does indeed go ahead with expansion, it will likely be via the latter route. Gov. Brownback has

said that he won't accept an expansion that requires any state funds. This is a tall order – but it's possible. Under Tennessee's proposed expansion, the state hospital association agreed to pay the state's share of the cost when the federal government's contribution scaled down.

Furthermore, the benefits of expansion make it worthwhile for the state to explore its options.

The Kansas Hospital Association, with researchers from Georgetown University, found that expanding health coverage in Kansas would create thousands of jobs. Similarly, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment recently found that expansion would create a net savings to the state of \$82 million between 2014 and 2020.

Simply put, expanding health coverage would be a good deal for Kansas, and the federal government has shown that it is willing to work with states to craft plans to fit their needs. Kansas lawmakers seem to be moving in that direction.

Oklahoma should consider doing the same. Okla-

homa has a variety of options available to craft an Oklahoma plan, including expanding Insure Oklahoma to include many more low-income uninsured Oklahomans.

Expanding access to health coverage for low-income Oklahomans would improve health outcomes and lower the uninsured rate, add thousands of well-paying jobs to the state economy, and save the state hundreds of millions of dollars.

According to a study commissioned by Gov. Mary Fallin, accepting federal funds would create net state savings of some \$450 million over a decade.

We've advised against following Kansas's budget path before, but this is one time where it would make sense. In a time of tight budgets and hard decisions, this is one decision that should be a no-brainer.

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

Another Tax Give-Away?

BY DAVID BLATT

There's lots of talk at the Capitol this year about the need for greater scrutiny and control of tax incentives. Bills authored by the House Speaker and Senate Pro Tem would evaluate all incentives on a regular basis and collect data on their fiscal and economic impact. Yet at least one measure that would create a new tax incentive of unknown cost and effectiveness is rushing through the Legislature.

HB 1747, authored by Rep. Tom Newell, has been labeled the Rural Opportunity Zone bill. As a way to lure new residents to struggling rural areas, it creates a five-year exemption from all state income tax for anyone moving from out-of-state to a county that is projected to lose population between 2016 and 2075.

The bill references a 2012 report by the Oklahoma Department of Commerce that identifies 25 counties, mostly in the western half of the state, that are expected to see their population decline in the coming decades.

Unlike most tax bills, HB 1747 was referred not to the Revenue and Taxation Committee but to the House Agriculture and Rural Development committee. [That may have been a tactic to go around Revenue and Taxation Chair Rep. David Dank, who has pledged that no bills creating new tax breaks will be heard in his committee while the state faces a huge budget hole.]

The bill, which has picked up several co-authors, including Speaker Jeff Hickman, passed unanimously out of House committee and then passed the full

House 64-11. As of late March, it awaited action in the Senate Finance Committee.

Newell's bill is modeled closely on Kansas legislation passed in 2011 creating Rural Opportunity Zones. In Kansas, the income tax exemption for individuals moving to designated rural counties is coupled with student loan repayments up to \$15,000.

As of last year, 240 taxpayers are claiming the tax exemption, while about 1,000 people are receiving student loan reimbursements, according to recent reports. The two incentives are estimated to cost Kansas state and local governments [which pick up part of the tab for the loan reimbursements] close to \$2 million.

For HB 1747, the Oklahoma Tax Commission was unable to calculate an estimated fiscal impact. The statement from House staff states, "Data is not available as to the number of people that migrate based on point of origin or country ... It is believed this measure will have an unknown negative fiscal impact for tax year 2016."

There are other uncertainties about HB 1747 in addition to its completely unknown cost. The bill hinges on establishing residency in a county, but unlike "state resident" – which is a well-established term in state and federal statutes – existing income tax law does not recognize county residency. How and by whom will county residency be determined? The bill is silent on the matter.

In its current form, HB 1747 provides a tax break for a limited time period in a limited geographic area,

but it's not hard to imagine steady pressure to broaden its provisions. In Kansas, the program, which was initially applied to 50 counties, was expanded to an additional 23 counties in 2013 and another four in 2014. Gov. Brownback now wants to expand the law to include those who take up residency in impoverished urban areas.

In Oklahoma, 27 counties border the 25 counties that would be designated as Rural Opportunity Zones

in HB 1747. Officials in those border areas, which include some of the poorest parts of the state, are unlikely to want the appearance of a competitive disadvantage in trying to attract new residents from out-of-state and will undoubtedly seek to be included.

Extending the exemption beyond the initial five years will no doubt become an urgent priority for counties fearful that new residents will pack up and

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Earthquake Fraudsters And Porch Monkeys

BY BOB JACKMAN

Finally, after five years of scary quakes, the Oklahoma Geological Survey with the blessing of the Corporation Commission and Big Oil bosses has acknowledged that "Oklahoma swarm earthquakes are most likely caused by oil production related waste water disposal wells."

However, this announcement – focused on Medford, Oklahoma's Earthquake Capitol – was made in speed-talk blurted out during a power point presentation involving OGS and OCC trained bureaucrats.

Dr. Strangelove is one of the need-more-data panelists. His strange message to an audience of Grant County residents whose homes are getting pounded three to four times daily: "Buy earthquake insurance and a new table with stronger legs to hide under because a big earthquake is coming to hit you."

Other panelists, who must have been Taser-trained in mortal fear of their jobs, said by rote, "We are enacting new protocols," and other nonsensical, inaccurate utterances even though the Grant County audience knew that quake rates for 2015 are projected to hit 900 magnitude 3.0-plus quakes – way above 2014's record-breaking 580.

Visualize the cumulative results of five years of quakes shaking and pounding your home's foundation and interior and exterior walls!

Those of us who have attended or watched on TV these Earthquake Road Shows produced and organized by Big Oil's fraudsters now refer to their mouthpiece panelists as Porch Monkeys.

Oklahoma – for the record – now has the nation's only pro-Man-Made Earthquake Lobbyists – the Oklahoma Independent Petroleum Association [OIPA]. They are often seen hiding behind The Fairy Job Queen's skirts when she tours tornado disaster sites.

Note, since tornadoes are not Big Oil's man-

made disasters, Gov. Mary Fallin usually shows up the next day with the press. But she has never toured or uttered a single word of care and compassion regarding our 10 counties designated as "man-made earthquake hazard risk centers" with current damages estimated into the billions.

Both OU's and OSU's geological, seismological and other earth-science professors and staff are under Putin-like censorship by their presidents, forbidding them to speak to the news media about their scientific opinions on the causes and effects of earthquakes in Oklahoma – they must keep their mouths shut or find another job.

At the same time, the U.S. Geological Survey's expert seismicity publications keep warning Oklahoma – in so many words – you are headed towards major, disastrous earthquakes unless you prevent them by shutting down 100-plus quake-causing, waste-water, high-volume disposal wells in 10 high-risk counties.

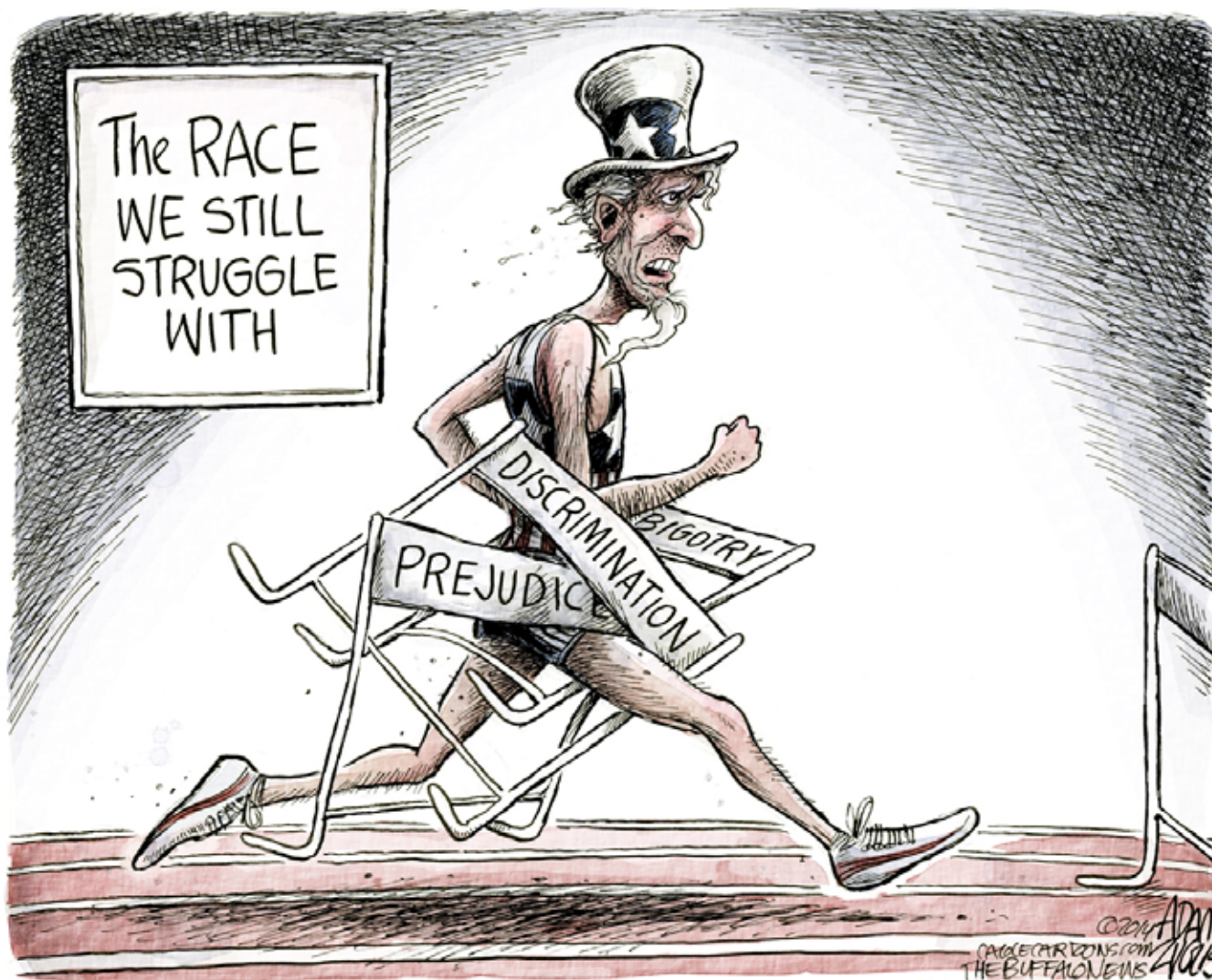
That is only 100 out of 3,300 Class II disposal wells in the state. No one is for shutting down Oklahoma's oil and gas production – just Big Oil's man-made earthquakes.

Weary Oklahoma residents and certain seismic monitor observers independently reported in recent months a rhythm to the earthquakes. The area around the Alfalfa County Courthouse, for example, might be struck on Mondays and Fridays, Stillwater and Perry on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and Guthrie on Saturdays and Sundays – or some similar pattern.

It's enough to make you wonder if there isn't an Earthquake Room where Dr. Strangelove, Devon, Sandridge and the OIPA run the controls on a subterranean Earthquake Factory.

And it might have signs like *Make the Rich Richer & Poor Poorer* and *No Rock Fights in the Earthquake Room*.

Bob Jackman is a Tulsa-based geologist.



Redneckism Drives Away State's Talented Millennials

BY CHRISTIAAN MITCHELL

It can be hard to be an Oklahoman. This is especially true if, like me, you're an Oklahoman who has spent much of the last decade out of state.

When you spend time living elsewhere, you develop a reaction where every time you see Oklahoma in the news your heart jumps into your throat. Invariably it's some tale of destruction involving a tornado or, with disturbing frequency, an earthquake. Otherwise it's a story about the latest hatefully regressive legislation wending its way from Bethany to a quiet death in some sub-committee. Or it's Jim Inhofe ...

There's not much we can do about the tornadoes, but the rest of those problems appear to be the direct result of old-fashioned stubborn pride. Having been

born and raised in Blackwell, and having spent the vast majority of my adult life in Norman and Stillwater, I know Oklahoman stubbornness as well as anyone.

A friend of mine used to tell a story about his grandfather, a crusty old Kay County farmer, who would sit on his front porch during tornado warnings and loudly declare, "I was here first and I ain't movin'!"

Fortunately, to the best of my knowledge, the limits of Grandpa Ivan's mettle were never tested on this count.

Truth be told, there is value in having people willing to stand by what they think is right, no matter how far it sets them apart from the main currents of

thought, or what is considered “smart” by the rest of the world.

But when that becomes a habit, when you consistently, even compulsively, define yourself by how far you can stand apart from the mainstream, it ceases to be noble struggle and becomes self-destructive vanity.

Just recently, NewsOK.com ran a story about the damage that Oklahoma’s national reputation does to efforts to attract businesses. All the petroleum industry giveaways and high-income tax cuts in the world can’t draw businesses to the state if none of their employees are willing to live here. And that’s not to mention the droves of talented young Oklahomans driven away from home by our intensely ideological regressivism.

We Oklahomans have to come to terms with the fact that the world is changing. The next generation of people – that vast, amorphous group of us called “the Millennials” – are just now beginning to age into the levers of control.

We Millennials are rapidly becoming leaders in the economy, and we are increasingly disaffected with ideology- and tradition-driven politics.

Millennials are more socially progressive, cosmopolitan, and accepting of “alternative” lifestyles than any generation in recent history. We are also increasingly unwilling to stick around in jobs or communities where we don’t feel we can be happy.

Oklahoma’s single-minded devotion to resisting change is hollowing out our reserve of talented youth who are going to power tomorrow’s economic and social engines.

It doesn’t have to be this way. There are pockets of Millennial-driven innovation here and there in Oklahoma. In a rare twist, Tulsa recently made the New York Times as a beacon of sophistication and modernity.

But if tomorrow’s movers and shakers can’t find a way to make a life here at home, we’re going to keep losing them and we’re going to keep pushing ourselves deeper into fiscal and cultural crisis.

Any economic and social system built on exhaustible resources is eventually doomed to fail. No one knows for sure how much more oil and gas can be squeezed from the ground, but we can see with absolute certainty that the current generation of leaders will someday pass.

And insofar as that generation continues to build Oklahoma to suit their own narrow ideological ends, they are ill-preparing the state for the future.

Being unwilling to change unto the death has its place, but for those of us who actually want to live here, there needs to be drastic rethinking of our politics.

For all of our stubbornness, we Oklahomans are also a practical people. And there comes a time in every practical person’s life where she has to ask whether a fight over principal is worth the cost.

As a state, we really need to ask whether it’s worth

saving an Oklahoma where none of our children want to live?

Christiaan Mitchell is a lawyer who holds master's degrees in philosophy and education. He lives in Bartlesville.

Give-Away

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

leave once they lose their tax break.

These counties may also look to expand the program to include migrants from other parts of the state, and to include long-time residents who may be unhappy when their new neighbors are exempt from taxes and they are not. Before too long, we might not be left with much of an income tax at all – an outcome that would surely not disappoint at least some of this bill’s principal supporters.

