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Justice For Sale?



Corporatists, Religious Zealots Still Plotting Takeover Of State Judiciary

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

Rep. Kevin Calvey's recent rant against the "evil" state Supreme Court easily could be dismissed as the anti-abortion frothing of a fringe politician with a microphone.

It's rare, after all, an Oklahoma lawmaker openly ponders self-immolation – marching across the street to the state Judicial Center, dousing himself with gasoline and striking a match.

But Calvey's screed was more than a Bible zealot's attack on Supreme Court rulings that favor reproductive rights. It also was a clear signal that some Oklahoma lawmakers remain determined to bend an independent judiciary to their will.

In the five years since Republicans seized total legislative power, an unholy alliance of wealthy cor-

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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

Day Of Reckoning

The Legislature's self-proclaimed "fiscal conservatives" have little choice in the session's final weeks but to declare a fiscal emergency in order to keep already starving state services on life support.

What does that mean? Dipping into the Republican majority's sacrosanct Rainy Day Fund to soften a \$611 million budget hole of their own making.

Sadly – no, frustratingly – the legislative majority repeatedly failed to heed a simple economic principle: when you're in a hole, quit digging.

For much of the last decade, lawmakers treated the state budget like a game of Monopoly, rolling the dice that soaring oil prices would indefinitely mask the impact of politically pleasing income tax cuts.

When the national economy soured, they relied on short-term federal stimulus spending to keep the Good Ship Oklahoma afloat – and kept cutting taxes.

Now, with the latest energy boom over and federal stimulus dollars dried up, the long-term damage to the state's budget infrastructure is painfully clear – from public schools to corrections to roads, vital state services are in peril.

Nonetheless, Oklahoma's lawmakers keep digging, recently extending the Quality Jobs Act to chicken egg producers, giving away more tax dollars in dubious corporate welfare.

In addition, legislative leaders steadfastly refuse to delay or cancel the .25% income tax cut scheduled to kick in next fiscal year, costing the state treasury more than \$200 million in FYs 2016 and 2017.

And they won't consider expanding Medicaid for Oklahoma's working poor – insisting the state can't afford it. Really? Gov. Mary Fallin's own Leavitt Group-produced study estimated the state would save \$450 million in health care costs over a decade by expanding Medicaid – 100% federally financed in the first years and 90% thereafter.

The shrink-government crowd, of course, bays incessantly that state

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THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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Observerscope



We mourn the passing of Republican Rep. David Dank, a fearless public servant who often spoke truth to his party's most powerful and venal. His honor and courage will be sorely missed.

Dart: To rookie Corporation Commissioner Todd Hiett, retiring his \$200,000 campaign debt with donations from the industries he regulates: oil and gas. Think lapdog, not watchdog.

Notice, served: Nearly 60% of Americans back local control on fracking, a new University of Texas Energy poll shows. Only 25% would deny municipalities the right.

Laurel: To Troy Stevenson and the Freedom Oklahoma coalition, helping defeat 18 anti-LGBT bills in this year's session. Amazing how much hate the far-right can muster.

What a contrast: As Oklahoma lawmakers move to cap spending on state's crumbling roads and bridges, Iowa parlays 10-cent-per-gallon gas tax hike into a record \$700 million in highway projects.

Dart: To U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe, still bullying the FAA five years after it had the temerity to sanction him for landing on the wrong runway in Texas. He's damn lucky he kept his license. Senatorial privilege?

Mark your calendars for May 21: Schools First and OKC Councilman Ed Shadid host a Town Hall on scheme to divert millions from OKC public schools and other services to new convention center - 6:30-8 p.m. at Tower Hotel [formerly Marriott] on Northwest Expressway.

Laurel: To ex-firefighter Kevin Matthews, winning the Tulsa area Senate seat vacated by Jabbar Shumate. In two-plus-years in the House, Matthews always stood up for rank-and-file Oklahomans; Shumate usually stood up only for himself.

Ex-Rep. Danny Morgan's dream was finally realized when Gov. Mary Fallin signed texting-while-driving ban. It never would have happened if the Prague Democrat hadn't begun making the case years ago.

Dart: To Americans for Prosperity, claiming in ads that Gov. Fallin's signing of HB 1749, attacking teachers and their unions, "levels the playing field." The Astroturf group's leaders must be snorting pure Koch.

Observer essayist Vern Turner will be signing copies of his latest book, *Racing to the Brink: The End Game for Race and Capitalism*, at OKC's Full Circle Books, on May 19 at 6:30 p.m.

Laurel: To state Mental Health Commissioner Terri White, publicly telling senators the truth and nothing but: "I don't know of a time when mental health was appropriately funded in the state of Oklahoma." OK ranks in bottom five in per capita mental health funding.

Wingnuts on Parade, aka Southern Republican Leadership Conference, invades OKC's Cox Convention Center May 21-23. Lineup includes Ted Cruz, Scott Walker, Ben Carson and Donald Trump.

Dart: To OCU Law Prof Andrew Spiropoulos, not only declaring in Journal-Record column there is no teacher shortage, but also that schools would be better off with fewer teachers, not more. No wonder his nickname is Scare-The-Hell-Out-Of-Us.

No thanks to U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe, Oklahoma's environment is improving. The EPA says OK ranks second nationally for phosphorus reduction and third for nitrogen reduction - nutrients that fuel fish-killing algal bloom.

Laurel: To MSNBC's Chris Matthews, nailing GOP leaders that never cottoned to a black president. "Some of these guys," Matthews said, "talk like they think the base is wearing sheets."

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Letters



Editor, The Observer:

In recent years at the Legislature we have privatized one entity at a time. We have private prisons, and we have been sending Oklahoma dollars out of state to virtual private schools.

The excuse for the private prisons is that it is cheaper – but is it? No private prisons have medical infirmaries, so guess where the sick inmates go? To the local emergency room, and the people of Oklahoma pick up the tab.

This year we have passed two measures that will further privatize state entities. The Legislature passed a 77-county private charter school bill. In addition, HB 1566 by Rep. Glen Mulready, R-Tulsa, will enable privatization of our Medicaid program.

And the purpose our leaders gave for such deeds? School choice and streamlining state government. Really?!

I see the reason for privatization in Oklahoma differently. These for-profit out-of-state corporations contribute to the leaders of our government. Also, with privatization, our leaders don't have to take the heat for problems that go with agencies. They can just appropri-

ate dollars to these corporations and wipe their hands clean of the public disappointed with the outcome.

As far as our Oklahoma dollars leaving the state, remember that every dollar spent in Oklahoma turns around seven times. I guess Oklahomans are stimulating the economy in other states. We should sleep better at night, I suppose.

The pendulum had better start swinging soon, because we are streamlining government right out of Oklahoma.

Brian Renegar
McAlester

Editor's Note: The author represents District 17 in the Oklahoma House of Representatives.

Editor, The Observer:

Two bills to protect preachers and secular judges are now on, or perhaps off, the desk of Gov. Fallin. I called the Office of the Governor and told her receptionist that I had been an ordained minister for over 50 years. During those years I never had anyone tell me who I could perform weddings for or who I could not perform weddings for. In every case, the decision was

mine. I told the pleasant receptionist that to please tell the governor that we did not need those two pieces of legislation in the first place. She assured me that she would send my message to the governor.

Since both the House and Senate passed the two bills by large margins, I doubt the governor will veto the bills. But she might.

Now the Legislature may be a subtle bunch. By passing the bills, the Legislature sends a message of approval to those clerics who might need an excuse to refuse to marry racially mixed couples, or tall couples, or couples who have had plastic surgery or even same sex couples. After all, the Bible-thumping Legislature gave permission to exercise whatever prejudice a cleric might have tucked away in his or her heart!

Or maybe Rep. Mike Shelton cleared the air when he is quoted [in the April 24 Oklahoman] as observing: "How many ways can we tell one group of people that we don't like them?" No more needs to be said!

Rev. Jeff Hamilton
Midwest City

Editor's Note: The author represented District 101 in the Oklahoma House of Representatives from 1986-94.

Editor, The Observer:

It's baffling to me that Gov. Fallin rails against the Affordable Care act, expanding Medicaid and federal over-reach in general, but when disaster hits she wants the feds to declare a disaster and send FEMA aid, instead of handling the relief effort within the state!

Robert Hefley
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

In November 2014, Iran and six world powers – Germany, France, Great Britain, China, Russia and the U.S. – agreed to continue nuclear negotiations. Wisely given

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Insatiable Appetite For State-Sanctioned Killing

Lawmakers seem dumbfounded by structural budget deficits they helped create. They fiddle while the partially completed American Indian Cultural Center and Museum rots. They took years to solve a public policy no-brainer – finally banning texting while driving.

Yet, they prove downright ingenious when it comes to finding new ways to impose state-sanctioned killing.

Alarmed the U.S. Supreme Court could ban Oklahoma's current three-drug execution cocktail, legislators quickly – warp speed, by their standards – approved nitrogen gas hypoxia as an alternative.

Never mind that it hasn't been tried elsewhere. Or that many jurisdictions already ban its use in euthanizing animals.

Policymakers' zest for vengeance must be satiated – even if that means Oklahoma now could become a very public laboratory for human experimentation.

Enough already. This obsession with Old Testament, eye-for-an-eye punishment is neither morally nor fiscally responsible.

First, it is abundantly clear that America's criminal justice system is imperfect.

Last month, the Washington Post reported that FBI experts routinely overstated forensic hair evidence over a two-decade period, helping prosecutors win convictions.

In over 200 cases examined, 32 defendants were sentenced to death – 14 already have been executed or died in prison.

Moreover, since 1992, the Innocence Project has deployed DNA testing to help exonerate 329 inmates nationally – including 18 from death row.

Given the evidence, it is quite likely innocents have been executed. No one knows for sure how many. But even one is unacceptable. Why take a chance? Isn't every life precious?

Second, it is indisputable that it costs vastly more to execute an inmate than to enforce a life without parole sentence.

Death penalty proponents will point to the high

costs associated with years of appeals as the primary reason for the disparity. True enough. But when a life is at stake, isn't it worth doing everything possible to ensure the state got it right?

Currently, 18 states do not include the death penalty on their list of approved punishments. In fact, four have banned it since 2009 – New Mexico, Illinois, Connecticut and Maryland.

And just last month, lawmakers in Nebraska – conservative, Republican Nebraska – voted to end capital punishment amid a shortage of lethal injection drugs.

"It makes sense for Republicans to support repeal – it's antithetical to life," Marc Hyden, director of the national group Conservatives Concerned About the Death Penalty, told Aljazeera America.

"What's happening in Nebraska is what we're seeing nationwide – more and more people are seeing the death penalty as a broken system that doesn't line up with their values."

Oklahoma's reputation took a serious hit, nationally and internationally, with Clayton Lockett's botched execution last year. So how do we respond? By doubling-down on dumb.

Afraid of appearing soft on crime, a vast majority of state lawmakers – representing both parties – allowed one of their loopiest colleagues to sell them on junk science that nitrogen gas hypoxia is a "foolproof" alternative.

"The process is fast and painless," declared the bill's House author, state Rep. Mike Christian, R-Oklahoma City.

How does he know? Well, by golly, he's evidently done some Internet research and watched a BBC documentary.

Millions of sperm and he was fastest?

Actually, this is no laughing matter. How would a grieving victim's family feel if it turned out the state executed the wrong perpetrator? How would an innocent's family feel? How would we all feel?

Forget nitrogen gas. Forget lethal injection. Life in prison without parole is nasty enough – tour Big Mac yourself, if you don't believe me.

Remembering George Wallace



This Best of Frosty column first appeared in the Sept. 25, 1998 edition of The Oklahoma Observer.

I had heard that George Wallace was a “new man” but I was still uncomfortable with the idea of sharing the stage with him at the Alabama Education Association convention.

I considered him an abomination. When he brought his message of racism and hate of the federal government to Tulsa, I was the associate editor who wrote the lead editorial “armies of the night,” excoriating everything he stood for.

I had our cartoonist draw one depicting Wallace standing in the door of a bus with his foot on the neck of a black child.

So you can imagine my feelings when the AEA president told me that as a courtesy to the governor, he would speak first and then leave. I had to listen to his anti-government claptrap.

Be careful about putting black hats and white hats on people – you never know when they are going to change hats.

My morning in Montgomery was one of the more memorial moments in my life.

They had built a special inclined ramp to the podium for Wallace. He was wheeled in to polite applause. This was no redneck audience. The audience was made up primarily of black teachers. Whites were bitterly opposed to “race mixing” in integrated schools.

It took grit for George Wallace to tell that audience how wrong he had been, how much damage he had done in his quest for public office. He told them he was fighting for much better funding for public schools but it was an uphill battle and he needed their help.

His voice was still powerful and his apology resonated through the auditorium. Tears streamed down his cheeks. Others in the audience began to weep. It was a gut-wrenching moment in which love and truth were joined.

There was thunderous applause, then a powerful surge of teachers toward the podium. He took hugs and shook hands, signed autographs and touched

hands until his aides finally broke it up, wheeled him off, and I was introduced.

While the audience was being quieted, I dashed out of my seat to the wheelchair being propelled toward the back. I shook his hand and thanked him. His eyes were still brimming with tears, he smiled a wan smile, obviously wrung out from the ordeal. He made no reply and his aides moved him out.

I told the teachers of my dislike for Wallace and how I had greeted him so resolutely in Tulsa, that we had quite a few cancellations. My publisher, who had been out of town, was none too happy with such an unvarnished editorial. He preferred a stiletto to a meat ax.

When George Wallace died on Sept. 13 at 79, the nation’s mawkish television industry repeatedly re-ran that film clip of him calling for “segregation forever.”

Some say the attempted assassination that left him paralyzed was his epiphany. Whatever brought his conversion, it was genuine. He became the best friend minorities and the poor ever had in Alabama. Blacks overwhelmingly voted for his re-election as governor.

He was a champion of improved public education for all of the state’s children. Most whites who could afford it had moved their kids to “Christian” schools and private education. Whites had continued to dominate Alabama local politics, defeating hundreds of bond issues, leaving the schools in terrible disrepair.

History will always remember him standing in that schoolhouse door. Not me. I will always remember him as one of God’s lost sheep who was found – heaven’s most prized possession.

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Voters Want Tax Cut Delayed Or Canceled

BY GENE PERRY

A new poll shows that 60% of Oklahoma voters support delaying or canceling the income tax cut scheduled for 2016, and only 33% still want the tax cut to go forward while the state has a large budget shortfall.

Before hearing any other information about the tax cut, 62% of Oklahoma voters said Oklahoma has cut the state income tax too much or the right amount, compared to just 27% who said it has not been cut enough.

At the same time, a very large majority [74%] said they think Oklahoma is not spending enough on education funding.

The poll of 500 Oklahoma registered voters was commissioned by Oklahoma Policy Institute and conducted by nationally-respected opinion research firm Global Strategy Group.

"The poll shows that the conversation at the Capitol has become far removed from what Oklahoma voters want," said OKPolicy Executive Director David Blatt. "By moving forward with an unpopular tax cut and talking about more cuts to education, our legislators are ignoring the citizens they are supposed to represent."

Large majorities of Democrats [70%] and Independents [68%] and a plurality of Republicans [47%] opposed allowing the tax cut to go forward amid a budget shortfall. Opposition grows even larger [29% support/64% oppose overall] when voters learn that "over 40% of Oklahomans will not receive a tax cut at all, the average reduction for middle-income families will be \$31, and the largest tax cuts will go to the wealthiest Oklahoma households."

On a survey question that has been asked for the past four years, belief that "low personal income tax rates" are most important to attract businesses to Oklahoma has dropped to a new low of 20%, compared to 68% who say "an educated and well trained workforce" is most important.

Majorities also supported several other proposals for closing Oklahoma's budget shortfall this year.

Among budget options presented in the survey, the strongest support [63% support/29% oppose] was for accepting federal funds to expand health coverage for low-income adults, which has been estimated to save the state \$450 million over the next 10 years.

Adopting combined corporate reporting to prevent

multi-state corporations from shifting profits out-of-state for tax purposes also received majority support, with the largest support for this idea coming from Republicans and conservatives.

A plurality favored ending the double deduction tax break that lets Oklahomans who claim itemized deductions to deduct their state income taxes paid from their state income taxes.

"The takeaway is that Oklahoma lawmakers have popular, sensible options to close the budget shortfall while avoiding damaging cuts to services," said Blatt. "I hope more Oklahomans will speak out to end this disconnect between what the people want and what the Legislature is doing."

Global Strategy Group is a U.S. public affairs and research firm with clients that include Fortune 100 companies and national political leaders, associations and nonprofits. The survey was conducted Mar. 26-29 with 500 registered voters in Oklahoma. The results have a margin of error of +/-4.4%, and care has been taken to ensure the geographic and demographic divisions of the expected electorate are properly represented based on past voter turnout statistics.

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

There's More To State's Budget Than Meets Eye

BY JOE DORMAN

I have watched with great interest the budget discussions occurring inside the state Capitol. Not surprisingly, the number of press releases significantly decreased this year since it is not an election year and the news has rarely been good.

The state's annual budget for appropriations has recently been around \$7 billion, but that is decreasing. In January, it was announced the state would face a \$611 million budget shortfall and this is expected to grow larger.

This is partly a result of reduced production from the energy sector, layoffs and the decrease of income tax collections, and reduced sales tax collections since Oklahomans must make necessary cuts to their lifestyles. Recent tax cuts implemented will also factor into collections.

An income tax cut trigger was met to implement a permanent reduction of a quarter percent. This

translates into roughly \$125 million less for the annual state budget. Economists suggest this amount infused back into the economy usually generates spending and allows for other tax collections, so the actual cut is estimated to be 50% of that amount in a best case scenario. This means a cut of \$125 million will in reality be roughly \$60 million reduced from each future budget.

In contrast, multiple fee increases have passed, providing limited dollars to targeted programs which often cover shortfalls in state agencies. These are essentially targeted tax increases, but by legal definition, fee increases are interpreted as being different than a tax to allow them to occur.

I also find it ironic, and sometimes hypocritical, that many legislators wholeheartedly endorse tax cuts, but support fee increases and tax credits. Tax credits either give taxpayer dollars from the budget to businesses or reduce their tax burden.

In other words, funding state programs that benefit people is bad, but subsidizing pet projects with taxpayer dollars is fine. Some credits legitimately provide incentives for increasing jobs, but many are simply a form of corporate welfare.

With this year's shortfall, we will see cuts to almost every agency and program. It is unlikely new monies will be spent on any programs. I suspect there will be no pay raises for state employees and educators, no cost of living increase for retirees, and no additional repairs for roads or prisons.

Many pundits view a shortfall as an ideal time to make cuts to what they view as a bloated government budget. Few of these critics actually pinpoint suggestions along with this criticism.

Rarely will you hear a person who says we need to reduce the size of government actually provide a valid suggestion for elimination. Even when they do suggest something, it is usually one example that is a fraction of the budget.

Federal funds significantly prop up the Oklahoma budget. The percent of our budget coming from the feds went from 29% in 2001 to 36% in 2012. Federal money per person went from \$1,022 in 2001 to \$1,963 in 2012, according to the Census Bureau.

Oklahoma has been willing to accept federal education, transportation, disaster assistance and other health care funds, but refused to implement Medicaid expansion. Expansion covers persons slightly above the current Medicaid rate, generally considered the working poor.

More than 180,000 Oklahomans in minimum wage jobs would qualify and the feds provide 90% coverage of these costs. The savings will far surpass this 10% cost share with improvements to health, less time off work, and maintaining medical jobs across Oklahoma.

Last year, legislators raided agency reserve funds to reduce the \$180 million shortfall we were experiencing then. It has been publicized this will occur again this cycle. Additional dollars will also likely be drawn

from the Rainy Day Fund, the state's savings account.

