

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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EMPTY PROMISES

A Decade After State Leaders Privatized Lake Texoma State Park, Their Grand Dreams Remain Unfulfilled



SPECIAL REPORT

***Lake Woe-Be-Gone:
Privatizing Texoma State Park
Proving To Be Nightmare***

– Pages 24-25

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OUR MOTTO

To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

OUR CREDO

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

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

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Observations

Priorities

Gov. Mary Fallin recently vetoed legislation that would have prevented private entities from banning guns in parks, recreational areas and fairgrounds. On the same day, she signed a measure into law that will permit school board-designated employees to carry handguns on campuses.

The governor's political pecking order is clear: Business interests trump the gun lobby and gun lobby interests trump school children.

Fallin did the right thing vetoing SB 41 – and not just because of its potential economic impact. This is a matter of public safety.

It's easy to see why organizers of major events often contractually require that guns be prohibited. Introducing loaded weapons into a crowd can be a recipe for disaster.

Anyone who's attended a Bedlam football game can attest to the perils of too much drinking and trash talking.

But the governor blew it when she signed HB 2014 empowering school boards to designate school employees that can carry handguns on campuses.

This was a political consolation prize for Second Amendment zealots that believe the only thing that can stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun.

Supporters of the new law assert safeguards are built in: weapon-carrying employees must be either a licensed security guard or reserve peace officer. That worked well for the Tulsa County sheriff's department, didn't it?

The arm-the-schools crowd blithely ignores a significant risk: putting students in proximity to loaded handguns in what traditionally was a weapon-free zone.

It's not difficult to imagine a student overpowering a school employee. High schoolers often are bigger, stronger and faster than their adult su-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 43

THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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Will ex-Sen. Jerry Ellis challenge Corporation Commissioner Dana Murphy in 2016? Unlike the incumbent, he wouldn't be a Big Oil lapdog – especially on earthquake issues.

Dart: To Tess Teague, declaring her candidacy for HD 101 while still managing the Journal Record's Legislative Reporting Service. Her ethical lapse got her the boot from Capitol pressroom.

Gov. Mary Fallin terms out in early 2019. By then, OSU President Burns Hargis will have served 11 years – longer than most college CEOs. Timing may be fueling rumors Fallin is angling to lead her alma mater.

Laurel: To ex-state Sen. Connie Johnson, new chair of Oklahoma Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. She long has opposed capital punishment – including when her brother was murdered in 1981.

Wow! The Cherokee Nation's economic impact on northeast Oklahoma was \$1.55 billion last year, according to an Oklahoma City University study – up more than 50% from five years ago.

Dart: To OU President David Boren, trying to serve two masters – the university and Continental Resources [as a board member collecting nearly \$1 million since 2009]. The earthquake debacle bismirches OU's reputation.

Mark your calendars: June 14 special elections in HDs 73 [Tulsa] and 85 [OKC]. Seven D's battle in winner-take-all primary to replace new Sen. Kevin Matthews in north Tulsa. The survivor of four-candidate GOP primary faces Democrat Cyndi Munson on Sept. 8 in OKC, the winner succeeding the late Rep. David Dank.

Laurel: To the OEA and other pro-public ed forces, refusing a deal-with-the-devil that would have stolen from pension funds to finance teacher pay raises. What GOP lawmakers are doing to public schools is criminal.

Someone who can speak slowly enough must tell Sen. Jim Inhofe that concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is 40% higher than when the Industrial Revolution began. Moreover, 14 of 15 warmest years on record have occurred this century. – NOAA

Dart: To Legislature's self-proclaimed fiscal conservatives, sparing the House and Senate budgets while imposing draconian cuts on most state agencies. Even the Daily Disappointment called it a "double standard."

Hypocrite: In his 2002 Senate campaign, rightwing darling Jim Bob Dugger urged capital punishment for incest – while covering up child molestation complaints against son Josh.

Last year's Democratic gubernatorial nominee Joe Dorman is now with Heart Mobile, working with senior nutrition centers and church groups to provide affordable phone service for eligible participants.

House Democrats reward Del City Rep. Scott Inman with fourth term as minority leader. The 2017-18 team also includes Beggs Rep. Steve Kouplen as caucus chair and Chickasha Rep. David Perryman as vice-chair.

Ex-Rep. Randy Terrill is now serving time after Court of Criminal Appeals upheld his bribery conviction. Terrill was a bright guy who lived life on the edge. You knew his political career would end badly.

Republican lawmakers vowed to be transparent when governing. They've often embraced opacity instead. Example: HB 1037 would restrict public access to police videos – allowing identities of officers under investigation to be concealed. The gov was still deciding its fate at press time.

Discipline problems at OKC's Roosevelt Middle School are so acute they could prompt a mass exodus of frustrated teachers. This isn't an indictment of public ed – it underscores a parenting problem that isn't easily solved.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 44

Letters



Editor, The Observer:

I have yet to see it reported whether Tulsa reserve deputy Robert Bates had his taser and his gun on the same hip or on opposite hips. We know he didn't know his taser from his gun. If they were on opposite hips, he didn't know his left from his right, either.

Nathaniel Batchelder
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

The Sheriff Stanley Glanz scandal is proof positive that we need to limit terms of law enforcement to 12 years.

The scandal involved a bungled sting in which a friend of the sheriff mistook his gun for a Taser and killed an unarmed black man trying to make a run for it.

The 72-year-old Glanz has been Tulsa County sheriff for 26 years.

That's way too long because power corrupts.

You become corrupt the first 10 minutes you have power.

For that reason, we limit the time that presidents [eight years], Oklahoma governors [eight years] and Okie state legislators [12 years]

hold office.

Let's give district attorneys, judges, sheriffs and police statutory term limits, too.

They are very powerful and once intoxicated with power can never willingly abandon it.

Recent corruption scandals in the Tulsa police department, and now the sheriff's office, should force us to take corrective action.

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner
Wagoner

Editor, The Observer:

Last month, Gov. Mary Fallin signed a measure that allows teachers and administrators with training to carry guns in school.

When will this insanity end?

No doubt their rationale was to prevent mass killings like Sandy Hook Elementary and Virginia Tech from happening again, but adding more weapons to the mix is not the solution. It never was.

One must confront the real problem. What is the real problem? It's mental health. In every situation where mass shootings took place the person who did the shooting suffered from mental illness.

Here is the conundrum. This year the state's mental health services took a 30% budget cut.

Mass shootings are traumatic, no doubt. First thoughts are of sympathy for the victims and their families, but think of the classmates and staff who survived, yet witnessed the killings. They will lose sleep for years.

Now, add to this a staff member whose responsibility it is to shoot the assailant. If that staff member is not shot or killed himself and he succeeds at either stopping the assailant or killing him, then that staff member will be a hero who will have to deal with that incident for the rest of his life.

I have a theory concerning the taking of another person's life. No one in their right mind ever kills another person without it taking its toll on them. [Ask me about a family friend who was a career police officer and what he was once forced to do.]

Anyone who thinks they can kill another person without it having an affect on them has watched too many action movies.

Certain things do not mix. Bleach and ammonia. Liquid and electronics. Weapons and schools. Adding more guns to schools is like throwing gasoline on a fire. You do not put a fire out by throwing gas on it.

I am beginning to think that our state Legislature is living in Bizarro Superman world. Everything is disjointed.

When will this insanity end?

Steve Jarman
Pauls Valley

Editor, The Observer:

With my apologies to the Bard ...

There is something rotten in [the east Tulsa] Walmart and me thinks it is not from the building's sanitary sewer system.

Tom Birbilis
Tulsa

CONTINUED ON PAGE 45



Honesty

Every so often I come across a column I wish I'd written. This is one. It is the work of Taylor Batten, the Charlotte Observer's editorial page editor, but it mirrors our approach at The Oklahoma Observer.

I wrote a light blogpost last month about Mayor Dan Clodfelter proclaiming April 30 "Honesty Day" in Charlotte. Honesty Day, it turned out, is observed on that date nationwide.

I noted a Wikipedia explanation of what it's all about: "On this day, anyone participating may ask any question they choose and the opposing person should give a truthful and straightforward answer."

I invited readers to say what they would ask, and of whom.

David Fry of Charlotte was among those who responded.

"To: Observer Editors

"Question? Why do you support such a liberal agenda?

"Remember you're supposed to answer honestly."

Well, rules are rules, so I suppose you deserve an honest answer for Honesty Day. Here goes:

We believe that everyone is created equal.

We believe that children should not bear responsibility for the sins of their parents.

We believe that prevention is a heck of a lot cheaper than a cure.

We believe people should not be treated as lesser citizens, with fewer rights, because of whom they love.

We believe a thriving city, state and nation rests to a great degree in the quality of its public schools, and that every child deserves a dedicated, dynamic teacher, regardless of what ZIP code that child lives in.

We believe discrimination is wrong in every instance.

We believe in consistency, so if you are going to drug-test recipients of public assistance, drug-test them all, including the corporate chieftains who are the biggest beneficiaries.

We believe that police officers should act professionally, under incredibly difficult circumstances, regardless of a suspect's race.

We believe taxes should be kept as low as possible while still providing a sound safety net for the neediest, a robust education for all, decent health care for the elderly and the destitute, and other basics.

We believe politicians of any party should keep their promises, avoid the appearance of personal gain from the public trust, and look out for the general welfare, not that of any one special interest.

We believe there are people of worth beyond our tight circle and there are neighborhoods beyond our own, with different histories, perspectives and needs.

We believe offenders have paid their price when their sentence is up and should be helped to assimilate back into society. And that that's better for the community than neglecting them and watching them commit another crime.

We believe there are peace-loving Muslims.

We do not believe President Obama was born in Kenya.

We believe in the separation of church and state.

We believe Moore Place, built with public and private money, and its housing-first approach is a model for how to help the chronically homeless.

We believe Charlotte will need effective mass transit to handle its continually swelling population.

We believe if you're a fan of a politician solely because he has a "D" or an "R" after his name, then you're not paying attention.

We believe we have only one planet, and we should protect it for our grandchildren.

If that earns us the label "liberal" in your eyes, Mr. Fry, so be it. We approach the issues of the day with an open mind and guided by those principles, not by blind devotion to any political party. And that's the honest truth.

Editor's Note: The Observer's new web site is set to debut this month. It includes a Calendar that we hope will serve as a Town Square, of sorts, for progressive politics. To list your group's meetings, marches, demonstrations, and activities, e-mail me at ahamilton@okobserver.net.

Leaders?

This Best of Frosty column first appeared in the Nov. 10, 1999 Oklahoma Observer.

It's tough to be an Oklahoma Democrat today, and not just because the Republicans have registered 200,000 new voters while Democrats have lost the entire congressional delegation.

The problem isn't what the party stands for nationally – it is better on the economy, education, inclusiveness, separation of church and state, and campaign reform.

The problem is Democratic leadership in Oklahoma. The 1999 session of the Legislature was a disgrace – millions in tax cuts for fat cat oil companies and a pair of the most pathetic education “deform” laws imaginable. There was zero public demand for either.

Small farmers were going broke – all they asked for was a little tax relief. They got none, but Phillips and Conoco fared well at the trough.

A Democrat-dominated Legislature couldn't find \$60,000 for the Ethics Commission so campaign contributions could be filed on-line. You have to traipse to the Capitol basement and go through individual files. To hell with the public.

Millions poured into highways but nothing for teachers who are among the most underpaid in America. For five consecutive years, public education's percentage of the state budget has plummeted.

Speaker of the House Lloyd Benson and Senate Leader Stratton Taylor teamed up to kill local control of public education. That is no exaggeration. Read those godawful laws.

They even gave the nod to a testing bill that would have required special education children to take college prep and ACT exams. Attorney General Drew Edmondson issued an opinion citing federal law to kill that bit of stupidity.