Most problematically, supporters of Rural Opportunity Zones, in Kansas or in Oklahoma, can’t point to any research that establishes the effectiveness of the incentive in meeting its goal, which is to attract people to an area who wouldn’t have migrated there otherwise. As a result, HB 1747 could become just another giveaway for behavior that would have happened anyway.

For too long, Oklahoma has passed more and more tax incentives without any real estimate of what they will cost or any way of determining if they are working. If lawmakers are truly serious about this being a new day in subjecting tax incentives to proper scrutiny, they should avoid unproven schemes like the one in HB 1747.

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>.



Time To Put Women In Charge

BY JENNIFER GRANHOLM

Editor's Note: Former Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm opened her keynote address at last month's annual Sally's List luncheon in Oklahoma City with an exquisite Dr. Seuss-esque ode to progressive women in politics. Sally's List is in its fifth year of helping recruit and train progressive women to run for public office in Oklahoma. Visit sallyslist.org for more details.

Oh, how long we've waited for this:
For five years now you've been compiling a list.
Men lead Oklahoma by margins too large –
Time to put some more women in charge!

So what about Sally, you may inquire
What does she stand for? Can she inspire?
While your list is named for Sally Rae Merkle
Mock
It's more than one woman of whom we take
stock:

Sally's the girl who sees the boys win the gold;
She's the worker who reels when the company's
sold;
She's the mom with a heat bill too high when
it's cold;
She's the CEO who's finally broken the mold;
Sally's fearless and confident and bold!

So batten down the hatches, amass the artillery
You know that in this crowd, Sally is Hillary!
Now, Sally is Kay Floyd and Jari Askins and Meg
Salyer, too –
Truth be told, Sally is you.

You say the last election made you depressed.
Was it our message that wasn't expressed?
Did we fail in our GOTV?
Did we not spend enough time and money?
So I understand the need to grieve,
But after these months we're now up from our
knees.
We've got work to do and here in your capital
You're signed up, enlisted and ready for battle!

In your state house, women are at 12%!
Time to recruit women who will represent!
Including Republican women I might add
They don't like either that their party's gone
bad.

Now, over in DC, it's gridlock times ten.
All that can be fixed with some more estrogen.
The boys had their fun; let's turn a new leaf.
We want a woman as Commander in Chief!

Despite that election, the Tea Party's afraid
That we'll hold the White House for another
decade.

So they're planning attacks, over and over
again.

But hey, Sally's been planning, too, since two
thousand and ten.

Will we see a raucous Republican fight?
Will Cruz and Santorum push them more to the
right?
Will Chris Christie tone down the volume a
smidge?
Have we heard the last of the George
Washington Bridge?

Will Rick Perry's memory agin' start to failin'?
Can we please have the second coming of Sarah
Palin?
Did Jeb Bush also stash his money offshore?
Will his cars get their own elevator?

So the far Right is auditioning every
conservative star;
Looks like another fun full clown car.
Rand Paul, Ted Cruz, Donald Trump blowing his
horn –
Just put up your feet and break out the popcorn.

We'll just let them steep in their party of tea,
We'll fight for the White House from Tulsa to DC!

For us our candidate could be heaven sent:
No finer words it seems than "Madame
President!"

*Jennifer Granholm served as Michigan's 47th
governor from 2003-11. The author of the best-
selling A Governor's Story: The Fight for Jobs
and America's Economic Future, she serves as
Distinguished Adjunct Professor at the Univer-
sity of California-Berkeley School of Law and
Goldman School of Public Policy and is Senior
Research Fellow at the Berkeley Energy and
Climate Institute and Center for Information
Technology Research in the Interest of Society.*

OKLAHOMA'S SHAME



Ugly OU Incident Tests Limits Of 'Free Speech'

BY GENE POLICINSKI

Once again, the brutal language of racism tests our commitment to free speech.

Only a bigot could approve of the chant using the "N-word" sung by Sigma Alpha Epsilon [SAE] members at the University of Oklahoma on a charter bus, loudly proclaiming African Americans would never be admitted to their fraternity chapter and gleefully mentioning lynching.

Consider the "song" in all its awful nature:

There will never be a n----- SAE

There will never be a n----- SAE

You can hang him from a tree

But he'll never sign with me

There will never be a n----- SAE

What could be worse?

How about this taking place on the same weekend

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the nation was commemorating the 50th anniversary of the famed civil rights confrontation at Selma's Edmund Pettus Bridge?

Awful. Disgusting. Repellent. Sickening.

But also, protected free speech.

The 10-second video clip was sent anonymously by e-mail to the student newspaper, the Oklahoma Daily, and to a campus organization. Within hours, it had the nation's attention.

University president David Boren – a former governor and U.S. senator – was outraged. He quickly ordered the fraternity house vacated and closed, declaring that “effective immediately, all ties and affiliations between this University and the local SAE chapter are hereby severed.”

A day later, he expelled two students whom he iden-

But even those worthy elements run up against the core First Amendment principle that government may not punish anyone for the content of their speech or for having a view that many – or even most – find offensive.

Put most simply: We have the right to offend others and to freedom from the fear of being punished for expressing such views.

If the expulsions are challenged in court [and SAE alums have hired high-profile attorney Stephen Jones to explore possible remedies], the university will have the difficult task of proving that this one-time incident constituted a direct or pervasive threat or provocation, substantially affected the ability of OU students to get a good education, and that there were no other, more-narrowly focused actions than

Put most simply: We have the right to offend others and to freedom from the fear of being punished for expressing such views.

tified as being in “leadership” roles connected to the obnoxious singing.

And it's there where President Boren crossed a clear constitutional line.

Condemning the song in the strongest possible way, at multiple occasions: Yes. Exactly the kind of response the First Amendment provides for – more speech to counter speech you don't like.

Shutting down the frat house: The university's regents apparently own the building and may evict occupants. The national governing body of SAE, as a private operation, also had the right to end its affiliation and to close down its own local chapter.

But a host of cases reaching all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, some involving similarly repugnant behavior – a fraternity's “ugly woman” contest, for example – say clearly that content-based punishments of individual speakers will not stand.

The former governor and U.S. senator said any punishments would be “carefully directed” to pass constitutional muster and cited his belief the singing students were creating a “hostile learning environment.” But saying it's so doesn't make it legal – or right.

Boren and a few scholars have raised the specter of potential civil rights violations or violation of the school's student code of “rights and responsibilities,” and indirectly embraced the underlying logic of what courts have called “optimum conditions for learning” and a university's “substantial interest in maintaining an educational environment free of discrimination and racism.”

expulsion available to counter the negative impact.

The student code would fall even more quickly before the First Amendment right of free speech – which cannot be signed away or overridden via a college rulebook.

Clearly, the public excoriation, rallies, marches, closing of the frat house and plans for the university community to conduct meetings and seminars to put more emphasis on diversity, offer such alternative – and longer-lasting – remedies. And all of those are more First Amendment-oriented than expulsion.

Boren made it clear how he feels about the content of the SAE members' speech:

“To those who have misused their free speech in such a reprehensible way, I have a message for you. You are disgraceful. You have violated all that we stand for. You should not have the privilege of calling yourselves ‘Sooners.’ Real Sooners are not racist. Real Sooners are not bigots.”

A call for fairness and equality that follows in the path set out by those Selma marchers five decades ago – including the hope of a better future.

But can any real question remain that by expelling them, this public university wasn't punishing the two students – and potentially more involved in the incident – for the content and viewpoint expressed in that reprehensible “song”?

Let's not compound one wrong with another. *Gene Policinski is chief operating officer of the Newseum Institute and senior vice president of the Institute's First Amendment Center. He can be reached at gpolicinski@newseum.org.*

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'The Stains Can Be Removed'

BY DONNIE LEE NERO SR.

The recent incident at the University of Oklahoma gives our state another "black eye" when it comes to being insensitive to the rights, beliefs, and liberties guaranteed by the constitution of the United States.

Growing up in the segregated community of New Chance City [Spencer, OK], my mother would often take the rug from the front room [living room] outside and put it on the fence and commence beating it with a broom.

This practice was utilized to remove the dirt and accumulation of debris, making it presentable with the luster of newness. Utilizing a vacuum cleaner wasn't an option because the only thing my dad purchased was food to "fill" the mouths of five kids, thus "filling" a machine with dirt was never entertained.

The recent actions by President Boren are understood and sanctioned by most, if not all college presidents. The president of a college or university has a tremendous responsibility of maintaining an environment of tranquility among its constituents and employees.

The actions of the fraternity members are divisive and contrary to the student code of conduct and ex-

pectations. The extraction of negative influences must occur to preserve the whole.

As the transgressors are disciplined, one must hope this hard lesson will produce positive results and these students will seek refuge among influences of favorable regard.

In addition, we must be mindful that our college campuses are a microcosm of our communities, state and nation. Often times, exhibited behaviors and attitudes on campus are brought along on the first day of attendance with the physical pleasantries.

The college campus provides opportunities to the exposure of much diversity, developing an appreciation which should complement the learning process. The cultivation of such appreciation takes longer for some and, sad to say, some never attain such.

We must not allow this incident to overshadow the performance and conduct of those students excelling in multiple areas.

The recent national incidents in Ferguson, MO, and Madison, WI, are reminders that as a nation we have miles to go. Although our nation has its first African American president, it seems we have become more divisive and less united.

Is this divisive nature a result of the president's race or policies? The answer lies within each of us.

Do these national issues and ideals impact our young people? I'm of the mind they do. Thus, when college students behave in such ways, we must ask, and wonder where the seeds of self-absorption were sown.

The question before us is what can or must we do to contribute to the vitality of our great state? I believe we must do more than join hands at rallies, or give "high fives" at Thunder games, only to return to our separate communities.

We must adopt a spirit of authenticity which requires an examination of our inner-being.

Although raised in a segregated community, the

values taught within the walls of my house were "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Thus, Mom didn't beat the neighbor's rug; she concentrated on the one in our house.

I believe our attitudes about those different from us will change when we focus on removing all the impure thoughts and acts which befall us, which begins at home.

The frequency of "Beating the Rug" may depend on the extent of the stains, but I'm confident they can be removed!

Dr. Donnie Lee Nero Sr. is president of the Oklahoma African American Educators Hall of Fame Inc. in Clearview and is retired president of Connors State College in Warner.

'Racism Is An Issue That Faces Us All – Red, Black and White'

BY RANCE WERYACKWE

News crews lingered on campus at the University of Oklahoma days after a video surfaced showing the fraternity Sigma Alpha Epsilon singing a racist chant. Protest and discussions continued as well.

A movement made up of primarily black students – but also inclusive of others – called Unheard was quick to respond to the university administration. Having prayed in ceremony about the ways in which we interact at this university the same weekend the video came out made this event a very surreal one for me.

I was a childhood fan of the University of Oklahoma. I later received my bachelor's degree at OU in Native American Studies. I am, currently, a graduate student and teaching assistant. Maybe one day, I will teach here.

While I am grateful for the administration's quick response to this situation, for the proposed Vice-President for Community at the university level and a director of Diversity and Inclusion in the College of Arts and Sciences, and for other measures to ameliorate this issue, including Dean Kelly Dampousse's taking time to sit down and discuss with us our concerns as Native students, nevertheless, I feel compelled to speak to some of the circumstances regarding race on this particular campus, which have long been an issue for American Indians as well as other people of color.

For Indians who have had not much going for them academically because of the racially-biased curriculum in K-12 education, less opportunity because of

discrimination, and other socio-economic circumstances, football, basketball, and other sports are a chance to be a part of something at which they can excel.

Sports are useful to Indians in this way as a means of opportunity. Local sports teams at every level are heavily supported; in particular, football is a way of life.

The most followed local college football team in Oklahoma is, of course, called the "Sooners," a term that refers to the settlers who prematurely took part in an event the federal government used to further divest Indians of land – the "unassigned lands" of Indian Territory after the Indian Appropriations Act of 1889.

This systematic taking of the land played its part not only in the destruction of tribal cultures, but our economies as well. Many times, in public events, our founding as a state has even been symbolized as a marriage between "Miss Indian Territory" and a white settler representing the forces of settler-colonialism.

Here in Norman, on some of that very land that was taken, on fall Saturdays, football fans roar to the shotgun blast as a prairie schooner re-enacts the 1889 Land Run and the band playing "Boomer Sooner" [an adaptation of the Harvard fight song "Boola Boola"]. Children are "Sooner born" and playing football before they are even old enough know what the heck a Sooner is.

As a Comanche Indian child, I had no idea that I even ought to be upset. We aren't taught to look at this critically. Oklahoma history isn't taught with

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much adherence to points of views from the indigenous inhabitants who resided here prior to the Land Run. But, then again, neither is U.S. history, nor world history, in general, throughout this country.

I as well was very much raised in this football culture. I followed OU football not questioning the nickname. Growing up and becoming conscious about it, I continued to support the team and university, but hate the name. For many, it is ingrained into the football culture of the state.

The school colors of the University of Oklahoma are not a random combination of colors. Crimson and cream – red and white – are the colors worn by the football team, colors that represent a metaphorical racial dynamic of the region and university at the time of its founding, with Oklahoma representing the “red” or American Indian people and Sooners representing the white settler-colonials.

Do not mistake this use of the term “red” as equivocal with the “R-word,” however, a word imposed by those who hunted our skins for bounty. The word “Oklahoma” is a Choctaw word referring to the land where victorious, powerful people of God reside, Humma meaning red and symbolizing both the sacred and victory in battle and Okla meaning a people or nation tied to a specific land base.

Here at the University of Oklahoma, imagery depicting Native Americans covers the campus, from statues by Alan Houser [Apache] and Enoch Kelly Haney [Seminole], to paintings by Doc Tate Nevaquaya [Comanche] and T.C Cannon [Kiowa/Caddo]. Nearly every wall in every building on campus is adorned with the images.

Although all of it quite lovely art and some of it is even made by relatives of mine, these images are frozen in history. These portrayals place Natives in the past. This facilitates others as seeing us as American Indians as separate from reality.

Modern depictions of our reality as present-day members of this society are nowhere or, if so, they are miniscule and invisible. Like these pieces of art, we are but objects in our surroundings, token Indians. This puts our Native students constantly in a mode of objectification, othered and marginalized by the mainstream population.

A classic example of this particular situation is the football team's erstwhile Indian mascot, “Little Red.” The person who portrayed Little Red was a member of a federally recognized tribe, but the use of this mascot was also brought to a stop in the early 1970s by a group of Indians protesting it due to insensitivity.

Recently, we, as Indian activists, brought attention to the use of the “R-word” mascot at an Oklahoma City high school, Capitol Hill, where after a presidential listening tour visited over Indian education issues, the school board voted unanimously to retire this racist term.

But here, at OU, where football is king and SAE members engage in racist chants, we are still the “Sooners” and on Saturdays, the football field is full of black student athletes. These black bodies, slaves in the field, are being commodified.

Like the Native students I mentioned above, many black students benefit from the college football experience. I cannot deny that this offers opportunity to individuals who might otherwise not be able to go to college and further their education.

Both the overt racism of SAE and the symbolic continuance of the settler-colonial and plantation dynamic are patently offensive and create an inhospitable learning environment, particularly when events such as those last month bring these dynamics into sharp focus.