The raided accounts helped avoid significant cuts to agencies, but left a strain on others, such as the Health Care Authority. Many healthcare providers reduced services or increased fees to Oklahomans due to reimbursement cuts.

With an economy that is increasingly stressed, more will qualify for a variety of government assistance, such as unemployment, which is up in 76 of our 77 counties. Funding for these assistance programs is unlikely to increase.

Budget negotiations most often involve taking the previous budget and tinkering with programs these few people feel are important or are the most politically relevant. Very little review by the Legislature actually goes into what is being spent by an agency except when the occasional audit is conducted following a scandal, or when an audit is mandated by state or federal law.

No mandate for better practices was included in a new law, SB 189, that simply changed the reference from zero-based budgets, already on the books but not followed, to performance-informed. Changing the name will not fix the problem.

When you review the proposal to modify how Oklahoma government changes the "business as usual" under the website <http://www.ok.gov/okstatestat/>, you will find five topics covering 50 subjects and 160 objectives. I challenge you to find a single item on this list that will require less money to attain that worthy goal. I also challenge you to name one major government program that has been eliminated in recent years.

There is legislation being considered that Gov. Fallin and I both endorsed in our race last year. I worked with Lt. Gov. Jari Askins years ago to set up parameters for the Legislature to spend an entire session on the budget and the next session on policy issues. This has been adapted into current legislation and I feel this is a significant improvement in the system.

A pure zero-based review is impractical for budget limitations, but a mandated performance-based model which eliminates duplication is much more attainable and affordable. Almost all federal programs are audited, so legislators would simply need access to those reviews. I worked with state Auditor Gary Jones to encourage performance and financial audits for agencies. With detailed audits, the up-front expense will generate long-term savings and show where change is needed.

Ultimately, the answer is already in place: elected officials should do their jobs and spend time thoroughly reviewing agency finances in public hearings before passing a state budget. It will take much work, but hopefully they will soon have an entire session to do that job.

Joe Dorman, a Rush Springs Democrat, represented District 65 in the Oklahoma House of Representatives for 12 years. He was the 2014 Democratic nominee for governor.

Five-Count Indictment Against The 55th Oklahoma Legislature

BY CAL HOBSON

Applications for these coveted positions will be taken for three days only at the Oklahoma State Election Board. The work is part-time but in need of your attention; however, just occasional attendance will suffice.

The flexible schedule will encompass four days a week from February to May annually. However, you will be paid as though you are employed full-time.

Additionally per diem and mileage are authorized whenever and wherever you travel. Train, plane, car, boat, bus, elephant or donkey ... your employers, known as taxpayers, don't seem to care about the mode of transportation. Also of little interest to them is your destination, the hotel preference, purpose of the excursion, how long you plan to stay, etc. The only thing expected of you is to submit a claim for pay.

Enough said about travel requirements. Your eventual place of employment is in the soon-to-be extensively and expensively remodeled People's Building – the state Capitol. The new job requires little to no overtime.

However, if the unexpected does occur, meals will be catered into a private dining room located only steps from your individual, fully-computerized work station. Young, eager staffers-in-training [they are benevolently called pages] await your “finger wag” which signals you need something such as pen, paper, cup of coffee or most likely just a brief conversation to distract both of you from blusterous and babbling hysteria masquerading as debate.

For example, Rep. Kevin Calvey, R-OKC, self-identified as the most Christian of all Oklahoma Christians, recently announced to a hushed House of Representatives that he so despised Oklahoma Supreme Court justices that, were it not for his faith, he would douse his body with gasoline and fling his flaming self onto the steps of the courthouse from which the evil jurists issue their ignominious but usually affirmed opinions.

And just what legislative proposal triggered such hysterics and threatened self-immolation from the publicity-crazed Kevin? It was a bill to give the Supremes, and other judges, a 6% pay increase fully funded by court fees extracted from often impoverished lawbreakers.

Setting aside temporarily the drama and theatrics played out daily on the Senate and House floors, not only are the physical environs of your future workplace attractive but there are also many other lesser

known perks inherent in your new career.

For example, thoroughly professional non-partisan staff advisors are embedded with you and are only a convenient tweet, text, email or phone call away. These pros know their business and can be extremely helpful to newly-elected officials as you hope to be. However, except for bill drafting and the corollary research, their opinions are rarely sought. Lobbyists, special interests, bloggers and Al Gore's invention, the Internet, are now the preferred sources for information.

After a successful election in 2016, you will settle into a recently remodeled, plush private office commanded by a full-time and extremely competent executive assistant. These fountains of knowledge and experience should be treasured by you for many reasons but the most important one is: They can lengthen or shorten your political career. Unlike you, they know what the hell has gone on, is going on, and will be going on at the Capitol. The EAs complete 90% of the important work and get 0% of the credit for it with the possible exception of an occasional lobbyist-funded lunch or vase of flowers at session's end.

Meanwhile, your assigned tasks involve talking, voting, debating, occasionally listening, voting, voting and then leaving for dinner.

By now you are probably wondering what is the point of this piece of pabulum penned by the Liberal from Lexington?

Here's the point: Our current crop of meandering minstrels has fiddled away most of the session with very little to show for it. Except for two minor initiatives – those being finally authorizing a small fine for texting while driving and the creation of a prescription drug registry – not much to cheer about has made its way down the Capitol steps to the governor's office for signature.

Unfortunately, real and lasting legislative havoc has been imposed upon our children, elderly, sick, uninsured, impoverished, imprisoned and mentally unstable. Also, Oklahoma's crumbling and outdated infrastructure – roads, bridges, buildings, hospitals, classrooms, and technology systems – were never even seriously discussed, let alone resolved.

Harsh criticism, indeed, on my part. The question is, can I factually document it? I wish I couldn't but I think I can.

The provable policy indictments are enumerated below. Next year, all members of the House and half of the Senate will attempt to justify their abysmal per-

formances to Okies who actually bother voting.

To retain them or not, that is the question.

For most, the answer should be a resounding no. However, if electoral preferences signal future predilections, and they often do, next session will be similar to the last six. Once again Mary, playing the predictable role of loquacious Lucy versus gullible Charlie, will assure us that due only to her policies our future is bright. Perhaps so in her life, but for too many others, only a dim bulb of disappointment flickers in the distance.

The misdeeds I allege will be considered proven, if corrective action is not taken by the last Friday in May:

INDICTMENT NO. 1

Per capita investment in what should be our most treasured asset – an educated citizenry – now challenges good ol' Mississippi for last place among the 50 states.

Even more embarrassing, our nationally recognized School of Science and Mathematics is the only Oklahoma public school to receive not one dime of additional revenue since Gov. Mary Fallin took office. No farthing, mill or even a penny for toilet paper. Only a routine resolution was read declaring how proud lawmakers are of faculty, staff and students at OSSM.

Luckily, General Electric executives recognized the difference between perfunctory platitude and scholarly performance. In doing so, they reached out for the offering plate and donated \$400,000 to keep the lights on and learning progressing at this unique institution. Unlike our lost legislators, these private sector innovators know the value of a good education and not just its cost.

INDICTMENT NO. 2

Wanton disregard for the sick and/or uninsured should be a crime. Surely this legislative misbehavior has inflicted more pain and suffering on innocent thousands than many activities currently classified as felonious.

For no other excuse than political cowardice, leaders have refused to accept our own Medicaid expansion money. Undoubtedly this has led to the death of some and shortened the lives of many. Perhaps you feel that is an exaggeration. To obtain a free second opinion, ask any emergency room doctor, RN or LPN.

For final confirmation, sip coffee with your local funeral home director.

INDICTMENT NO. 3

All the talk about sentencing modernization was mostly just that – talk. In fact, new laws have passed that impose additional felonies, exacerbating the current crisis. Reform measures conscientiously suggested by the governor in February, with the exception of one minor proposal by Rep. Pam Peterson, R-Tulsa, were immediately put on legislative life support and only recently have quietly been given lethal injections of indifference by committee chairs.

INDICTMENT NO. 4

And Rule No. 1: When in a hole, quit digging. Our determined to dig yet fiscally-challenged gang violated both by affirming in March a giveaway tax cut scheduled to take affect January 2016 which not by accident denotes an election year.

The inevitable consequence? Previously announced deep cuts in core services will inevitably be deeper and more damaging. As our sage from the past, Alfred E. Neuman, declared, "What? Me worry?" Same song from our solons.

INDICTMENT NO. 5

Most dramatically obvious to the naked eye of missed opportunities was the leadership decision by House Speaker Jeff Hickman, R-Fairview, and Senate President Pro Tempore Brian Bingman, R-Sapulpa, to not even discuss within their caucuses the most hated four-letter word in a Republican's vocabulary: *B-o-n-d*.

Catastrophic, crazy, consequential, curious, confusing. All describe well such disregard of Oklahoma's physical needs. Don't finish the Native American Museum. To hell with the inevitable decertification of our medical examiner's shop. Safe rooms? Tornadoes surely won't hit Moore again! Dilapidated health and veteran complexes? Who cares at the Capitol?

No one, because these lawmakers are focused like laser beams on the only bond issue they've ever authorized – a complete rehab for their place of work costing at least \$120 million.

In closing, readers may be tired of or bored with my missives containing only criticisms of the goings-on at NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd. Indeed, so am I. Therefore, I pledge that in my next column I shall exude

effusively, if progressive, common sense proposals have repaired the current shortcomings.

Of course legislators have to do their part between now and May 29 – produce something, preferably some things, positive.

If they do I'll glow like a lightning bug in June. So will most of you. *Cal Hobson, a Lexington Democrat, served in the Oklahoma Legislature from 1978-2006, including one term as Senate President Pro Tempore.*

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.rsos-okc.com>

STILLWATER: Sunday morning. Call 405.372.4839

TULSA: Sunday afternoon. Call 918.743.6827

NORMAN: Sunday morning. Call 405.321.7971

KAIAMICHI WORSHIP GROUP (SE OK): Monthly.
Call 918.569.4803.

Oklahoma's [Other] Deficit – And Why It Matters

BY KATE RICHEY

As plummeting oil prices trigger layoffs in Oklahoma's oil and gas sector, the job market is beginning to receive more scrutiny from the media, elected officials, and business leaders. Yet there was reason to be concerned about the state's employment picture long before oil prices started to dip. We just haven't been paying close enough attention.

If you followed the economic news and the press releases of elected officials over the past seven years, you might have gotten the impression that in Oklahoma we experienced "recession light." But popular talking points about Oklahoma's economic resiliency and a Teflon-tough job market have cloaked an underlying and ongoing structural deficit in employment across all sectors.

Our statewide unemployment rate [currently 3.9%] is deceptively low because the official unemployment rate statistic does not count everyone who is out of work. The official unemployment rate excludes the following by definition: the longest-term unemployed, discouraged job seekers, people who have dropped out of the formal labor market entirely, and people currently working part-time jobs who are really in need of full time work.

When all of those excluded workers are included, Oklahoma's annual average unemployment rate for 2014 nearly doubles – from 4.5% to 8.6%.

But even that more accurate measure fails to adequately capture the extent of unemployment. First, because of built-in survey bias that leads to underreporting [in short, people are ashamed to admit that they can't find work]. And second, because the availability of employment has always varied significantly across Oklahoma, with some counties reporting much higher unemployment than others.

One way to bring clarity regarding the overall health of our labor market is to ask a simple question: is job creation keeping pace with population growth? In Oklahoma, as in most places in the U.S. since the Great Recession, the answer is no.

As of January, Oklahoma had added 62,100 total net jobs since the early days of the recession in December 2007. That's better than some states, but it's not enough.

Oklahoma needed to add 136,400 net jobs to keep up with our growing working age population, which grew 8.5% during the same period. That means Oklahoma maintains a jobs deficit of 74,300.

If we care about full employment, we need to be fo-

cused on all sectors and all parts of the state. Job losses in the oil and gas sector are bad news, both for the people out of work and for the state's economy. But these are temporary job losses caused by price shocks – those jobs will come back.

Can we say the same about the thousands of jobs lost during the Great Recession, and the thousands more lost to stagnant job growth since? No. And that's not good news for Oklahoma workers.

Kate Richey is Oklahoma Assets Network [OAN] coordinator at 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>.

Jackass Of The Month



After a long absence, The Observer revives its Jackass Of The Month award. This month's recipient is state Rep. Kevin Calvey, who exposed his gluteus maximus with a rant in which he swore he'd set himself ablaze at the state Supreme Court's front door to underscore his opposition to abortion – were it not for the fact his religion prohibits suicide. As Will Rogers put it, "There are adults running governments who shouldn't be allowed to play with matches."

FIGHTING FOR LOCAL CONTROL



DAVID VS. GOLIATH

Stillwater Residents Battle To Keep Big Oil From Drilling Wherever It Damn Well Pleases

BY GRANT SAMMS

It is the silence before a catastrophe that is most damning. That type of silence hung thick in the warm air over Clark, WY on Aug. 11. Late that day in 2006, the Crosby 25-3 gas well, in the process of being drilled, suffered a catastrophic blowout.

Firefighters rushed up and down the valley ordering residents to evacuate as a plume of petroleum particulate poured into the air while chemical laced drilling fluid spilled into nearby creeks and wells. Homeowners experienced severe respiratory distress and vomiting as they were forced to evacuate their homes for 2½ days. Almost nine years later, the cause of this blowout remains unknown.

Accidents like this are not uncommon. A 2009 blowout in Louisiana saw two dozen homes evacuated and one worker killed. Texas has documented 80 such blowouts since 2011; many of them resulting in

evacuations and acute illness.

Given this brief and recent history, it should not be a surprise that the residents of Stillwater have recently sought a new ordinance that would increase the minimum distance that well operators must maintain from houses, schools, and hospitals. But this push for increased regulation has been met with stiff resistance and legal threats from the oil and gas industry.

An industry lobbying group known as the Consumer Energy Alliance mounted a campaign that encourages everyone across the nation tell the City Council of Stillwater to vote no on this local ordinance. The claims that they make sound dire. "No more jobs! Increasing poverty!" Most importantly, they say, no evidence exists for these new restrictions.

The fact that the industry so disingenuously tells citizens that their activities have no negative effects

FIGHTING FOR LOCAL CONTROL

should serve as the strongest warning against that very claim. In reality, the peer reviewed, scientific literature is filled with evidence from economists, doctors, organic chemists, sociologists, and other professionals that cast serious doubt on every claim made by the industry.

The primary benefit touted by the industry, as all Oklahomans have heard, is that economic benefits from oil and gas activities are all that keep our state's head above water.

While it is undeniable that where there is taxable activity there will be revenue, the economic numbers put forth by the industry-funded and -staffed Oklahoma Energy Resources Board should be doubted. Analysis by independent economists has shown estimations the industry uses to describe its economic impacts often lead to tremendously inflated figures.

Pennsylvania economist Thomas Kinnaman analyzed industry-funded economic reports from Pennsylvania and Arkansas and found that the reports assumed that all royalty payments were spent, in their entirety, in the state in which they were paid out. Additionally, these reports assumed all the money was spent in the year in which payment was made.

However, behavioral economists already know that when mineral owners receive large, windfall payments they typically save almost all of it or use it to pay down debts. Additionally, many of Oklahoma's mineral rights owners reside out of state.

The assumption that every dollar paid out to leaseholders is fully and immediately funneled into the local economy is simply fallacious. This failure of assumption can be seen in analyses from Texas, Pennsylvania, and Arkansas which all found that the introduction of oil and gas activities in those regions failed to raise median household income.

In short, there is no measurable trickle-down effect.

Secondly, the industry claims oil and gas operations create many jobs around the state. As economist Jannette Barth explains, these numbers are also fraught with inflation.

The industry often prefers to fill drilling jobs with migrant petroleum workers who come in from out of state and typically send their wages back home. The oil and gas industry also has a tendency to count all people they hire or contract as a job they have created. This claim is non-sensical, however, as 10 pipe installers who laid irrigation pipes last week and gas pipes this week in no way count as 10 new jobs. Pre-existing jobs have simply been redirected to an oil and gas task. But in the eager eye of the industry, they created those jobs out of nothing.

The final claim that the oil and gas industry makes in regard to the proposed Stillwater restriction is that there is no scientific proof that such a setback is necessary. If the industry were in any way serious about claims that they work for the utmost safety of the

communities in which they operate, they would know that this statement simply is not true.

Theo Colborn and his colleagues published a report of 353 known chemicals used in the drilling and recovery processes of hydraulically fractured wells and found that three-quarters of them had a known toxicological effect on human health.

Studies from Pennsylvania and Colorado show that concentrations of ground level ozone and volatile organic compounds within a half-mile of drilling operations are many times above safe levels. A study from Yale found those living within one-mile of a hydraulically fracture well were significantly more likely to suffer skin, breathing, and neurological issues known to be caused by chemicals used in the drilling and recovery process. The proposed Stillwater ordinance is not even at the half-mile minimum that the science would suggest.

It's true that petroleum is a deep part of Oklahoma's heritage. It has been since before we were granted statehood. It is a reliable source of income for many people.

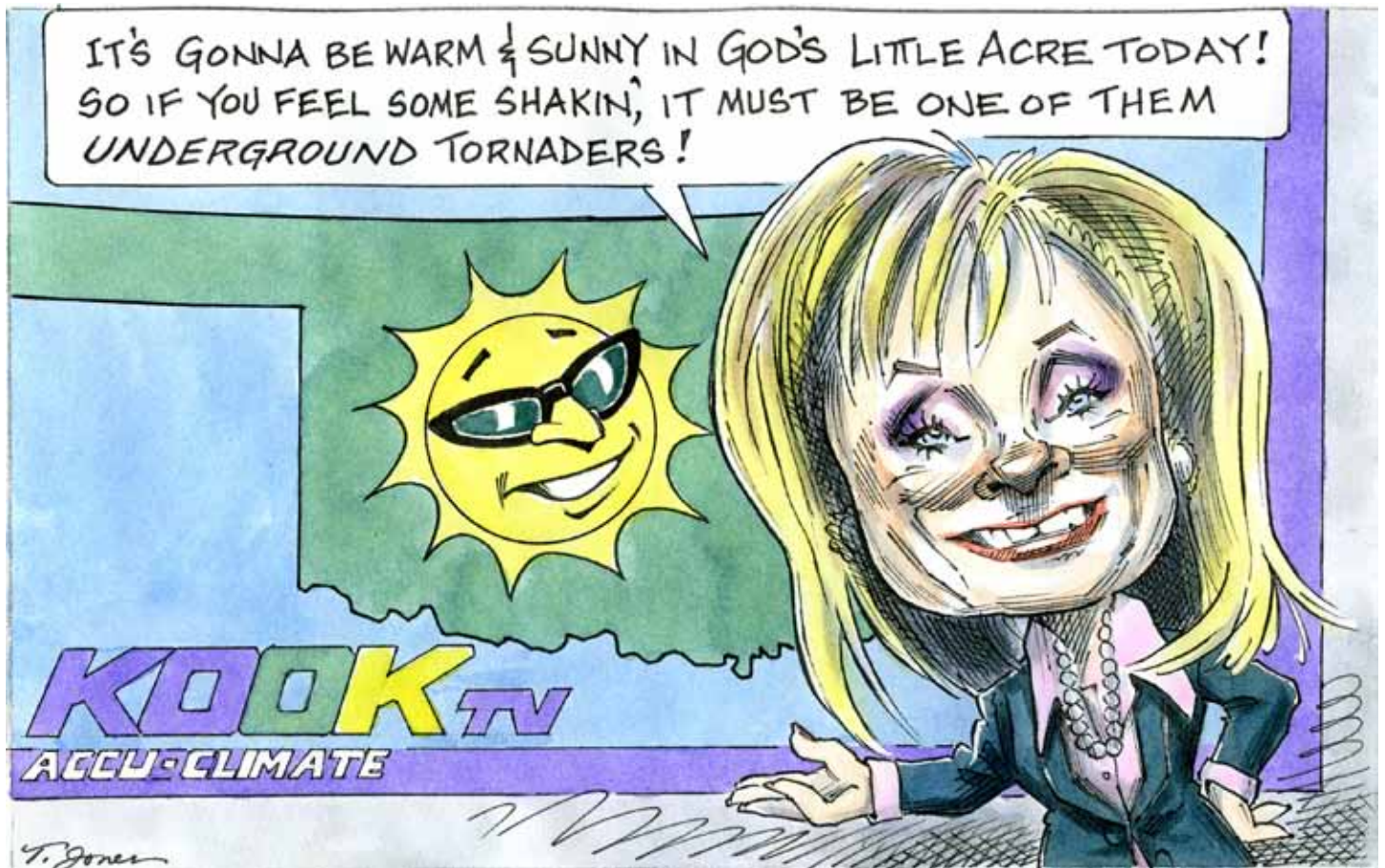
It is time for the industry to admit to the reality of the situation they cause to those living near their operations. That is, petroleum activities are beneficial to a small minority of people and deleterious to those nearby who never see a form of redress.