They OK'd a charter school bill that requires no certified teachers, no curriculum standards, no tests and no professional negotiations for teachers or other employees.

Republicans – from public school bashing Gov. Frank Keating on down – are dancing in the streets. If enough kids are set up for certain failure, vouchers

are just around the corner – and Keating and his clan are voucher supporters.

It is Democrats who produce the state budget, and for the fifth consecutive year, mental health's pitiful portion was reduced. Yet they dig deep for new prisons and pass even more law-and-order trash.

The Health Department is out with its annual report – Oklahoma has slipped again and is one of the most dangerous states in the union in which to raise children. Yet fat cats get tax breaks – more than \$300 million in exemptions from the state sales tax. The list grows and grows.

The party fight over the chairmanship masks the real problem – pork barrel politics and a failure of nerve or brains [or both] in the party's last large bastion of strength, the Legislature.

Certainly not all legislative Democrats have joined the Benson-Taylor clique, and many loyalists are bitterly disappointed at the gutless leadership. They talk a good game but when push comes to shove and the leadership arm-twisting begins, Keating gets the gold and the people get the shaft.

If the rapid downward spiral continues, let the tombstone read, *The Oklahoma Democratic Party: Killed By Its Own Leaders.*



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Happiness Is 2015 Session In Rearview Mirror

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

Oklahoma lawmakers owe taxpayers a refund for the 2015 session.

They skirted the state's most pressing issues – nibbling around the edges of some, completely ignoring others.

They failed to deal with the state's epic teacher shortage. They stole from already under-funded roads and bridges in order to balance the budget. They didn't come close to solving the ticking time bomb known as the state's prisons, severely understaffed and overcrowded.

Indeed, they squeezed most vital state services to

the breaking point, imposing even deeper cuts on top of five years of downsizing.

Leadership, where art thou?

When was the last time the state's elected elite conceived and implemented a truly big idea – a visionary proposal to move the state forward?

Gov. Henry Bellmon's iconic HB 1017 education reform package 25 years ago?

Pause.

Any other nominations?

This year's signature achievement was meeting the constitutional mandate to balance the budget. Woo-

The Incredible Shrinking Legislature

hoo!

Never mind that it is a shortsighted spending blueprint that protects the state's wealthiest at the expense of the state's most vulnerable – school children, the working poor, and the mentally ill.

Or that it is a product of years of poor public policy choices: income tax cuts and corporate welfare that disproportionately benefitted the state's deepest pockets.

Even facing a \$611 million budget hole, lawmakers could not muster a serious discussion about delaying or canceling yet another .25% personal income tax cut scheduled to take effect next fiscal year.

Yet, Gov. Mary Fallin, House Speaker Jeff Hickman and Senate President Brian Bingman put their rotator cuffs at serious risk, patting themselves on the back for a job well done.

The Big Three seemed content serving up chicken-- and calling it chicken salad.

The ultimate indignity? While cutting many state agencies 7%-plus, the House and Senate spared their own operations – they essentially get the same amounts as last year.

HUBRIS? OR POLITICALLY TONE DEAF?

The spending plan is so venal that it almost was derailed in a late-night House session, even though Republicans own a veto-proof majority. Hickman and GOP whips herded their caucus into a closed-door meeting where, presumably, they offered enough threats or incentives to turn the necessary nays into ayes.

Ah, transparency.

As usual, the budget was developed behind closed doors and sprung on most members in the session's waning hours – no time to review specifics.

From the moment Fallin, Bingman and Hickman unveiled the budgetary train wreck, it was placed on the legislative fast-track. There would be no going home over Memorial Day weekend, even though the session was not required to wrap up until May 29.

The reason: The Big Three feared what would happen if lawmakers faced constituents that were slowly, but surely discovering what the \$7.1 billion budget meant for them.

The stampede to budget approval bought the state's Republican leadership a few months, but next year's budget – *an election year budget* – will be worse and even more problematic politically.

Think about it: This year's budget is less than last year's. Next year's likely will be worse: at least \$500 million less to spend than this year.

The Legislature's devotion to the discredited theory of Supply Side economics – tinkle down? – dooms Oklahoma to a downward spiral that will haunt future generations.

Cutting taxes does not magically increase state revenue. Rewarding campaign donors with corporate

welfare makes matters worse. Knowing the cost of everything and value of nothing is not sound public policy.

Of course, the dunces who rallied around this budget may not be around to suffer the consequences. Many will depart office because of term limits, not because voters finally awakened to their failures.

SHAMEFUL SPINNING

The leadership's tub-thumping about education spending is particularly shameful. A flat budget did not leave public schools unscathed. It compounded five-plus years of the nation's worst education cuts.

Schools need at least 1,000 more qualified instructors to meet the needs of a growing student population, up 40,000-plus in recent years.

And it ignored the fact that the costs of doing business – turning on lights, supplying classrooms and transporting students, just to name a few – aren't frozen.

As state Rep. James Lockhart, D-Heavener, put it in a Facebook post: "I'm tired of being dead last in the nation – you name it, education, healthcare, roads and bridges.

"What this [budget] means is we aren't going to invest in our state – bad roads, poor schools, no health-care in rural Oklahoma.

"What are we leaving our kids???"

SERIOUS INTELLECTUAL DROUGHT

The current crop of lawmakers is remarkably adept at playing Small Ball – passing resolutions to praise the local volleyball team's championship or dabbling in social issues that curry favor with the political base.

But there is precious little big picture vision or long-term thinking that you find in other states.

This may be Oklahoma's most devastating drought.

Oklahoma lawmakers often declare some measure – or package of bills – to be visionary. But most prove to be nothing more than political window dressing or are quickly rolled back in subsequent years – former House Speaker Kris Steele's criminal justice reform initiative is a prime example.

Other states' legislatures manage to consider the future beyond the next election.

Look at Iowa – yes, Iowa – whose visionary leadership offers a sharp contrast from shortsighted Oklahoma.

On a single, late February day, the Iowa House and Senate both approved the state's first gas tax hike in 26 years. The next day, Gov. Terry Branstad signed it into law. Three days later, the increase took effect.

If you're keeping score, that's five days – *five!* – from legislative action to the pump. And what that means for Iowa is an additional \$215 million annually for city, county and state roads.

"This is a great example, on a difficult and controversial issue, of the kind of bipartisan cooperation

FIVE BAD BILLS

HB 1749 – Eliminates payroll deduction option for teachers' union dues. It was a purely political power play, aimed at crippling the OEA and ATF and muzzling teachers. There is no evidence it cost school payroll departments anything to provide the option. The virulently anti-union State Chamber promoted the ban so, naturally, Gov. Mary Fallin was on board. Authors: Rep. Tom Newell, a fundamentalist preacher from Seminole, and Sen. Nathan Dahm, a homeschool-educated software developer from Broken Arrow.

SB 782 – Expands charter schools to rural areas. A wolf in sheep's clothing, the measure does nothing to improve public education, but could siphon more money from already under-funded, over-crowded schools. The Oklahoma School Boards Association and Cooperative Council for Oklahoma School Administration signed onto this stinker, thinking they can make nice with the Legislature's anti-public ed crowd. Recent history shows that's a fool's errand. Authors: Self-proclaimed public school champions [?] Rep. Lee Denney of Cushing and Sen. Clark Jolley of Edmond. Signed by governor.

HB 1409 – Extends the waiting period for abortions from 24 to 72 hours. Another sop to the

GOP's fundamentalist base, it achieves nothing but inserts government squarely between a woman and her doctor and undermines personal liberty. Authors: Rep. Lisa Billy of Purcell and Sen. Greg Treat of Oklahoma City. Signed by governor.

SB 809 – Prevents local governments from banning oil and gas drilling within their jurisdictions. Remember when Republicans were the party of local control? Not any more. They were routinely for their corporate masters – last year thwarting grass-roots efforts to raise the minimum wage, now by undermining local zoning authority. Authors: House Speaker Jeff Hickman of Fairview and Senate President Pro Tem Brian Bingman of Sapulpa. Signed by governor.

HB 1037 – Restricts public access to police videos. Remember when Republicans were the party of transparency? Not any more. The measure adds dozens of new exemptions to the state's Open Records Act for law enforcement – just as the debate intensifies over police conduct. It even allows law enforcement to keep secret the identity of officers under investigation. Authors: Rep. George Faught of Muskogee and Sen. David Holt of OKC. At press time, Fallin still had not acted on the measure.

FIVE GOOD BILLS

SB 313 – Allows a person with a driver's license to register on-line to vote. Oklahoma joins 19 other states acknowledging the ubiquity of the Internet – especially for millennials. Last year, only one in five Oklahomans eligible to vote bothered to participate in the mid-terms. This is a huge step toward another common sense proposal: same day registration. Authors: Sen. David Holt of Oklahoma City and Rep. Gary Banz of Midwest City. Signed by governor.

HB 1965 – Not only bans texting while driving, but also makes it a primary offense. Oklahoma now joins 44 other states in outlawing the dangerous practice – studies show texting drivers are 23 more times likely to be involved in an accident. The bad news: The new law doesn't take effect until Nov. 1. Author: Rep. Terry O'Donnell of Tulsa. Signed by governor.

HB 1074 – Gives terminally ill patients access to medicines being used in clinical trials. Before lawmakers approved the so-called "right-to-try" bill, the terminally ill could petition the FDA for access to investigational drugs. But the process was often slow and patients frequently died before the FDA ruled. The Oklahoma law allows doctors to prescribe medicines that already have passed Phase 1 of the FDA approval process. Au-

thors: Rep. Richard Morrisette of OKC and Sen. Rob Standridge of Norman. Signed by governor.

HB 1574/HB 1518 – The measures eliminate mandatory minimum sentences for some non-violent offenses and give judges more flexibility in imposing sentences – an acknowledgement that Oklahoma's love affair with lock 'em up and throw away the key punishment isn't working. It's not the comprehensive criminal justice reform former House Speaker Kris Steele envisioned, but it's a start. Authors: Rep. Corey Williams of Stillwater and Sen. A.J. Griffin of Guthrie [HB 1574]; Rep. Pam Peterson of Tulsa and Sen. Wayne Shaw of Grove [HB 1518]. Signed by governor.

You might wonder, given our vocal criticism of corporate welfare, why our list did not include SB 806 and HB 2182 which require all business tax incentives be reviewed every four years. While the two measures may indeed clean up the legalized looting, it's far from certain they will. Some of the wording is ambiguous, leaving the term "effectiveness" open to interpretation. You can bet special interests will be working around-the-clock to persuade lawmakers of the efficacy of their tax breaks. Without clearly defined standards, the review process easily could be nothing more than political theater.

The Incredible Shrinking Legislature

that really makes Iowa stand out as a state where we work together and we get things done on behalf of the citizens of our state,” Branstad told reporters.

“This is important for economic development. This is important for our farmers to be able to get their crops to market. I know that many people have been waiting a long time for this.”

HOW IOWA DID IT

What’s also significant is how Iowa did it – with the support of the state’s biggest special interests: the Iowa Farm Bureau, the state’s Chambers of Commerce, the trucking industry and other business groups.

By the way, unlike our state government – dominated by one party – Iowa’s is divided: Republicans control the House, Democrats the Senate. The governor also is Republican.

The Iowa plan couldn’t be as easily implemented in Oklahoma, of course, because of the voter-approved constitutional amendment that requires a super-majority of state lawmakers or a statewide vote to approve any tax increase.

But there weren’t even any serious discussions about increasing Oklahoma’s gas tax – 17 cents a gallon and holding, since 1987 – even though May’s

record rainfall wreaked havoc on already crumbling roads and bridges.

The drought-breaking monsoon prompted calls from House Minority Leader Scott Inman, among others, for a special session to dip into the Rainy Day Fund to make hundreds of millions in deluge-related road repairs.