I remember one Saturday several years ago while walking home from the game with my young daughter – her asking me what a Sooner was, looking at the word on my jersey. At first, I was speechless.

When I answered her honestly, she asked why so many Indians support a team that celebrates this history. I had to tell her that the situation was complicated, but being very proud that she was already questioning this reality. Since that time, I try to buy only OU gear that says “Oklahoma” and eschews the term that carries the weight of Manifest Destiny.

But for the first time in my life, as a lifelong OU fan, an alumnus, and a graduate student employed at this institution, I am taking a vocal stand against the University of Oklahoma's nickname. Decolonizing and indigenizing my life is something I have worked on and will continue to do.

These days, I consciously push against the oppressor's racism. I work in the NAS program here at OU, interacting with undergraduate students, many of whom who are totally unaware of their white privilege and sometimes dysconscious and sometimes consciously racist attitudes.

Everyday is a battle, but it is one I think worthwhile. If I am going to take a stand anywhere, why not here?

I also know that in that battle, I am not alone. Racism is an issue that faces us all – red, black, and white – and it is not going to be a problem that we solve unless we do it together. It may be awhile before we are ready to change the name “Sooners,” but at least our beginning to talk about the issue will begin a process of healing that we all need.

Rance Weryackwe earned his bachelor's degree from OU in Native American Studies and is currently pursuing a master's degree while working as teaching assistant in the NAS program. He is a citizen of the Comanche Nation and is a member of the Tabe Eka Native American Church chapter. He attends First American United Methodist Church in Norman, where he resides with his family. This essay first appeared at Nativemaxmagazine.com.

Fulfilling America's Destiny

BY BOB AND MARIA ROUNSAVELL

More than 300 million Americans have a problem that many thought had been solved: diversity. To us, it's actually our country's major strength. We come from many backgrounds. We worship in different ways. We play different games. We speak languages other than English. Some even hold dual citizenship. These are strengths, not weaknesses, as some believe.

Although English is our official language, Oklahoma has more spoken languages than the entire continent of Europe. That's probably hard to realize but it's largely because we have about 47 languages spoken in Indian Country. If America recognizes a second official language, perhaps it's Spanish since Hispanics are now our second largest population.

With all this diversity in America, it remains a fact that many white Americans don't think of diversity as an asset. Why not?

The first white settlers coming largely from Western Europe received a warm welcome from friendly natives. Hence, our annual celebration of Thanksgiving. Then they found themselves needing land to settle after they did not fully succeed in their quest for God-Gold-Glory, as enunciated by the earliest Europeans: the Spaniards were ushered here by Columbus as early as 1492, way earlier than the Puritans in the early 1600s. As the Europeans migrated over the vast frontier, they slowly and methodically pushed the natives onto small patches of wasteland. Thus the pattern was laid of white people controlling most resources, the economy at large and government.

America's early government excluded all minorities, including women, regardless of color, thus setting the pattern for white male domination. Today women and minorities of all colors have improved status. In our recent commemoration of Martin Luther King holiday, we are reminded of the turmoil and pain we had to undergo in the 1960s before several laws granted equal status to African-Americans.

Nearly a century ago, Ponca Chief Standing Bear became our first civil rights leader: In 1879, he won a court decision allowing him the right to bury his son and stay with a small band of his people in his ancestral land along the Niobrara River.

Despite these civil rights won at such great sacrifice and pain, however, a pecking order still exists, if not exclusion, in 21st century America – for minorities like Native Americans, Hispanics, women and blacks.

A black president is serving his second term. Unfortunately, there are still negative comments about

him. That this situation represents racism is denied by many whites claiming equal status for all Americans.

There are two reasons for the denial of racism by whites: one group is trying to cover up the main reason for their discrimination and the second group of white Americans suffers from so-called unconscious racism. This second group truly believes that people of color may once have been victims of racism – but no longer.

But look carefully at recent events in Norman, New York, Ferguson and Cleveland. Yes, the racists are a smaller group, certainly less violent or obvious than during the Tulsa Race Riot in 1921. Still many whites are blinded by their denial of racism: it simply does not exist in the good ol' USA.

We can accurately refer to “unconscious racism” in today's America. Most of us think we could never exclude on the basis of race. But it happens everyday at work, in school, at shopping malls – in fact, wherever life goes on. Until we become more conscious of our racial discrimination, we will never solve the problem.

Solution: Let's recognize the problem and realize that all people discriminate in many obvious ways. Some of this discrimination is for worthy purposes, reflecting our values.

We have heroes who by their public service or noteworthy achievements we honor in our Presidents Day or Veterans Day or at Kennedy Center Honors. Biennially from among us we choose as senators, congressmen, and legislators those deserving to represent us in the governance of our nation. Or those who as president or governors will execute our will in the running of our national or state affairs. We recently inaugurated a re-elected governor and convened a new U.S. Congress. Oklahoma's 55th Legislature is now underway.

However, the underside of this discrimination is our looking askance or as inferiors some Americans for unworthy reasons. One significant reason is physical attributes like skin color. For example, black [African], brown [Natives or Hispanics] or yellow [Chinese or other Asians].

Note our inability to come up with an updating of our immigration policy. In other words, what country do we want to create? What individuals or groups do we require as principal segments of this nation we envision? Do we wish to return to the days of Japanese internment camps or German POW camps or

the long era of slavery?

Once we realize the unworthy bases of discrimination, we can start addressing the issue and our society can overcome it.

We are all human beings with differences that can unite and strengthen us. Let no differences serve as barriers to envisioning and creating a United States of America that truly is a beacon of democracy. We believe that we can overcome our political, social, philosophical and other differences and then begin to solve the problems facing us everyday.

Let's work and play together. Living and working together, and thus knowing one another, we can more easily go beyond the physical characteristics and recognize Martin Luther King Jr.'s content of character.

Glorying in one another's strengths, we can readily break the gridlock in Washington, formulate our national goals and more joyfully accomplish them. As the only superpower today, we have an obligation to

lead.

Let's not succumb to climate change, religious differences, environmental pollution and a few others. Let's solve them and inaugurate in today's world of puny hopes an era of human achievement undreamed of even by our Founding Fathers in the Age of Enlightenment.

Authors' Note: We are a mixed marriage couple who recently celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary. Our contribution to society, we think, is our family of 12 – two children, five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. We met in Maria's country, the Philippines. Bob, a Peace Corps volunteer, and Maria, his boss as chairman of the Humanities Department, worked at UP College of Agriculture [now the University of the Philippines at Los Banos]. We not only hope but we also know that people of different racial/cultural backgrounds can live and work together to make this world better.

2015 EDUCATION RALLY

Yet Again, State's Big 3 Stiffs Public School Supporters

BY CAL HOBSON

Perhaps because I just celebrated a 70th birthday, my mind often strays from the comfortable present to conflicting ruminations about the past – both mine and the ancestors who proceeded me in Oklahoma. I think about what they accomplished, the disappointments endured and the challenges they faced while contributing to the form, fabric, style and history of what was then known as The Land of The Red Man.

Life for them wasn't easy nor by homesteading here did they expect it to be. If easy was their goal, they had to know settling here wouldn't be.

I have learned that my forebearers were progressive people. Compassionate and generally religious, they were patrons of art, music, song and prolific users of the English language.

While usually conservative in business ventures, they weren't afraid to take risks that led to some successes but also more than a few failures.

Their careers included that of my great-great-grandfather, pioneer postmaster Jefferson Sanders Thacker, and for whom Thackerville is named – probably by him – once he and his family settled there via wagon on their trip up from Texas in 1880. One of his many children was my great-grandfather and country doctor, Robert E. Lee Thacker, who made the famous Land Run of April 22, 1889 into Oklahoma Territory,

specifically to settle in Lexington. I continue to reside there in his 100-year-old home.

These men, and the women they married, produced progeny who sometimes became wealthy, then eventually went broke, working as oil patch wildcatters in the early Healdton and Seminole fields. Others chose to become a fighter pilot, an artist, mysterious poet, an airplane mechanic/carpenter, a doctor, psychologist, lawyer, realtor, forester and, most importantly of all, careers as teachers and housewives.

No candlestick-makers, to my knowledge, but since Lexington had a score or two of saloons right after The Run of '89 probably a couple of bartenders or moonshiners plied their trades in the bustling city.

Since Indian Territory was located just across the South Canadian River, "dry" liquor and the dispensing thereof was the biggest business in town – even exceeding the planting, processing and transporting of cotton. At its zenith Lexington had five cotton gins, maybe more than our entire state has now.

Footnote for Norman residents who now proudly live in our county seat: Please know that Lexington, immediately following the Run, was the first county seat, but lost out later when the railroad chose Abner Norman's community for the main train station which, of course, still exists today. *We wuz robbed by those city slickers!*

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However, all is now forgiven because the University of Oklaahoma is where all my college-educated relatives, save one, earned their degree[s]. As an aside that family black sheep matriculated in Stillwater on some relatively unknown campus earning, of course, a degree in animal science. Our first Sooner graduate, in 1913, was my grandmother Mabel and daughter of Dr. Thacker. While studying at OU she was a proud Theta but treasured more her education degree which led to an eventual career as a classroom teacher.

For those of you who are still reading this missive about my relatives, let me first thank you for that and then explain why I chose to write about this topic. Twenty-eight years of elected service in our Legislature, including a stint as leader of the Senate, introduced me to thousands of my fellow Okies – elected or otherwise – whose stations in life ranged from minimum wage janitors to millionaire university regents. Each and every one of them, like me, had a family story to tell. Humor, heartbreak, humility, sadness, success and failure were all common denominators threaded through these tales.

Which leads me to ask: In what other profession, except perhaps learned historian, could a small town politician like me be introduced personally to more of the amalgamated human cloth that makes up this crazy quilt we call Oklahoma?

These thousands of conversations and nearly three decades of employment in the Capitol have convinced me of the following: My fellow citizens can handle the truth from their elected officials much more than they receive it. Contrary to the bile babbled on talk radio, normal folks don't hate their government. Rather, they just don't understand how it works, or doesn't, for them. And that's the rub.

A classic example of this disconnect occurred Mar. 30, which happens to be my aforementioned birthday, when tens of thousands of educators, parents, children and concerned citizens traveled to NE 23rd and Lincoln to inform our governor and 149 legislators about the sad status of schools.

Public education – pre-kindergarten through graduate school and including CareerTech – has been grievously damaged over the last six years through purposeful neglect, self-righteous legislative arrogance, counterproductive mandates and financial starvation.

These are not just my opinions; rather they are documented facts that reveal exploding class sizes, monetary cuts deeper than imposed in any other state, and the flight of thousands of well educated and dedicated teachers for opportunities elsewhere.

And just who among our self described leaders bothered to shorten their lunch breaks by speaking to the assembled crowd waiting on the south steps of the Capitol? One would think that Gov. Mary Fallin, who never misses an opportunity to extol the bene-

fits of her self-proclaimed Oklahoma Standard, would cherish the chance to explain personally to Oklahoma's educators all it supposedly has done for them. Think again. Toooooooooooooooooo busy to make the one-minute walk from the second floor.

Or how about Senate Boss Brian Bingman or House Honcho Jeff Hickman? I served with these gentlemen and personally like them very much. They are both well-educated, articulate and make a good speech. Surely one or the other could break away for a millisecond or two from other pressing business, such as shutting up Rep. Sally Kern's endless homophobic harangues or Sen. Ralph Shortey's search for proof that fetuses are routinely inserted in America's food chain ... or, or, or, or. But, no. They, too, were unfortunately MIA.

However, and to their credit, able House Minority Leader Scott Inman, knowledgeable state Rep. Lee Denney, Senate Education Chair John Ford, state Auditor Gary Jones [who's wife is a longtime public school teacher] and newly-minted Superintendent of Public Instruction Joy Hofmeister did address the assembled masses.

Unfortunately, as sincerely as their expressions of support were and are, none of these public servants are in a position to deliver *anything* of significant relevance to our school kids. Only the Big Three can do that and all were notably absent on Mar. 30 – and, in effect, every other day the previous six years.

My guess is Fallin, Bingman and Hickman were all busy making phone calls to current and prospective businesses conveying the importance of the upcoming one-fourth of 1% personal income tax cut to be effective *next year*. Hell, they probably threw in the need for campaign contributions to re-elect their colleagues even though they themselves are term-limited. I can hear the pitch now.

Good conservative government costs a lot of cash to nourish, support and expand so, therefore, with your generous financial largesse, we'll continue on our allegedly frugal path of watch-dogging your reluctantly provided taxes. Indeed, we're so good at it that our policies have dug a \$611 million – and growing – budget hole while paying educators the second-lowest salary in the nation, thanks only to Mississippi; creating the third sickest population among the 50 states; being home to the fourth-largest prison gulag; overseeing the second-worst road and bridge infrastructure, edging out only Pennsylvania; and famously ignoring our capital needs, ranging from storm shelters to college campuses to even constructing a modern morgue!

But, hey, all is not lost in the Land of Boomers and Sooners. You lucky one-percenters out there will receive 63% of next year's tax cut so why not collar your favorite legislator and go to dinner at Junior's to celebrate! After all, he's your employee.

Of course you'll pick up the tab, but no problem. You can write it off on next year's taxes, unlike the commoners who pay a sales tax on their grub – at the corner grocery store.

For full disclosure: I've dined many times in Junior's restaurant at the expense of lobbyists and rich people, often one and the same. My most memorable evening there was right after a major piece of legislation was passed by a Democratic-controlled Legislature and signed into law by Republican Gov. Frank Keating. I had the privilege of carrying the proposal on the senate floor. It authorized and paid for the largest one-year teacher pay increase in the history of this state – \$3,000 per educator and a nice salary boost for all school support personnel as well.

That just proves miracles can happen most anywhere but apparently not here ... not anymore. *Cal Hobson, a Lexington Democrat, served in the Oklahoma Legislature from 1978-2006, including one term as Senate President Pro Tempore.*

State Schools Need L'Dor V'Dor

BY JOHN THOMPSON

Oklahoma education bloggers recently were challenged to articulate what we would do about schooling if we were a Queen or King for a Day. My contribution appears here. The others can be read by clicking on the link at www.okobserver.net.

My aspiration is inspired by the words of Randi Weingarten who reminds us of the Jewish concept of *L'Dor V'Dor*, or “from generation to generation.” I dream of a learning culture where each generation teaches and learns from each other.

My parents' generation, having survived the Great Depression and World War II, were committed to providing children with greater opportunities than they had. This was “Pax Americana” before our extreme confidence was shattered by Vietnam. In my postage stamp of the 1950s and 1960s, children continually heard the exhortation, “Pay close attention, I'm only going to show you once.”

Coming from parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and neighbors, those words were the opposite of a stern admonition. They challenged us to focus, so we could “learn how to learn.” By the time we were teens, our mentors urged us to practice “creative insubordination.”

Never facing a shortage of caring adults for schooling us on life in a democracy, I learned as much “wrasslin iron” in the oil patch and from fellow work-

ers as I did from formal education. We Baby Boomers listened to Woody Guthrie and read Ken Kesey, and jumped into exploratory learning, often hitchhiking and backpacking widely.