If the industry would like to hold true to its oft-touted promise that it cares about the safety of communities, they should come to the table and have an honest discussion about the impacts they knowingly have. Until that happens, we must all be cognizant that their promises of concern ring hollow, reflecting a selfish and greedy tone that sweeps across our state from Capitol to City Council chamber.

Grant Samms is a graduate student studying Environmental Sociology at Oklahoma State University.



FIGHTING FOR LOCAL CONTROL



After Hiding Truth For Eight Years, State Earthquake Response Still Lags

BY BOB JACKMAN

Call it Quake-Gate.

The troubled Oklahoma Geological Survey last month finally acknowledged what nationally recognized seismicity experts have known and proclaimed for years: Oklahoma's swarm earthquakes are man-made ... by oil-men.

It turns out the OGS' director and senior geo-scientists knew it as well, but kept silent for eight years – persuaded or ordered not to tell residents of Oklahoma's 16 quake-battered counties, according to an EnergyWire investigative report published April 27.

As the frequency and magnitude of the quakes increases, shaking homes and rattling nerves, state experts ignore the ticking "Big One" disaster clock.

Worse, the Oklahoma Corporation Commission's solutions are just more of the same "feedlot ground cover" that Oklahomans have been fed for last eight

years.

The three-member, statewide elected panel that regulates the oil and gas industry recently ordered class II disposal well owners in the 16 counties to cease injecting in the lower basement [granite] rocky zone. Plus, the OCC ordered such wells to seal off their deeper perforations, and create and use new higher perforations in the Arbuckle formation for new wastewater disposal zones.

This solution is not smart geo-technical seismicity prevention. Here's why:

It is important to understand the Arbuckle formation and lower older Cambrian granite are often hugely interconnected by Arbuckle's measured high porosity and permeability – plus they share numerous lengthy ancient faults.

The OCC plan fails to recognize the "shared-zone

FIGHTING FOR LOCAL CONTROL

faults” which become conduits causing earthquakes when lubricated with briny wastewaters produced by disposal wells.

FYI: Faults in the Midwest primarily originate upward from Cambrian and Pre-Cambrian basement to – and often through – many younger overlaying sedimentary formations like the statewide Arbuckle.

The number of hours or days or months for petroleum disposal wells’ high volumes and high-pressured wastewater to migrate into the nearest shared fault [activating earthquakes] or simply flow down to faults depends on the Arbuckle’s thickness and porosity below each disposal well’s surface location.

Moratoriums on disposal wells in Texas, Arkansas, Colorado and Ohio stopped their induced earthquakes.

Kansas recently imposed less robust measures on two counties next to northern Oklahoma – disposal wells must immediately taper down volumes to a maximum allowable 8,000 barrels per day, and use lower max injection pressure of 500 psi or face penalties up to \$10,000 per day. [See KS OCC Docket # 15-CONS-770-CMSC March 19, 2015]. We will see if they succeed!

The Oklahoma Corporation Commission’s so-called solutions do not factor in geoscience proving the interconnectedness of the basement zone and Arbuckle formation. Injecting in the Arbuckle is likely to have the same earthquake inducing and triggering effects as disposing directly into the Cambrian-faulted basement.

Also, the OCC’s action omits any restrictions on its current disposal well limits – up to 50,000 barrels of wastewater per day. They’re still approving high injection pressures up to 2,500 psi.

Seismicity experts agree these are the two main causes of induced, triggered earthquakes in Oklahoma – they have activated ancient faults ... by the thousands.

Oklahoma permits the nation’s highest disposal well volumes and injection pressures, resulting in massive, ongoing subterranean rock lubricating fracturing. Earthquake-making, house-breaking mistakes brought to you by Gov. Mary Fallin and her Big Oil partners.

Must we endure more years of damaging earthquakes with Big Oil hiding behind their OCC-controlled smoke screen while thousands of Oklahoma homeowners watch their foundations hammered, wall cracks grow, and tilted doors that close no more?

Skeptics are urged to consult outside of Oklahoma seismicity experts and independent petroleum structural geologists or watch the April 24 Chinese TV-produced story about Oklahoma earthquakes at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G69SnUvOUfw&feature=youtu.be>

With petroleum industry campaign donations keep-

ing regulators at bay and oil and gas production taxes low, we the people are paying dearly for their earthquakes.

Bob Jackman is a Tulsa-based geologist.

Time For Solutions

The number of earthquakes in Oklahoma has soared. In 2014 there were 585 or three times as many as California. So far in 2015 we are on pace for 800 to 900.

Oklahoma Corporation Commission regulates oil and gas. The three members of the commission, the governor, and head of Oklahoma Geological Survey have said more information was needed before declaring a connection between injection wells and earthquakes. The U.S. Geological Survey for years has stated there was a connection between the two.

Deny or avoid were the two plays most Oklahoma officials turned to when the word earthquakes was mentioned. It appears Oklahoma had everything under control until outside media began to print the facts along with a lawsuit representing citizens in the Prague area following a 5.7 quake in November 2011.

The scrutiny increases with a news crew from South Korea coming next week and investigators from Washington, DC asking about fracking and earthquakes last week. The oil hub at Cushing stores 58 million barrels of oil. Cushing is in the earthquake zone. Results could spell disaster.

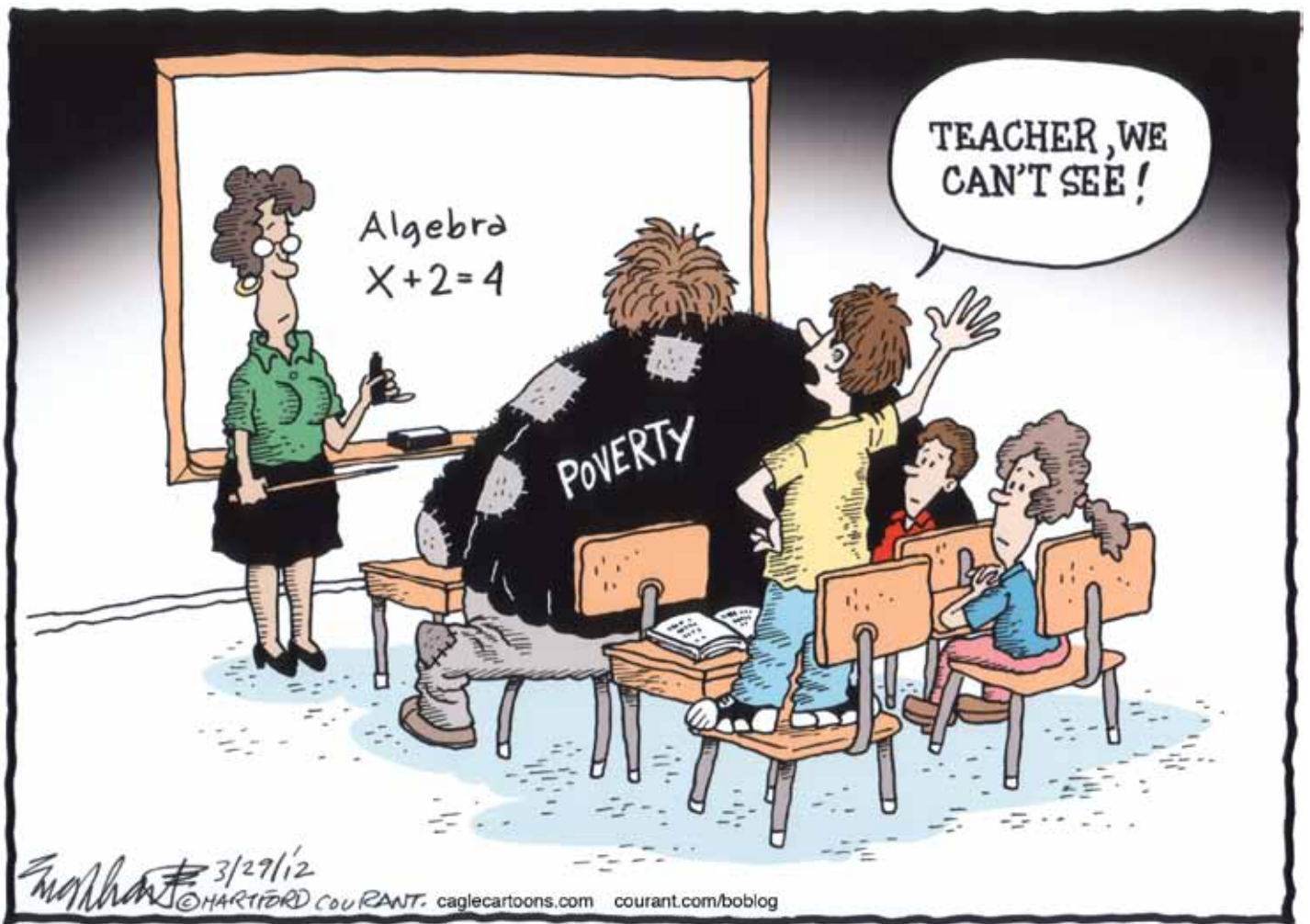
Truth finally surfaces. A press release by the Oklahoma Geological Survey states OGS believes many of the earthquakes in Oklahoma are triggered by waste water disposal wells. Fallin the same day launched earthquakes.ok.gov, dedicated to sharing earthquake information. The denial phase is over – it’s solution time.

In her press release Gov. Fallin said, “Oklahoma state agencies are already taking action to address this issue and protect homeowners.”

Governor, your concern for homeowners is refreshing news. You can begin helping without leaving the Capitol. Go to room 408 on the House side and visit with the legislative assistant. The Prague earthquake cost of damage to her home and property exceeded \$100,000.

Oklahoma Geological Survey has reminded me of the chemist who blew the lab up. Leaving the building engulfed in flames, the chemist yelled to his co-worker “who said a decimal point didn’t mean anything.” OGS has found the decimal point, make sure they put it in the right place.

This editorial first appeared in the Southeast Times newspaper in Idabel. It was written by publisher and former state Sen. Jerry Ellis.



We Have A Choice When It Comes To Public Education

BY JOHN THOMPSON

The New York Times' Nicholas Kristof is the latest supporter of school reform to acknowledge [April 23 column] that the market-driven movement has peaked. He then cites Oklahoma when calling for a new science-based approach to school improvement.

The entire nation should listen to Kristof's wisdom. We in Oklahoma City, especially, should think about what we could accomplish by ending our bitter education civil war and focusing on high-quality early education.

Kristof describes competition-driven school improvement as an idealistic movement where "armies of college graduates joined Teach for America. Zillions invested in charter schools. Liberals and conservatives, holding their noses and agreeing on

nothing else, cooperated to proclaim education the civil rights issue of our time."

But now, these reform "brawls have left everyone battered and bloodied, from reformers to teachers unions." Kristof observes that "the zillionaires are bruised. The idealists are dispirited. ... The Common Core curriculum is now an orphan, with politicians vigorously denying paternity." Those expensive campaigns have left K-12 education "an exhausted, bloodsoaked battlefield. It's Agincourt, the day after."

Kristof provides three reasons why we should "refocus some reformist passions on early childhood." He starts with the scientific evidence that "early childhood is a crucial period when the brain is most malleable, when interventions are most cost-effective for at-risk kids."

The internationally renowned journalist knows from experience that “helping teenagers and adults is tough when they’ve dropped out of school, had babies, joined gangs, compiled arrest records or self-medicated.”

But he has seen the benefits of high-quality early education in Oklahoma where:

I once met two little girls, ages three and four, whose great-grandmother had her first child at 13, whose grandmother had her first at 15, whose mom had her first at 13 and now has four children by three fathers. These two little girls will break that cycle, I'm betting, because they [along with the relative caring for them] are getting help from an outstanding early childhood program called Educare. Those two little girls have a shot at opportunity.

Kristof could have also had Oklahoma City in mind when he explained the second reason why it is time to find a new school reform approach. He notes that reformers picked “the low-hanging fruit” of the K-12 world.

While we should applaud the successes of the best charters, the fact remains that they accept only as many of the highest-challenge students as they can handle. This means that OKCPS neighborhood schools are left with even more intense concentrations of generational poverty. The unintended result is that our traditional public schools are overwhelmed by unmanageable numbers of children who have endured extreme trauma.

Third, Kristof cites Oklahoma as evidence that early education is the most politically viable option. He notes, “New York City liberals have embraced pre-school, but so have Oklahoma conservatives. Teacher unions will flinch at some of what I say, but they have been great advocates for early education. Congress can’t agree on much, but Republicans and Democrats just approved new funding for home visitation for low-income toddlers.”

Kristof does not criticize so-called “corporate reformers,” or the Obama Administration for imposing the entire test-driven school improvement package on every classroom in the diverse nation.

In order to persuade Oklahoma City to refocus, however, it is probably necessary to explain why [to take just one example] the tens of millions of federal School Improvement Grant [SIG] dollars have failed to improve our schools. Otherwise, patrons might buy into the latest national reform gamble and try to “blow up” the system in order to save it.

[OKC had one SIG success, but as with most of the country, most SIG schools failed to improve; nationally, one-third of SIG schools produced declines in student performance.]

The SIG was supposed to be based on the Gates-funded The Turnaround Challenge. It explained why it is impossible to turnaround the most challenging schools – like the OKCPS schools that received \$5 million SIG grants – without first creating the types of socio-emotional supports that are provided by Educa-

re and the best early childhood programs. SIG rules required schools to rush ahead without laying that foundation.

Oklahoma City was as professional as other districts in following the game plan imposed by the federal government. We did our best to build a skyscraper on sand.

The billions of dollars wasted on the SIG, the RttT, VAMs, and the rest of the alphabet soup of test-driven school reform are gone. We are back to trying to hold our traditional public schools together with the meager \$8,000 per student that is appropriated in our state.

But, like Nick Kristof, we can learn lessons from those failed experiments. We should first ask what we could have accomplished if tens of millions of these federal dollars had been invested in Educare. We should then pull together, leverage our local resources and national grant money in order to start anew – this time concentrating on whatever it takes to provide high quality early education.

The bad news is that a huge body of research explains why No Child Left Behind and the test, sort, and punish policies of the last dozen years were doomed in terms of improving Oklahoma City secondary schools that serve the census tracts characterized as having “extreme poverty.”

The good news is that we only have 13 of those tracts. With the money wasted on the SIG, we could have scaled up Educare to the point where all of our highest-poverty neighborhoods were provided the best possible science-based interventions.

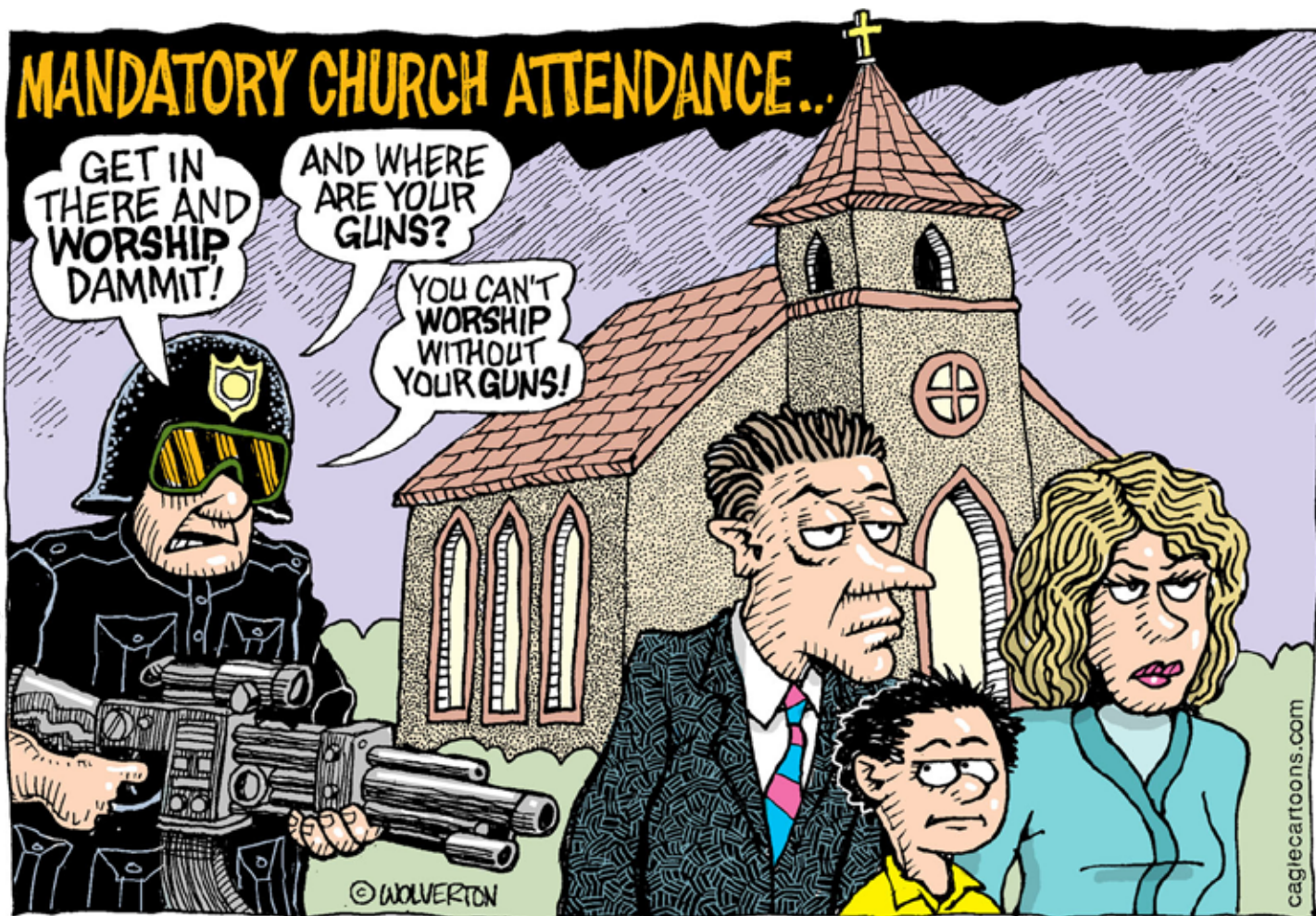
It also would have been the single most effective policy for promoting Oklahoma City as a place for business investment and to raise families.

There is no point in crying over the spilled dollars that went into K-12 reforms. Neither is there a point to rehashing the many reasons why the battle between top-down test-driven reformers and educators became so bitter. Patrons have seen the damage done by test-driven reward and punishment policies.

And we have a choice in Oklahoma City and the rest of the nation. We can continue to starve our schools and to fund ever-more-expensive political battles, or we could pull together in a public-private partnership.