The response: crickets.

Instead, lawmakers scrambling to patch the massive budget hole actually siphoned money away from funds dedicated to road and bridge repairs.

It’s hard to fathom why the self-styled conservatives that dominate the Oklahoma Legislature aren’t all over the Iowa model. Despite an almost pathological aversion to taxes, our lawmakers routinely increase user fees on all sorts of government services.

Who better to pay for sorely needed repairs – nearly 4,000 miles of substandard roads and 1,000 dilapidated bridges – than folks who drive on them?

What better timing? Gas is far less expensive now than two years ago.

What better slogan for hard-core conservatives than pay-as-you-go?

All it takes is leadership – and vision.

Voters, take note.

The Real Damage Of Budget Cuts, And Latest Bad Excuse For Tax Cuts

BY GENE PERRY

Oklahoma’s Legislature just passed a budget that cuts funding for most state agencies while refusing to halt a scheduled tax cut or rein in tax breaks.

As some pre-budget spin in defense of these decisions, The Oklahoman editorial board and the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs have pointed to \$40 million spent on “swag, advertising, and memberships” as evidence that Oklahoma can afford to reduce taxes further even during a budget shortfall.

It’s worth noting that the source of the \$40 million figure is never shared, nor is what they specifically mean by “swag, advertising, and memberships,” even when they put it in quotation marks. But if we take them at their word that this is unnecessary spending, that’s still not an argument to cut taxes again.

We can just as easily find examples of how severe under-investment by the state is harming Oklahoma families and the economy. To list a few:

Low pay and the growth of unfunded testing mandates is creating an exodus of teachers out of Okla-

homa. According to State Superintendent Joy Hofmeister, schools started the year with 1,000 teacher vacancies and had to cancel about 800 classes. College graduates can make \$10,000 more as an entry-level teacher in neighboring states, creating a constant drain of talented educators from Oklahoma. The lack of qualified applicants for teacher positions has forced many districts to lower their standards, bringing in teachers who have not completed their education to earn a certification. Education officials predict another 2% funding cut would lead to the loss of more than 1,700 teachers statewide. Already four Lawton elementary schools will be shut down at the end of the year due to budget cuts.

The Oklahoma School of Science and Math, which educates some the state’s highest performing students interested in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, has been forced to eliminate one-third of its staff and cancel several classes due to state budget cuts of 22% in recent years.

With even more cuts on the horizon, Oklahoma

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Medical Research Foundation President Dr. Stephen Prescott wrote that Oklahoma is “eating our seed corn” by failing to support our most talented STEM students.

Tuition at Oklahoma’s four-year colleges and universities has increased by \$1,192 per year since 2008, as state funding for higher education has dropped by \$2,251 per student. That may be a reason why enrollment at Oklahoma colleges and universities fell 10,105 students over the past year.

Higher Education Chancellor Glen Johnson said funding cuts would put Oklahoma’s degree completion goals at risk, and the state regents said more cuts could result in the elimination of more than 100 academic courses, 80 faculty positions, and more than 55 staff employees.

Since education levels are strongly linked to wages in a state, falling behind in college degrees means we are sacrificing our future prosperity far more than what might be gained from another tax cut.

State prisons are at over 100% capacity with staffing of just 60% to 70%. Corrections officers and inmates have already been seriously injured or killed due to our neglect. The situation is so dire that House Speaker Jeff Hickman has said we are “one lawsuit away” from a federal takeover of our prisons.

While recent reforms show encouraging signs that we may reduce incarceration over the medium- to long-term, they do nothing for the crisis that is happening right now. To save lives and prevent an even more costly federal takeover, this area of government needs more funding.

Oklahoma’s longstanding, continuing underfunding of mental health care is leaving thousands of Oklahomans without treatment. Mental illness is one of the primary reasons behind homelessness and incarceration in Oklahoma, both of which are very costly to taxpayers over the long-term.

Even though mental health received a small increase in next year’s budget, it doesn’t keep up with increasing costs. That means thousands of Oklahomans will lose services, adding to the six in 10 adults with mental health problems who aren’t getting treatment.

Due to increasing enrollment and rising costs, Medicaid also did not receive enough funding to continue its existing services for Oklahomans. Oklahoma’s Medicaid program is planning more cuts to reimbursements for health care providers. These cuts are especially harmful to rural clinics and hospitals, many of which are shutting down.

As one rural health researcher pointed out, “When a hospital closes, the physicians leave. A lot of the health care infrastructure leaves. Sometimes the local businesses will leave ... the schools suffer. There’s a whole multiplier effect that really can devastate some towns.”

Oklahoma’s public health lab is at risk of losing accreditation due to its aging, poorly maintained facility. A new lab is estimated to cost \$49 million, and without it, Oklahoma could be forced to send thousands of tests for hospitals and medical facilities to an out-of-state lab. That is likely to mean delays and added costs for the state, as well as a loss of expertise within Oklahoma on how to prevent dangerous epidemics.

Cuts to the Oklahoma Supreme Court will mean they no longer are able to pass down any funds to county clerk offices. In some counties, as many as half of the county clerk positions have been funded by the state Supreme Court, and loss of funds will mean layoffs and significantly longer wait times for Oklahomans who have any business with a county clerk, from getting a marriage license to obtaining real estate records.

Cuts to the Supreme Court also threaten OSCN.net, a website where Oklahomans can access public court records. The site is visited by the public more than 500,000 times a day, and it is used by the media, businesses, and other for conducting background checks.

These cuts are just scratching the surface of a large and growing structural deficit in Oklahoma that prevents us from funding core services at the levels needed by Oklahoma families in both good years and bad.

Is there waste in government? Sure, just like in any large organization, and we should do our best to root it out and direct that funding to more useful areas. That’s not what lawmakers are doing.

Instead, Oklahoma is slashing important services and allowing wasteful tax breaks that cost many times more than \$40 million to multiply and grow.

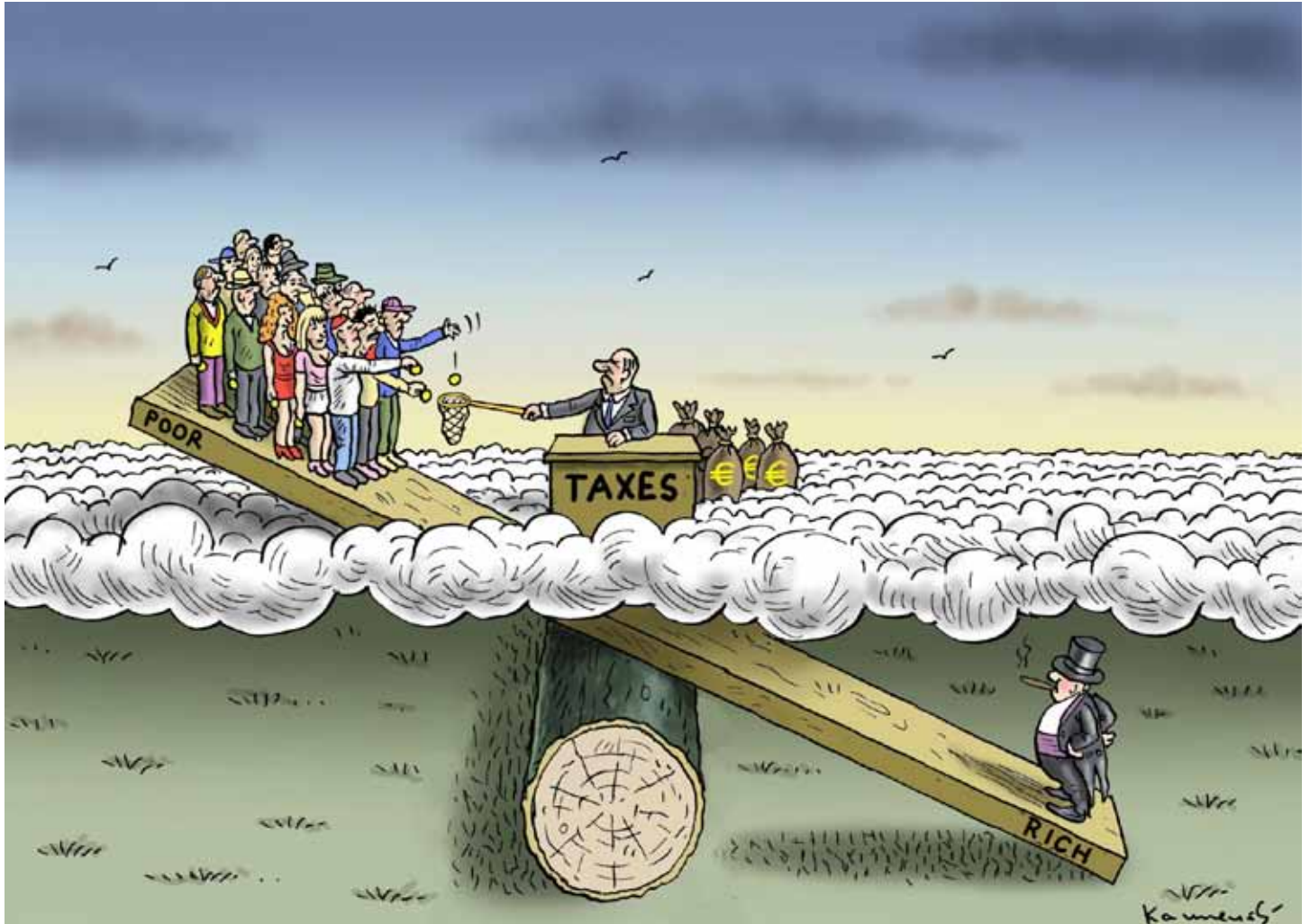
Oklahomans are wiser than that – a majority of registered voters in the state think we should prioritize education funding over more tax cuts and at least delay tax cuts that are happening during a budget shortfall.

So far, state budget writers don’t seem to have gotten the message.

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>



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Lawmakers Sell Their Souls To The Party Line

BY DAVID PERRYMAN

Sixty years ago, Tennessee Ernie Ford's version of *Sixteen Tons* reached No. 1 on the Billboard charts. The lyrics were written and performed by Merle Travis nine years earlier, but Ford's beloved humor and rich bass-baritone voice sent the song to the top for seven weeks in late 1955 and early 1956.

The folk song relates the social and economic oppression of a culture that labored endlessly in the coalmines. The monumental task of loading 16 tons of coal day after day was rewarded by nothing more than being "another day older and deeper in debt."

The constant and inescapable debt arose because of low wages and a "truck system" in which workers would be paid with private scrip that could only be spent at the "company store."

Since that economic system treated workers as tools or resources to be used and cast away, it provided, at best, only bare subsistence. The ballad spoke of a people that were too poor to die. According to the lyrics, "St. Peter, don't you call me, 'cause I can't go; I owe my soul to the company store."

This mindset that a person is a resource that may be taken, used and discarded is the same mindset

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that causes a state to use infrastructure that exists without planning for its replacement or repair.

Historically, Oklahoma's aging infrastructure, installed generations ago, has been used and abused, and even if currently functional, it suffers from deferred maintenance.

According to the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Council, in 2014, only two states spent less in local and state spending and the majority spends from 25% more to 250% more than Oklahoma on things like roads, bridges, education and health care.

According to the Oklahoma Policy Institute, that equated to \$1,700 less per person than the average state in 2005 and \$900 less per person than our surrounding states. Consequently, the condition of Oklahoma's public structures and facilities rank in the bottom 10 states nationwide.

Coupling the deplorable condition of our infrastructure with a complete lack of fiscal foresight, Oklahoma puts itself in a condition of being unable to "pay the piper" as roads, bridges and water and sewer lines collapse from age and neglect.