My buddies were first generation working or middle class. We assumed that tomorrow would be better than today. We sought social justice where everyone could enjoy the same opportunities that we had.

I was born in the middle of a 40-year economic boom, benefitting from the greatest economic miracle in history. Generation X was not so lucky. They experienced a 40-year drop in wages, and a growing gap between the rich and poor. In my neighborhood, the decline happened overnight. The Reagan Administration's Supply Side Economics, the savings and loans' and banking industries' collapse [which Reaganism prompted], and AIDS were followed by the crack and gang epidemic.

My Baby Boomer friends found incredible joy nurturing poor young neighbors who sought safety and love. I wish the same fulfillment for today's generations, though not under such tragic circumstances.

Back then, the American Dream seemed to be in its death throes. We have since debated why the violence of the time receded. One reason, I believe, is that kids learned from their older relatives' experiences.

If I had a magic wand, I'd wish that today's children would be socialized into the same hopefulness as the Baby Boomers, while benefiting from the realism of subsequent generations. I would love to see the children of the 1980s and 1990s pass down the innovation which prompted the digital miracles of the last generation. The hard-earned experience of learning to compete in the global marketplace could provide a nice balance to the confidence that my generation was granted.

That wish may be fulfilled. Millennials might become the 21st Century's Greatest Generation. They are the most multicultural and multiracial of our generations. They may face the prospect of lower salaries and benefits but, then again, they might reinvent our economy. And they could help reinvent our schools.

My wish is that young people will find purpose and employment helping us create full-service community schools and achieve socio-economic integration. Twenty-somethings could spearhead a Maker Movement or Teach Computer Games for America, and collaborate with students to develop new digital systems for authentic learning.

I wish them the joy an education version of a old-timey barn raising, making school a team effort, as they continue *L'Dor V'Dor*.

Dr. John Thompson currently is working on a book about his experiences teaching for two decades in the inner city of OKC. He has a doctorate from Rutgers University and is the author of Closing the Frontier: Radical Responses in Oklahoma Politics.

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Public Schools

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

is leading the charge, not only campaigning statewide to get teachers' salaries to the regional average [currently they earn \$3,200 less], but also to replace End of Instruction tests with the ACT and add enough instructional days to reach the national average.

"Those who want to blame teachers first," Superintendent Joy Hofmeister declared at the Mar. 30 rally, "are wrong ... wrong ... wrong." [For more, see *Cynical* on page 2 and *Ode to Joy* on page 5.]

The battle lines between the GOP's pro-voucher majority at NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd. and most Oklahomans who hold dear their public schools could not be clearer.

Though both the House and Senate approved HB 1749 – ending the 40-plus-year policy giving teachers the right to deduct their union dues from their paychecks – other school "reform" measures have been shelved under pressure from pro-public education supporters or are on life-support.

Even Gov. Mary Fallin's staff is at least going through the motions of asking those who voted against HB 1749 to explain their opposition – a hint she might be

undecided about whether to sign it.

The likelihood of a veto seems remote, for at least one major reason: The State Chamber loves it – a news release hailed it as "a great first step" – and reviles the teachers' unions.

"We believe that taxpayer resources should not be used to fund politics and believe it is wrong to use public taxpayer resources to collect union dues and campaign contributions," said State Chamber President Fred Morgan.

"Collecting political money from a public worker's paycheck creates the potential for corruption, or at least the appearance of corruption, as union executives turn around and make campaign contributions to the very officials they negotiate with."

Translation: The state's plutocracy is irate that the hired hands all too often don't know their place – sometimes they publicly demand better pay, other times they oppose incumbent lawmakers or the legislative leadership's handpicked candidates. Twice now, they've even rallied the general public to their cause.

Last year's first pro-public ed rally attracted an estimated 25,000 educators, parents, students and public school supporters to the Capitol, demanding lawmakers reverse five years of draconian cuts that left Oklahoma schools second-worst funded in the

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nation.

This year, organizers hoped to double the turnout, but numerous school districts that encouraged attendance last year by canceling classes declined to do so this year – some because they already lost so many instructional days to inclement winter weather.

Even so, 7,000-plus showed up on a postcard-perfect spring day to renew their demands that lawmakers who proclaim their support for public ed back home deliver on those promises in Oklahoma City.

Seven-thousand no doubt deflated some organizers, but perspective suggests otherwise: It's difficult these days to get 7,000 people to do anything in Oklahoma – especially on a workday – other than attend a Thunder contest or an OU or OSU football game.

The intra-party intrigue over HB 1749 also is worth noting. Eleven Republicans in both the House and Senate voted against ending the payroll deduction for teachers – votes that caught the attention of the state's most virulently anti-public education organization, the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs.

Sen. Greg Treat, R-Oklahoma City, who voted for the measure, demanded an apology from the OCPA after its vice president, Trent England, took a Twitter shot at Sen. Jason Smalley, R-Stroud for opposing the bill.

The tweet, dripping with sarcasm, suggested Smalley need not sweat about breaking with most of his party's caucus because both the National Education Association and Planned Parenthood have "got your back." England later apologized and deleted the tweet.

Other signs that pro-public ed constituents are

making headway with Republican lawmakers is that Sen. Clark Jolley, R-Edmond, abandoned SB 609 that would have created so-called Educational Savings Accounts [ESAs] – a voucher scheme that would have diverted tax dollars from public schools into private or on-line education, even homeschooling.

Jolley decided to shelve the bill, for now, he said, because of all the misinformation spreading about it. Misinformation? Really?

It reminds of the famous quote from President Harry S. Truman: "I never did give anybody hell. I just told the truth and they thought it was hell."

A side but significant note: The Oklahoma Constitution is very specific that no public dollars can be spent for religious or sectarian purposes. ESAs are an attempt to avoid the constitutional problems that plagued previous voucher efforts.

Meanwhile, pro-public education supporters are battling hard against Oklahoma City Sen. David Holt's SB 68 that would expand the entities that can establish charter schools in the state's major metropolitan areas.

Many education experts worry the proposal could end up creating a two-tier inner-city school system that leaves high-poverty students far behind while the children of upper-income urban dwellers cash in on what amounts to boutique educations.

Opposition to the plan infuriates the right. In response to a Mar. 9 Observer on-line essay raising concerns about the scheme, Republican pollster Bill Shapard fired off a tweet, asserting: "Article is proof that for the public education establishment, it's all about the money & not all about the kids."

Like Jolley, Shapard either fails to appreciate that the republic is best served by a robust public square, featuring competing ideas, or knows that his argument is weak and can best be defended by hurling broad-brush brickbats.

The campaign to preserve and improve public education has had its setbacks and successes. It's going to take time and hard work to get public schools anywhere near where Republican Gov. Henry Bellmon helped lead them a quarter century ago.

But there is reason for optimism. SB 609 shelved. A strong pushback against SB 68. And nearly two dozen Republican votes against HB 1749.

If you couple the GOP "no" votes with a firebrand Republican state superintendent and the Legislature's small Democratic contingent, you have the ingredients for a force that could produce brighter days for Oklahoma public education – especially budget-wise – and a brighter future for Oklahoma school children.

Photos courtesy of state Reps. James Lockhart and Eric Proctor.



"NOW LET'S SING THAT FUNNY DITTY ABOUT OBAMA BEING GONE!"

CONSTITUTION 101

Senate Flunks Test On Treaty Powers

BY DANNY M. ADKISON

First Speaker Boehner and the Republican Congress stuck a stick in President Obama's eye by inviting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to address them. It seems the Republicans don't like the direction of the president's recent nuclear negotiations with Iran with the possibility of lifting sanctions.

The Republicans decided to ratchet up their strategy. So, they wrote an open letter to the Islamic Republic of Iran. That's when they really embarrassed themselves.

When going over the U.S. Constitution in introductory American government class I always explain the three steps involved in making treaties: the president negotiates a treaty; the Senate exercises advice and consent; and the president ratifies the treaty [assum-

ing the Senate consented].

It is probably true that many people think that the Senate vote to consent to the treaty is the same as ratification. But many people are not actual senators.

Yet, in the letter senators wrote to Iran, they asserted that they did, in fact, ratify treaties. Here is how the Senate explained the treaty-making process to the Iranian government: "It has come to our attention while observing your nuclear negotiations with our government that you may not fully understand our constitutional system ... under our Constitution ... the president negotiates treaties [and] the Senate must ratify it by a two-thirds vote."

When you teach the U.S. Constitution things like this get your attention. So, first stop for me was Edward F. Cooke's *A Detailed Analysis of the Constitu-*

tion. Cooke covered treaty-making in his analysis of Section 2 of Article II ["powers of the president"].

He describes treaty-making as a three-step process: the president negotiates the treaty, the Senate gives or withholds its consent, and if the Senate consents to the treaty, it forwards it to the president for his approval. Cooke concludes, and I quote, "This is called ratification."

Next, I picked up *A Dictionary of Politics* by Elliott and Sumnerskill. In their entry on "treaty" they write that treaties are ratified by "the heads of state."

Next up was *The American Political Dictionary* by Plano and Greenberg. They explain, "Treaties must be approved by a two-thirds vote in the Senate, followed by presidential ratification."

Finally, there is the massive government document on the U.S. Constitution [which runs in excess of 2,000 pages]. This is the federal government's official document on what the Constitution means. In its comprehensive discussion of treaties it stipulates, "The act of ratification for the United States is the President's act" [assuming the Senate gives its consent].

When it comes textbooks on the presidency, none is better than Arthur Miller's *Presidential Power*. In his discussion of treaty-making, he points out that the president alone negotiates the treaty and the Supreme Court has stated, "the Senate cannot intrude." He continues, "The Senate's power is to approve or disapprove" of those negotiations.

Miller also points out that not only do presidents ratify treaties, but presidents have refused to ratify treaties to which the Senate concurred.

Ironically, in its letter to Iran explaining how the U.S. Constitution worked, the Senate – *the Senate!* –

got it wrong. Forty-seven Republicans signed it.

What's interesting is that up until the last two weeks of the Constitutional Convention, the power to make treaties was vested solely in the U.S. Senate. Conventional wisdom has it that the Framers were so enamored with the presidency that they sought to make him the most powerful executive on Earth.

The truth is that they realized near the end of the Convention that they had, in fact, made the Senate too powerful [and the president too weak]. That, and the realization that one man could better represent our nation in foreign negotiations, caused the change.

During ratification Hamilton, Madison, and Jay explained the document in *The Federalist Papers* [writing as Publius]. On treaty-making Publius notes, "it is one of the best digested and most unexceptionable parts of the plan."

Publius gives two major reasons for involving the president in the process: dispatch and secrecy. Would the senators signing the open letter know this? Unlikely.

One final point: Unites States treaties [regardless of whom one thinks ratifies them], are the Supreme law of the land. At one time, the Supreme Court interpreted this as meaning that a provision which would be unconstitutional in a federal law would be legal in a U.S. treaty. That view, needless to say, no longer holds.

It is hard to say what impact this letter [which in modern politics is a first] will have on our president's negotiations with Iran. What is not hard to say is the grade the senators earned for getting it wrong.

Dr. Danny M. Adkison teaches constitutional law at Oklahoma State University.

Media's E-Mail Hysteria: Why Are Republicans Exempt?

BY JOE CONASON

It is almost eerie how closely Hillary Clinton's current e-mail scandal parallels the beginnings of the Whitewater fiasco that ensnared her and her husband almost 20 years ago.

Both began with tendentious, inaccurate stories published by The New York Times; both relied upon highly exaggerated suspicions of wrongdoing; both were seized upon by Republican partisans whose own records were altogether worse; and both resulted in shrill explosions of outrage among reporters who couldn't be bothered to learn actual facts.

Fortunately for Secretary Clinton, she won't be subjected to investigation by less-than-independent

counsel like Kenneth Starr – and the likelihood that the e-mail flap will damage her nascent presidential campaign seems very small, according to the latest polling data.

Yet the reaction of the Washington media to these allegations renews the same old questions about press fairness to the Clintons, and how the media treats them in contrast with other politicians. In this instance, the behavior of Republican officials whose use of private e-mail accounts closely resembles what Secretary Clinton did at the State Department has been largely ignored – even though some of those officials might also seek the presidency.

Jeb Bush released a large volume of emails from the personal – i.e., non-government – e-mail account that he used as Florida governor, and praised his own transparency with typical extravagance. The problem is that those e-mails represent only 10% of those he wrote. The rest he has withheld, without any public review under Florida open records laws.

When Scott Walker served as Milwaukee county executive, before he was elected Wisconsin governor, he and his staff used a secret e-mail system for illegal campaign work, which emerged as part of an investigation that ultimately sent one of his aides to prison [another was immunized by prosecutors].

Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal has used a personal e-mail account for government business, as has Texas Gov. Rick Perry. So have Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, and various Congress members who have been heard to spout about Clinton's e-mails, such as Utah Rep. Jason Chaffetz.

Hypocritical as they may seem, none of those examples compare with the truly monumental e-mail scandal of the Bush years, when millions of e-mails went missing from White House servers – and many more were never archived on those servers, as required since 1978 by the Presidential Records Act, because dozens of Bush White House staff were using private

e-mail accounts provided by the Republican National Committee. Notably, those RNC e-mail clients included top Bush adviser Karl Rove, who used committee accounts for an estimated 95% of his electronic messaging, and by his staff.

Among many other dubious activities, Rove aide Susan Ralston used her private RNC e-mail to discuss Interior Department appointments with the office of crooked lobbyist Jack Abramoff, who wanted to influence the department on behalf of gambling interests. She told Abramoff's associate that "it is better not to put this stuff in their e-mail system because it might actually limit what they can do to help us, especially since there could be lawsuits, etc. ..."

While Rove was forced to surrender some e-mails involving his notorious exposure of CIA agent Valerie Plame, he retained the capacity to delete thousands of e-mails.

Various investigations and lawsuits eventually uncovered the astonishing breadth of the Bush White House e-mail fiasco, such as the "recycling" of backup tapes for all of its archived e-mails between Inauguration Day 2001 and sometime in 2003. This meant, for instance, messages pertaining to the 9/11 terrorist attack went missing of course – along with whatever Rove and his aides might have communi-



cated on that topic, or weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, or countless other topics of public concern.

And former Secretary of State Colin Powell, whose office was also involved in both the Plame and WMD scandals, admitted recently that he used private e-mails in office – but that he turned over and retained none of them – zero. By contrast, Clinton has turned over tens of thousands of her e-mails to the department.

Thanks to a federal lawsuit filed by two non-profit watchdog groups, the National Security Archive at George Washington University and Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, a small proportion of the missing Bush White House e-mails were eventually restored – but only when the Obama Administration finally settled the case in 2009.

Those strict Obama rules for preserving e-mails [which Clinton stands accused of ignoring] resulted

directly from the new administration's determination to avoid the mess engendered by the deceptive and unlawful preservation practices of the Bush White House.

So if Hillary Clinton's use of a private e-mail account is so shocking to the Beltway media, why did they barely notice [and care even less] when millions of e-mails disappeared during the Bush years?