As Oklahoma competes in the global marketplace, we have a choice. Do we want to continue to read about ourselves as the national press covers our violence, racial and social conflict, and our political squabbles? Or do we want the type of publicity that would come from pulling together and fully investing in Educare and the other proven policies cited in Kristof’s influential commentary?

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



Dominionist AG Vows To Protect School Proselytizing

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

It's a sad day when Oklahoma school superintendents are better off trashing a letter from the state's attorney general than seriously reviewing it.

Of course, not every attorney general is Scott Pruitt, the state's current lawyer-in-chief who sorely needs remedial coursework in U.S. history and the U.S. Constitution.

Last month, Pruitt effectively advised public school leaders he has their backs when it comes to on-campus Christian proselytizing, an exhortation sent just after a dust-up over a Duncan third-grade teacher distributing Gideon Bibles to her students.

"Few things are as sacred and as fundamental to Oklahomans as the constitutional rights of free speech and the free exercise of religion," the attorney general opined.

"It is a challenging time in our country for those who believe in religious liberty. Our religious freedoms are under constant attack from a variety of groups who seek to undermine our constitutional rights and threaten our founding principles."

Hardly. What's really under attack is the fundamental American principle of separation of church and state. And in Oklahoma, it's Pruitt leading the assault, not only threatening our freedom of, and freedom from, religion, but also seeking to rewrite history.

Pruitt is a poster boy for Dominion theology, a movement guided by preachers and politicians who promote the canard that America was founded as a Christian nation. Their goal: Transform government into a Christian theocracy.

The problem is, America's founders weren't any-

thing like the uber-fundamentalists Pruitt and Co. portray. Most were deists. Thomas Jefferson created his own Bible, excising Jesus' miracles and the resurrection from what dominionists would view as the literal, divinely inspired word of God.

So, now, Pruitt stands poised and ready to spend taxpayer dollars to support public educators sharing Christianity with captive audiences.

Who does he think he is? The second coming of Roy Moore, the Alabama Supreme Court justice infamous for thumbing his nose at the Constitution?

You don't need a scientific statewide poll to know the vast majority of Oklahomans view themselves as Christians. All you have to do is drive through most towns – churches are everywhere.

Churches of different stripes.

There are too many Christian denominations and sects to count. And don't forget the thousands of Jews, Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus – just to name a few – practicing religion in Oklahoma, as well.

The diversity suggests Oklahomans, like their fellow Americans, refuse to permit one religious sect to dominate. It's in our DNA to oppose an official state religion.

What Pruitt seeks – his brand of Christianity melded officially into public life – isn't going to happen, even in a buckle on the Bible Belt like Oklahoma.

But it could cost the taxpayers dearly, thousands if not millions of dollars squandered on futile, unwinnable and wholly unnecessary court battles, fueled by crackpot conspiracies that a War Against Christianity is underway in America.

And it could backfire on the would-be Christian theocrats by throwing open the doors to other religious or anti-religious groups seeking equal access to taxpayer-financed settings – from monuments on the state Capitol grounds to materials distributed in public school classrooms.

Already, for example, a Satanist church in Oklahoma City has asked permission to distribute materials at the Duncan school where the Gideon Bibles were given to students. Hindus want to erect a statue of Lord Hanuman on the Capitol grounds, presumably near the Ten Commandments monument.

Pruitt's main goal should be protecting the rights of all Oklahomans, not advancing a religious agenda that promotes exclusivity. He is playing with fire, but it's Oklahoma that could get burned.

'Bible' State Diversity

BY KRISTI CRUTCHFIELD COX

When I first heard about a Duncan Public Schools elementary teacher handing out Bibles, I felt both anger and a sense of dread. Passions were incited, logic pushed sideways, and reactions were evident.

Appignani Humanist Legal Center sent a letter to the school system, enlightening them to Supreme Court rulings. Facebook became a battleground of both those professing persecution, touting a need for the Bible to return to school and those who had a firm understanding of the basis for separation of church and state as necessary to protect everyone, religious or not.

The question that has been buried: what would the reaction have been if the teacher handed out Book of Shadows, The Satanic Bible, Tipitika, or The God Delusion? Would they have defended the teacher who wanted to hand out the Torah around Yom Kippur, Judaism Day of Atonement, or the Koran on Milad un Nabi, birthday of the Prophet Muhammad?

Would they welcome the introduction of divergent teachings from their child's third grade teacher? Would our Attorney General protect those religious freedoms?

Changes things a bit when the book and belief being touted isn't the one you teach in your home.

I sent the mother a series of questions to better understand beyond media hype and emotional responses. The transcript, abbreviated, follows – my ques-

tions are in italics, her responses in regular type:

On this particular day, Thursday, the eve of Good Friday, my son called me at work and said, "Mrs. Mackey gave me a Bible today at school. It's the New Testament?" [The tone in his voice expressed a question and I could tell he wasn't even really sure what it was] I told my son we would discuss that when we got home. I have been told that the school is asserting that a priest brought the Bibles on career day and left them.

What were his feelings? Did this challenge any ideas or prompt discussions of religions in home?

I asked my son to tell me exactly what happened. He said that Mrs. Mackey stated that she had a Bible for anyone that wanted one. All of the other kids got up and went to her desk to get one, and he wasn't sure what to do, so he got up to get one, too.

I asked him if he knew what it was and he stated, "Mrs. Mackey called it the Holy Bible, so I thought it was a good thing." He is so innocent and naïve. If Mrs. Mackey told him the sky was purple with orange polka dots, he wouldn't question it. I didn't push it. I left it at that.

What are your family's beliefs?

We believe you should always do the right thing. Not for hopes of heaven or fear of hell. Do the right thing because it's the right thing to do. We believe people should be regarded on who they are as human beings, not because of religious affiliation or belief.

We just try to be good people because it makes us feel good inside. We have discussed with him why we don't believe, while trying to keep the conversation at an age appropriate level. Respecting each other's views on the subject. If he changes his mind later, as he gets older and understands more, we will support him 100%.

What steps did you take and what results emerged?

I posted a rant about it on Facebook. Facebook is my venting place. Didn't say anything bad about the teacher, just that I wasn't happy about her handing out Bibles in class.

I messaged a friend on Facebook for advice. Take it back to the school? Throw it away? She suggested contacting the American Humanist Association. An attorney from the AHA offered to write a letter to the school district on my behalf. So I said OK. She sent me a copy of the letter and it didn't mention any names and stated what the Supreme Court has ruled numerous times "that this is an infringement of the First Amendment of The Constitution and we ask that you instruct your teachers and staff that these kinds of infringements are not OK and if this is not corrected they could face litigation."

I never in a million years thought it would go as far as it did. The letter was emailed to the school on Saturday, giving the district seven days to respond. The district responded on Friday stating that they would correct the actions of the teachers and staff. Both the attorney and I are very happy with that result.

Do you feel terminating the teacher is the goal or are you hoping for a conversation and mutual respect so that a learning situation might occur?

I DO NOT, ABSOLUTELY DO NOT want the teacher fired. Teachers are too valuable a resource and hiring and training new teachers takes precious time and money away from the school district. I have not signed the petition for teacher firing and I have spoken out against it.

I feel that the letter from the attorney and the response from the district regarding the situation has been addressed and resolved. It is my hope that the district makes good on their commitment and it doesn't happen again.

Has the reaction from the community felt supportive or hostile?

Reaction from the community has been divided. Some have been hostile. I think this reaction was due to fear, like the community "feared" that this was an attack on the Bible or religion and that I'm trying to take it away from them.

I am not attacking the Bible, or religion. Everyone is still free to worship. This was simply an infringement of my son's First Amendment right, protected by the Constitution. I was protecting that.

The hostility really has been hard to deal with. They attacked me as a person, parent, and member of the community. They verbally attacked my family, both local and out of state. Threats were made. A few stated they were going to "run me out of town." I've

kept quiet. I haven't lashed out or attacked anybody. I pulled my son out of school for many reasons. I feared retaliation from school staff or bullying from other kids.

In support of the teacher, parents sent their kids to school with Bibles. I couldn't let my son walk into that and face ridicule. My son doesn't know half of what's happened. He doesn't know about the threats or why I pulled him out of school. I don't want to scare him.

What would you like to convey to those who may be reacting emotionally without understanding the larger implication of the effect of religion in schools?

Calm down. Nobody is trying to take your Bible away. School is for reading, writing, and arithmetic; church and Sunday school are for Bible. Can we just please try to keep it that way? Then nobody is bickering over which religion is right or wrong.

I think if it works for you, then it's right for you. Religion is just not right for everybody, and that's OK, too.

The biggest challenge has been being atheist in the "Bible belt." It is definitely not easy. But it has taught me a lot about respect.

Kristi Crutchfield Cox raises intellectual hell in Ardmore, where she lives with her husband and three dogs. She currently is finishing her first novel, The Tattoo's Artist, and is preparing to be a presenter and studio consultant for A Room Of Her Own at Ghost Ranch 2015. She also writes a local blog, Adventures in My Hometown, for the Daily Ardmoreite.

When The Soul Of Tulsa Marched

BY BARBARA SANTEE

On Mar. 29, an interfaith service was held at All Souls Unitarian Church commemorating an original service and march held 50 years ago in Tulsa supporting the Selma demonstrators.

It also recognized a Tulsa minister who had marched with Dr. Martin Luther King that day, Rev. Theodore Kachel.

Rev. John Wolf of All Souls called together several ministers for that original 1965 meeting, including Rev. Ben Hill, Rev. Warren Hultgren, Father James McNamee, Rabbi Rosenthal, and others. They wanted to do something to express their shock and outrage at what had just happened in Selma, AL.

Some suggested going to Selma, but because Tulsa was only 44 years removed from the worst race riot in U.S. history, they decided to stay here and bring attention to our still very segregated city and state. Out of this united interfaith action came the Tulsa Metro-

politan Ministry, still active today and doing wonderful work in the community.

But these gentlemen were not the only ones in Tulsa paying attention to this outrage.

One 28-year-old suburban secretary who was divorced with a child watched those flickering black-and-white images on her 15-inch television, and she became incensed at the inhumanity being shown toward other human beings.

I don't remember how I found out there was going to be a local march, but I was determined to go. I wasn't a minister, and didn't have big name, but felt the need to express my concern.

I had been raised by a racist family in a segregated state, and had never gone to school with any black children. All I knew intuitively was that all people are the same inside. Regardless of our color, we all bleed red.

My ex-husband had our son that day, so I hopped in my old car [which did me the great favor of starting] and off I went.

I believe we met at the current municipal courthouse. I was surprised to see so many people who felt the way I did. I think there were probably 1,000 people.

I didn't know anyone, but it didn't matter. It made me feel good there were this many decent people in Tulsa.

There was at least one TV camera, and a young reporter named Clayton Vaughn was interviewing folks. It was exciting. I'd never seen a TV camera before.

We started lining up to march to the old federal courthouse where there would be speakers. My memory is fuzzy on the exact route that wound around several blocks, but I know we went down 1st or 2nd street which in those days was skid row.

It was lined with bars, and the local drunks were standing outside hooting and calling names as we passed by.

I was at the outside of a line with mostly black people, so I got a lot of that directed at me.

But as I passed one bar, for some reason, I looked at one man about my age who was already pretty drunk and holding a beer bottle in his hand. Our eyes locked.

I had never seen such hate and rage in anyone's face in my life. I knew what his visceral reaction must have been as a white male seeing a white woman with all of these black men!

He literally spit at me "You f---ing n---r lover," and pulled back the beer bottle as if to throw it. I turned my head without flinching, and looked straight ahead expecting that bottle to crash into my skull at any second.

My heart was pounding a thousand beats a minute. I thought, "OK. Selma starts here." But it never came. I just kept marching, and I've been marching ever since.

Dr. Barbara Santee is a native Tulsan and life-long political activist.

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State Democrats Would Be Wise To Open Primaries To Independents

BY TOM GUILD

Why is Oklahoma currently a very conservative Republican bastion? Oklahoma became a state in 1907 during the bubbling up of a national progressive movement.

Teddy Roosevelt was famous for busting up “big” things like business. He made an ill-fated promise to not run for another term as president in 1908. This led to the regime of his hand-picked successor William Howard Taft, who was a great disappointment to TR and a welcome surprise to big business and the status quo. TR ran as the Bull Moose third-party progressive in 1912 and finished second to the new president Woodrow Wilson.

In the early days of socialist elective politics in America, the socialist candidates often ran as well or better in Oklahoma than in the other states. Oklahoma was trending towards prairie populism in many respects. By the 1930s and the election of Franklin Roosevelt, Oklahoma had become a reliably Demo-

cratic state.

In the period between statehood and 1988, Oklahoma elected only one Republican Corporation Commissioner [1921-27], two Republican governors [1962 and 1966], a few Republican U.S. senators [including 1968, 1972 and 1974], one Republican Attorney General [1966], and had only one two-year period [1921-23] when the Republicans controlled the state House of Representatives.

Democrats have come full circle in the history of the state of Oklahoma. In the first decade of the 21st Century, Democrats lost control of the state House of Representatives and a few years later lost control of the state Senate.

Takeover of the state Legislature was hastened by weak showings in Oklahoma by Democratic presidential candidates. John Kerry and Barack Obama had identical percentages in 2004 and 2008, with Kerry running somewhat stronger in the traditionally

Democratic rural areas in 2004 and Obama running a bit stronger in the urban areas in 2008. Obama ran a few tenths of a percentage point worse in 2012 in Oklahoma than in 2008.

Democrats last had a mostly good election cycle in 2006, when Gov. Brad Henry was easily re-elected over Congressman Ernest Istook, and Democrats won all statewide offices on the ballot except corporation commissioner.

The fleeting success was wiped out when Congresswoman Mary Fallin was easily elected governor in 2010, dispatching Democratic Lt. Gov. Jari Askins in the general election. Askins had survived a brutal primary with Attorney General Drew Edmondson, winning by a political whisker. Both Askins and Edmondson were accomplished, strong, and attractive candidates, but it didn't change the dynamics of the election.

In 2010, Republicans won every statewide race, and now hold every single statewide office, including all three corporation commissioners.

To add insult to injury, when Blue Dog Democrat Dan Boren, son of OU President David Boren, voluntarily retired from the U.S. House in 2012, Republicans captured the lone remaining Democratic seat in the congressional delegation, by taking the 2nd Congressional District.

2016 finds that Democrats have no statewide representation in state office and no representation in the congressional delegation, and are badly outnumbered in both houses of the state Legislature. By November 2014, the Democratic lead in voter registration had shrunk to a mere 5,000, according to figures from the Oklahoma State Election Board. 2014 was the last election cycle for the foreseeable future when Democrats will outnumber Republicans among registered voters in the Sooner State. In early 2015, Republicans took the lead in registered voters in Oklahoma for the first time in state history.

It is abundantly clear that the Democratic Party in Oklahoma has become a weak and relatively uncompetitive institution. The metamorphosis from 800-pound gorilla in Oklahoma to a minority party losing ground nearly every election cycle has taken place over many decades.

Republicans have long played demagogue on race, immigration, God-gays-and guns, the Panama Canal Treaty, the federal "takeover" of health care, public schools etc. to convince Oklahoma voters to vote against their best interests. It is also a tactic for absolving the GOP of their failures to provide health care, healthy and well-funded public schools, etc.

We have an emergency on our hands, and we must urgently come together to do what we can to take the necessary steps to move our state forward again.

If not us ... who? If not now ... when?

One of the most important steps Democrats in Oklahoma can take to immediately become competitive is to invite registered Independents to vote in Democratic primaries and runoff elections. Accord-

ing to the Oklahoma State Election Board, there are currently [as of May 4] 882,686 [43.47%] registered Democrats, 886,153 [43.64%] registered Republicans, and 261,429 [12.87%] registered Independents.

Since it is highly unlikely that the GOP will invite Independents to vote in their primaries, Democrats can get a leg up on support from the nearly 13% [and growing percentage] of Oklahoma voters who are currently registered as Independents. Those who choose to vote in the Democratic primary will have a new home.

Currently, Independents are excluded from voting in partisan primary and runoff primary elections, unless invited to do so by the Democratic or Republican state chairs. After Democrats invite and enfranchise Independents to vote in the primary process, we can follow up and contact those who chose to cast their lots with the Democratic Party in the primaries and encourage and urge them to continue supporting Democratic nominees in the general election.

Democrats and Independents in alliance can wrest control from Republicans in Oklahoma.

Independents that choose to sit on the sidelines in the primaries, for whatever reason[s], will likely not be a major factor in the general election. Those who choose to participate in the Democratic nominating process are natural allies to remain Democratic voters in November. This will give Oklahoma Democrats reinforcements and help us win general elections that are now going increasingly to Republican nominees.

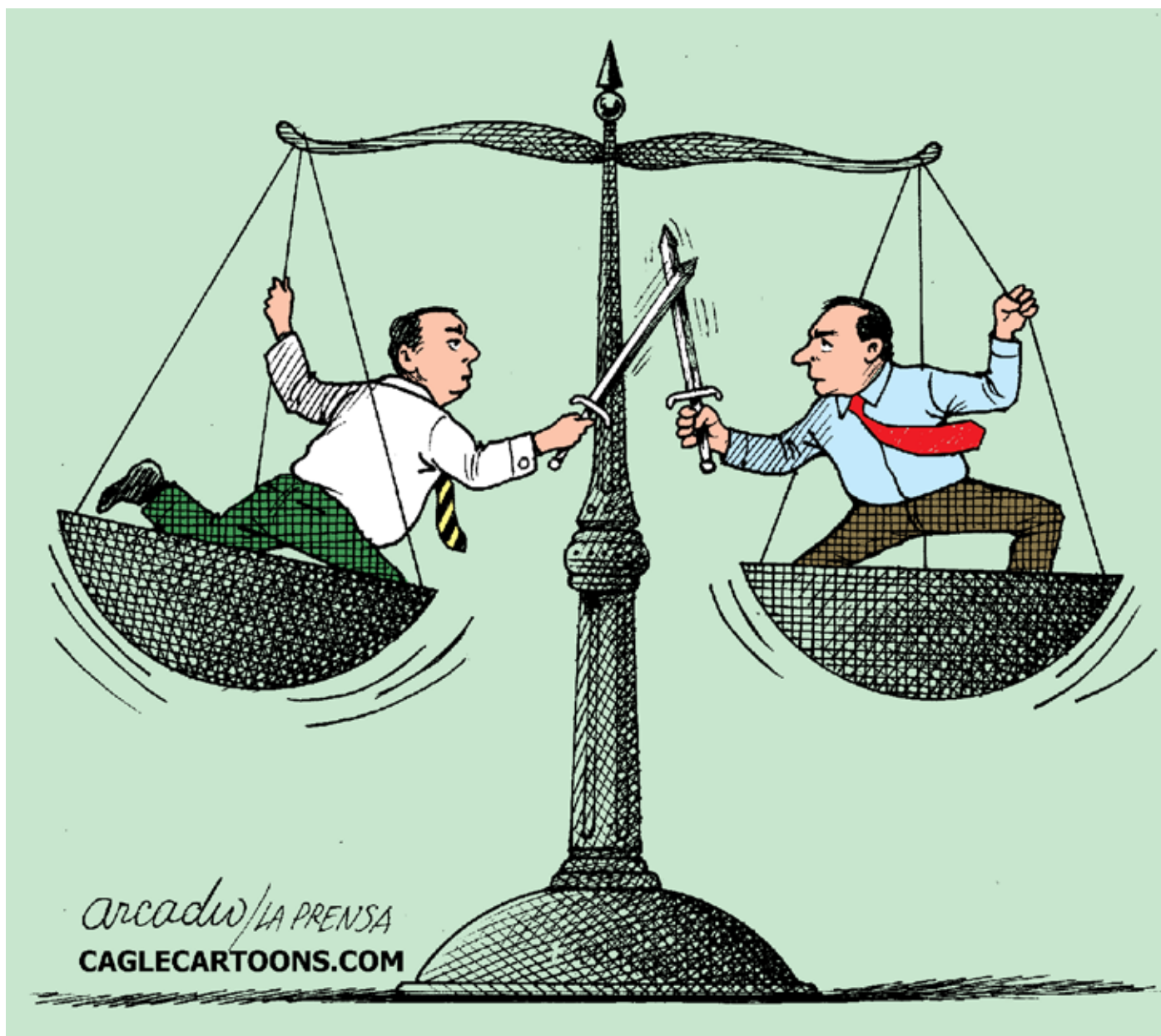
In 2015, the Oklahoma County Democratic Party and the Fifth Congressional District Democrats voted at their recent party conventions to include Independents in our primary and runoff primary elections. The resolution now goes to the State Democratic Convention May 30 in Oklahoma City for consideration.