Politicians run for office on a platform of "cutting taxes" without regard to the cost of delivering core services. The fallacy in perpetually cutting taxes is an inexplicable assumption that government will always be "too big;" that there will always be "waste in government;" and that governmental services will always be available regardless of the amount of tax revenue.

The fiscal *truth* is that when taxes are cut, governmental services will be cut, unless other sources of revenue are identified and utilized to fund governmental services that are at risk.

For instance, when state income taxes are cut, counties, cities and towns will be forced to increase sales taxes or property taxes to repair roads, educate children or provide health care.

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, income tax cuts are a poor strategy for economic growth and the states that tried deep income tax cuts over the last three decades have not seen their economies surge as a result. In fact, four of the five states that enacted the largest personal income tax cuts in the last few years have had slower job growth since enacting their cuts than the nation as a whole.

Four of the six states that cut personal income taxes significantly in the 2000s saw their share of national employment

decline after the cuts were enacted.

The exceptions – New Mexico and Oklahoma – grew mostly because of a sharp run-up in oil prices in the mid-2000s. That trend reversed when oil prices declined.

For decades, individuals and businesses have utilized water and sewer lines and roads and bridges that are 50 to 75 to 100 years old and given little thought to their upkeep.

With historic flooding and storm devastation, we find that tax cuts have devastated our ability to pay for repairs. That should not be a surprise since we were unable to pay for education and health care prior to the storms.

Our infrastructure is another day older and we're deeper in debt. My, what a bind! We have sold our soul to the party line.

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



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FAILING GRADES

Regular Folks Will Find Little To Cheer In A Session Dominated By Hypocrisy

BY CAL HOBSON

Were guns, vaginas and the state budget the Legislature's priorities? Apparently they were since little else was debated and finally passed into law by the just-adjourned 55th session of the Oklahoma Legislature.

As some feared, Gov. Mary Fallin was just kidding when she enunciated important goals during her State of the State speech in early February. You may remember she advocated [1] enhanced funding for public education; [2] improved health indicators characterizing our citizens; and [3] meaningful reform of the criminal justice system. Her grades, and those of her political classmates, have now been released and some would say a good old spanking with a paddle is in order.

For now you'll just have to settle for my tongue-lashing. The pols won't care. I hope you do.

1. THE EDUCATION GOAL GETS AN F

More funding for schools and maybe even a teacher pay raise was advocated by the governor and kudos to her. The result? Neither Pre-K through the 12th grade classrooms nor our career technology campuses received anything more than lip service.

Not one red cent was added even though thousands more students were placed into already overcrowded schools and a teacher shortage resulted in 600 emergency certifications – an all time record.

To add insult to injury this state's greatest economic engine – our higher education system – was cut once again, this time an additional 3.4%. Another round of tuition increases is now unavoidable.

2. HER HONOR'S HEALTH IMPROVEMENT GOAL IS AWARDED THE LOWEST POSSIBLE SCORE: F-MINUS

Tragically, the session's greatest failure was literally a real killer *and totally unnecessary* with complete disregard for 250,000 of our poorest and sickest citizens.

Fallin and Co. blissfully left billions of our health care tax dollars in Washington, DC, where they were and are being distributed to other states.

The reason? Hysterical hatred for ObamaCare and the alleged political risk it carries for Republicans from the Tea Party crowd. How sad.

The governor lost both her parents to cancer, hails from a small Oklahoma town lacking in quality medical services for its rural residents, and she comes from a background of modest means. I served with her in the Legislature for many years and found her then to be a compassionate, competent lawmaker. So ... *que pasa?*

Of course, the tired, old excuse for such dereliction of duty was trotted out once more: Budget leaders, a non sequitur if I've ever heard one, wailed there was no money for the very modest state match required to access our own federal health insurance money. Not true. Big bucks were available from the Rainy Day Fund, agency cash and revolving accounts as well as over \$1 billion of untouched tobacco settlement money that, ironically, must be spent on health care.

All these revenue streams save one were tapped during the spring to close a \$611 million deficit dug by the Capitol shovel brigade. A counter-productive tax cut – 65% of which will benefit our wealthiest 1% – is the main cause of the yawning financial chasm.

Interestingly, polls show that even the beneficiaries of this tax reduction bonanza don't want it and prefer their share be allocated to core services identical to those outlined by Fallin in February.

3. FINALLY, THE MUCH DISCUSSED CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM GOAL AVOIDED AN F SCORE BUT JUST BARELY. GIVE IT A LOW D.

To be fair, legislators did develop small but probably transitory spines [remember 2016 is an election year] and passed two or three tweaks to the justice code but at the same time authored several new laws that increase incarceration.

Appropriately, judges were given modest flexibility to modify some draconian sentences, such as life without parole for a drug offense, but why would the men and women garbed in black robes risk their political careers by doing so? Some district attorneys will attack them for showing common sense and then go file against them or get some under-employed lawyer to do so. A candidate's fee to run is only \$200 – less than most barristers charge per hour for their words of wisdom.

There you have it. Two flunking Fs and a dismal D

The Incredible Shrinking Legislature

are awarded for Fallin's February Follies.

Unrelated, however, small spring sprouts of common sense did bloom with the passage of a pair of tourism-related bond issues. Debt financing funded a new OKPOP museum in Tulsa – Senate President Pro Tem Brian Bingman's pork project – and also enough money to hopefully finish the Native American Museum in OKC.

However, a greater building priority needed to serve the recently deceased – that being a new medical examiner's facility – as well as two more for the still living – a Veterans' department headquarters and a health testing laboratory – were ignored with nary a syllable uttered in support.

Dead folks, veterans, and the sick apparently need to hire lobbyists if their interests are to be heard in

First up guns. The Second Amendment crowd hit one bulls-eye but missed entirely the target on another of their pro gun agenda. The victory came when lawmakers finally passed and NRA toady Fallin signed legislation that authorizes firearms in schools.

Yes, there is a lot of window dressing attached to the implementing document ordering training, safety and education just as there is for Highway Patrol troopers. Yet a child is dead in Logan County because a brown shirt failed to secure his personal weapon.

Children are curious and mischievous. Accidents happen. Why mix the two in already overcrowded school buildings? Answer. Because the National Rifle Association demanded it and our guys and gals just don't know how to say no to that Washington-based special interest group or to gun-toting goobers in lo-

Dead folks, veterans, and the sick apparently need to hire lobbyists if their interests are to be heard in the halls of the Capitol.

the halls of the Capitol.

And, finally, Oklahoma will now join 46 other states in imposing a small fine for driving while texting, but it took the tragic death of a trooper on I-40 near Shawnee to shake solons from their public safety sleep. Unfortunately, and for no good reason, they delayed the effective date of this life-saving proposal until November.

Although the Legislature accomplished little of importance to us commoners, it did stay busy revisiting, discussing, amending and passing new versions of laws that greatly interest the membership.

Much time, money and hot air were expended by our pontificators exploring the subtle and not-so-subtle nuances of three political priorities, only one of which really deserved their attention. They were, in order of importance: Guns, followed by vaginas and, finally, passage of a state budget.

The first two only because they are more fun to talk about within the he-man dominated Legislature while writing a \$7.1 billion budget was left to a handful of accounting nerds, mostly obscure unelected bureaucrats whose names you'll never know, because that important process is boring.

Conversely, dialogue and debate about weapons and women's parts is, of course, more interesting, though often expressed irrationally by males who dominate both elected bodies.

Therefore, since I too am a "woman mystified" male, but own neither a gun nor have a vagina, let me add to the uninformed dialogue expressed by my former colleagues in revealing my own prejudiced views about firearms, women's privates and the new state budget.

cal coffee shops.

The other proposal to further expand access and availability of deadly weapons was shot down because it ran up against an immovable object even more powerful than the NRA: m-o-n-e-y.

Briefly here's the background: A music festival was scheduled for downtown Norman in April. A local ordinance bans open carry at such events. Song loving and pistol packing moms and pops demanded they be allowed to wear their hardware while attending the event and a judge ruled they could.

Then, at the speed of a ballistic missile, a bill was drafted, passed and rushed down for signature that would put into state law the local jurist's ruling. However NRA A-plus rated Fallin vetoed it because the State Chamber of Commerce fretted it would be bad for business, which it would, discourage tourism and motivate conventions, conferences and even sporting events to select less gun-crazed locales in which to spend their time and disposable income.

Authors of the legislation initially vowed an easy override of Fallin's veto but they too got the money message from chamber big wigs and no such attempt was made.

Moving now from firearms to women's body parts, specifically vaginas, the male-dominated Legislature once again decided it needed to insert itself [pun intended] into the most private decision-making process some women may face: whether to terminate a pregnancy.

In paternal Oklahoma, father knows best, especially if he happens to be a lawmaker, so now the waiting period to have an abortion is, without reason or

The Incredible Shrinking Legislature

medical merit, 72 hours not 24, extending only the incredible agony and angst faced by females and their family members.

If three days is better than one why not make it a week or two? If preservation of life is really the goal behind men's meddling with medical decisions best left to doctors and their female patients, why not pass a similarly invasive law requiring the male half of the species to go through the same public process to have a vasectomy?

Lastly, and during the last hours of the last day of this year's lamentable session, a budget was passed – barely. Only a handful of numbers' crunchers really knew, or even know now, how your billions of tax dollars will be allocated beginning in July.

We are aware, though, there are many losers. Children, educators, the sick and uninsured, old folks, the poor and underserved, bankrupt rural hospitals, our infrastructure – all told to go to the back of the line and wait for better times. Low energy prices are blamed but the pending \$146 million tax cut exacerbates the crisis.

During the session dozens of vital programs were reduced yet again, including roads and bridges. This comes at the worst possible time since our vital arterial network is suffering its worst damage ever due to the record floods.

Fallin ordered the Department of Transportation to speed up repair projects, even though the FY '16 spending blueprint cuts \$72 million from its budgetary base. Transportation secretary and innovative bureaucrat Gary Ridley is human not Houdini. He

doesn't own Fort Knox or a printing press.

Lawmakers called for a special session to raid the Rainy Day Fund to deal with the rain damage, but Her Honor was too busy hosting a dozen or so Republican candidates for president to respond.

All those aspirants have left town and most will never return because [a] they won't be their party's nominee and/or [b] why should they because the faithful will vote for any of them over any Democratic nominee – especially if it is Hillary – regardless of the fact she has more domestic and international experience than all of GOPers combined.

Current favorite is Dr. Ben Carson, famed neurosurgeon who happens to be black. However, Dr. Oz has higher name recognition and a far better chance to win than he.

As I close this column you should know two agency budgets did fare well in the upcoming funding allocations. They were, and not surprisingly, those of the House and Senate.

Through ingenious accounting, both were shielded from any financially negative consequences which means plush remodeling of offices will continue unabated. Travel, per diem, personnel, insurance and retirement accounts remain excessively funded.

"Do as I say not as I do" comes to mind, as well as a series of unprintable four letter words – and one containing nine: hypocrites.

Cal Hobson, a Lexington Democrat, served in the Oklahoma Legislature from 1978-2006, including one term as Senate President Pro Tempore.

Legislature Wisely Funds Museums

BY BOB AND MARIA ROUNSAVELL

It took until the session's final hours, but state lawmakers finally approved funding for the Oklahoma Museum of Popular Culture [OKPOP] in Tulsa and the American Indian Cultural Center in OKC.

Before the legislative year, we hoped both would easily get funding. But the budget shortfall which had ballooned to more than \$600 million created a mountain of fear stifling any courage among our conservative-dominated Legislature to fund any initiative outside their definition of basic government service.

When the 55th session started, panic ensued throughout the Capitol. Up went the cry, "Oh no, we can't fund anything that isn't a core service of government." Of greater import was the strong unwillingness of our leadership to postpone the tax cuts or to eliminate the tax credits that could more easily wipe out the budget shortfall.