The current hysteria may reflect the intense press prejudice against Clinton that several well-placed Washington journalists confessed during a brief moment of introspection following the disgraceful coverage of her 2008 campaign. And it should serve to warn voters that what Gene Lyons famously called "the Clinton rules" – which encouraged all varieties of inaccuracy, bias journalistic failure in the 1990s – simply never went away.

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Republicans Sinking Hopes Of An Entire Generation

BY ELIZABETH WARREN

Last year, I introduced a bill that would allow people getting crushed with student loan debt to refinance their loans down to today's lower interest rates.

More than 700,000 people signed petitions in support of the plan. Every Democrat, every Independent, and three Republicans voted to move the bill forward. But the rest of the Republicans filibustered the bill, so it didn't pass.

Since last year, nearly a million more borrowers have fallen behind on their payments. Altogether, students are now struggling with \$100 billion MORE debt than they were a year ago.

Student loan debt was an economic emergency last year – and now that emergency is getting worse. That's why I'm reintroducing the Bank on Students Emergency Loan Refinancing Act. Join me in telling the Senate Republicans: Student loan refinancing can't wait another year.

Our proposal is simple: Refinance outstanding student loans down to 3.9% for undergraduates, and a little higher for graduates and PLUS loans. This single change would give borrowers across the country a chance to save hundreds – and for some, thousands – of dollars a year.

That's real money that these borrowers could put toward paying down the balance on their debt, saving for a home, buying a car, starting a small business – money they can put toward building a solid future.

We should have done this a year ago, but Repub-

licans said no. They refused to even debate the bill. They said there were other, better ways to tackle student debt – but then the Republicans did nothing – nothing except filibuster the only student loans bill on the table.

I don't kid myself: Refinancing loans won't fix everything that's wrong in our higher education system. We need to cut the price of college, to reinvest in public universities, to shore up federal financial aid, to crack down on for-profit colleges, and to provide better protections on student loans.

But let's start with the \$1.3 trillion in outstanding student loan debt. Let's start by cutting back on the interest payments that are sinking young people and holding back this economy. Tell the GOP: Let's start with Bank on Students.

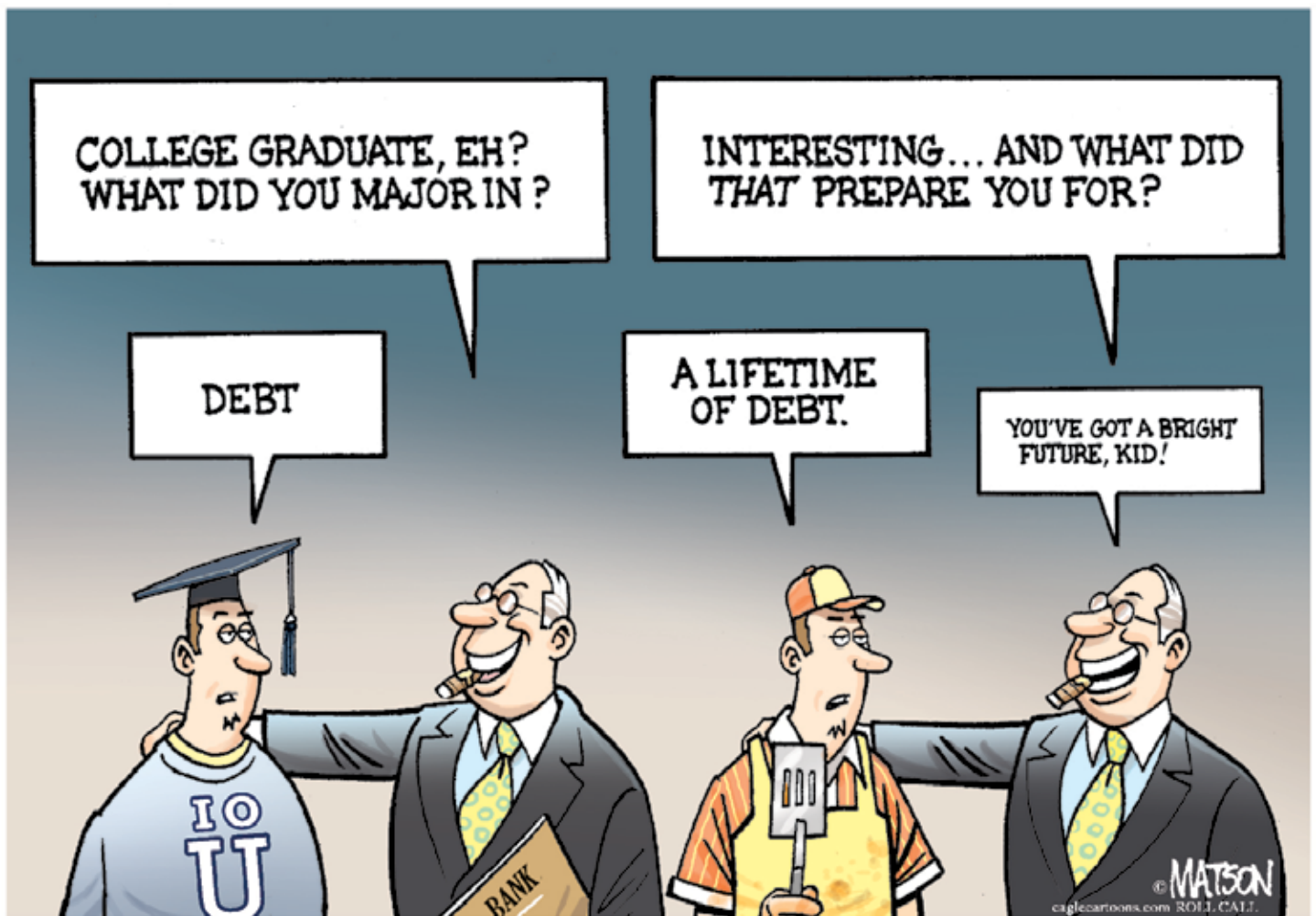
The Republicans can't just close their eyes and pretend this isn't happening. By refusing to act, they are sinking the hopes of an entire generation.

It's time for Congress to step up and fix this problem, before it drags down another million Americans, and another, and another. It's time to refinance student loan debt.

Oklahoma native Elizabeth Warren represents Massachusetts in the United States Senate.

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Why College Isn't For Everyone [And Shouldn't Have To Be]

BY ROBERT REICH

I know a high school senior who's so worried about whether she'll be accepted at the college of her choice she can't sleep.

The parent of another senior tells me he stands at the mailbox for an hour every day waiting for a hoped-for acceptance letter to arrive.

Parents are also uptight. I've heard of some who have stopped socializing with other parents of children competing for admission to the same university.

Competition for places at top-brand colleges is absurdly intense.

With inequality at record levels and almost all the economic gains going to the top, there's more pressure than ever to get the golden ring.

A degree from a prestigious university can open doors to elite business schools and law schools –

and to jobs paying hundreds of thousands, if not millions, a year.

So parents who can afford it are paying grotesque sums to give their kids an edge.

They “enhance” their kid's resumes with such things as bassoon lessons, trips to preserve the wild-life in Botswana, internships at the Atlantic Monthly.

They hire test preparation coaches. They arrange for consultants to help their children write compelling essays on college applications.

They make generous contributions to the elite colleges they once attended, to which their kids are applying – colleges that give extra points to “legacies” and even more to those from wealthy families that donate tons of money.

You might call this affirmative action for the rich.

The same intensifying competition is affecting mid-range colleges and universities that are doing everything they can to burnish their own brands – competing with other mid-range institutions to enlarge their applicant pools, attract good students, and inch upward on the U.S. News college rankings.

Every college president wants to increase the ratio of applications to admissions, thereby becoming more elite.

Excuse me, but this is nuts.

The biggest absurdity is that a four-year college degree has become the only gateway into the American middle class.

But not every young person is suited to four years of college. They may be bright and ambitious but they won't get much out of it. They'd rather be doing something else, like making money or painting murals.

They feel compelled to go to college because they've been told over and over that a college degree is necessary.

Yet if they start college and then drop out, they feel like total failures.

Even if they get the degree, they're stuck with a huge bill – and may be paying down their student debt for years.

And all too often the jobs they land after graduating don't pay enough to make the degree worthwhile.

Last year, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, 46% of recent college graduates were in jobs that don't even require a college degree.

The biggest frauds are for-profit colleges that are raking in money even as their students drop out in droves, and whose diplomas are barely worth the ink-jets they're printed on.

America clings to the conceit that four years of college are necessary for everyone, and looks down its nose at people who don't have college degrees.

This has to stop. Young people need an alternative. That alternative should be a world-class system of vocational-technical education.

A four-year college degree isn't necessary for many of tomorrow's good jobs.

For example, the emerging economy will need platoons of technicians able to install, service, and repair all the high-tech machinery filling up hospitals, offices, and factories.

And people who can upgrade the software embedded in almost every gadget you buy.

Today it's even hard to find a skilled plumber or electrician.

Yet the vocational and technical education now available to young Americans is typically underfunded and inadequate. And too often denigrated as being for "losers."

These programs should be creating winners.

Germany – whose median wage [after taxes and transfers] is higher than ours – gives many of its young people world-class technical skills that have made Germany a world leader in fields such as precision manufacturing.

A world-class technical education doesn't have to mean young people's fates are determined when they're 14.

Instead, rising high-school seniors could be given the option of entering a program that extends a year or two beyond high school and ends with a diploma acknowledging their technical expertise.

Community colleges – the under-appreciated crown jewels of America's feeble attempts at equal opportunity – could be developing these curricula. Businesses could be advising on the technical skills they'll need, and promising jobs to young people who complete their degrees with good grades.

Government could be investing enough money to make these programs thrive. [And raising taxes on top incomes enough to temper the wild competition for admission to elite colleges that grease the way to those top incomes.]

Instead, we continue to push most of our young people through a single funnel called a four-year college education – a funnel so narrow it's causing applicants and their parents excessive stress and worry about "getting in;" that's too often ill suited and unnecessary, and far too expensive; and that can cause college dropouts to feel like failures for the rest of their lives.

It's time to give up the idea that every young person has to go to college, and start offering high-school seniors an alternative route into the middle class.

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Reality Check

When it comes to the Golden Years, one person's bane is another's perk. Consider these realities:

Kidnappers are not very interested in you.

In a hostage situation you are likely to be released first.

People no longer view you as a hypochondriac.

There is nothing left to learn the hard way.

Things you buy now won't wear out.

You can eat supper at 4 p.m.

You can live without sex but not your glasses.

You get into heated arguments about pension plans.

You no longer think of speed limits as a challenge.

You quit trying to hold your stomach in no matter who walks into the room.

You sing along with elevator music.

Your investment in health insurance is finally beginning to pay off.

Your joints are more accurate meteorologists than the national weather service.

Your secrets are safe with your friends because they can't remember them either.

Government By Sucker Punch



Ed, please call home! Edward Snowden, that is: Come quickly; your country needs you.

Once again, the American people are being victimized by a hush-hush blanket of official secrecy, rhetorical dodges and outright lies. This time it's not about wholesale spying on us by our own government, but a wholesale assault on our jobs, environment, health and even our people's sovereignty. The assaulters are a cabal of global corporations and the Obama Administration.

Their weapon is a scheme hidden inside a scam. Called the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the scam is their claim that TPP is nothing but another free trade deal – albeit a whopper of a deal – one that ties our economy to Brunei, Vietnam, and nine other nations around the Pacific Rim. But of the 29 chapters in this deal, only five are about tariffs and other trade matters.

The real deal is in the 24 other chapters that create a supranational scheme of secretive, private tribunals that corporations from any TPP nation can use to challenge and overturn our local, state and national laws. All a corporate power has to do to win in these closed proceedings is to show that a particular law or regulation might reduce its future profits.

This is big stuff, amounting to the enthronement of a global corporate oligarchy over us. Yet it's been negotiated among trade officials of the 12 countries in strict secrecy. Even members of Congress have been shut out – but some 500 corporate executives have been allowed inside to shape the “partnership.”

Now President Obama and his corporate team intend to spring it on us and start ramming TPP through Congress. He recently arranged a briefing to woo House Democrats to support it – but he even classified the briefing as a secret session, meaning the lawmakers are not allowed to tell you, me or anyone else anything about what they were told.

A gag order on Congress? Holy Thomas Paine! The only reason Obama is desperate to hide his oligarchic scheme from us is because he knows the people would overwhelmingly oppose it. So he's resorting to government by sucker punch. It's cowardly ... and disgraceful.

The wonkish, gibberishistic jargon used by the

Powers That Be to write these corporate boondoggles they call “trade deals” is toothachingly boring and incomprehensible. Could that be on purpose? Of course! If they wrote these wage-destroying, environment-killing, sovereignty-sucking scams in plain English so we commoners could understand what they're doing to us, they couldn't get away with it.

So the TPP, by far the largest trade flim-flam in history, is written in legalistic gobbledygook and was negotiated by corporate lobbyists and government lawyers. Even Congress doesn't know what's in it – yet the plan is to hustle TPP into law through a super-rushed, rubber-stamp process called “fast-track.”

No need to worry about the content, though, for an upstanding new group called Progressive Coalition for American Jobs now assures us that this global deal “will support hundreds of thousands of new jobs in the United States.”

Hello – do we have sucker wrappers around our heads? That's the exact same claim that Bill Clinton and the corporate elite made in 1993 for NAFTA, which siphoned hundreds of thousands of jobs and entire industries out of the U.S.

By the way, who are the members of this “coalition”? Every progressive group I know of is adamantly against the TPP, and no progressive has stepped forward to claim ownership of this PR push for corporatizing the people's democratic rights. Is there a coalition? Who's in it? Who funds it? Nobody's talking because nobody's there. The coalition is a fraud, just like TPP.

Reps. Raul Grijalva and Keith Ellison, co-chairs of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, wrote in an op-ed for the Guardian that, “Good trade agreements can only be negotiated in the open. ... The U.S. must stop using trade agreements as investment deals for the world's wealthiest corporations and instead prioritize higher wages, safer work and environmental standards and a healthier world economy. Trade agreements should improve the bottom lines of all Americans, not just of American corporations – or else we shouldn't enter into them at all.”

Now that's progressive. To join the real coalition of progressives like them who're standing tall against the whole TPP fraud, go to www.StopFastTrack.com.

Debt Buyers Bury Hard-Hit Consumers In Lies

Good news, people: The “boom” is back! Yes, good times are here again, thanks to an economic boom that’s being generated by [of all things] bad times.

As you might know from your own experiences, tens of millions of Americans have been hit hard, knocked down and held down in recent years by the collapse of jobs and wages. This calamity has led to a second blow for millions of the same families, who find themselves suddenly buried in piles of overdue bills for credit card charges, student loans and other consumer debt.

But the good news is that there’s a bright silver lining in that dark financial cloud. Only, it’s not for the indebted families, but for a booming breed of finance hucksters known as consumer debt buyers. Believe it or not, in the warped world of high finance.

“There’s gold in them thar hills” of bad debt, and where there’s gold, there are diggers.