As the decades have unfolded, the number of Oklahomans choosing to register Independent has grown at a rapid pace. If Democrats can tap into that gold mine of Independent voters, we can immediately and once again challenge Republicans for political supremacy in the Sooner State.

Democrats favor increased participation and enfranchisement of American and Oklahoma voters. Inviting Independents to join us will not only increase participation, but also build up trust and loyalty with Independents, who are now disenfranchised.

Let's honor our Democratic and progressive traditions and make Independents welcome in our primary elections. The simple act of inclusion, friendship extended, and doing the right thing will pay big dividends. It will rescue our state from its current downward spiral, resulting from Republican control and mismanagement of our state.

Tom Guild, a retired University of Central Oklahoma professor, was the 2012 Democratic nominee for Oklahoma's 5th Congressional District seat. He was a founder of the Brennan Society, a group that promotes progressive ideals, issues and candidates.



Justice

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

poratists and religious fundamentalists have worked methodically to tilt the scales of justice in their favor.

With all eyes on budget writers in the session's last month, this is a prime moment for court-haters to slip "wooly boogers" into bills, language that could erode the separation of powers and return Oklahoma to the bad old justice-for-sale days of the mid-20th Century.

For the record, more than a dozen bills were filed this session that could be interpreted as – or serve as vehicles for – undermining an independent judiciary.

Only one remained alive as the Legislature entered its final month – Sen. Anthony Sykes' SB 548, the judicial pay raise bill that drew Calvey's wrath.

But that doesn't mean other bills – shell bills, any-

one? – can't be hijacked in the session's frenzied closing hours. Legislative leaders are exceedingly adept at expanding the definition of germaneness, especially when serving high-powered special interests, such as the State Chamber.

This potential should frighten all clear-eyed Oklahomans who know their history: It was only a half-century ago the state suffered an embarrassing Supreme Court bribery scandal.

In the late 1950s, the high court reversed a tax claim against a shady company – the decision greased when Justice Nelson S. Corn accepted a \$150,000 bribe, then shared the loot with two other justices, Napoleon Bonaparte Johnson and Earl Welch.

Corn later served a federal prison sentence for income tax evasion. Johnson was impeached. And Welch resigned.

[For all the sordid details, read *Justice For Sale: The Shocking Scandal of the Oklahoma Supreme Court* by retired Justice William A. Berry and James Edwin Alexander. Published in 1996, it is now out of

print. It should be reprinted and required reading in state history and government classes.]

The state's current Powers-That-Be would return us to those days of ignominy. They want a judiciary that rubber-stamps their social and business worldviews.

The easiest, surest way to achieve their goal? Change to partisan judicial elections that would unleash a flood of campaign cash into a system that is supposed to seek justice.

Check out the arbitrary, pro-corporate rulings in Texas or the case of the coal baron who bought his own justice in West Virginia if you doubt the wisdom of Oklahoma's current system.

The state's current Powers-That-Be ... want a judiciary that rubber-stamps their social and business worldviews.

At the time of the scandal, Oklahomans could elect appellate judges from the field of all qualified lawyers. Afterwards, the state adopted the modified Missouri plan in which a nominating commission recommends candidates to the governor to fill judicial vacancies.

The selection panel was comprised of six Oklahoma Bar Association and six gubernatorial appointees, with a 13th member chosen by the original 12.

Once appointed, jurists on the state's highest courts appeared periodically on non-partisan "retention" ballots in which voters decided whether to give them another six years in office.

When they were in the legislative minority, Republicans supported the modified Missouri plan. Once they gained control of the House and drew even with Democrats in the Senate, they began whittling away at the system.

In 2010, they persuaded voters to add two more members to the judicial nominating commission – one each appointed by the House speaker and the Senate president pro tem.

The Supreme Court evidently didn't take the hint. It continued to actually read the Oklahoma Constitution and take seriously its role as a separate, independent branch of government.

GOP leaders, though, became especially enraged when the court repeatedly declared measures to be unconstitutional because they violated the state's single-subject rule.

When the Supreme Court last year briefly stayed the executions of Clayton Lockett and Charles Warner, the enmity spilled again into public view.

Gov. Mary Fallin big-footed the high court, declaring she would not honor its stay. Then, in a fit of pique, state Rep. Mike Christian, R-OKC, introduced impeachment proceedings against five justices who supported the delay.

The Supreme Court ultimately backed down and Lockett's execution proceeded – with disastrous results, when the three-drug cocktail didn't work as

intended.

The problem is, the high court ended up looking weak. And when legislative sharks smell blood, they await the appropriate moment – then strike.

Unfortunately, the state's courts are not as independent as they need to be. The Legislature still controls much of the judiciary's funding. Can jurists afford to repeatedly anger those who control purse strings?

The reality is, the courts must ignore the not-so-veiled fiscal threats, ruling without fear or favor – or regard to financial clout. State leaders would be well served to lead a campaign to make the courts truly independent, not a wholly owned subsidiary of the

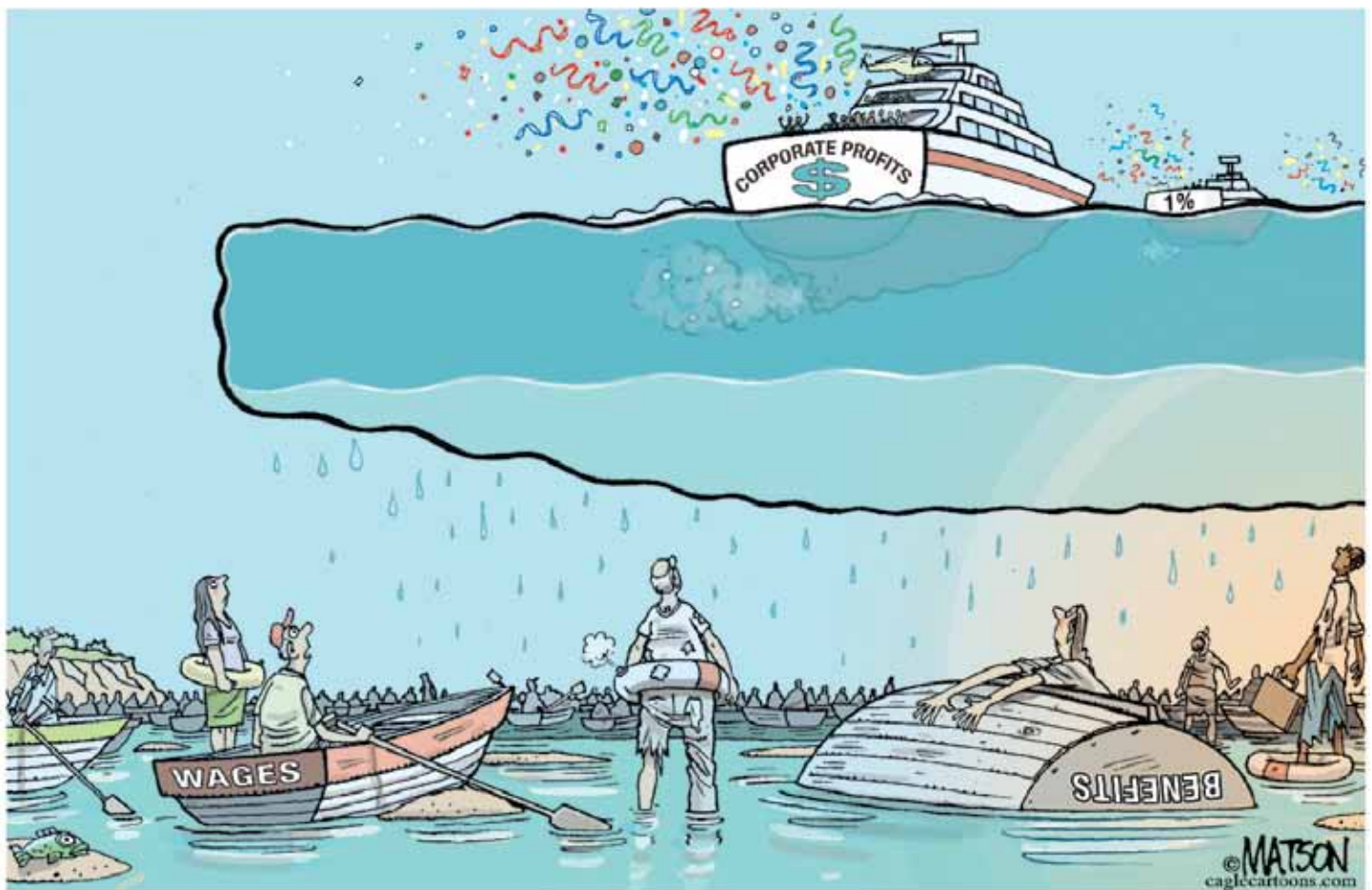
wealthy corporate elite or religious fundamentalists.

Otherwise, rulings in high profile cases – Harold Hamm's divorce is a recent example – can leave the appearance that wealth has its privileges, even when justice is supposed to be blind.

It's unclear what nefariousness might be up the sleeves of some legislators in the session's final days. Perhaps nothing will happen. Perhaps they will wait until next year to strike.

In the meantime, it's incumbent on all who care about fairness and justice to remain vigilant. Or the courthouse door in Oklahoma could be padlocked forever to all except the 1%.





"A RISING TIDE LIFTS SOME BOATS..."

A Simple Progressive Economic Agenda for Hillary [Or Anyone Else]

BY DEAN BAKER

In the weeks since Secretary Clinton announced she is entering the presidential race there have been numerous stories asking about the agenda she will adopt in her campaign. In her announcement video, she indicated she wanted to be a champion for the average worker against the wealthy.

While many policies will be needed to improve the situation of the poor and middle class, there are three simple ones that could make a big difference: a more competitive dollar, a Federal Reserve Board committed to full employment and a financial transactions tax to rein in Wall Street.

If Clinton or any other presidential candidate wants to level the playing field, these policies would be a great place to start.

The competitive dollar is an issue that is actually quite simple, but obscured by bad reporting in the media. The value of the dollar relative to other currencies

is by far the main determinant of the country's deficit. We currently have a trade deficit of more than \$500 billion a year [at 3% of the Gross Domestic Product].

This trade deficit is money that is creating demand elsewhere rather than in the United States. This \$500 billion trade deficit has the same impact on the economy as if households or businesses took \$500 billion from their income each year and stuffed it under their mattress rather than spend it. This is a main reason that the economy remains well below full employment seven years after the collapse of the housing bubble.

A progressive presidential candidate should make reducing the value of the dollar against the currencies of our trading partners a top priority. This would make our goods and services more competitive internationally and get us closer to balanced trade.

The job creation potential here is enormous. If we went from our current trade deficit to balanced trade, it would generate over four million jobs directly. This would get us back to full employment and hugely improve the bargaining power of ordinary workers, thereby driving up wages.

The second item is having a Federal Reserve Board that is committed to full employment. One of the main reasons that workers have had less bargaining power in the last three decades is that the Federal Reserve Board has quite deliberately acted to keep the unemployment rate up.

On several occasions it has explicitly raised interest rates to slow the economy and reduce the pace of job creation out of a concern that a tighter labor market would lead to higher inflation. As a result, the Fed has prevented most workers from getting the bargaining power needed to share in the gains of economic growth.

The Fed is prepared to attack workers' bargaining power yet again with its plan to raise interest rates at some point this year. Higher interest rates will reduce growth by reducing borrowing for home buying, car purchases and other purposes.

A progressive presidential candidate should commit themselves to appointing people to the Federal Reserve Board who place a top priority on its legal mandate to promote high employment. If the Fed is not prepared to allow the labor market to tighten, any employment gains from reducing the trade deficit could be reversed by higher interest rates choking off growth.

The third policy, a financial transactions tax, is a

great way to raise revenue, reduce inequality and increase the efficiency of the financial sector. It should also be an easy political stand for a Democratic presidential candidate, since a broad-based financial transactions tax was recently proposed by Rep. Chris Van Hollen and endorsed by other members of the Democratic leadership in the House.

A tax structured along the lines proposed by Van Hollen [e.g. .1% on stock trades and .01% on derivatives] could easily raise more than \$1 trillion over a 10-year budget horizon. Virtually all of this money would come out of the pockets of the financial industry.

The industry would pay most of the money since the biggest traders are hedge funds engaged in high-frequency trading and other short-term transactions. The vast majority of ordinary investors would pay almost nothing, since their trading volume would decline roughly in proportion to the increase in trading costs, leaving what they spend on trading little changed.

In addition, the tax would reduce amount of economic resources wasted in useless financial transactions. As recent research from the Bank of International Settlements has shown, a bloated financial sector can be a major drag on economic growth.

So there you have it, three simple policies waiting to be embraced by a progressive candidate. We'll have to see if anyone rises to the occasion.

Dean Baker is a macroeconomist and co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington, DC.

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If Inequality Worries Republicans, Why Are They Making It Worse?

BY JOE CONASON

You can tell things have gotten very bad when the issue of economic inequality – a serious national problem mostly ignored for more than three decades – is suddenly in political vogue. And you can be sure things have gotten very, very bad when Republicans – who usually insist that inequality is natural, inevitable, even beneficial – suddenly claim they're worried about it, too.

As the 2016 contenders officially declare their intentions, all of them seem aware that voters want to restore a vestige of fairness to the American economy. Regardless of personal ideology or political reliance on plutocratic billionaires, every presidential candidate must, at the very least, display concern for working families, single mothers, indebted students and everyone struggling to achieve or maintain a de-

cent living.

Yet how concerned are they, really? In the video that announced her candidacy, Hillary Clinton spoke briefly but bluntly: "Americans have fought their way back from tough economic times, but the deck is still stacked in favor of those at the top. Everyday Americans need a champion, and I want to be that champion."

The first Democrat in the race, Clinton realizes that a populist agenda will be required to excite her party base – and to answer those who regard her as too wealthy and too well-connected to empathize with the downtrodden.

That unflattering portrait omits many relevant facts about Clinton's life, from her own modest origins to her many years of advocacy for the disadvantaged, es-

pecially women and children. She spoke out publicly about economic fairness long before doing so became politically fashionable, both as a United States Senator and during her last presidential campaign. Now the skeptics can listen and decide for themselves.

But voters should also listen closely to the Republicans who mock Clinton's populist tone – and assert that they are the true spokesmen for the working class. What do they propose to address inequality? And how “authentic” is their concern?

At least two of the Republican candidates, Sen. Rand Paul, R-KY, and Sen. Ted Cruz, R-TX, want to institute a so-called flat tax – which would severely exacerbate inequality by reducing tax levies on the wealthy and increasing the burden on everyone else. Such plans would cost the Treasury an annual amount estimated between \$700 billion and \$1 trillion.

Yet Paul and Cruz insist that they will simultaneously slash taxes, increase defense spending, and balance the budget – and so does Sen. Marco Rubio, R-FL, who proposes his own regressive tax breaks for the rich.

Those promises are mathematically impossible – unless, perhaps, the federal government permanently ended all discretionary spending on student aid, unemployment insurance, health care, veterans benefits, environmental protection, food safety and dozens of other programs necessary to working and middle-class families. Somehow they never mention that part.

While decrying economic inequality, Republicans tend not to emphasize their other proposed giveaways

that would benefit wealthy donors, such as Paul's plan to end capital gains taxes, or Rubio's plan to end not only all taxes on capital gains but on interest and inherited estates, too – leaving only wage earners to be taxed. Schemes like this delight the Koch brothers precisely because they would heighten inequality to an even more astronomical level.

Although Republicans often mention the “right to rise,” as Jeb Bush would put it, they're hostile to any measure that would actually elevate the incomes of those at the bottom – for example, increasing the minimum wage. Indeed, they tend to be opposed to the very idea of a legislated wage floor because, as Rubio once said, “I don't think a minimum wage law works.”

The Florida senator's economic knowledge is as weak as his budgetary arithmetic. The most recent studies show that in states without a minimum wage law, inequality is considerably worse than in states with a minimum wage that is at least a dollar above the federal minimum.

But don't worry; Rubio says he knows a better way to reduce inequality than either higher wages or fairer taxes. Instead, for people languishing in low-wage jobs, government should “incentivize the creation of innovations in education that are accessible.”

So he offers something for everyone: The wealthy get still more big tax cuts; and the not-so-wealthy get a few phrases of incomprehensible, pseudo-wonkish jargon.

How can you think that Republicans don't care?

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Call It What You Like

BY SHARON MARTIN

In a Nairobi slum,
families squat,
throw up walls with whatever
they can find, mostly
corrugated tin
and scavenged lumber.

They form communities,
call their square of bare dirt
home.

A local teacher
shows them how
to grow greens in vertical gardens
on the walls of their shacks,
to raise rabbits in cobbled hutches,
to survive.

Recall the broken promises here,
of forty acres and a mule?

And this one: the land will be yours
as long as the rivers run?

And another as corrupt legislators
dismantle the War on Poverty?
They pass laws to tell hungry people
what color potatoes they can buy
with their puny stipends, then
deny them health care
when all they can afford to eat
makes them fat and diabetic.

They tell you they're balancing the budget, but
they spend those dollars and more
on oil wars, conquest, and
corporate whores.

We could make it right.

A little bit of land
and a good education
could save the world.

Sharon Martin lives in Oilton and is a regular contributor to The Oklahoma Observer.

How Women Can Help Jammu, Kashmir Make Progress In Democracy And Peace

BY NYLA ALI KHAN

The partially autonomous northern Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir is a beautiful part of the world – and also one of three areas of Kashmir divided into areas of control by India, Pakistan, and China and marred by a long history of violent political and ethnic struggles. The area is my homeland, and my family has been part of its history. I love it greatly.

I have been motivated to imagine the possibility of different destinies for women in a world that is not governed by the aspirations and wishes of those women.

It is challenging to reconstruct women's lives, even those who have been visible in the public arena, because women are conditioned to wipe away their footprints and end up leaving very few traces of the kind that historical exploration would accept as legitimate.

The life of the woman I have written on, Akbar Jehan Abdullah, my maternal grandmother, was so intricately tied with the political trajectory of Jammu and Kashmir that delving into the labyrinthine issue of the Kashmir conflict and the part she played in it afforded me glimpses into the momentous changes in the regional political structure of her era and into the ability of a conventional, religious, and progressive woman whose work was a powerful assertion of her convictions.

Not only did she represent the Srinagar and Anantnag constituencies of Jammu and Kashmir in the Indian Parliament in 1977-79 and 1984-89, respectively, but she was also the first president of the Jammu and Kashmir Red Cross Society from 1947-51.

Obviously, an important challenge in this day and age is to create new openings for people, including women, to discuss public issues and become active participants.

Women in my homeland are gaining new rights and increasingly asserting themselves in politics – and this momentous shift in traditional gender relationships opens up new possibilities for the pursuit of democracy and regional peace.

Women in civic associations and in government can lead the way toward a peaceful pluralistic democracy and support international negotiations for a sustainable peace in the region.