In stark display was the basic philosophical clash between conservatives and progressives in their perspective on the function of government. The former would have little need for government and thus would not provide it with any funding, even while they would try to obtain tax credits for the oil industry. The progressives, on the other hand, would try to fund social services, especially education.

For those unfamiliar with the OKPOP museum project, here's a little history. Like most ideas this one has been floating around for some time. Three years ago Dr. Bob Blackburn, the Oklahoma Historical Society's executive director, met with Garth Brooks; they discussed assembling a world-class collection to showcase Oklahoma creativity.

There are many artists in Oklahoma who will contribute to the OKPOP. Thousands of artifacts will find their way into the museum. Dr. Blackburn and other

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dedicated Oklahomans hold this vision and they will ensure its fulfillment.

In the May *Mistletoe Leaves*, the OHS newsletter, Dr. Blackburn mentions the Oklahoma Historical Society partners that range from the Bank of Oklahoma [BOK], the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce to Tulsa Mayor Dewey Bartlett. Also there's a perfect location in the Brady Arts District: a generous donation of BOK, one full block in this most vibrant cultural center. Planned to serve the tourists flocking to learn about their idols is a 650-space parking garage.

The heart of this sustainable institution is the creativity of Oklahomans in "the world of movies, television, radio, music and popular literature."

Among the iconic names cited are Will Rogers, Woody Guthrie and Bob Wills; Ben Johnson, Lynn Riggs, and Alfre Woodard; Roger Miller, Patti Page, and Tony Hillerman. Also recognizable are those favorites who do not need last names: Leon, J.J., Reba, Vince, Toby, and Garth.

"Each and everyone of these artists," Dr. Bob says, "gives us an opportunity to connect the dots between

their Oklahoma roots and their creativity."

According to Dr. Blackburn, the potential revenue would fund 100% of operating costs, including staffing, collections care and exhibits. Neither Oklahoma's revenue-strapped government nor the general public need contribute anything for its construction or operation. And best of all the city of Tulsa and the state of Oklahoma will benefit from tourism dollars for a long time.

Amidst all the political turmoil in this year's legislative session, Oklahoma got it right about these two projects – the OKPOP and the American Indian Cultural Center. It decided to face squarely and glory in its two significant aspects: its creativity and the Indian legacy.

By helping create two fund-generating projects, the state will be telling its story to our children and to other Americans and pursuing greatness and excellence.

Bob and Maria Rounsavell live in Oologah. He is president of the Carrie Dickerson Foundation. She is focused on geopolitics, religion and food.

Word Plays

"Logophile" is a word describing people with a love of words. They enjoy word jokes, such as, "You can tune a piano, but you can't tuna fish" or "Writing with a broken pencil is pointless."

Here are some more:

Time flies like a race horse, but fruit flies like a banana.

Fish swimming in schools sometimes take debate.

A thief who stole a calendar got 12 months.

Whenever the smog lifts in Los Angeles, U. C. L. A.

The batteries were distributed free of charge.

A dentist and a manicurist got married, but fought tooth and nail.

A will is a dead giveaway.

With her marriage, she got a new name and a dress.

A boiled egg is hard to beat.

When you've seen one shopping center you've seen a mall.

Police were called to a day-care center where a three-year-old was resisting a rest.

Did you hear about the fellow whose whole left side was cut off? He's all right now.

A bicycle can't stand alone; it's two tired.

When clocks are hungry they go back four seconds.

A guy who fell onto an upholstery machine is

now fully recovered.

He had a photographic memory which was never developed.

When she saw her first strands of grey hair she thought she'd dye.

Acupuncture is a jab well done, but that's the point of it.

Those who get too big for their pants will be exposed in the end.

Thanks to Nathaniel Batchelder for sharing these gems.

Just A Thought

After being sentenced to 90 days, the defendant asked, "May I address the court?"

Judge: "Of course."

Defendant: "If I called you a son of a bitch, what would you do?"

Judge: "I'd hold you in contempt and assess an additional five days in jail."

Defendant: "What if I thought you were a son of a bitch?"

Judge: "I can't do anything about that. There's no law against thinking."

Defendant: "In that case, I think you're a son of a bitch."

Holding Police To Higher Standard

Mike Kasper / THE DENVER POST 2001 www.cagle.com



BY DAVID SLANE

A proposal by state Sen. Kyle Loveless will make law enforcement officials more accountable and prevent innocent people from losing their personal property.

The bill, which will likely be considered next year in the Oklahoma Legislature, involves asset forfeiture laws and how police can confiscate money and property from a person without an arrest or conviction ever taking place.

Loveless' idea is to require a conviction before police can seize a person's property or money regardless of the circumstances. Currently, law enforcement officials are allowed to stop a vehicle and then take the car or truck and any property in it with only a hunch that a crime has been committed. No evidence is required, not even probable cause.

Sheriffs and police chiefs are throwing tantrums and screaming that this proposal, if approved, would kill their war on drugs. These law enforcement officials contend they stop few, if any, innocent people. That's not entirely true. These same lawmen claim most of their stops result in confiscation of illegal drugs, so they're doing the public a favor.

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While there is some truth to their argument, there are cases when innocent people's property has been seized without a justifiable reason. Getting the property or money back requires hiring an attorney and going to court, which can be costly. The current law favors the police and tramples on the Fourth Amendment, which prohibits unreasonable searches and seizures of personal property.

Part of the problem now is that lawmen target certain types of vehicles, mostly out-of-state, and specific races driving certain types of cars.

For instance, a black man driving a Cadillac with an out-of-state tag is more likely to be stopped than

a white man driving a BMW with an Oklahoma tag. Hispanic men also have proven to be targets of law enforcement. That, my friends, is called racial profiling, which is wrong and should not be used by police and highway patrol troopers.

After Loveless introduced his bill recently, Canadian County Sheriff Randall Edwards exploded with rage, claiming his entire department would be decimated since he uses a large portion of seized cash to pay for public education programs and drug interdiction officers and vehicles.

The Canadian County sheriff's department and the Oklahoma Highway Patrol are notorious for stopping drivers who have committed no wrongdoing, but claim personal property must be seized for no apparent reason.

At least one senior official in Gov. Mary Fallin's Administration has vowed to fight Loveless' proposal, but that would be a bad course of action if the governor and her staff truly believe in the U.S. and Oklahoma constitutions.

This unconstitutional practice is wrong and should be stopped. The U.S. Constitution allows that a person is innocent until proven guilty. Under Oklahoma's current asset forfeiture law, a person must prove their seized property was not used in the commission of a crime. How do you prove a negative?

It's time to stop giving law enforcement a pass on this issue and require they prove that the property was used in a crime.

Let's not trample the Constitution so law enforcement can line their pockets with extra cash and property without abiding by the Fourth Amendment. David Slane is an Oklahoma City criminal defense attorney who has practiced law for more than 20 years.



On The Scientific Dark Side

BY BOB JACKMAN

The sun seldom shines on science in Oklahoma! Those disagreeing with that statement should consider the following dark clouds:

A recent Bloomberg story, published in May 19 Tulsa World, detailed Oklahoma's earthquakes and Harold Hamm's attempts to load up the Oklahoma Geological Survey with seismologists of his choice.

It appears Hamm got what he wanted! See newly appointed OGS Director Jeremy Boak. Google his resume – a background of shale-oil and Big Oil expertise, plus mining minerals geology, but lacking in Oklahoma's needed hydro-geology [water].

Did Hamm contact the new director search committee ... a billionaire's discretion?

As Oklahoma's natural resources agency, OGS is mandated to publish unbiased scientific studies of research on all the state's natural resources. The state has few proven mining resources but lots of unsettled inventory – and it sorely needs extensive research into surface and groundwater quality, especially in the state's western half, gripped by drought in recent years.

The problem is, Big Oil and Harold Hamm dominate which natural resource is researched and which geo-issue is not reported.

It's time for an independent inquiry into OGS' con-

flict-of-interest-riddled leadership – OU President David Boren, College of Earth and Energy Dean Larry Grillot and Hamm.

Grillot serves on the board of shale driller Pioneer Natural Resources at reported compensation of \$279,405. Boren has received nearly \$1 million for serving on the Continental Resources board since 2009, including \$272,000 in 2013.

When did double dipping at OU become an accepted benefit?

It appears the OU-based and OU-controlled OGS is a subordinated subsidiary of Big Oil – ordered for eight years, according to media reports, not to disclose the known scientific causes of hazardous high frequency earthquakes hitting central and north central Oklahoma: high-volume disposal wells.

Non-scientists controlling science in Oklahoma isn't limited to OGS.

My study of the Oklahoma Water Resources Board found striking similarities to OGS when it comes to who actually directs its management.

The study – Comparative Analysis of Applied Science in Oklahoma Water Management – determined Oklahoma ranks last among states surveyed in science-based water management.

If your Oklahoma football team ranked that low you'd be outraged!

So who is really in charge of the state's water management planning?

Consider these numbers: The American Bar Association reports Oklahoma has 11,711 attorneys; the State Board of Licensure for Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors records 2,562 civil engineers; the Oklahoma Geological Survey has one – *one!* – hydrogeologist, and the Oklahoma Water Resources Board has two non-research geologists.

Three? For the entire state?

Add to this imbalance: the president of the politically powerful Oklahoma Farm Bureau also happens to be the Oklahoma Water Resources Board chairman.

LAKES AT RISK?

Just how much cumulative earthquake damage has occurred to Oklahoma's 52 major man-made lakes – those with at least 1,000 acres of surface area – and its 3,000 lakes and ponds that are 10 acres or larger in size?

First some background: The majority of our lakes were constructed by combination of earthen and concrete structures like Lake Eufaula, the largest covering 105,000 surface acres. Publicly owned lakes' beneficial uses or purposes are recreation, irrigation, fish and wildlife, flood control, and municipal and rural water systems. In addition, five have hydroelectric-generation turbines.

The larger 144 lakes are city, state or federal owned and were built between 1909-97 with the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers constructing 26 of the largest.

Many Oklahoma lakes in the 16 counties in the Earthquake Hazard Fairway are in mature stages, indicating their aging earthen and concrete integrity has weakened. This begs an unanswered – indeed, all but avoided – question: Besides being structurally frail from aging and the recent heavy, filling rains, how much more degradation has occurred to Oklahoma man-made lakes due to the past seven years of daily tremors from man's disposal wells-made magnitude 3.0-plus earthquakes?

EARTHQUAKES AND 'BOMB TRAINS'

In the Earthquake Fairway's 16 counties, think about the courthouses, jails, schools, hospitals, universities, commercial buildings, dams, residential homes, public roads and bridges, railroad lines and bridges, and airports.

Neither Gov. Mary Fallin, the three statewide elected Oklahoma Corporation Commissioners, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Federal Aviation Administration, Environmental Protection Agency, nor the federal prosecutors or the FBI have so far initiated even preliminary surveys of earthquake damages.

Nor have the state or federal agencies declared states of emergency in any of the 16 counties – a total abdication of state and federal government responsibility.

Worse, neither the governor nor the railroad-regulating Corporation Commission have assessed – or asked federal railroad regulators for help assessing

– the risks of combustible, gaseous crude oil tanker cars traversing the state's rail lines.

The tanker cars, essentially 730-barrel Molotov cocktails, are routinely rolling through high-earthquake counties like Logan, Noble, Oklahoma, Garfield, Alfalfa, Payne, Grant and Lincoln on three railroad lines: BNSF, Union Pacific and Stillwater Central Railroad.

In addition, officials recently announced plans to build a rail spur connecting to Cushing's massive petroleum above-ground storage and transfer hub.

Have railroad operators surveyed tracks and bridges for earthquake damage? Do state and federal authorities have contingency plans in the event a magnitude 5.0-plus earthquake ignites a Bomb Train in Oklahoma? Will Cushing become the Grand Central Station of Bomb Trains?