Whenever a corporation issues a statement declaring that it’s committed to “treating consumers fairly and with respect,” chances are, it’s not.

After all, why say such a thing, when actually practicing it would make a statement unnecessary? Indeed, with names like Encore Capital Group and Sherman Financial, these miners of human misery buy bales of these unpaid bills from banks and other lenders, paying pennies on the dollar. Then they unleash packs of their hard-nosed, aggressive collectors on the families. If they still can’t extract payment, the corporate debt profiteers turn to their meanest dog: The courts.

Debt firms routinely file thousands of lawsuits a day against financially devastated Americans. They know that most debtors can’t understand the legal gibberish filed against them, can’t afford a lawyer, can’t take time off to go to a court hearing and can’t mount an effective defense against the corporate lawyers. So, some 95% of these lawsuits produce default judgments against hapless borrowers – meaning debt buyers can then confiscate the wages of borrowers or freeze their bank accounts.

This boom in vulture capitalism is disgusting – but, worse, it’s subsidized by us taxpayers! We pay for the judicial system – the judges, courtrooms and endless

rounds of hearings. Predatory debt corporations have perverted our so-called justice system into their own subsidiary for squeezing profits out of destitute debtors.

This is why New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman has started going after these for-profit corporate debt collectors. He found that Encore, based in San Diego, filed nearly 240,000 lawsuits against debtors in a recent four-year period, using the courts as its private collection arm.

Problem is, Encore’s bulk filing of lawsuits against the hard-pressed borrowers are rife with errors, out-of-date payment data, fabricated credit card statements, etc. With debt buyers scooping up millions of overdue bills each year from lenders, tons of them are missing original loan documents, payment histories and other proof of debt.

Debt predators, however, scoot around this lack of facts by simply having their employees sign affidavits asserting that the level of money owed is accurate. Judges, overwhelmed by the unending flood of lawsuits filed by Encore et al, have accepted those affidavits as true, thus ruling in favor of the corporations.

But Schneiderman found that – surprise! – affidavits were simply being rubber-stamped by company employees, with no effort to ensure the truth of the information. An employee of one large debt-buyer testified that his corporation ran an assembly-line scheme in which he signed about 2,000 affidavits a day.

This is no minor scam – one in seven adults in the U.S. is under pursuit by debt collectors. It’s hard enough for struggling families to claw their way out from under the economic crash without having lying, cheating predator corporations twist the court system to pick their pockets and shut off their hope of recovery. – *Jim Hightower*

Why Are Taxpayers Subsidizing Corporate Crime?

Do the crime, do the time,” the old saying goes. Unless, of course, the criminals are corporate executives. In those cases, the culprits are practically always given a “Get out of jail free” card.

Even the corporate crimes that produce horrible injuries, illnesses, death, massive pollution, consumer ripoffs, etc. are routinely settled by fines and payoffs from the corporate treasury, with no punishment of the honchos who oversee what amount to crime-for-profit syndicates. The only bit of justice in these money settlements is that some of them have become quite large, with multibillion-dollar “punitive

damages” meant to deter the perpetrators from doing it again. Yet the same bad corporate actors seem to keep at it.

What’s going on here is a game of winkin’ ‘n’ nod-din’, in which corporate criminals know that those headline-grabbing assessments for damages they’ve caused have a secret escape hatch built into them. Congress has generously written the law so corporations can deduct much of their punitive payments from their income taxes! As Sen. Pat Leahy points out, “This tax loophole allows corporations to wreak havoc and then write it off as a cost of doing business.”

For example, oil giant BP certainly wreaked havoc with its careless oil rig explosion in 2010, killing 11 workers, deeply contaminating the Gulf of Mexico and devastating the livelihoods of millions of people along the Gulf coast. So, BP was socked with a punishing payout topping \$42 billion. But – shhhh – 80% of that was eligible for a tax deduction, a little fact that’s been effectively covered up by the bosses and politicians.

This crazy quirk in America’s laws to deter corporate crime forces victims to help subsidize criminals.

Follow the bouncing ball here: First, a court orders a corporation to pay punitive damages to a victim of its criminal acts; second, the corporate offender pays up, and then merrily subtracts a big chunk of that payment from its income tax, effectively taking money out of our public treasury; third, while the criminal is counting its tax break, the victim is notified that the punitive damage money he or she received from the corporation will be taxed as “regular income;” fourth, that means a big chunk of the victim’s payment goes into the treasury to replenish the public money the corporate villain subtracted.

This is nothing but shameful pandering by government officials to rich and powerful criminals.

It’s bad enough that corporate-financed lawmakers legalize such encouragement of criminality, but corporate-coddling judges are playing the same disgraceful game – drastically reducing the amounts that juries order corporations to pay.

In a Montana case, for example, a jury awarded \$240 million in punitive damages to the families of three people, including two teenagers, killed in a car crash. The deaths were blamed on a steering defect that South Korean automaker Hyundai was found to have known about and “recklessly” ignored for more than a decade.

But a district judge has since supplanted the jury’s ruling with her own. While declaring that Hyundai’s “reprehensibility” certainly warrants a sizeable punishment, she cut the corporation’s punitive payment down to \$73 million.

Hello – that’s not punishment to a \$79-billion-a-year car giant, it’s pocket change. Why would Hyundai executives quit putting corporate profits over people’s lives if that’s their “punishment”?

Plus, we taxpayers and the victims’ families are still

lined up to subsidize whatever “punishment” Hyundai ultimately pays. With subsidies and wrist-slaps, the corporate criminal whirligig will continue to spin, making a mockery of justice.

Fortunately, Sen. Leahy has had the good sense to introduce legislation to lock down this escape hatch for thieves, killers and other executive-suite villains.

For more information on the moral outrage of ordinary taxpayers being forced to subsidize corporate criminals, visit www.uspirg.org. – *Jim Hightower*

GOP’s Supreme Gang Goes After ObamaCare

Look out – the Supreme Court’s black-robed gang of far-right ideologues are rampaging again! The five-man clan is firing potshots at ObamaCare – and their political recklessness endangers justice, the court’s own integrity, and the health of millions of innocent bystanders.

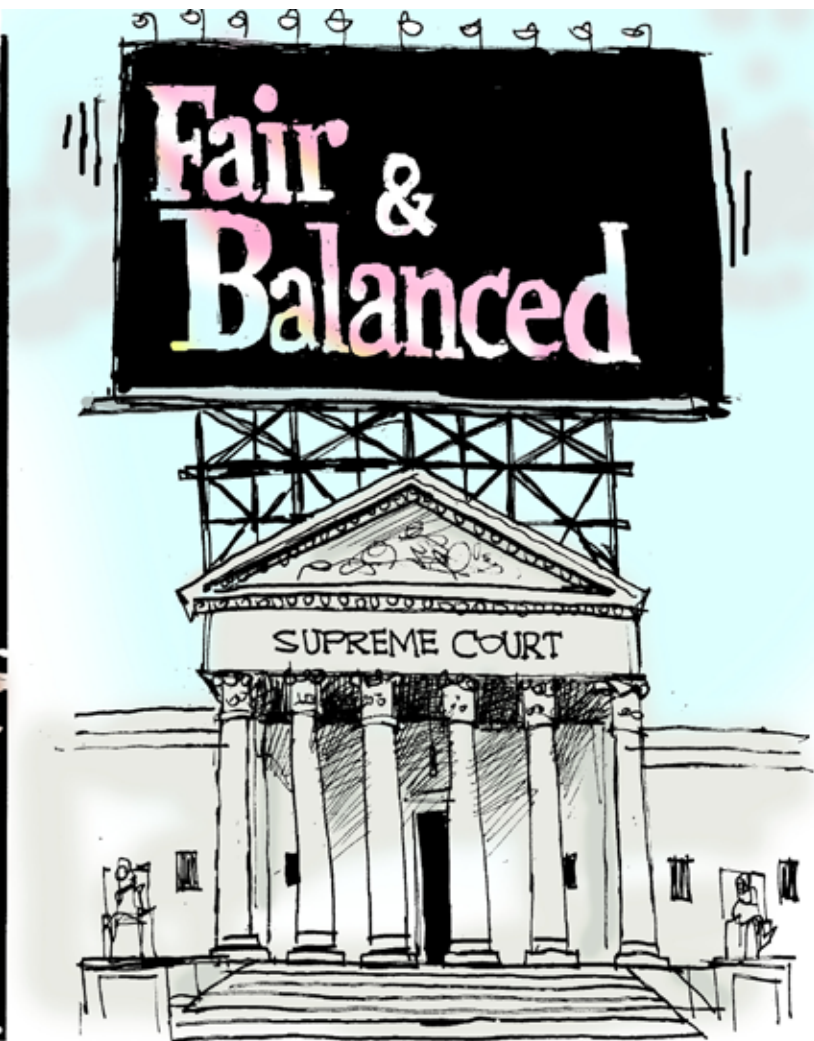
In an attempt to override the law, these so-called “justices” have jumped on a wagonload of legalistic BS named *King v. Burwell*. But that case is a very rickety legal vehicle.

It sprang from a frivolous lawsuit concocted in 2010 by a right-wing front group funded by such self-serving oligarchs as the Koch brothers, Big Oil, Big Tobacco and Big Pharma.

The chairman of the front group was neither delicate nor discrete in describing the purpose of the lawsuit as a raw political assault on ObamaCare: “This bastard has to be killed as a matter of political hygiene,” he howled at the time. “I do not care how this is done, whether it’s dismembered, whether we drive a stake through its heart ... I don’t care who does it, whether it’s some court some place or the United States Congress.”

So much for the intellectual depth of the *King* case, which was fabricated on a twisted interpretation of only four words in the 906-page health care law. The plaintiffs claim that the law prohibits insurance subsidies to the millions of low and middle-income Americans living in the 36 states that did not set up a state exchange – thus making health care unaffordable to millions of hard-working Americans and small business who are purchasing insurance on the federal exchange, essentially, nullifying the heart of ObamaCare.

Both the district and appeals courts rejected that perverse ideological Tommyrot, and even the nation’s largest health care provider called the claim “absurd.” Nonetheless, the gang of Supremes grabbed the case



as a chance to wreak their own brand of ideological havoc on a law they personally dislike.

By taking over this case, these Republican judges have openly become partisans, thrusting the Supreme Court itself into the forefront of the GOP's war against ObamaCare – and against Obama himself.

While we know that an anti-government group funded by plutocratic corporate powers is behind the lawsuit intended to terminate ObamaCare – who are the four people who are out front as the actual plaintiffs in the case?

The Competitive Enterprise Institute is the corporate front, but it had no standing to sue, so it had to find some actual people who would claim they've been harmed by the health care law. Thus, David King, a 64-year-old Vietnam vet, was recruited to be the lead plaintiff in *King v. Burwell*, which is now in the Supreme Court's hands. He and three co-plaintiffs were chosen to put sympathetic human faces on what essentially is a right-wing political ploy.

But who are they? An investigative article in *Mother Jones* magazine by Stephanie Mencimer reveals that King's modest income as a self-employed limo driver exempts him from ObamaCare's insurance mandate –

so he's done no harm by the law and, therefore, has no standing to sue. Moreover, as a veteran, he's entitled to VA care and, in a few months, to Medicare, making him double-covered by public health programs.

Mr. King's main reason for being on CEI's lawsuit appears to be that he loathes Obama, referring to him as "a joke" and "the idiot in the White House."

None of the three other recruits seem to have been harmed by ObamaCare, either. "I don't know how I got on this case," says Brenda Levy, adding that, "I don't like the idea of throwing people off their health insurance."

Then there's Rose Luck, whose low income also exempts her from the law's mandates. But she, too, fiercely loathes Obama. She posted on her Facebook page that she "wouldn't admit he was our president," calling him "The anti-Christ" who only won the Oval Office because "he got his Muslim people to vote for him."

This lawsuit was a fraud from the get-go – and if five Supremes use it to take away the health coverage of some 10 million Americans, they'll also be exposed as rank political hatchetmen masquerading as "justices." – *Jim Hightower*



Americans Are Brainwashed To Fear The Wrong Things

BY STEVEN ROSENFELD

What is a bigger threat to most Americans: big government or big business?

In December 2013, the Gallup poll found that nearly three out of four people feared “big government” more than “big business” or “big labor.” After President Obama took office in 2009, 55% feared Big Brother. By late 2013, the last time Gallup asked, the government-fearing figure was 72%, the highest in 50 years.

Only 21% of Americans said that big business was a bigger threat.

Gallup attributed the jump to “government policies specific to the period, such as the Affordable Care Act – perhaps coupled with recent revelations by former

NSA contractor Edward Snowden of government spying tactics.”

This is a curious coupling that reveals much about fear-mongering and what’s deceitful in American media and politics. Is an effort bringing health insurance to millions who lack it a big threat? No. On the other hand, the revelation that the most secretive U.S. spy agencies are grabbing and warehousing all domestic electronic communications is eerie. Anything we say can and might be used against us long before it gets to a court of law.

But most big businesses, especially those online, also are violating our privacy daily, spying on us, profiling us, and reselling that information. Banks moni-

tor our balances. Insurers say yes or no to medication refills. The list goes on.

The government might be ultimately more powerful and threatening, but a strong case can be made that big businesses are more overtly interfering with our lives, whether that's seen as an annoyance or a threat.

"You're absolutely right," said George Lakoff, a linguist and author who has analyzed how language and the media shape conservative and liberal dogma. "Basically, what you've got are monopolies running your life in any dimension and it's not mentioned. It's not discussed. It's not a topic of conversation. It's not a topic of legislation. It isn't something that's out there."

PREVAILING MEDIA NARRATIVE

Instead, American media is filled with pro-corporate and anti-government propaganda.

"Corporations run your life all the time," Lakoff continued. "Look at the corporate ads on TV. Corporation ads are innocent. They have nice little sounds. Think of the music in oil company ads and the people in them. It's like, 'We're pleasant. We're progressive. We're making progress. We're cute,' etc., when they're actually running your life."

What's going on is Americans are endlessly being bombarded with media messages that are fearful and deceitful. The result not only affects our politics and policies, as we are insistently told to fear and respond to exaggerated or fake threats. But, going deeper, this onslaught literally shapes how brains work and what people end up believing, Lakoff and other astute observers have said. The result is many small problems get undue attention while widespread problems go unacknowledged and unanswered.

For example, taxpayers have spent millions to create the flashing highway alerts about supposedly kidnapped children, which usually end up being with angry family members. In contrast, Americans continuously overlook the millions of children nationally who lack health insurance, who are malnourished and have rising illiteracy rates. Nobody needs to be reminded which of these two issues is likely to be on the evening news.

"Whenever one group uses fear to manipulate another, someone benefits and someone pays," wrote sociologist Barry Glassner, in the 10th anniversary edition of *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things*, where that example originated.

As he noted, "Threats to the U.S. financial system, obscured from public view in part by endless attention to the 'war on terror,' undermined America's national security more than Osama bin Laden and his organization ever did."

And yet, Gallup found Americans feared big government much more than big business. Gallup didn't cite more tangible reasons why many Americans fear government. It didn't mention abusive policing, being arrested for victimless crimes, being followed or

harrassed by faceless law enforcement, or targeted by overzealous prosecutors. It cited a right-wing bugaboo, ObamaCare, and Snowden's revelations.