The best way to put the state's house in order is by further developing responsive and pluralistic democratic government. Historical foundations for pluralist democracy in Jammu and Kashmir were established by the revolutionary metamorphosis of the agrarian economy during the 1950s, which had

groundbreaking political consequences in a previously feudal economy.

Building on the earlier gains, a pluralistic government can now ensure further economic, social, and educational gains for women and marginalized groups. Here is what the next steps should aim to do:

- Women citizens should be accorded equal rights with men in all fields of national life – economic, cultural, political, and in government services.
- Women should have the right to work in every line of employment for terms and wages equal to those for men.
- Women would be assured of equality with men in education, social insurance and job conditions, though the law should also give special protections to mothers and children.

Not just in Jammu and Kashmir, but also in many parts of the world women can play an important role in establishing a more inclusive democracy and new forums for citizen cooperation. Female leaders can lead the way by offering new ideas, building broad-based political coalitions, and working to bridge organizational divides.

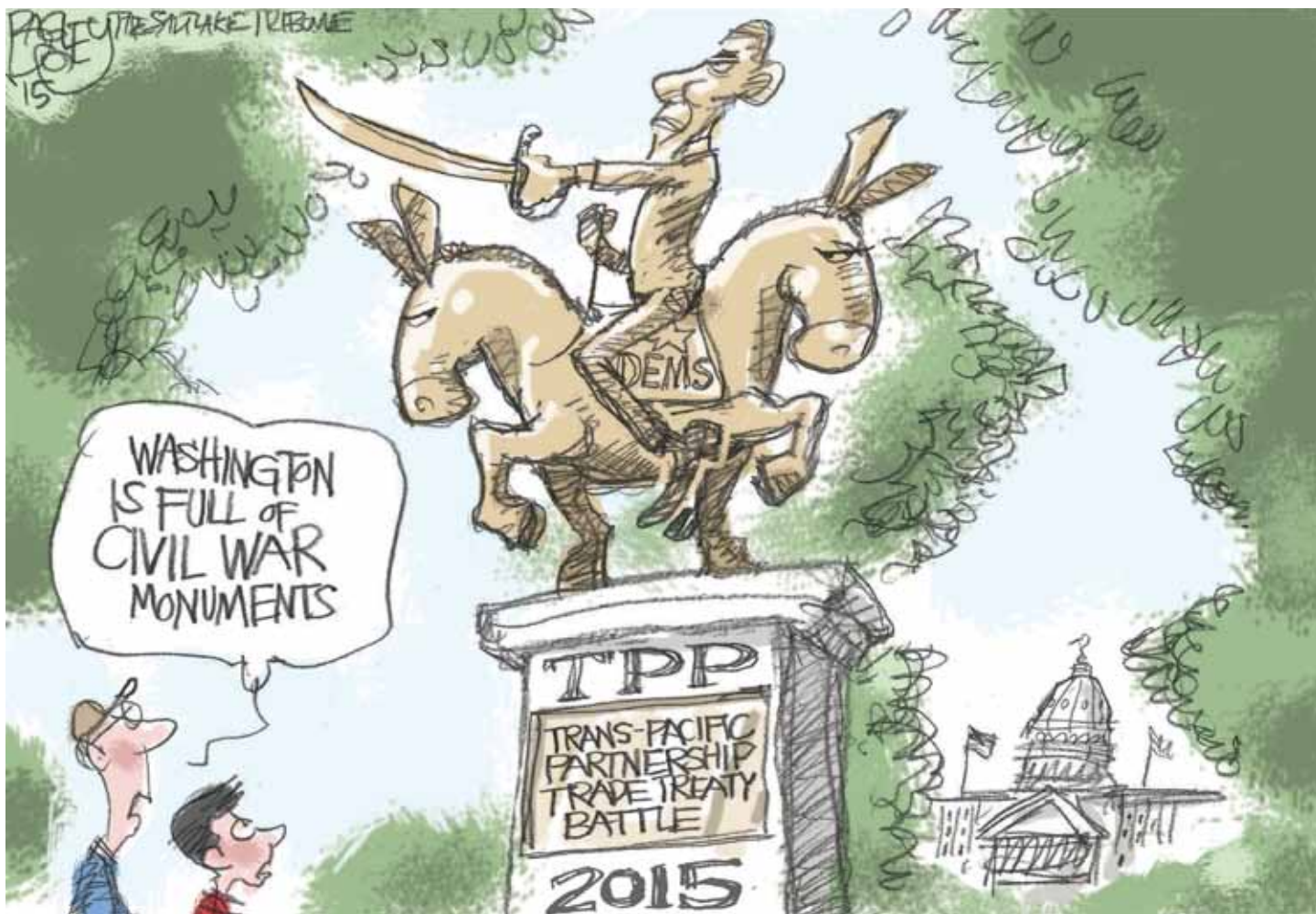
Women active in politics must aim not just to improve the position of their particular organizations but also to forge connections between the group's agendas for conflict resolution and reconstruction of society with the strategies and agendas of other groups in the population, who have also suffered from ongoing conflicts. In this way, women's groups can pave the way for sustainable peace, universal human rights, and security from violent threats of all kinds.

There must be redress for previous violations of human rights for all groups within the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

In addition, everyone needs to be open to diplomacy and peaceful negotiations to further the India-Pakistan peace process.

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Obama, Corporate 'Free Traitors' And You

BY RALPH NADER

The pro-big business President Barack Obama and his corporate allies are starting their campaign to manipulate and pressure Congress to ram through the “pull-down-on-America” Trans-Pacific Partnership [TPP], a trade and foreign investment treaty between 12 nations [Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the United States and Vietnam].

The first skirmish is a fast track bill to have Congress formally strip itself of its constitutional authority to regulate trade and surrender this historic responsibility to the White House and its corporate lobbies.

Lest you think the TPP is too commercially complex to bother about, think again. This mega-treaty is the latest corporate coup-d'état that sacrifices the American consumer, labor and environmental stan-

dards – inventively called “non-tariff trade barriers” – and much U.S. sovereignty to the supremacy of corporate commercial trade.

No single column can adequately describe this colossal betrayal – camouflaged by phrases like “free trade” and “win-win agreements.” For comprehensive analysis of the TPP you can go to Global Trade Watch [<http://www.citizen.org/trade/>].

Trade treaties, like NAFTA and GATT, which created the World Trade Organization [WTO], already have proven records of harming our country through huge job-exporting trade deficits, unemployment, freezing or jeopardizing our consumer and environmental rules, holding down regulations on giant banks and weakening labor protections.

How does the corporate state and its “free traitors” construct a transnational form of autocratic governance that bypasses the powers of our branches of

government and accepts decisions that greatly affect American livelihoods issued by secret tribunals run by corporate lawyers-turned-judges?

Well, first they establish autocratic procedures, such as fast track legislation that facilitate the creation of an absentee autocratic government, which betrays the American people by going far beyond reducing tariffs and quotas.

Imagine, when the TPP treaty finally gets negotiated with other nations in secret, the White House cynically classifies it as an “agreement” requiring a simple majority vote, not a treaty requiring two-thirds of the Congress for passage. Fast track legislation then limits debate on the TPP to a total of 20 hours in each chamber. Then, Congress lets the White House tie Congress’ hands by prohibiting any amendments and requesting just an up or down vote.

Meanwhile, the campaign cash flows into the abdicating lawmakers’ coffers from the likes of Boeing, General Electric, Pfizer, Citigroup, Exxon Mobil and other multinational corporations that show a lack loyalty to the United States [no corporate patriotism] due to their ties to communist and fascist regimes abroad who let them get away with horrible abuses and repression in the name of greater profits.

Many of these Pacific Rim countries, for example, have bad labor laws and practices, few, if any, consumer or environmental protections that can be enforced in courts of law and precious little freedom of speech. A recent treaty with South Korea was pushed through Congress on false predictions of jobs and win-win solutions. In fact, the Korean agreement resulted in a ballooning of the trade deficit that the U.S. has with that country, costing an estimated nearly 60,000 American jobs.

The majority of these corporate-managed trade agreements come from the demands of global corporations. They exploit developing countries that have cheap labor and lax laws, unlike more developed countries, such as the U.S., that have greater protections for consumers, workers and the environment.

Under this trade agreement, countries that seek better protections for their workers and consumers can be sued by corporations and other nations. Remarkably, better treatment, such as safer motor vehicles, is seen as an obstructive trade barrier against inferior imports.

For one example of many, under the WTO, the U.S. cannot keep out products made by brutal child labor abroad, even though U.S. law prohibits child labor in this country. This is how our sovereignty is shredded. Under the WTO, the U.S. has lost 100% of the cases brought before the secret tribunals in Geneva, Switzerland against our public interest laws –like consumer and environmental protections. The TPP will produce similar autocratic outcomes.

Proponents of the TPP want to limit debate and prevent any amendments to this treaty that might deal with issues such as currency manipulation, child labor, bad workplace conditions, etc. by such coun-

tries as Mexico and Vietnam. What is enforceable, with penalties, are sanctions and lawsuits against our country [and others], which corporate power demands. U.S. taxpayers will ultimately pay that price.

This is why Sen. Elizabeth Warren is opposing the TPP. She wrote in the Washington Post that the TPP “would allow foreign companies to challenge U.S. laws – and potentially to pick up huge payouts from taxpayers – without ever stepping foot in a U.S. court.”

For example, if a company doesn’t like our controls over cancer-causing chemicals, it could skip the U.S. courts and sue the U.S. before a secret tribunal that can hand down decisions, which can’t be challenged in U.S. courts. If it won before this secret kangaroo court, it could be given millions or hundreds of millions of dollars in damages, charged to you, the taxpayer. Again, the big business “free traitors” are shredding our sovereignty under the Constitution.

Scores of such cases already have been brought under the WTO. Sen. Warren explained that “recent cases include a French company that sued Egypt because Egypt raised its minimum wage, a Swedish company that sued Germany because Germany decided to phase out nuclear power after Japan’s Fukushima disaster, and a Dutch company that sued the Czech Republic because the Czechs didn’t bail out a bank that the company partially owned ... Philip Morris is trying to use ISDS to stop Uruguay from implementing new tobacco regulations intended to cut smoking rates.”

Sen. Warren upset President Obama who, before a business audience [he wouldn’t talk TPP before a labor or consumer gathering], called Warren “wrong on the facts.” Really? Well, why doesn’t he debate her, as Al Gore debated Ross Perot on NAFTA? She has read the fine print; I doubt whether he has read more than the corporate power tea leaves. He seems to have forgotten his severe criticism of NAFTA from when he ran for president in 2008.

Right now, President Obama probably has the Republican votes in the Senate, but not yet a majority of votes in the House. The vast majority of the Democrats are opposed to the TPP. Tea Party Republicans are reducing Speaker Boehner’s vote count among Republicans. Using history as an example, President Bill Clinton easily peeled off votes during his push for NAFTA.

What we need now are a couple of million voters around America to put serious heat on their faltering members of the House and Senate – not that arduous of an effort – over the next few months. That is fewer Americans than watch big league games on television.

In addition, these civic-minded and active Americans would be backed by 75% of Americans who think that the TPP should be rejected or delayed, according to a bipartisan poll from the Wall Street Journal.

People know what these “pull-down” trade agreements have done to them in their own communities.

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CNE Syndrome Strikes State Governments

It's well-known that harsh climate conditions can mess with your mind – from cabin fever to heat delirium. But America is now experiencing an even more dangerous mind-numbing disease called Climaticus Non-vocalism Extremism.

Oddly, CNE Syndrome almost exclusively afflicts a narrow segment of our population: Republican political officials and candidates. Scientific studies suggest that CNE Syndrome might stem from a genetic defect, but scientists say more research is needed on that.

The symptoms, however, are uniform and include an obsessive impulse by GOP politicians to deny that human-caused climate change is happening. It's often accompanied by a feverish insistence that government employees be banned from studying it, discussing it or even uttering such phrases as "climate change" and "global warming."

Hard to believe? For an example of the mind-altering impact of Climaticus Non-vocalism Extremism, look at Gov. Scott Walker's Wisconsin administration. The Koch-funded governor and Republican presidential wannabe is an ardent climate-change denier – but the state's public lands board has escalated his denial to Orwellian censorship.

The two GOP commissioners on the three-member board, which oversees the ecological health of thousands of acres of Wisconsin forestlands, have banned agency employees from even considering damage caused by climate change. Worse, they have such severe cases of CNE Syndrome that they've imposed a gag order on freedom of speech by public lands employees, prohibiting them from even talking about climate change while on the job.

The heartbreak of CNE is that its victims even deny that they're in denial about the disease. Thus, the Wisconsin duo say that their no-speech rule is not censorship, because employees are still free to talk about climate change at home – or even chit-chat about it "by the water cooler," just as they might talk about sports.

Gov. Walker – who wants to be your president – says

that he finds that censorship perfectly reasonable.

But it's not just Wisconsin that has imposed such ridiculous levels of science-denial and censorship. This begs the question: If a state government issues a right-wing political order, but it's not written down, does it make a sound? Let's ask Florida.

Bart Bibler, a respected employee of Florida's Department of Environmental Protection, says you betcha it makes a sound – even though the order directed at state employees like him was meant to enforce the sound of silence.

Since Rick Scott became governor of the Sunshine State, various agencies run by his appointees have issued 1984-style newspeak decrees that "climate change," "global warming," "sustainability" and other terms related to Earth's looming climate disaster are verboten.

Unaware of this censorship edict, Bibler innocently blurted out the phrase "climate change" in a February teleconference. To his amazement, his breach of ideological correctness earned him an official letter of reprimand, a two-day suspension without pay, and – get this – an order to undergo a doctor's evaluation to verify his mental "fitness for duty."

When outrage over this blunt attempt to banish the idea of climate change spread across the country, the governor and his appointees doubled-down on Orwellian denial: "It's not true," said the slippery Scott, insisting that no such gag policy exists. By "exist," though, he means his dictate is not written down.

As many employees have confirmed, however, state officials verbally impose their policy of outlawing the language of climate change. The official taboo is so extreme that even a phrase as benign and factual as "sea-level rise" is banned. Instead, Scott's team has mandated that this measurable [and alarming] reality be referred to as "nuisance flooding."

It's their mental fitness that needs to be evaluated! Trying to ban words only amplifies their sound, meaning and impact – while also exposing how pathetically scared and stupid the censors are.

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‘Dr. Evil’ Turns Out To Be ‘Dr. Silly’

Big Oil, labor exploiters, industrial food factories, frackers and other corporate profiteers have been paying a lot of money to a man that celebrates himself “Dr. Evil” – the scourge of all progressive groups!

But Rick Berman is not a doctor, not evil and not a scourge. While he is a wholly unprincipled little man, he’s just a self-serving huckster who grubs for corporate dollars by offering to do their dirty PR work. His specialty is taking secret funding from major corporations to publicly slime environmentalists, low-wage workers and anyone else perceived by his corporate clients as enemies.

Berman’s *modus operandi* is not exactly sophisticated. Taking money from the likes of Phillip-Morris, Monsanto and Tyson Foods, he sets up tax-exempt front groups [with non-descript names like Center for Consumer Freedom, Employment Policies Institute and Environmental Policy Alliance], posing them as independent research and academic outfits.

Each one is an empty shell, run by his small staff of political hacks out of his Washington, DC, office, and, using the names of the front groups, Berman and Co. buy full-page newspaper ads and write opinion pieces filled with made-up facts and manufactured horror stories for clueless media outlets that amount to raw hatchet attacks on whatever progressive groups or public policies the corporate funders want to kill.

His mad dog style is hardly worrisome to those targeted, for rather than drawing converts to the corporate funder’s cause, it merely rallies the usual anti-labor, anti-enviro, anti-“fill in the blank” crowd. But it still appeals to brand-name corporate clients, for Berman promises to spew their message into the media without having any of the nastiness stick to them.

“We run all this stuff through non-profit organizations that are insulated from having to disclose donors,” he assured energy executives last year. “There is total anonymity,” he bragged. “People don’t know who supports us.”

And can you even imagine a political PR campaign against environmentalists that was so negative, so ridiculously slanted and downright dirty, that it actually repulsed executives of some of America’s biggest fracking corporations?

Wow – it’s got to take a big wad of ugly to gag a fracker! But in the gross world of political rancor, few cough up hairballs as foul as those produced by Berman.

Last year, he was in Colorado Springs, speaking at a meeting of Big Oil frackers about his down and dirty plan to smear and ridicule the grassroots enviros who’ve dared to oppose the fracking of Colorado’s land, water, people and communities. Dubbing the campaign “Big Green Radicals,” the Berman team revealed that their PR firm had dug into the personal lives of Sierra Club board members, looking for tidbits to embarrass them. Gut it up, Berman cried out to the executives, “You can either win ugly or lose pretty.”

The Little Generalissimo then urged them to pony up some \$3 million for his assault, saying they should “think of this as an endless war,” adding pointedly, “and you have to budget for it.”

Unfortunately for the sleaze peddler, one appalled energy executive recorded his crude pitch and leaked it to the media. “That you have to play dirty to win,” the executive explained, “just left a bad taste in my mouth.” Even Anadarko, an aggressive fracking corporation with 13,000 fracked wells in the Rockies, publicly rejected Berman’s political play, telling the New York Times: “It does not align with our values.”

Berman likes to be called “Dr. Evil,” but he’s so coarse, strident, bombastic and clownish that he’s become known as “Dr. Silly.” And oops, not only is this huckster an ineffectual fake, but big holes in his curtain of anonymity are now revealing some of the corporations hiding behind it and his big funders want no part of that. To take a peek, go to www.BermanExposed.org. – *Jim Hightower*

Corporate Thieves Are Stealing Workers’ Comp

They say there’s honor among thieves, but I say: That depends on the thieves.

Your common street thief, yes – but not those princely CEO’s of corporate larceny. America’s working families have learned the elites in the top suites are rewarded for being pickpockets, swindlers, thugs and scoundrels, routinely committing mass economic violence against the majority of America’s working people to further enrich and empower themselves.

But now comes a cabal of about two-dozen corporate chieftains pushing a vicious new campaign of physical violence against workers. The infamous anti-labor bully, Wal-Mart, is among the leaders, but so are such prestigious chains as Macy’s and Nordstrom, along with Lowe’s, Kohl’s and Safeway.

Their goal is to gut our nation's workers compensation program, freeing corporate giants to injure or even kill employees in the workplace without having to cover all [or, in many cases, any] of the lost wages, medical care or burial expenses of those harmed.

Started more than 100 years ago, workers comp insurance is one of our society's most fundamental contracts between injured employees who give up the right to sue their companies for negligence when injured on the job and employers who pay for insurance to cover a basic level of medical benefits and wages for those harmed.

Administered by state governments, benefits vary, and they usually fall far short of meeting the full needs of the injured people. But the program has at least provided an important measure of help and a bit of fairness to assuage the suffering of millions.

But even that's too much for the avaricious thieves atop these multibillion-dollar corporations. Why pay for insuring employees when it's much cheaper just to buy state legislators who are willing to privatize workers' comp? This lets corporations write their own rules of compensation to slash benefits, cut safety costs – and earn thieving CEO's bigger bonuses.

But who, you might ask, would help these corporate crooks in their callous and calculating scheme to rob workers of their hard-earned benefits? Why, that would be the work of ARAWC – the Association for Responsible Alternatives to Workers' Compensation.

When you come across a corporate lobbying group claiming to be pushing "Responsible Alternatives to Such-and-Such," you can rightly assume that it's really pushing something totally irresponsible, as well as malicious, shameless, self-serving and even dis-

gusting.

Mother Jones magazine reports that ARAWC is a front group funded by these hugely profitable retail chains and corporate behemoths that want to weasel out of compensating employees who suffer injuries at work. By law, corporations in nearly every state must carry workers' comp insurance, but the ARAWC lobbying combine is pressuring legislators to allow the giants to opt-out of the state benefit plans and instead substitute their own, highly restrictive set of benefits.