State Rep. Richard Morrisette, D-OKC, recently spoke of possible disaster in the wake of congressional cutbacks for Amtrak and the state's failure to aggressively pursue or secure federal funds for safety systems, including positive train controls.

LAW OF UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

A civil engineer recently told an OGS researcher that he is "now designing bridges to withstand magnitude 5.0-plus earthquake events." The OGS scientist asked whether it didn't make more sense to design bridges to withstand multiple, daily 3.0-plus quakes instead. The bridge engineer replied, "No one knows how."

A "Resource Curse" often afflicts countries rich with non-renewable natural resources. Many of those nations have corrupt governments that collude with resource-extraction companies, often leaving behind pollution and degradation that fouls land, air and water.

Since extraction companies now can and do cause swarm earthquakes, should we consider this a new form of petroleum pollution? Will Oklahoma qualify for listing as a Third World State like West Virginia after being under the influences of the Resource Curse?

Are oilmen-made earthquakes Oklahoma's equivalent of West Virginia's coal-men scalping mountain tops?

Both states are guilty of reckless disregard of personal property and individual wellbeing – casualties of corporate profiteering.

Oklahomans endure ticks, tornados, crop failures, job losses, droughts, floods and elected fools. But their patience is getting shorter from man-made quakes and fracked-up water systems.

An Okie revolt is coming ... just when depends on what's left of thousands of quietly burning fuses.

Former state Sen. Jerry Ellis, D-Valliant, said it best: "If it starts with the letter 'E' Oklahoma officials will mess it up – Executions, Education and Earthquakes."

Bob Jackman is a petroleum geologist living in Tulsa.

Is Inequality Justified?

BY KENNETH WELLS

In his book entitled, *The Price of Inequality – How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future*, Joseph Stiglitz stated, "In the battle over public policy, whatever the realpolitik of special interests, public discourse focuses on efficiency and fairness. In my years in government, I never heard an industry supplicant looking for a subsidy ask for it simply because it would enrich his coffers. Instead, the supplicants expressed their request in the language of fairness – and the benefits that would be conferred on others [more jobs, high tax payments]."

"The same goes for the policies that have shaped the growing inequality in the United States – both those that have contributed to the inequality in market incomes and those that have weakened the role of government in bringing down the level of inequality. The battle about "framing" first centers on how we see the level of inequality – how large is it, what are its causes, how can it be justified?"

As long as "Big Money" knows there is an "open door" to our lawmakers – whether federal, state or local – there is little hope of overcoming the multitude of inequities facing the majority of the population in our country.

After leaving elective office, too many of the people we elected almost immediately join the ranks of the lobbyists. The same also is true of many political appointees.

When the Constitution and the ground rules for regarding conduct of our elected officials were established, the authors did not worry about the "common man." Because of that societal omission, there was left only one direct way with which the general public can support a cause or an issue, i.e., by mass written support, or public rallies.

Without the wealth to hire an individual to "lobby" the legislature for a cause, one is left with no way to sway a vote in favor of a more equitable outcome.

Inequality of income has many consequences that affect those who are working in minimum wage service jobs. It applies equally as well to those with physical and mental health issues which limit or negate their abilities to work. Thus, the middle class finds it has no escape route.

When 10% of the population controls the largest share of the national wealth, there is a loss of equality in education, health [both mental and physical], so-

cial welfare, loss of will to participate in government, all of which leads to a crumbling of infrastructure in areas across the width and breadth of this land.

The first remedy toward easing the financial inequality of the working class is in the raising of the minimum wage throughout the nation by passing the Federal Minimum Wage Bill that is now under consideration in Congress.

As submitted, this bill will bring the current \$7.25 per hour minimum wage to \$12 incrementally and eliminate the current \$2.13 per hour minimum wage paid to service personnel who primarily work in the food and hotel industry. The first year, the rate would rise by 85 cents per hour; then it will \$1 per hour for the next four years to reach a \$12.00 per hour minimum wage. There are also provisions in the current proposal which will cause the minimum wage to keep up annually thereafter with the average national median wage.

In a study by the Pew Research Center regarding whether people of wealth vote for Republicans while individuals of less means vote for Democrats, it was found that while this hypothesis was true to a degree, the study also revealed that the financially insecure actually tend to drop out of the political picture altogether. [Is this a major factor in the decline of actively participating voters over the last decade?]

Only 26% of the financially insecure could identify the party in control of the U.S. House and Senate. Though they know who our president is, both by name and ethnicity, many of our younger generation do not know the name of our country's vice-president! *Kenneth Wells lives in Ratliff City and is a regular contributor to The Oklahoma Observer*

Cheatin' Hearts

BY TOM ELLIS

It seems that our latest national, major crisis is winding down to an end with the appeal process being put into motion. What, you may ask is this world shaking, shaping problem? D-E-F-L-A-T-E G-A-T-E, what else.

Cheating at anything should come as no surprise to anyone in the good ol' USofA. We have a lengthy legacy of cheats and cheating, probably going back to pre-historic times. There have been defense attorneys who have cheated to get their clients off, prosecutors who have cheated to get a conviction, and in most, if not all, walks of life someone has cheated somehow, somewhere along the way.

Cheating in athletics stretches from Little League baseball to what is considered, by some at least, to be the epitome of athletic endeavor: the grand ol'

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23

A Challenge To Observer Readers

Grappling with deep budget cuts, Oklahoma's public libraries and public schools are being forced to make tough financial decisions. Many are electing to cut subscriptions to publications like The Observer.

Last month, longtime Observer reader Homer Hulme stepped up to sponsor 12 libraries that otherwise would no longer be carrying

The Observer. He then challenged nine other Observer readers to match his gift, ensuring educators, students, parents and library patrons continue to have access to facts and viewpoints the state's rightwing mainstream media suppress.

Each tax-deductible gift of \$35 to the Oklahoma Observer Democracy Foundation will provide a one-year Observer subscription to a library or school in your area.

Won't you help us meet Homer's challenge?

Yes! I want to support Oklahoma's public libraries and schools with gift subscriptions to The Observer. Enclosed is my check for _____ made payable to the Oklahoma Observer Democracy Foundation for _____ gift subscriptions for libraries and schools.

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____
Libraries/Schools _____

Dear Arnold,

I'll challenge 9 other readers to each cover 10% of the remaining libraries: please renew the ones I've underlined. Mother who was an avid volunteer at the Chickasha library until she was 96 was born in Frederick, Md was born in Thomas. The other 10 are because I'm partial to Eastern Oklaho

Sincerely,
Homer
Homer H. Hulme



Mail checks to:
Oklahoma Observer Democracy Foundation
PO Box 14275
Oklahoma City, OK 73113
The Oklahoma Observer Democracy Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit. All donations are tax deductible within the limits of the law.

This month, these libraries and schools need your support in order to continue receiving The Observer:

Murray State College – Library
 Healdton Community Library
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 Crescent Community Library
 Redlands Comm. College – Library
 Jim Lucas Memorial Lib - Checotah
 Suburban Acres Library – Tulsa
 Meeker Library
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 Spencer Mem. Lib – Rush Springs
 Elk City Carnegie Library
 Slief Memorial Library - Cheyenne
 Madill City Library
 Warner Memorial Library - Hooker
 Fairview City Library
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 Reiger Memorial Library - Haskell
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 Page Memorial Library – Sand Springs
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 Kennedy Library of Konawa

Choctaw County Library – Hugo
 Florence Park Library - Tulsa
 Harrah Ext. Library
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 Maysville Public Library
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 Grandfield Public Library
 Kingfisher Memorial Library
 Hollis Public Library
 Luther Public Library
 Mangum Public Library
 Waurika Public Library
 Okemah Public Library
 Cordell Public Library
 Wetumka Public Library
 Sayre Public Library
 Wewoka Public Library
 Sentinel Public Library
 Muldrow Public Library
 Carmen Public Library

Sperry Public Library
 Medford Public Library
 Great Plains Tech Center - Lawton
 Nash Public Library
 Green County Tech Center - Okmulgee
 Okeene Public Library
 Mid-America Tech Center - Wayne
 Shattuck Public Library
 Northeast Tech Center - Pryor
 Waynoka Public Library
 Tri-County Tech Center - Bartlesville
 Bixby Public Library
 Francis Tuttle Tech Center - OKC
 Bristow Public Library
 Cooper Tech Center Supt - Shawnee
 Chelsea Public Library
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 Coweta Public Library
 Collinsville Public Library
 Drumright Public Library
 Inola Public Library
 Mannford Public Library
 Oilton Public Library
 Owasso Public Library
 Pawhuska Public Library
 Pratt Public Library – Sand Springs
 Skiatook Public Library
 Stroud Public Library
 Newkirk Public Library
 Chandler Public Library

Cheatin'

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

NFL. I heard someone once say that next to the word cheater in the dictionary you would find a picture of Bill Belichick, the coach of the New England Patriots. Obviously, not all participants cheat, but when a scandal is brought into the open, the entire group is despoiled.

The obscene amounts of money involved in professional athletics is most likely the root cause of the desire to cheat. For his day, Bud Wilkinson made a pretty healthy chunk of dough [it has been rumored that one year George Cross, the OU president at the time, had to be given a raise in order to, as leader of the pack, be the highest paid member of the staff and faculty. I wonder if Boren gets more than Stoops?] But adverse or derogatory comments were hardly, if ever, mentioned in the same sentence with Wilkinson's name. That kind of shows that cheating is not a requirement for success.

It's a shame that people with all that talent and ability feel the need to cheat to win.

Now don't misunderstand – I bleed red and white and am a longtime 49er faithful, but this stuff needs to be relegated to a more proper place in society. I also fully understand that a whole bunch of these guys give back to their communities, but with all the

problems in the world it seems that a lot of other things – war, hunger, famine, disease, poverty, et al – need to have a higher priority than fun and games.

We are a nation of cheaters, and anyone who chooses not to believe it is naïve. Make the jump from professional athletes to professional politicians and you would find the pot calling the kettle black [that is not a racist metaphor]. Those – you fill in the adjective – guys are all-world at trying to make anything they do legal, ethical, acceptable, or whatever, both before and after the fact. One difference between politics and athletics is that athletics is entertainment, even though politics is moving rapidly in that direction.

I don't know, maybe deification of sports is what we have to do to relieve the stress and strain of just being alive.

When the athletes cheat, they are just cheating each other. Why not just let them have at it and may the best cheater win? On the other hand, the politicians are cheating all of us as well as themselves.

In closing, I would like to repeat another phrase bandied about occasionally: where the hell are we going and what are we doing in this hand basket?

Tom Ellis lives in Okeene and is an occasional contributor to The Oklahoma Observer



LAKE WOE-BE-GONE

Privatizing Texoma State Park

Proving To Be Nightmare

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

A decade after Oklahoma authorized the sale of Lake Texoma State Park, 758 prime lake-front acres remain undeveloped – a monument to the dangers of the private-is-always-best movement sweeping state government.

The four-star resort and conference center was required to be complete by now, but instead is mired in a lawsuit between the state and Pointe Vista Development LLC that may not soon be resolved.

The state was paid \$14.6 million for the property, but the two sides differ over whether the development proceeded as required contractually. The judge assigned to the case ordered mediation.

The development gridlock is a disaster for the Oklahoma side of Lake Texoma – the aging, decaying state lodge was demolished, killing several mom-and-pop

businesses along U.S. 70 and gut-punching an already lagging local economy.

It also raises serious questions about how state and federal officials handled the transaction, which included a federal requirement – still unmet – that the state make available to the public comparably-sized and -equipped recreational land along the lake.

The deal cries out for an investigative audit, but neither state nor federal officials seem inclined to step in – at least for now.