In an interview, Glassner said he was not surprised by Gallup's finding and cited reasons why Americans are especially susceptible to fears about government, even as they rely on government services like roads.

"Our self image is a nation of self individualists," he said. "You make it on your own and success comes from your own hard work. That doesn't mesh well with any kind of collective or community notion."

"There's that and then just being able to take an entity and demonize it. To be able to do that it [the target] has to be very abstract, and there have to be very powerful forces who are working in consort to demonize it. That's where successful fear mongering happens in pretty much every case I've looked at and that's true here too... I can't think of a more abstract entity than government."

These factors are all seen in American politics and media, especially on the right where fanning anti-government flames also serve corporations that profit from less effective government.

"When politicians run fear campaigns about government, they're able to do that because it's an implicit way of being a populist," Glassner said. "They say they're for the people as opposed to what they portray as these big anonymous organizations."

Obviously, major corporations can be very big and anonymous. And unlike government, there are fewer transparency and public accountability laws to learn about what they're doing.

Glassner said his goal was to decrease fear mongering – not shift it from one exaggerated target to another. "The kind of scares that are thrown out there about government apply at least as much to businesses, or certainly large corporations," he said. "My sense is these scare campaigns are just as destructive in both cases."

SOME FEARS STICK, OTHERS DON'T

But fear-based messaging differs on the political right and left, Lakoff said, as does its impact – and this explains why right-wing fears often stick more than left-wing fears. Two high profile recent examples begin to illustrate his point.

In her speech at the Oscars, Laura Poitras, the documentary filmmaker who made *Citizen Four*, said the Snowden whistleblower film not only exposed "a threat to our privacy but to our democracy itself. When the most important decisions being made affecting all of us are made in secret, we lose our ability to check the powers that control. Thank you to Edward Snowden for his courage and for the many other whistleblowers. And I share this with Glenn Greenwald and other journalists who are exposing truth."

Lakoff said it was not surprising that her words flashed by and barely sank in.

"You have all of these progressives out there who went to [liberal arts] school and did well thinking that all you have to do is tell people something once, give

them the facts, they're all reasons to the right conclusion," he said. They think "that's all you can do, or should do, when that's utterly false... That's not how the brain works."

In contrast, consider the e-mail message from Rand Paul, Kentucky's Republican senator and likely 2016 presidential candidate, opposing the recent Federal Communications Commission decision to reclassify the Internet as a public utility.

It was filled with many right-wing buzzwords – adjectives and nouns, not concepts – that Republicans have heard over and over. He called the FCC's move "aggressive, invasive, and harmful regulation," and adding, "We've seen this movie before – it's called *ObamaCare*."

Lakoff said repetitive, fear-based moralizing sticks – and the GOP knows it, in the same way that corporate marketing experts do.

"In politics everything is based on morality," he said. "Mainly, you want your policies to be right, not wrong. What counts as right varies between progressives and conservatives. The conservatives, when they go to school, take business courses and marketing courses. Marketing professors study neuroscience and cognitive science ... They've been doing it very well for 40 years."

BRAIN PATTERNS AFFECTED

Repetition of fear-based messaging – without a steady counterpoint or context to stop that drumbeat – has been shown to affect the brain patterns that determine how people think, Lakoff said. It is akin to repetitive exercise that creates muscle memory. Depending on whether one is more inclined toward a liberal or conservative ideology, one can hear the same words but reach different conclusions. Fear of big government is an example.

"For conservatives, democracy is about the liberty to do what you want to do to anybody and meet no public responsibility," he said. "With progressives, people care about each other and work through the government to provide public resources so that private life can function and private business can function ... The whole idea of public resources for well being and freedom isn't there for conservatives."

Lakoff said pollsters have spread a false myth that there is a political center. What really exists are varying degrees of conservatism and liberalism – two bell curves, not one. The absence of strong, clear, morally based messages from Democrats has allowed the GOP to demonize government, which pleases their corporate sponsors. Meanwhile, corporate publicists keep touting their good deeds, he said, and "you don't hear anything else."

"You don't hear anything at all," Lakoff said. "Let me give you a simple example. What are pensions? Pensions are late payments for work already done. They're part of wages. When a company says, 'Well, I can't afford to pay your pension anymore,' or when they cut public servant pensions, they're stealing your money. They're stealing your wages. Who say

it? ... The Democrats say, 'Oh, well, we can't say stuff like that.'"

And so, as Gallup found in late 2013, more than three times as many Americans say the government is more threatening than big business. And he doesn't expect that to change with Hillary Clinton's likely presidential campaign. Lakoff said he has already been contacted by some of her biggest pre-2016 organizers and they still don't get it.

"They think this is about words and slogans," he said. "They write to me and they're saying, 'What's the best slogan for this?' No, that's not what this is about. This is about how you understand things, morally, and how you project that moral understanding ... Words aren't labels. They mean things. They link up to your brain. People don't understand what words are."

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Fair And ... Un-Balanced

A Harley biker is riding by the zoo in Washington, DC when he sees a little girl leaning into the lion's cage. Suddenly, the lion grabs her by the collar of her jacket and tries to pull her inside to slaughter her, under the eyes of her screaming parents.

The biker jumps off his Harley, runs to the cage and hits the lion square on the nose with a powerful punch. Whimpering from the pain the lion jumps back letting go of the girl, and the biker brings her to her terrified parents, who thank him endlessly.

A reporter has watched the whole event. The reporter, addressing the Harley rider, says, "Sir, this was the most gallant and brave thing I've seen a man do in my whole life."

The Harley rider replies, "Why, it was nothing, really, the lion was behind bars. I just saw this little kid in danger and acted as I felt right."

The reporter says, "Well, I'll make sure this won't go unnoticed. I'm a journalist, you know, and tomorrow's paper will have this story on the front page ... So, what do you do for a living and what political affiliation do you have?"

The biker replies, "I'm a U.S. Marine and a Democrat."

The journalist leaves.

The following morning the biker buys the paper to see if it indeed brings news of his actions, and reads, on the front page: U.S. MARINE ASSAULTS AFRICAN IMMIGRANT AND STEALS HIS LUNCH.

That pretty much sums up the mainstream media approach to the news these days.

Privacy Vs. Security: How The Debate Changes

BY FROMA HARROP

The pilot who crashed the Germanwings plane, taking 150 lives, was too ill to work, according to doctors' notes found at his home. But Germany's strict medical privacy laws barred the doctors from conveying that judgment to the airline.

A horrific event that could have been averted with a sharing of information happened because of laws designed to protect privacy. As typically occurs in such cases, the same public that supported such laws turns around and asks, Why didn't the authorities know?

It's really hard to get an intelligent conversation going about the balance between privacy and security. Posturing over government intrusion into our personal lives blossoms at times of calm and then wilts when terrorists hijack the headlines.

Not long ago, privacy advocates were inflaming the public over the National Security Agency's surveillance programs. In doing so, they often exploit the public's confusion on what information is collected.

Last October, CNN anchor Carol Costello grilled Sen. Dan Coats, an Indiana Republican, on NSA spying activities, in an exchange that indicated she didn't quite know what metadata is. As Coats tried to explain, metadata is information about numbers we call [the date, time and duration of each call] – not what was said in the calls.

That's what the government computers track. If they flag a worrisome pattern, a court must grant permission for a human being to listen in on the content.

Another tactic of the program's critics is to point to every terrible thing that happens as evidence the program doesn't work. "It didn't stop Americans from being beheaded," Costello said.

No, the NSA didn't stop radical groups from kidnapping Americans in Middle Eastern war zones and executing them in their cruel way. It can't stop every terrorist outrage in the world, including in Boston. But it has been credited with uncovering plots to wreak havoc.

The grown-up question is, Where do we draw the line between our right to privacy and our desire to be protected?

Should we care if a government computer collects the metadata on

all our calls? I don't. The phone company has that information. As for noting the websites we visit, Google knows all about that.

Sure, metadata can provide clues on one's interests – say, searches on a disease or visits to pornography sites. A rogue NSA worker might tap this information for illegal purposes, but there's been scant evidence that such abuse has occurred, the hyperbolic charges notwithstanding.

Recall the furor in France after Edward Snowden released stolen documents describing the NSA surveillance programs. Now, in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo massacre, French leaders are proposing an NSA-style program that would let their country's intelligence agencies do similar sweeps of metadata.

Recall the anger in Germany over the Snowden revelations. The CIA's top official there was expelled. And President Obama had to apologize for American monitoring of Chancellor Angela Merkel's cellphone, something we should not have done.

But now, when so many German citizens are joining radical groups in Syria – nine so far have participated in suicide attacks – the German government is more tied into American intelligence than it was before. After all, the U.S. is the only country to track foreign fighters crossing into Syria.

In the U.S., the horror of the beheadings has caused public protests against U.S. spying programs to rapidly fade. Our society seems especially vulnerable to the hurt inflicted by terrorism; witness the attention paid the Boston Marathon bombing trial – a relatively small attack by the standards of modern terrorism.

The next time something gruesome happens, expect to hear, "Why didn't they stop that?" To say we can be secure without giving up some privacy is child's talk.

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Oklahoma Friends Meetings (Quakers)

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

- Author unknown

MEETING FOR WORSHIP SCHEDULE AND CONTACTS

OKLAHOMA CITY: 333 SE 46th St, 73129. Worship Sunday evening at 7pm. FMI 405.632.7574)

<http://www.rsok-okc.com>

STILLWATER: Sunday morning. Call 405.372.4839

TULSA: Sunday afternoon. Call 918.743.6827

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Eliminating Violence, Discrimination Against Women Is World's Greatest Challenge

A CALL TO ACTION

Women, Religion, Violence And Power

By Jimmy Carter

Simon & Schuster

224 pages, \$16 [paperback]

BY JOHN WOOD

In James David Barber's seminal work *The Presidential Character: Predicting Performance In the White House*, he rates the 39th president of the United States as "Active/Positive" – arguing that Jimmy Carter was not only one who pursued aggressively his responsibilities, but also loved the job of being the nation's political leader.

While Carter, now 90, loved his job as president, many considered his presidency underwhelming. Historical rankings of U.S. presidents placed Carter between 19th and 34th. While his presidency has largely mixed reviews, his humanitarian work and peace-keeping since he left office has certainly made him renowned as one of the most successful ex-presidents in U.S. history.

Since his presidency, Carter has written 29 books and has traveled worldwide on missions with his Carter Center, working toward health and peace. He even won the Noble Peace prize in 2002 after more than two decades of an amazingly tenacious effort to find peaceful solutions to our world's conflicts, advancing human rights, and promoting social and economic development.

His most recent book is *A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence, and Power*. In this tome, Carter focuses on what he finds as the greatest challenge unaddressed worldwide: the abuse of and discrimination against girls and women.

Carter has traveled to nearly 145 countries and has met with top leaders in every one of them, gifting him with a rather deep worldview.

His book chronicles in a broad way, the problems

that face women across the globe – whether it is lack of health care, deprivation of education, rape, machismo, child marriage, cycle of poverty and violence, etc.

Carter covers a great deal of ground in this book, but does not delve too deep on any of the 23 areas in which he provides recommendations "that can help blaze the road to progress" and urges readers to visit his Carter Center web site to join with him in his efforts.

"My own experiences and the testimony of courageous women from all regions and all major religions have made it clear that there is a pervasive denial of equal rights to more than half of all human beings, and this discrimination results in tangible harm to all of us – male and female," Carter writes. "A commitment to universal human rights is desperately needed if humanity is to escape the cycle of war, poverty, and oppression."

What I find particularly interesting is that Carter was a devout Southern Baptist for 70 years. Like many Baptists, he left this denomination over the role of women. Southern Baptists were certainly against women working as military chaplains and in their denominational seminaries. In essence, Carter felt that women should not be classified as secondary citizens in the eyes of God.

Carter doesn't mention in his book that in around 2006, he in partnership with Bill Clinton and former Mercer University President Bill Underwood, started what they called the New Baptist Covenant, which seeks to unite Baptists of all cultures, races and affiliations with a more progressive bent, serving as an alternative to the Southern Baptists. Religion itself is a big part of this book.

Religion is not the only reason why society "others" women, or makes them secondary. It depends on the denomination, but the Southern Baptist Convention is an example of this tendency. There also are cultural and political reasons women are treated as secondary citizens.

For example, Carter notes that the U.S. ranks nearly 60th in the world in the percentage of women in political offices at every level – 20% in Congress. This

is lower than the worldwide average – 23 percent – and that figure includes several countries where women are outlawed from running.

This, in my mind, means women often lack political power to make a difference about their positional power.

However, in terms of education, women represent nearly 57% of university graduates. This may mean a bright future in making gains in representation. And yet, they have their work cut out for them as women currently only make 78% in the same job as men on average.

At the end of Carter's book, he gives 23 recommendations on what we can do. For example, we can inspire churches to work with women as equals in the "eyes of God." On top of this, women need to speak out. Moreover, college presidents need to make sure their campuses are safe from rape, among other things.

What I think is interesting is that a colleague of mine pointed out: "Why is a white man telling us about the plight of women?"

I have thought a great deal about this. Much like white liberal civil rights activists were key in winning the historical fight against slavery and segregation, men were important in the women's movement, too.

For example, Lucretia Mott's husband, James Mott, presided over the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention and 32 men – including Frederick Douglass – signed the Declaration of Sentiments. Later, in the 1920s, male state legislators submitted woman suffrage referendums to state voters.

In addition, millions of men voted to approve these ballot measures. Particularly union men were often strong supporters of woman suffrage, because their struggle resonated with them.

When African Americans and women were shut out without political voice, they needed those with the levers of power to either find common cause, or at least give them a fair shot at life's opportunities.

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Today, women need men. They need them to not always dominate conversations in groups, something I know I struggle with. Women need men as equal partners in their relationships. Women need men to be aware how they interact with them. Isn't it about respect,

after all?

I recommend this interesting, important, and readable book. *John Wood, PhD, is an assistant professor of political science at the University of Central Oklahoma and a frequent contributor to The Oklahoma Observer.*

Post-Racial America? Mockingbird's Tale Remains Hauntingly Familiar

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

By Harper Lee

HarperCollins Publishers

336 pages, \$25.99

BY WANDA JO STAPLETON

Harper Lee wrote the Pulitzer-Prize winning *To Kill a Mockingbird* in 1960. This book is being publicized anew because Harper Lee, after all these years, is releasing her second book, *Go Set a Watchman*, in July.

Go Set a Watchman was written first, in the mid-1950s; however, the manuscript was assumed to be lost. It was discovered in late 2014. Both books include many of the same characters.

To Kill a Mockingbird examines racism, in the 1930s deep South [Alabama], as seen through the eyes of a little girl, Scout Finch, age eight. The central truth in the book is: When it's a white man's word against a black man's, the white man always wins.

The drama began when Bob Ewell went to get the sheriff. Ewell told the sheriff "some n----- had raped his girl, Mayella." The sheriff immediately took the "n-----," Tom Robinson, to jail.