What a deal! But it's a raw deal for injured workers. In Texas, which already has this write-it-yourself loophole, more than half of the corporate plans – get this – pay nothing to the families of workers who're killed in job accidents! Similarly, under an ARAWC-written opt-out provision that a Tennessee senator sponsored this year, employers wouldn't have to cover artificial limbs, home care or even funeral expenses of on-the-job accident victims.

Also, the Tennessee bill lets a company simply walk away from maimed workers after just three years or after paying only \$300,000 in expenses. Corporations always claim to "value" their employees – and this tells us exactly how little that value is.

By the way, the CEO of ARAWC also happens to be the head of "risk management" at the mingiest of workplaces: Wal-Mart. And that's what this opt-out scam amounts to – corporate profiteers hoping they can manage to escape paying for risking the lives of America's workforce.

Yes, this shifty move is a scurrilous crime, but it's a crime that pays richly for those at the top. And the money can fill the hole in their souls where their honor used to be. – *Jim Hightower*

If I Were A Christian Business Owner In Indiana ...

... this is the sign I would put in my door:

Dear Valued Patrons,

Due to my sincerely held religious beliefs, and in light of the RFRA, recently signed by our Dear Leader Pence, I will no longer be doing business with the following persons; nor permitting them in my establishment:

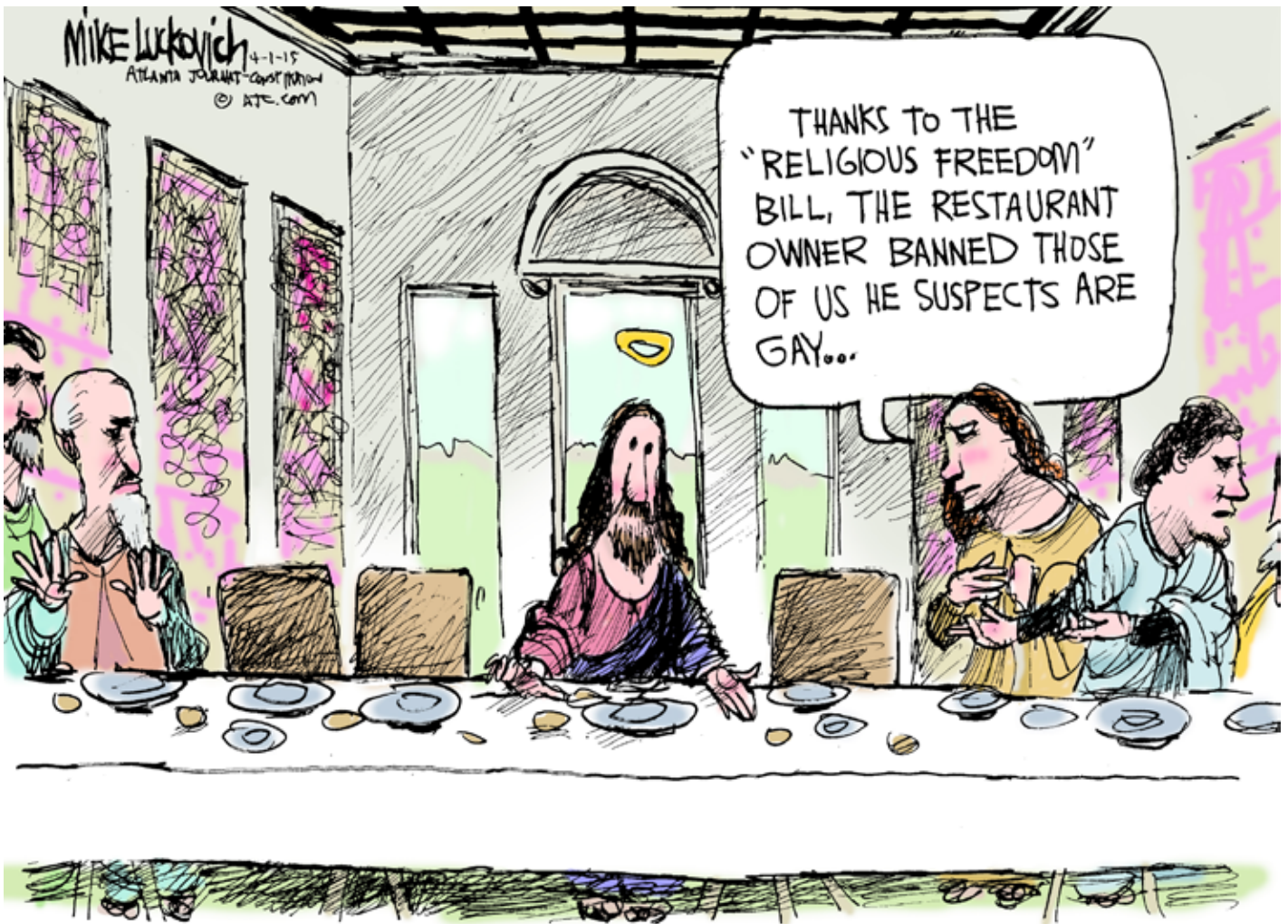
1. Divorcees. Matthew 19:9: "And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery."

2. Anyone who has ever read their horoscope or called a psychic hotline. Leviticus 20:6: "As for the person who turns to mediums and to spiritists, to play the harlot after them, I will also set My face against that person and will cut him off from among his people."

3. Anyone with a tattoo. Leviticus 19:28 "You shall not make any cuts in your body for the dead nor make any tattoo marks on yourselves: I am the Lord."

4. Anyone born illegitimately. Also, anyone who, back to 10 generations, is descended from someone born illegitimately. If you cannot PROVE, using appropriate church sources, that 10 generations of your family were born in wedlock, I will have to err on the side of caution and not serve you. Deuteronomy 23:2 "No one of illegitimate birth shall enter the assembly of the LORD; none of his descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall enter the assembly of the LORD."

5. Anyone who makes a practice of praying aloud, or in public. Matthew 6:5-6 "When you



pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."

6. Any woman with braided hair or gold jewelry. Just to be on the safe side, NO jewelry at all. 1 Timothy 2:9 "Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments."

7. Any man who has ever, by accident or not, had his genitals damaged. [Current interpretation of this scripture is under debate, so just to be safe, if you've had a vasectomy, or testicular cancer, I can't serve you. I apologize for the inconvenience but I am worried for my soul.] Deuteronomy 23:1 "A man whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off may never join the assembly of the Lord."

8. Please don't bring your kids in if they have a bowl cut. Leviticus 19:27 "You shall not round off the side-growth of your heads nor harm the edges of your beard."

For those of you complaining that some of these scriptures are from the Old Testament, and that Jesus came to redeem us from these laws, I refer you to Matthew 5:17-19, where Our Savior himself says: "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Again, I am sorry for the inconvenience. It's nothing personal, "love the sinner but hate the sin" and all, but I simply can't serve anyone who would blatantly disregard God's sacred law in such a fashion.

Of course, this would never happen. People don't refuse to serve gays because they find it against God's Law. They do it, by and large, because "the gays are icky."

Jesus had dinner with prostitutes and tax collectors. Get over yourselves.

© Daily Kos

As Safety Net Shrinks, Fears Stalk The Aging

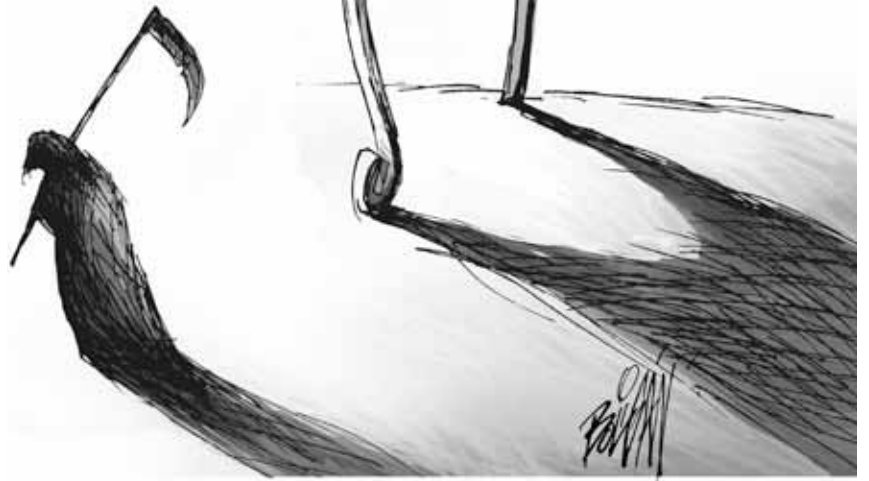
BY STEVEN ROSENFELD

No topic in America may be as closeted and yet on the tips of people's tongues as what really happens as loved ones pass through their senior years, especially the end of life.

I recently told one middle-aged friend I'll call Tom that his college roommate, Jon, has been taking care of his 91-year-old mother-in-law at his home, which silenced Tom. Jon, now an accountant, was stunned when told by a local nursing home "to bring her in and we'll figure out the finances later." The facility charges \$10,000 a month.

Before I could say this sounded like a senior version of a subprime loan, Tom blurted out that his 83-year-old ex-professor dad just had both knees replaced and was "wondering what he will do before he dies." Tom recounted wanting to help a relative get a veterans' stipend toward nursing home costs, griping that hiring an expert for the paperwork costs \$4,500. Then he fretted about his own mother-in-law, who is in her 80s.

On the other hand, when I recently talked to a family member who is approaching 80, fairly healthy and still working, not complaining about himself or taking care of his wife, there's a positivity and acceptance lacking in my middle-aged peers. My relative is still active and living at home, unlike many of the people profiled in Atul Gawande's bestseller, *Being Mortal*, which chronicles the last phases of life, in



which decline and a loss of independence push many Americans to put loved ones in cold institutions in their final months.

These anecdotes are the tip of an enormous iceberg about the struggles, fears and generational temperaments accompanying aging in America. While there is plenty to worry about, it is often not what is advertised in fear-based ads targeting graying mid-lifers and more elderly people.

Different issues and existential concerns confront people in different phases of later life – financial, physical, emotional – especially at the end.

But aging does not have to be a one-way slide downhill. Studies have found people who feel younger than their age may live years longer. Positive social factors, if present, can improve physical and mental functioning. And several studies conclude that one's

emotional life is richest well into one's seventh decade.

There is no single landscape of fears or concerns surrounding aging. Take the 77 million baby boom generation, born between 1946 and 1964 who today are between age 69 and 49. In a remarkable nationwide survey a few years ago, Pew Research Center found that the youngest boomers' worst fears and highest hopes were not confirmed by the actual experiences of their older counterparts.

When asked, sizeable percentages of people under age 65 said they expected to face the following problems as they aged: memory loss, losing ability to drive, serious illness, diminished sex lives, sadness, depression, loneliness, not being needed, trouble paying bills, and being a burden.

Yet the prevalence of those problems among people over 65 was markedly lower in every category – sometimes by more than 2-1. In contrast, expectations that people under 65 had about having more time for

lion people who now are 65 and older, a cohort whose ranks will reach 86.7 million by 2050, according to the U.S. Census. The rub is that \$28 trillion is mostly concentrated in upper-income households.

So while millions of people can afford to stop working and might fret about unplanned expenses, namely health crises, millions of households – especially non-whites – face starker futures because they will primarily rely on government safety nets.

Alicia Munnell, director of Boston College's Center for Retirement Research, testified recently in the Senate that Americans would need an additional \$7.7 trillion in savings to maintain current living standards. Others, such as the National Institute on Retirement Security, estimated that the "retirement income deficit" could be \$14 trillion. The reason for the massive shortfall is decades of middle- and working-class wage stagnation and the disappearance of pensions – delayed salary payments for retirement. Wall Street's touted replacement, stock market index funds, have

“Getting old isn’t nearly as bad as people think,” Pew said. “Nor is it quite as good.”

hobbies, family, volunteer work, travel and financial security in later life were also unmet.

Pew's results suggest that two biggest variables affecting well-being as one exits middle age are health, physical and mental, and finances. The book by Gawande, a surgeon, teacher and New Yorker writer, is notable because it fills in what happens at the very end of life: how medical interventions and nursing home costs can roil family finances and emotions, and often do not bring comfort or dignity to people in their final months.

Yet in between these two life passages – exiting middle age and the loss of independence – sits another expanse, often lasting decades, with its own spectrum of issues about aging gracefully.

As Americans enter a period where there will be more aging and elderly people than any other time in its history, we can point to a handful of facts, factors, fears and realities that will shape the quality of million of lives. These start with the financial landscape, which creates a baseline from which other issues emerge or recede.

INEQUALITY'S OLDER FACE

American may be living longer, but there are serious questions about whether millions of people will slowly slide into poverty because they lack the savings to supplement Social Security and other government safety nets. On one hand, millions of Americans are well-prepared for retirement in coming years. However, millions also will be in trouble.

The nation's 77 million baby boomers control 67% of America's wealth, or \$28 trillion, ImmersionActive.com, an ad agency specializing in boomers, said, citing federal figures. That wealth, along with Social Security, has to sustain the living expenses of 40 mil-

lion people who now are 65 and older, a cohort whose ranks will reach 86.7 million by 2050, according to the U.S. Census. The rub is that \$28 trillion is mostly concentrated in upper-income households.

According to AARP, half of all current retirees depend on Social Security – averaging \$1,330 a month – for 50% or more of their income. That's 20 million people today, which will grow every year. If that average monthly payment were a salary, it would be a dollar more than the federal minimum wage.

While there has been a push by Democrats and Independents in Congress to increase Social Security payouts, Republicans keep balking, even though the fairest fix is lifting a cap on payroll taxes for the wealthy.

HEALTH ISSUES: REAL VS. IMAGINED

The biggest fear cited by people under age 65 in Pew's national survey of expectations about older life was that the majority – 57% – expected they would experience memory loss. But only 25% of Pew's respondents over age 65 said that happened. This result partly refutes a stereotype – that getting old means inevitable mental health decline.

Other research supports Pew's finding. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that “approximately one in eight adults over age 60” had increased confusion or memory loss in 2010. Notably, less than half of those experiencing these difficulties sought help from a family, friend, or a health care provider, CDC said, for reasons ranging from shame to fear of healthcare expenses.

The American Psychological Association also said that 12% of older Americans, or 5.4 million people, experience dementia, a catch-all term for a range of memory and behavioral lapses. APA said about one in five adults 65 and older “met criteria for a mental disorder,” which also included anxiety, depression

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Spirit of ~~'76~~ 2016



America's Political Problems: Then And Now

BY HAROLD V. SARE

First of Four Parts

We hear from time to time that the U.S. should go back to the Founding Fathers to restore the way the U.S. system of government should work. So let's travel back to the Constitutional Convention of May-September 1787 in Philadelphia.

The political order of the time was in trouble and something had to be done. The U.S. government under the Articles of Confederation could not respond to either national or international problems because of the deadlock between the central government and the states.

The U.S. government did not have sufficient revenues or the needed political authority to cope with domestic or international problems.

Most leading Americans of the day recognized the

problems, but they did not have the constitutional structure or established processes to deal with serious problems. They communicated and decided to meet to amend the Articles of Confederation in order to provide the necessary government and processes that would enable them to cope with national and international problems.

Today, we benefit from what they established then as a system of government and processes and also from the additional developments over the decades that keep the system functional. Still we are stymied in an ideological gridlock that prevents us from taking vigorous and common sense action to resolve our problems.

Political common sense and practicality seem to have lost their rightful place in today's political environment.

Back in Annapolis in 1786, a small number of state representatives met to consider ways to amend the Articles of Confederation. They finally called for a meeting of all states in Philadelphia in May 1787 with the objective of amending the Articles of Confederation to resolve the U.S. government's deficiencies.

Little did they realize that they were going to write a new constitution of great historic significance not only to the U.S. but also one that would provide a model for other political systems to borrow from. The new U.S. Constitution over a period of time became a well-established system of constitutional democracy. At issue today are problems of political culture that are critical to the functioning of a constitutional order.

With some reluctance, 70 delegates were selected by the states to meet in Philadelphia. Fifty-five eventually arrived. Upon historic reflection a notable group of experienced men came to the convention. James Madison from Virginia diligently prepared for the convention, and became one of its most knowledgeable and leading spokespersons, in spite of his shyness, small stature and squeaky voice. He was young, a recent college graduate, and a participant in the discussions relating to the independence and the inadequacies of the U.S. government. He had the freedom of time and position because his father was a very wealthy land owner in Virginia.

But, in addition, there were other outstanding men – such of George Washington, the famous general of the Revolutionary War; Benjamin Franklin, the oldest [81] person there; and Alexander Hamilton – who were prominent in the states.

James Wilson, Roger Sherman, Gouverneur Morris, William Paterson, and Charles Pinckney were well known. The only person considered by historians to be a scoundrel was William Blount. A few were present who did not play a prominent role.

Of all these personalities, George Washington was easily selected as president of the convention. Even so, he seldom presided and did not speak much. Because of his reputation, his presence at the convention was critical [see Collier & Collier, *Decisions in Philadelphia*]

These men at the convention were noted for their pragmatic, practical and common sense approach to resolving the new nation's problems. Most were learned, experienced, and strongly oriented toward compromise. They were not emotionally ideological, though they were concerned about basic values of self-government, individual freedom and public participation in government. They were not democratic in the modern sense.

Women did not participate, nor did black men or men of lower levels of society, and certainly not slaves or Native Americans.

Because of complex problems and the many different political positions, a process of discussion and compromise was essential to establishing a firm foundation for the U.S. Members of the convention

succeeded in writing a new constitution, but it was not easy.

Discussion was intense, and at times the convention almost broke up. There was ugly talk from some about splitting up the nation, but that, under the circumstances of geography, and a feeling of weakened capability of the states, simply would not have been a practical option.

Compromise saved the day! Thirty-eight of the 55 delegates signed the Constitution on Sept. 17, 1787, and it took more than a year for all the states to ratify it. Nine states ratifying the constitution set up the new U.S. government. Not all states had ratified before that took place.

George Washington was the appropriate national figure of the time to initiate and to establish the new political system.

Harold V. Sare is regents service professor of political science emeritus at Oklahoma State University.

Whole Truth And Nothing But The

The following are actual statements made during court cases:

Judge: I know you, don't I?

Defendant: Uh, yes.

Judge: All right, tell me, how do I know you?

Defendant: Judge, do I have to tell you?

Judge: Of course. You might be obstructing justice not to tell me.

Defendant: OK. I was your bookie.

Judge: Please identify yourself for the record.

Defendant: Colonel Ebenezer Jackson.

Judge: What does the "Colonel" stand for?

Defendant: Well, it's kinda like the "Honorable" in front of your name. Not a damn thing.

From a defendant representing himself ...

Defendant: Did you get a good look at me when I stole your purse?

Victim: Yes, I saw you clearly. You are the one who stole my purse.

Defendant: I should have shot you while I had the chance.

Judge: The charge here is theft of frozen chickens. Are you the defendant?

Defendant: No, sir, I am the guy who stole the chickens.

Axelrod's Rx For What Ails U.S. Politics: Get Involved

BELIEVER

My Forty Years In Politics

By David Axelrod

Penguin Publishing Group

528 pages, \$35

BY WANDA JO STAPLETON

In his new memoir, David Axelrod, the mastermind behind Barack Obama's historic election campaigns, shares a wealth of stories from the perspective of one who was at Obama's side every step of the way. Axelrod and Obama first met in Chicago in 1992 where Obama worked as a community organizer.

Later, Obama called upon Axelrod to help him become a U.S. senator from Illinois. "Yes we can!" became the rallying cry in this campaign. Axelrod designed and executed the winning campaign messages and advertising.