Among the questions that should be answered:

What has happened to the \$14.6 million? What became of \$1.6 million in federal grant money to help secure comparable recreational lands at Texoma? Did the development contract set penalties for not meeting deadlines? Were any penalties assessed or col-

lected?

Why wasn't an environmental impact study completed, as required by federal law? If one is to be carried out before development, who should be on the hook to pay for it?

State Auditor Gary Jones' office is the logical choice to carry out an investigation aimed at ensuring the taxpayers' interests are protected. But Jones' office may not have the money to do so, given this year's legislatively-imposed budget cuts.

Also problematic: Jones himself sits on the state Land Commission – which is suing Pointe Vista for breach of contract.

When state leaders – including then-Gov. Frank Keating and then-Lt. Gov. Mary Fallin – began pursuing the privatization scheme early this century, it was heralded as a creative way forward for the state's financially-strapped lodges and parks.

Of course, the lodges and parks were financially-strapped because lawmakers made them so – cutting taxes, which slashed revenues, which reduced dollars available for routine maintenance, much less improvements or expansions.

By willfully starving state parks and lodges, the state's powers that be created an opportunity to privatize. They persuaded federal officials – Texoma is a federally-controlled lake – to go along.

Then they just happened to sell to two of the state's well-heeled, politically-connected business executives: Chaparral Energy's Mark Fischer and Chesapeake Energy's Aubrey McClendon.

McClendon dropped out of the Pointe Vista deal last year. He earlier left Chesapeake and launched a new company, American Energy Partners.

The proposed \$500 million development was ballyhooed as an economic development juggernaut for the region – a world-class destination resort and high-end residential development.

In all the tub-thumping, however, it never was clear exactly how much benefit would accrue to local residents, many of whom live on the edge of or mired in poverty – close to 20%, according to some Census data analyses.

Aside from an initial burst of construction jobs, much of the long-term employment seemed destined to be minimum wage service jobs – cooks, housekeepers, lawn maintenance and the like.

Moreover, it always was debatable whether the complex would be good for Marshall County taxpayers.

In 2009, county commissioners approved a 30-year tax break – a Tax Increment Financing [TIF] district – to encourage the project. Last year, with the development stalled, they dissolved the TIF.

Will the upscale development more than help shoulder the county's tax burdens or end up demanding even more tax breaks that put additional pressures on already strapped local services – roads, water, sewer, schools?

The private development already has been on the drawing board longer than it took to build the entire

lake – six years, starting in 1938.

The rush to privatize has not served Oklahoma citizens well.

A 1964 federal law requires that when park property is sold, and the transaction involves federal grants, it must be replaced with comparably-sized, publicly-accessible lands within a year. It affords up to three years then to ensure the new site is comparably equipped.

It does not appear the state has met the requirement Texoma, though it's possible they applied the law more broadly – opening up new public access to recreational lands at Little Sahara State Park in northwestern Oklahoma and Beaver's Bend State Park in far southeastern Oklahoma.

Moreover, the state appears to be ignoring its own 2005 law, SB 823, that mandated replacing the Lake Texoma State Park property with land at Lake Texoma – not at parks a half a state or more away.

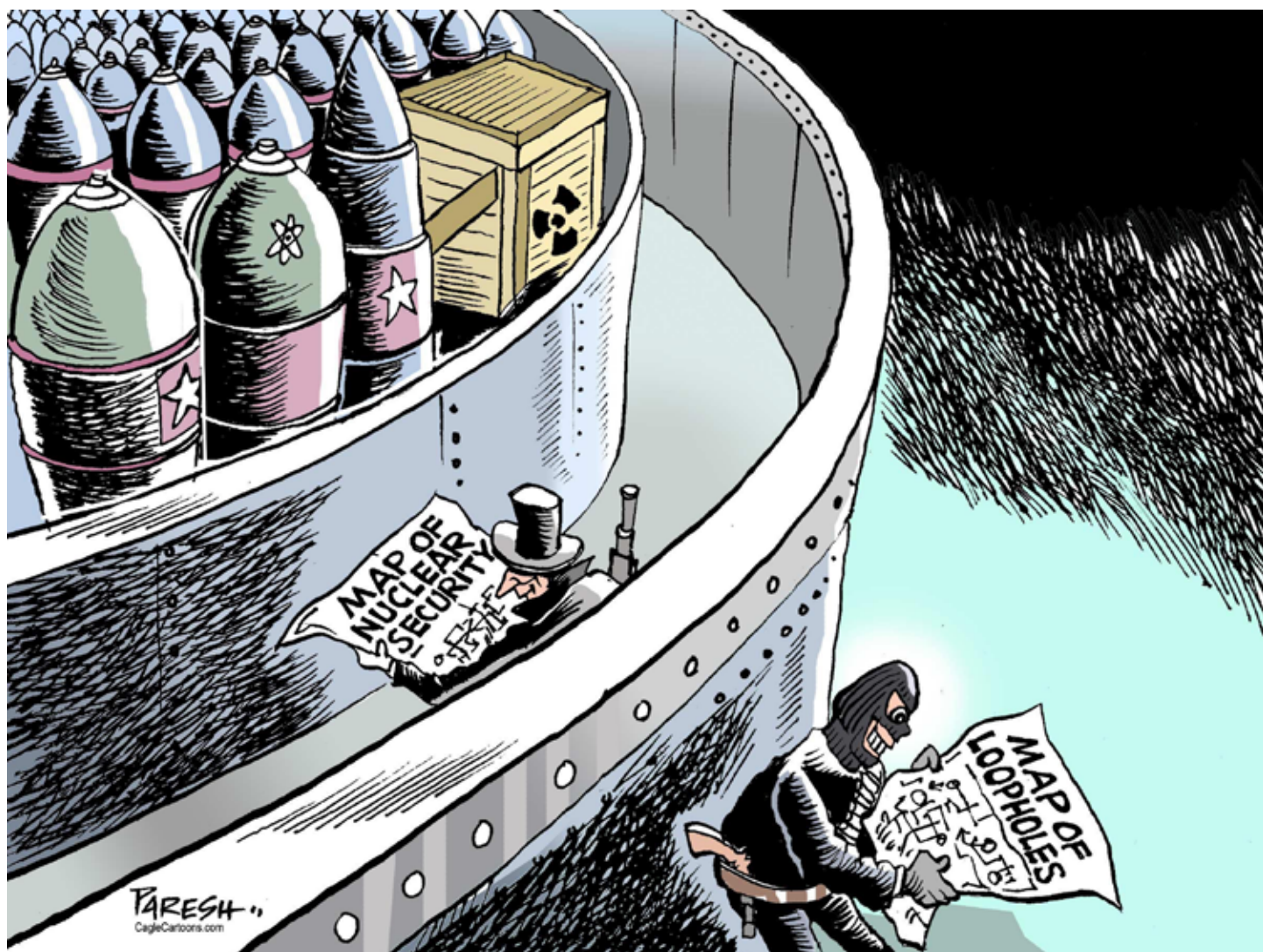
The drive to privatize Lake Texoma State Park was a bipartisan undertaking. It was launched under a Republican governor [Keating] and lieutenant governor [now Gov. Fallin], aided and abetted by Democrats, some of whom allegedly cashed in on the deal.

Now that it's tied up in court, there's little state lawmakers, local officials and state taxpayers can do but wait, though rumors persist outside investors – the Chickasaws, perhaps? – could swoop in, buy out Pointe Vista and jump-start the development.

Private development of the state park has been on the radar for a decade, but the full story of the Pointe Vista debacle is just now emerging. Stay tuned.

Editor's Note: The photos of the undeveloped former Lake Texoma Lodge site [cover] and the lodge's demolition [page 24] are both courtesy of Stephen Love Willis. For more information, visit his web site, defend-lake-texoma-state-park.org. Keep an eye on www.okobserver.net and upcoming Observer print editions for developments.





As Physicians We Ask: Will No One ‘Treat’ This Insanity?

BY BRUCE AMUNDSON

Nuclear weapons are the only weapons of mass destruction not yet prohibited by an international convention, even though they have the greatest destructive capacity of all weapons. A global ban on nuclear weapons is long overdue.

Since 1947 the single hand of the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists’ Doomsday Clock has symbolized the threat of the end of civilization. Initially the clock only conveyed the urgency that the magazine’s founders, mostly nuclear physicists, and the broader scientific community wanted to convey to the public about the dangers of nuclear war.

Earlier this year, the clock was reset at three min-

utes to “midnight for Western civilization.” It was at two minutes to midnight in 1953 when the U.S. tested the hydrogen bomb. In 1991, when the Cold War officially ended, it was set at 17 minutes.

The mere presence of the world’s 16,300 nuclear weapons poses a continuing grave and constant threat to humanity. In his recent book, *Command and Control*, Eric Schlosser documents over 1,000 accidents and mishaps involving nuclear weapons, some of which could have resulted in catastrophic nuclear exchanges [think President Kennedy and the Bay of Pigs]. Current threats come from accidents like those chronicled by Schlosser, unstable countries like India and Pakistan again going to war, fur-

ther proliferation by dangerous regimes, and especially from nuclear terrorism.

Yet our current political leaders are still locked in a Cold War mentality. In a vastly changed world, the U.S. budget for nuclear weapons and research currently exceeds the all-time record set by President Reagan at the height of the Cold War. But it gets more bizarre.

President Obama, who pledged in a dramatic and visionary speech in Prague in 2009 to “pursue the security of a world without nuclear weapons,” has lost that noble vision. His administration, with strong support in Congress [which has long been under the influence of the major defense contractors], is now calling for “modernization” of the entire U.S. nuclear force.

The magnitude is astonishing: 12 new Trident submarines [most housed across Puget Sound at Bangor, putting Seattle in the nuclear crosshairs], up to 100 new long-range bombers and 400 land-based missiles. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates the cost to taxpayers will be \$1 trillion over the next 30 years, a trillion dollars at a time when almost all of the rest of civil society is starved of the resources needed to make our society function.

Apparently our president and Congress have not noticed that most of the rest of the world is moving in the other direction. At the third international Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, held in Vienna in December 2014, over 150 nations met and called for the swift pursuit of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty’s goal of a nuclear-weapons-free world. Pope Francis weighed in as well, adding a compelling moral urgency. As did the Dalai Lama.

By launching the proposed modernization of its nuclear weapons, the U.S. would set a highly embarrassing example within the community of nations and likely trigger a new nuclear arms race with Russia and China.

This plan is indefensible from every angle. Whether your concerns are national security, economic investments in underfunded domestic programs, or the sanctity of human life, there is no justifiable reason for massive investments in these weapons of mass destruction. The hostile use of any modern nuclear weapon for deterrence or any other justification would constitute a crime against humanity by any of the standards leveled against aggressors in past wars.

This is not the country we are. And this is not what President Obama promised when he received the Nobel Peace Prize for his nuclear-free vision.

We all need to hold the president and Congress to a sane vision: no nuclear modernization and get us on the international bus to their abolition.

Join us in communicating with your congresspersons to stop this march of madness.

A former Oklahoma City resident, Bruce Amundson, MD, lives in Seattle and is president of Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility.

No More War

BY SHARON MARTIN

The biggest threat we face in this world today is the one that pits us against them. It doesn’t matter who the them is.

You believe your God is the only God. Your way is the only way. Your skin color, gender, or sexual orientation is superior. Your children are the only ones who deserve the best of everything. Stop.

There are those in this country who promote daily us/them battles. It’s good for business. Goading others to fight your wars is an act of evil. War is an evil. No more war. We all belong on this planet and there are enough resources for everyone.

One in four children in Oklahoma, about a quarter million kids under the age of 18, are food insecure. You who have well-nourished children in your household may believe this has nothing to do with you. Perhaps it’s their parents’ fault. We can’t go enabling deadbeat parents, can we?