When attorney Atticus Finch let it be known that he was going to court to defend Tom Robinson, Atticus' children, Scout and Jem, were taunted by young and old alike in Maycomb, AL, because their father was a "n----- lover" and was "no better than the n----- and trash he works for."

Scout asked Atticus, "Are we going to win?" "No, honey," Atticus replied, "because we were licked a hundred years before we started is no reason for us not to try to win. I think we'll have a reasonable chance on appeal though."

During the trial, Scout Finch and her brother Jem slipped into the balcony at the courthouse, and watched their father, Atticus, in action.

Atticus called Bob Ewell to testify. Ewell said that as he approached his house, he heard his 19-year-old daughter Mayella screaming. When he looked in the window, he saw Tom Robinson raping Mayella. When Mayella took the stand, she confirmed her father's testimony.

Atticus believed that the Ewells had been the disgrace of Maycomb, AL for three generations. None had ever done a day's work, according to Atticus' rec-

ollection. They lived like animals behind the town's garbage dump, where the family searched for food.

The patriarch, Bob Ewell, spent the family's welfare check on green whiskey. His eight children would have gone hungry if he had not been permitted to hunt and trap out of season. Landowners around there didn't begrudge the Ewell children any game their father could hit.

Finally, Atticus called Tom Robinson to the stand. Robinson said he passed the Ewell house daily going back and forth to work in Mr. Link Deas' cotton fields in the summer and to do other work for Deas in the winter. Tom said that Mayella called him inside the fence lots of times to do odd jobs like chopping kindling or carrying water.

On the day in question, Mayella called him to do some work inside the house. She had sent the children to town for ice cream. She grabbed Tom around the waist and started hugging him. Then she kissed him on the side of the face and said, "Kiss me back, n-----."

Tom testified that he was petrified and said "Miss Mayella, let me outta here." Tom said that he tried to run, but Mayella got her back to the door and Tom didn't want to hurt her to get her out of the way. About that time, according to Tom, Bob Ewell looked in the window and hollered "you god-dam whore, I'll kill ya."

Tom said that he got out of there fast because he was so scared.

Atticus in his closing argument said that no medical evidence had been sought or produced to show that Mayella had been raped; that she did something unspeakable in their society: She kissed a black man.

Her father saw it, and there is circumstantial evidence that he beat her savagely.

Nevertheless, the jury was unanimous in convicting Tom Robinson, and he went to a prison farm 70 miles away. At the prison farm, during exercise period, Tom Robinson went into a blind rage and was climbing the fence to escape. Prison guards shot and killed him.

In conclusion, Atticus gave his son Jem a moral lesson when he said, "Shoot all the blue jays you want ... but remember, it's a sin to kill a mockingbird." His reasoning: "Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy." Tom Robinson, in his innocence, is the mockingbird in this book.

The editor of the local newspaper, The Maycomb Tribune, likened Tom's death to the "senseless slaughter of songbirds by hunters and children."

Wanda Jo Stapleton represented south Oklahoma City in the state House from 1986-96.

Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Oklahoma schools endured five years of the nation's deepest budget cuts before receiving a small increase in FY 2014-15. The increase didn't even begin to restore adequate funding – leaving the state with 1,000 fewer teachers as the student population soared 40,000.

Why would anyone who cares about public education want to reduce funding further – especially when the state already faces a \$611 million budget hole in the next fiscal year?

For OCPA, the income tax scheme is potentially win-win, public relations-wise. It could help create the [mistaken] impression they actually care about teachers and are interested in them being well compensated.

At the same time, if the tax break for teachers were to become law, it would further their ultimate goal, one shared with anti-government zealot Grover Norquist: to shrink government to the point where the rest can be drowned in a bathtub.

Clever, eh? It's like Segretti's line in *All The President's Men*, when he attempts to downplay his role in what Nixon campaign insiders called "ratf---ing." What he did to disrupt other campaigns, he said, was "nickel and dime stuff" yet "stuff with a little bit of wit attached to it."

The decal prank was too cute – and breathtakingly cynical. The OCPA should be ashamed of itself. It should make its case honestly for a totally revamped educational system, no resorting to cheap political tricks.

But educators and pro-public school supporters bear responsibility, too, for putting themselves in position to be suckered. They had better become more educated and sophisticated about the political games being played at NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd. – and fast.

They can't just rally at the Capitol once a year and think their work is done. The OCPA and its ilk plots year-around to undermine common ed. Public school supporters must work just as tirelessly – not only dialoguing with local legislators, but also organizing to defeat them if they fail to deliver on promises to make education a priority.

On Tap

When it comes to Oklahoma's antiquated liquor laws, change can be slower than the aging process of fine Kentucky bourbon.

In the three decades since voters approved liquor-by-the-drink, efforts to modernize more of the state's liquor laws repeatedly have failed to gain legislative traction, particularly the sale of wine in grocery stores.

This year, freshman state Sen. Stephanie Bice, R-

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OKC, hoped to nudge the state's alcohol policies into the 21st Century by authorizing liquor stores to sell refrigerated strong beer – an option available to consumers in both Texas and Kansas and one that some producers require because of their product's otherwise limited shelf life.

Her SB 383 sailed through the Senate, but stalled in the House. Now it appears her proposal – and other possible reform – will be reviewed more thoroughly in interim study, with an ultimate goal of giving voters a voice in deciding alcohol policies.

It won't be an easy, direct route to a statewide referendum, of course. What grocers, microbrewers, vintners or consumers want isn't necessarily what the politically – and financially – powerful liquor retailers want.

Oklahomans interested in modernizing state liquor laws would be well served to voice their opinions to policymakers. Otherwise the state could end up with a referendum that reinforces the status quo and leaves many spending their liquor dollars out of state.

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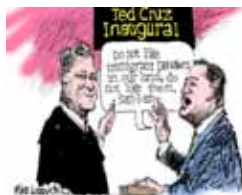
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Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Racism and homophobia jeopardize Oklahoma's future. Just ask OKC Chamber CEO Roy Williams: "Millennials are the ones who are kind of changing the paradigm of economic development. They are going to where they want to live and the companies are going where they are. So we have to be very conscious of what kind of signals we send to the world."

Priorities? A House-approved measure, HB 1387 by Rep. Casey Murdock, R-Felt, would stiffen penalties for stealing a "horse, jackass, jennet, mule, cow, hog, or implement of husbandry" – up to 15 years in jail and a fine equaling three times the value of livestock or equipment. Coldcock another human and you only face up to a \$500 fine and five years in prison.

"I go to my church and I hear love and inclusion. I come to my Capitol and I hear hate and exclusion. I can feel that difference ... and that bothers me about my government." – Richard Francis, who has a gay son, speaking against a proposed Texas law that would instruct the state not to issue same-sex marriage licenses

While state lawmakers dither over a proposal to ban texting while driving, a new survey finds 18% of drivers admit they "cannot resist the urge" to read or send texts while driving. Equally alarming: 27% of teens occasionally change clothes or shoes while driving. – Time

Think Oklahoma's drought is frightening enough? A new UN report projects 40% of the world's water needs won't be met by 2030 if current trends continue, threatening economic upheaval.

Tribes, the Oklahoma Department of Health and AARP-OK are among those involved in the Preparing for the Seventh Generation Conference April 7-9 in Norman. It's aimed at helping reduce Native American disparities through better nutrition. Featured speaker is Shannon Francis from the Denver Indian Center. For more information, visit cherokeepublichealth.org.

A 104-year-old Texas woman believes she knows the secret to her longevity: downing three cans of Dr Pepper every day.

Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

for April 6 at 6:30 p.m.

Ned Williams
Pawnee

Editor's Note: Ned Williams is superintendent of Pawnee Public Schools.

Editor, The Observer:

Oklahomans are losing their freedoms, one local-control issue at a time. And why? To satisfy certain lobbies like the tobacco and the oil and gas industries.

Last year, Gov. Fallin signed into law a bill that says municipalities cannot enact anti-smoking laws that are more stringent than the state's. She also vetoed Rep. Katie Henke's HB 2155, which would have created a parent-teacher-student team to decide whether a failure on a third-grade reading sufficiency test was due to extrinsic factors.

Also last year a law was created to keep counties and municipalities from raising the minimum wage. The proposed defunding of our advanced-placement U.S. history classes is taking local control away from local school boards.

So is HB 1440 by Rep. Chad Caldwell, R-Enid, which would impose term limits on school boards. This contradicts Rep. Caldwell's other measure, HB 1442, which says that if a school district can't find someone to run in their district, they can go outside the district to get someone to serve! Talk about a lack of common sense.

Even the Speaker of House, Jeff Hickman, is getting into the act with HB 2178, which would disallow municipalities from adopting ordinances to ban fracking in their city.

Brian Renegar
McAlester

Editor's Note: Democrat Brian Renegar represents District 17 in the Oklahoma House of Representatives.

Editor, The Observer:

Former President Ronald Reagan once said, "The government is the problem." I'm not sure that was true then, but it's certainly true now.

For starters, Oklahoma's two Republican U.S. Senators [Jim Inhofe and James Lankford], as part of a total of 47 Republican senators, were called "traitors" in the Mar. 10 issue of the New York Daily News.



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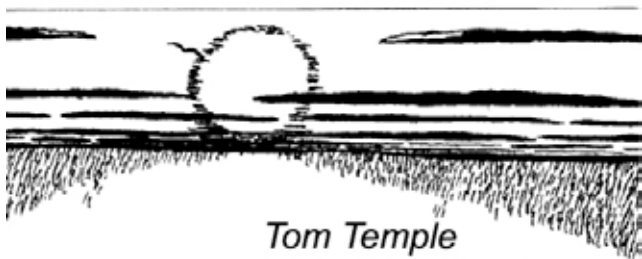
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This newspaper said that these 47 senators signed an open letter to the leaders of Iran – a letter which intended to sabotage President Obama's efforts to negotiate a settlement to keep Iran from becoming capable of and intending to produce nuclear weapons.

President Obama, our commander-in-chief, is the one to negotiate with foreign countries. Unbelievably, these arrogant, ignorant senators undermined President Obama. They also made former President Ronald Reagan sound prophetic when he said, "the government is the problem."

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:

It is not often that I become ashamed of Oklahoma, the state where I grew up, where I earned two degrees from the University of Oklahoma and where I worked as a journalist.

But this first week of March in 2015, Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Oklahoma, reddened my cheeks. He went on the floor of the Senate with a snowball he fetched from the outdoor expanse of Congress and he threw it upon the Senate floor as proof there is no truth in global warming.

He made me remember the time I was in Kroger's a few years back when a matron with a voice as loud as an angry seagull, a voice untempered from her advanced years, was talking in the lobby with three old men. Her voice resounded. She seemed so confident. "So much for climate change," she ministered to her aged friends. She was referring to the fact that it was cold outside as winter still remained on this part of earth.

I thought about paying for my groceries and then going to the lobby to tell her that to measure global warming, you had to take temperatures throughout the world. But I did not stop. Some people belong in their own foolishness.

Then Sen. Inhofe showed his intelligence by throwing the snowball on the floor of Congress, obviously letting a Senate page wipe it up. Inhofe, chair of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, presides over legislation affecting climate change, but he does not have a grade schooler's understanding of science.

I understand his book against climate change uses as proof a quote from Genesis in the Old Testament that God promises us the seasons – and that includes spring, fall and winter. I guess God does not hang out at the equator. And Sen. Inhofe left us with this ugly heave.

All Sen. Inhofe needs to do is to go to his Internet and Google: global ice melt. And read and read and read all the stories.

Hugh Morgan
Oxford, OH

Punitive

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

Merry Christmas.

In the book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Victor Frankl chronicles the horrors of being locked up in a concentration camp but, more importantly, highlights the fact that, even in those dire circumstances, one always has the ability to transcend those circumstances through helping others.

Although we weren't innocent victims like the Holocaust victims, Gibby has been and continues to be the Victor Frankl for many a young man searching for a light.

A little over three years ago, I spoke for him at his parole hearing and he was recommended for parole by the board. However, the governor failed to sign it so was placed back on the docket after a three-year wait.

Several months ago, we went back up. Not only was he denied unanimously, one of the board members took it upon himself to launch into a rant which served no purpose other than to shame and belittle the same person that had garnered a favorable review three years prior. The only difference was Gibby had three more years of clear conduct and more college classes successfully completed.

I choked back angry words, knowing that anything I said would hurt Gibby's chances in the future but when we got outside I launched into a tirade of my own.

Gibby, being his usual self, urged me to calm down. Here was a situation where it would've been perfectly normal to be outraged and he was urging me to practice restraint. Later that night, when we talked on the phone, he said, "I know I should've been angry but I'm telling you, the first thought I had when I stepped back outside was what a beautiful day it was."

I know people want punishment for people like me. It's impossible to talk about punishment without talking about forgiveness. In fact, if we don't incorporate the two, we end up with problems like the one we're addressing today.

My first brush with forgiveness came about 20 years ago when I was talking to a group of students from an area high school.

I told them the story of what happened that fateful night; why I was in prison. I had gotten into a fight with one guy – everyone was drunk – and had left but then came back and was followed out of town by several cars. Afraid and angry I got out of my vehicle with a bat, determined to show these guys I wasn't afraid. Killing someone was nowhere in my mind ...

When I got to that part of the story, a young lady jumped up, sobbing, and ran from the room. Without knowing, I knew.

Rattled, I hastily wound up my talk and sat down.

Several minutes later our staff sponsor approached me and told me what I knew and feared.

"Bo, the young lady that left the room is Bart's cousin. She wants to talk with you."

Oh, my, I didn't want to. What would I say? I think that moment may have been the very first time I – the person who always had an excuse for his behavior – realized there was nothing I could say.

"Do you want to? You don't have to."

Yes, I did.

I remember having to force myself to look up from my shoe-tops to meet her gaze. It wasn't angry; it was hurt and confused.

"All my life, I've heard what a monster you are." Her eyes said she no longer believed that. "I just want you to know that I don't hate you."

I couldn't talk. I just nodded my head and looked back down.

Since that time, I've had more and more encounters with forgiveness; none of them any easier to accept than that one.

My final story takes place in Washington, DC. I have had the pleasure and honor of serving as a consultant at a private school there. For the last 10 years I spent a week there, every November, talking with the freshman class about substance use and abuse and choices.

One day, during my first year there, I was talking to a group of young men and this little guy stands up and says, "Mr. Cox, it seems to me that all any of this boils down to is that you've done some bad things in your life and now you're just trying to make up for it."

I was several sentences into explaining to him how it wasn't that simple and was, in fact, much more complicated when it occurred to me that he was exactly right. I am a guy who has done some bad things in his life and I am trying to make up for it.

Not only was he right about me, without even knowing it, he was right about a lot of other people. I'm not the only person who has made terrible and inexcusable mistakes and is living their life seeking to make amends for their wrongs.

There are a lot of guys in prison who are, too. Today, we have evidence-based tools available to better identify them and move Oklahoma Corrections and its alarming overcrowding problem toward a more progressive criminal justice system.

Is it easy? No.

Does it better serve Oklahomans? I believe so.

People in prison are people.

Bo Cox lives in Norman.

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