Afterwards, Obama credited Axelrod with helping him get elected to the U.S. Senate in 2005. He wrote Axelrod a note that said: "To Axe, Here because of you!"

Along the way, Obama's wife Michelle asked what Obama could contribute that others couldn't. His answer: "Million of kids – black kids, Hispanic kids – will look at themselves differently. It would open up possibilities that they could scarcely imagine."

When Obama decided to run for president in 2008, he again called on Axelrod and asked him to do the media and message work as he had in the U.S. Senate campaign.

Before working for Obama, Axelrod, after graduating from the University of Chicago [where he studied political science], went to work for the Chicago Tribune where he covered local, state and national politics. He had also managed the election and re-election of Harold Washington, Chicago's first African-American mayor.

This experience qualified Axelrod to work for Obama's U.S. Senate and presidential campaigns.

For Obama's presidential campaign, Axelrod and his team developed a logo, the sunrise logo, which

spoke to a new beginning: a red-and-white striped ocean with a white sun rising on a sky blue horizon. "Fired up, ready to go" became the rallying cry.

T-shirts – bearing a stenciled portrait of Obama under the words "hope" and "change" – appeared everywhere.

Obama won the election and swept sizable majorities into the House and Senate. After the election, Axelrod, along with Valerie Jarrett, became senior advisers to President Obama. With a room adjacent to the Oval Office, Axelrod controlled the speechwriting process. He had help with writing speeches from a group he called "Wordsmiths."

During his first two years in office, President Obama accomplished more than any president since LBJ. For example, he stanchied the bleeding of an economy of the brink of disaster, passed health care reform, saved the American auto industry, struck down the ban on gays in the military, passed the Lilly Ledbetter law to combat pay discrimination against women, and much more. His legislative victories were possible only because of the strong Democratic majorities that Obama had swept into Congress.

Axelrod had planned from the beginning to leave after the 2008-10 session, and he did. He went back to Chicago where he founded the Institute of Politics at the University of Chicago.

In closing, Axelrod says "I don't speak with the president as much anymore. But half a century later, I'm still a believer."

His belief is something everyone should share: Get involved. Get in the arena. Help shape the world in which you're going to live. Be the engaged citizen a healthy democracy demands.

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

Caste Aside: Jim Crow Revisited

THE NEW JIM CROW
*Mass Incarceration
In The Age Of
Colorblindness*
By Michelle Alexander
The New Press
336 pages, \$19.95

BY HANNIBAL B. JOHNSON

The New Jim Crow paradigm represents yet another lens through which to view race dynamics in America. The concept of a “New Jim Crow” derives from *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, a book by Michelle Alexander, a civil rights litigator and legal scholar, published in 2010.

“Jim Crow” refers to anti-black laws and practices [e.g., de jure segregation of public accommodations; restrictive covenants in housing; restrictions on voting rights] that dominated the post-Reconstruction American landscape through the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. The name Jim Crow traces back to a 19th Century song-and-dance minstrel show popularized by a white actor in blackface.

Alexander explained how mass incarceration of African Americans, particularly, men, resurrected Jim Crow:

Arguably the most important parallel between mass incarceration and Jim Crow is that both have served to define the meaning

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and significance of race in America. Indeed, a primary function of any racial caste system is to define the meaning of race in its time. Slavery defined what it meant to be black [a slave], and Jim Crow defined what it meant to be black [a

second-class citizen]. Today mass incarceration defines the meaning of blackness in America: black people, especially black men, are criminals. That is what it means to be black.

The New Jim Crow paradigm ar-

gues that a web of laws, policies, and practices conspire to ensnare thousands of African Americans, especially males, in the vortex of the criminal justice system.

That entanglement leads inexorably to incarceration and, with it, a pariah-like status that follows them through life.

What is different now, and thus “new” about Jim Crow, is that many of the offending laws and practices are facially neutral.

That is, they do not explicitly say: You are a black male, and therefore, you are less; your life does not matter; you will be treated less favorably. Rather, the discrimination and determinism of the New Jim Crow rests largely in discretionary practices implemented by those charged with enforcing those seemingly even-handed laws and policies.

Consider the perception of hyper-criminality among African Americans, especially males. This popular notion is fueled in part by the reality of differential and disparate treatment by and within the criminal justice system and the grossly disproportionate incarceration of black men.

Numerous studies confirm that black males, both adult and juvenile, face harsher consequences at every stage of the criminal justice system: [1] Disproportionate minority contact with law enforcement [i.e., stops, arrests, etc.]; [2] Enhanced likelihood of criminal charges upon contact with law enforcement; [3] More severe criminal charges; [4] Greater likelihood of conviction; [5] Harsher punishment/sentencing; [6] Greater likelihood of the imposition of the death penalty, where available; and [7] High rates of recidivism.

Who benefits? Who suffers?

Jurisdictions increasingly rely on privatized prisons. These for-profit behemoths prosper off the backs of the voiceless, powerless black men they warehouse behind concrete and steel. Their sustainability and profit-making potential hinge on keeping a full house.

The social spillovers from these gaping disparities burden African American communities specifically and, by extension, all of us. We wind up with legions of black men undereducated, unavailable for relationships and absent from family, ineligible to vote on account of felony convictions, difficult to employ, and distrustful of lawful authority.

All the while, black/white socioeconomic disparities widen, including profound gaps in education, employment, poverty, wealth, and health. Families suffer. Communities suffer. Our democracy suffers.

Often, the root of the problem begins in the pre-criminal-justice-system-contact phase. The “school-to-prison pipeline” deserves as much attention as the much-debated Keystone Pipeline.

Young black boys, very young black boys, regularly receive grossly disparate disciplinary actions [e.g., suspensions; expulsions] in school and get labeled as miscreants. They are far more likely than their

white counterparts to receive harsher punishments for the same or similar offenses.

As a result, they lag behind academically. They lose interest. Educators, in turn, lose whatever interest they may have had in them in the first instance. These boys drop out, not just from school, but also from membership in the class of productive, law-abiding community members.

This becomes, for some, a self-fulfilling prophecy as they enter adulthood. Criminality follows, and the vicious cycle begins.

We have work to do. The first step, though, is a broad acknowledgment of what is an empirically-provable problem. That requires education.

What might we do now? Some thoughts include:

- Engage politically. Vote for elected representatives with [1] a positive track record on issues affecting people of color; and [2] the knowledge, understanding, and skill to craft public policies that will reduce race-based socioeconomic disparities.

- Scrutinize prison privatization, which creates a financial incentive for incarceration.

- Create business/entrepreneurship mentorship opportunities for youth as diversionary, right-track approaches in lieu of truancy and criminality.

- Limit, if not wholly eliminate, mandatory minimum sentencing which leads to more incarcerations for longer stints.

- Encourage the decriminalization of some nonviolent drug offenses and move toward a public health model for appropriate drug offenders.

- We must also intervene early, disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline by instilling a sense of cultural competence in those charged with teaching our children and youth.

- We should work with law enforcement officers in a similar vein, building trust between them and the communities they police; helping law enforcement members understand that implicit bias [i.e., unconscious racism] is both real and a clear and present danger to the kind of mutually-respectful and beneficial relationships we all should want in our communities.

African Americans parents often prepare their children for the reality of the real world. Their kids may, in fact, be treated differently, and, if and when they are, they need to know how to navigate encounters that could, in an instant, veer irretrievably off course. We must shore up family and community supports.

Mentors, role models, and structure matter for children, no less so for black male children. It indeed “takes a village,” and we need more of them. We have to work toward the day when this protective strategy will no longer be deemed necessary.

Progress awaits. A change is indeed going to come. But until that time, it is best to be prepared for in the present.

Hannibal B. Johnson, a Harvard Law School graduate, is an author, attorney, and consultant living in Tulsa.

Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

budgets are larger now than six years ago. It's a basic tenet of the discredited Supply Side Economics theory that tax cuts generate more tax revenue.

Here are the facts: When adjusted for inflation, this year's budget is \$680 million smaller – *smaller!* – than six years ago, according to the Oklahoma Policy Institute.

These three points – expanding business tax incentives, cutting income tax cuts and rejecting Medicaid expansion – tell you everything you need to know about who's in charge at NE 23rd and Lincoln Boulevard.

Who benefits most from tax breaks? The state's largest corporations. From tax cuts? The state's wealthiest residents. From Medicaid expansion? The state's working poor and rural hospitals, buckling under the mounting costs of uncompensated care.

There is no doubt who has the biggest megaphone at the Capitol – it's the state's wealthy business execs who are among the biggest campaign donors to lawmakers setting public policy.

The working class gets the scraps. This year's income tax cut? According to OKPolicy, the median household will realize \$31 while two-fifths of Oklahomans won't see anything.

Given that 87% percent of Oklahomans responding to a recent survey want teacher pay increased – it's \$3,200 below the regional average – you can bet most would just as soon the state keep the \$31 and do something for the common good.

Common Sense

The red light near the top of the Capitol dome isn't just a warning for low-flying aircraft. It also symbolizes the fact most of the state's elected elite are in effect property of the gun lobby.

How else to explain the Legislature's utter indifference to a hidden tax borne by the state's law-abiding citizens – the cost of gun violence?

Mother Jones recently calculated that Oklahomans pay \$1,200 a year each in gun violence-related costs, everything from police investigations to prosecutions, uncompensated health care to incarceration.

It doesn't have to be this way. A thoughtful, *independent* Legislature would require that gun-owners obtain liability insurance.

The state already mandates insurance for owners of 4,000-pound killing machines known as the automobile. Why not guns?

Insurance companies would do background checks, set policy terms and costs, and keep government informed on who does or doesn't have coverage. Just

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like with motor vehicles, uninsured guns could be "impounded" – giving law enforcement another tool to get illegal weapons off the streets.

Liability coverage also would provide protection from misfires, missed targets or reckless discharges. And it would lift some of the burden from government coffers, leaving more money for essential services.

Shouldn't it at least be part of the discussion?

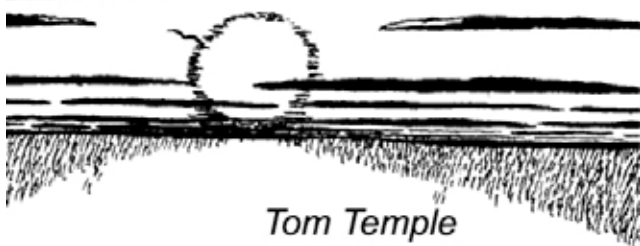
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Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Walmart has sued Texas, demanding the right to sell hard liquor in its stores. That knocking sound you hear is the knees of Oklahoma's liquor wholesalers – Walmart's financial clout could end their stranglehold on the sale of spirits.

Tulsa's Premier Consulting is becoming a political halfway house for Republicans whose rising stars flamed out: Corporation Commission-ex Patrice Douglas, who lost her bid for 5th Congressional District, and former House Speaker T.W. Shannon, defeated for U.S. Senate, now work there.

Ex-Sen. Randy Brogdon won state Republican chair only to discover the party was in serious debt [\$50,000?]. He's kept the lights on – literally, not metaphorically – but must know GOP's deep pockets aren't keen on his far-right base.

Gov. Fallin and legislative leaders are gushing over the corporate welfare review bill, HB 2182, but it is so murky that no one knows whether it's the real deal or typical window dressing. Only time will tell.

This must keep bigots like Rep. John Bennett up nights: The number of Muslims worldwide is projected to nearly equal the number of Christians by 2050. – Pew Research

This must keep bigots like Rep. Sally Kern up nights: Support for same-sex marriage has more than doubled in the last two decades – from only 27% in 1996 to 55% last year. – Gallup

Special elections: At least six Democrats want to succeed Kevin Matthews in Tulsa's HD 73. At press time, three Republicans and Democrat Cyndi Munson had filed for OKC's HD 85, vacant because of Rep. David Dank's death.

Well deserved: Linda James Farley and her late husband, Jack, honored with 2015 Legends of Labor award at recent Central Oklahoma Labor Federation's annual banquet.

Check your pockets: Airline passengers left \$674,841.06 in loose change at major U.S. airport checkpoints in FY '14. – Transportation Security Administration

Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

time, those negotiations have now culminated in yet another advance toward ensuring that Iran will never produce nuclear weapons.

During an interview with Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif last fall, Zarif said, "What we need to do is to put in place mechanisms to ensure that Iran would never produce nuclear weapons. We are prepared to put those mechanisms in place."

Those mechanisms are now being put in place.

A few key agreements from the recent diplomatic accord are:

1. Iran's centrifuges to be reduced from 19,000 to 6,104.
2. Nuclear enrichment for energy and medical needs to not exceed 3.7%.
3. 97% reduction in current nuclear material.
4. Continuous monitoring by the IAEA of all aspects of nuclear process from mining to production to storage using the most modern, up-to-date technology.

The fact that the U.S. did not impose more sanctions has allowed multi-national talks to work and we've avoided a much greater likelihood of military conflict – something the American people are emphatically against.

Equally important was the flexibility to extend the time needed to finalize the framework.

The steady diplomatic efforts of Iran, five other nations plus the U.S. are moving the world toward safer and more secure relations and away from war.

Once again, we have proof that, given adequate time, diplomacy works.

Mary Francis
Norman

Editor, The Observer:

How many Americans are fully aware of our relationship to Iran over the past 65 years? For instance, how many know that the U.S.-CIA and the UK-MI9 jointly overthrew the democratically elected government of Mohammad Mosadegh in 1953 and then installed Shah Reza Palhavi as ruler? The Shah was infamous for his use of SAVAK [a secret police unit that rivaled the Nazi Gestapo in brutality] to keep political opponents tortured, imprisoned or dead.

When the seriously ill Shah was invited to the U.S. in 1979 for treatment it was no surprise that his government was overthrown. The seething Iranians, suffering under 26 years of the Shah's despotism and angry at the U.S. for complicity, surprised few observers



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when they took our embassy people captive and held
them for 444 days before releasing them unharmed.

Is it not both sad and ironic that our government
is responsible for the establishment of the Islamic
Republic in Iran and the coming to power of Ayatollah
Khomeini?

Subsequently, the U.S. clandestinely supplied Iraq's
Saddam Hussein with a wealth of weapons, including
chemicals [WMDs] and sophisticated satellite intel-
ligence trying to depose the new Iranian government
led by the Ayatollah Khomeini. The war was a stale-
mate.

Very few people know that the Ayatollah refused the
advice of his military to use chemical weapons and
work on developing nuclear bombs. Khomeini firmly
held that weapons of mass destruction violated the
tenets of Islam.

The Ayatollah died in 1988 just months before our
warship "Vincennes" shot down an Iranian airliner
killing all 290 aboard. No apology was rendered and
the Navy tried to cover up the deed by insisting the
airliner was easily mistaken for a fighter jet! The air-
liner was both climbing and heading away from the
Vincennes.

Frank Silovsky
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Help me get this straight, please.

Did almost half [46%] of our United States Senate
send a letter to the Islamic Republic of Iran saying
you can't trust the United States?

Did they say "you may not fully understand our
Constitution" and "bring to their attention features
of our Constitution"? How condescending.

Was the letter written by the junior senator from
Arkansas, Tom Cotton?

Did they believe the Ayatollahs trusted us?

Did the Iranian foreign minister, Mohammed Javal
Zarif [a professor of international law], respond that
the signatories of the letter "not only do not under-
stand international law, but are not fully cognizant of
the nuances of their own Constitution"?

Did the Dumb Duo from Oklahoma sign? [Okie
choices for the "world's greatest deliberative body."]

How embarrassing! And harmful to our country?

Al Engel
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

For 80 years, Oklahoma towns and cities have had
the right to regulate oil and gas production in their
city limits. There hasn't been a problem. Now HB
2178 and SB 809 would give that additional respon-
sibility to the Oklahoma Corporation Commission,
a busy state agency already overburdened with new
regulatory responsibilities and no new staff or fund-
ing due to \$611 million budget shortfall.

Cities and towns understand the balance between
businesses development and the need to protect pre-

cious clean water and air for all citizens, including many who don't profit from oil and gas income. The best government is local government because it is most responsive to local citizens.

Legislators need to vote no on HB 2178 and SB 809 as well as SB 468, which would make cities and towns financially liable if personal oil and gas income was affected by regulation of oil and gas drilling.

Phyllis Bryant
Bethany

Aging

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 37

and suicide risk.

Again, the fears and concerns of aging vary with one's life stage and even gender. As men and women leave middle age, caring.com reports that what they fear most about aging differs. For women, the top concerns are "losing attractiveness/becoming 'invisible,'" being left alone, becoming poor, developing cancer – especially breast cancer – and being dependent on others. For men, the top concerns are sexual impotence, physical weakness, becoming irrelevant by ending a career, losing the ability to drive and their independence, and suffering dementia – or their spouse suffering from it.

As people move beyond age 65, the focus seems to shift, according to other studies [yet again by senior marketing experts] where the greatest fears have to do with more concrete physical or cognitive impairments and the existential issues that come from running out of money, having to move from familiar surroundings, the death of a spouse, or the inability to manage daily activities and reliance on strangers.

It's easy to conclude that there's little that can be done to slow or stop these worst-case fears or inevitable bad endings. Yet one of the biggest takeaways from scouring recent reporting and research is there is a period between middle age and when people say they are old – an unnamed zone – where concrete actions can increase the quality of life.

According to one study by Becca Levy at Yale School of Public Health, cultural attitudes and media messages about the elderly can translate positively and negatively, making older people feel better or worse in measurable ways. In the UK, a study of 6,000 over age 52 found that people who felt they were "at least three years younger than their chronological age were less likely to die over the next eight years than those who felt equal to or older than their actual age."

In other words, feeling younger prolongs lifespans.

CAREGIVING QUANDRIES

As Gawande notes, the most difficult period with the greatest unknowns comes at the end of independence of loved ones and their families. Here, too, there's a progression that can be seen in caregiving, where each stage presents fears and challenges.

In a recent article, AARP said that "more than 42 million family members provide care to an older adult." It continued, "But there is also a growing care gap, as boomers transition from giving care to needing care themselves."

It is not a new scenario to hear about families exhausting their assets to provide various forms of residential care before qualifying for state-run Medicaid to cover what follows. But that is only part of the concerns facing families as loved ones age; as scary is having "the talk" about when long-term care is needed, medical intervention stops and hospice begins.

The challenges facing families who are wrestling with how best to care for loved ones in these settings also varies with age. To middle-aged children arranging the care, their top frustration may be finding the right caregiver or pinpointing costs.

Jon, the accountant who helps care for his wife's 91-year-old mother, said government websites never reveal what financial assistance one can expect from state and federal safety nets. This gap – between fixed incomes and unknown living expenses – affects many aspects of senior life, said Paul Kleyman, editor of Generations Beat Online.

On the other hand, the older family member who is being told he must get help from a stranger in his home or must leave his longtime home faces entirely different issues and emotions. Most seniors don't want to see familiar surroundings vanish, and may be confused – and depressed – about what's going on around them. The great service Gawande's book provides is showcasing these struggles in his family of physicians, humanists and teachers.

Stepping back from end-of-life issues, when one surveys the landscape of fears that face aging Americans, several big takeaways emerge. First, generalizations do not apply when life in every successive decade or phase presents different challenges. Moreover, lots of what is pedaled in the media, or by fear-mongering businesses, is wrong, because people's real-life experiences are different.

What really matters or scares people the most isn't widely talked about at all – even though what's really happening to aging loved ones sits on the tips of people's tongues.

Steven Rosenfeld covers national political issues for AlterNet and is author of Count My Vote: A Citizen's Guide to Voting [AlterNet Books, 2008].

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Speaker – Arnold Hamilton, Editor, The Oklahoma Observer

Following the speaker

Pastoral Reflection – Imam Imad Enchassi

Question & Answer panel

Ringing The Bell Of Freedom – traditional ceremony of the Day of Reflection
Reception



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