Who cares whose fault it is when a child is hungry? Feed the child. Sort out the reasons later and try to come up with solutions so it doesn’t happen again. But first, feed the child. To let children go hungry as a form of political stance shows a lack of conscience.

To fund some schools well because parents in the district pay more property taxes is not only morally wrong, it is misguided. To believe that it is justifiable to educate some children and let others take their chances does not make this a better world.

Neither does parsing out health care. What kind of world do you want to leave for your lucky offspring, one that is secure and equitable or one that is fraught with social tensions?

Whose God wins? When religious foes fight, no one wins. War, actual or psychological, steals resources, souls, and lives.

Was there ever a time when clan cooperation wasn’t safer than war between clans? Is it really about survival of the strongest organism? What about the strongest mind? What about the strength of all of us together?

We don’t need to worry about immigrants. It’s likely your ancestors were immigrants once. They come, build lives, buy homes and stuff for their homes. They pay taxes and give back, regardless of what you’ve heard.

Don’t worry about trade agreements. You have it in your hands to buy local. Let’s pay living wages so local workers can afford to buy local. Buy across borders or natural barriers those things we don’t make or grow at home. Make and grow more stuff at home. Demand fair laws. Realize that workers and owners need each other. We all need each other. Cooperation, not war, is what will make us stronger and safer. *Sharon Martin lives in Oilton, and is a regular contributor to The Oklahoma Observer*



Ten Commandments For Religion And Politics

BY J. BRENT WALKER

The 2016 election season began in March when Sen. Ted Cruz, R-TX, announced his candidacy for president of the United States at Liberty University's convocation in Lynchburg, VA.

The rollout was carefully orchestrated to appeal to conservative Christians: Liberty is the largest Christian university in the world, it's in a critical purple state – Virginia – and it guaranteed a large audience – convocations are mandatory at Liberty.

Much of the relatively short speech was biographical and testimonial. Religious themes were pervasive. Sen. Cruz mentioned God five times and Jesus Christ twice. This was not improper; candidates for office do not check their faith at the door when they run for or serve in public office. When properly done, candidates' talk about their faith can help us know who

they are, learn what makes them tick and examine their moral core.

Some of what the senator said I agree with, such as his assertion that religious liberty comes from the hand of Almighty God, not the state. I disagree with other things that he put forth, like his applauding of vouchers for parochial schools and accusing the federal government of “wag[ing] an assault on our religious liberty.”

But Sen. Cruz has every right to disclose his Christian faith and discuss what his faith means to him in his speeches and public rhetoric.

That said, danger always lurks when we meld religion and politics. And now is a propitious time to start thinking again about how we combine the two with subtlety and integrity while keeping an eye to the constitutional ban on religious tests for public

office [Article VI, U.S. Constitution].

Yes, that provision technically only bans legal religious qualifications for office imposed by government, but, as I have often argued, we should make every effort, as good citizens, to live up to the spirit as well as the letter of the religious test ban.

Although religion is at home in the American public square and is certainly relevant to the political conversation, it's wrong to impose a rigorous religious litmus test in how we conduct our politics and the way we decide whom to trust to lead our nation.

Several years ago my friend – and now Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom – Rabbi David Saperstein put forth “Ten Commandments for a Proper Relationship Between Religion & Politics.” We would do well to heed this Decalogue [slightly modified by me] over the upcoming 18 months:

FOR CANDIDATES

1. Thou shalt offer an explanation to the electorate about how your religious beliefs shape your views on the issues, but never justify policy only on religious beliefs.

2. Thou shalt discuss your views on policy and legal issues that directly affect religion and religious liberty.

3. Thou shalt feel free to use religious language to explain how your beliefs would affect your ability to perform in elected office.

4. Thou shalt feel free to discuss the role religion plays in shaping your values, character and worldview.

5. Thou shalt minimize the use of divisive and exclusive religious language.

FOR POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS AND PARTIES

6. Thou shalt not seek to organize partisan supporters in houses of worship, but should respect their sacred spaces.

FOR RELIGIOUS GROUPS AND LEADERS

7. Thou shalt not use religious authority, threats or discipline to coerce the political decisions of candidates and American citizens.

FOR VOTERS

8. Thou shalt not base your votes on a candidate's religious beliefs or practices.

9. Thou shalt not blame candidates for isolated, out-of-context statements of their pastors and spiritual advisors.

FOR EVERYONE

10. Thou shalt never, explicitly or implicitly, suggest that there is a religious test for holding office.

These are wise injunctions for all campaigns – the presidency and otherwise – for the 2016 elections to follow. They are good for us voters to heed, too. They will help us acknowledge the pertinence of religion to public life while affirming the prohibition on even de facto religious tests for public office.

J. Brent Walker is executive director of the Washington, DC-based Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty. For more information, visit BJCOnline.org.

Qualifying Candidates

BY DANNY M. ADKISON

According to the latest count there are 18 individuals running for president in 2016. That's just the Republicans, by the way. This explains a recent announcement by Fox News that they will limit their presidential debates to just 10 candidates.

One of the major questions is, how do you make the cut? Who is in and who is out of the debate?

Fox News, in its announcement, stated it would make this decision based on how popular the candidates were. This, in turn, would be based on popularity polls.

Here is how Fox explained it would determine which candidates were allowed on stage to participate in the debates: the candidates must place in the top 10 of an average of the five most recent national polls.

This would probably be enough to keep Ben Carson off the stage. But then again, it might not. Why the concern over Dr. Carson's candidacy? It has to do with a recent remark he made. In fact, his remark may highlight a better threshold for determining who is allowed to debate.

Who is Dr. Carson? He is famous. Famous among neurologists, that is.

According to news reports, Dr. Carson was the first neurologist to operate on conjoined twins who were joined at the head. He successfully separated the twins, which surely reveals a level of genius of a particular type.

It's the qualification of his particular genius that demonstrates the problem of his aspiration to be president. While he is, without a doubt, one of the greatest neurological surgeons alive, he appears to be ignorant of the American system of government.

In case you missed it, Dr. Carson recently announced “we need to discuss” the Supreme Court's power to rule on the constitutionality or unconstitutionality of laws passed by Congress. He is referring to the most important Supreme Court case ever decided by the court: the 1803 decision of *Marbury v. Madison*.

In short, the doctor is asserting that *Marbury* was wrongly decided.

Before discussing that point, it should be noted that the good doctor probably has in mind some modern Supreme Court decisions he doesn't like. *Roe v. Wade* comes to mind.

What he perhaps hasn't thought through, however, is that if the court can't declare laws unconstitutional

al then Citizens United, allowing corporations to give unlimited amounts of money to candidates [mostly Republicans], is also suspect.

The fact is, though, that John Marshall, America's greatest chief justice, got it right in 1803. While it is true that the Constitution doesn't specify that the Supreme Court can declare a law unconstitutional, the documentary history is clear.

First, there is The Federalist Papers. These essays are cited by the court more than any other document [other than the Constitution itself] for determining the Constitution's meaning.

In essay No. 78 Publius explains that the Constitution specifically prohibits Congress from passing certain laws. One such prohibition is ex post facto laws. Publius then asserts that there is no way of enforcing such prohibitions other than through the courts "whose duty it must be to declare all acts contrary to the manifest tenor of the Constitution void." That's a quote.

In addition, there are numerous comments at the Constitutional Convention in which the delegates specifically referred to the power of the court to judge the constitutionality of laws.

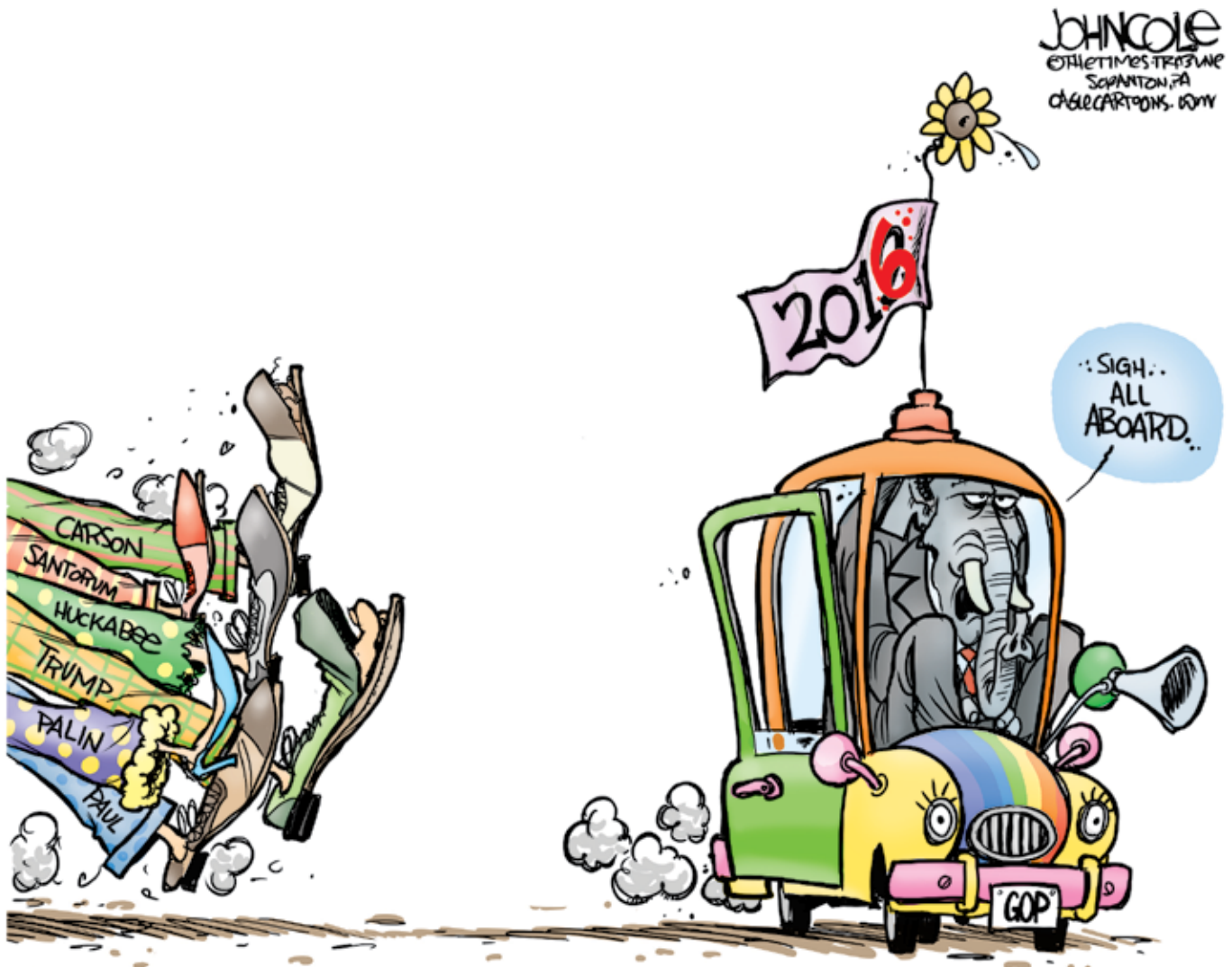
Here is just one – it comes from Madison himself [the father of that document] who in July was defending the manner specified for ratifying the Constitution. He asserted [in no uncertain terms], "A law violating a constitution established by the people themselves, would be considered by the judges as null and void."

Finally, there is the Constitution itself. In Article VI the framers specified, "The Constitution, and the laws of the United States made in pursuance thereof, . . . shall be the supreme law of the land."

Is it reasonable to think that a law that contradicts or is contrary to the Constitution can actually be made in pursuance of that Constitution? Apparently, Dr. Carson thinks so.

Which brings us back to whom the media might want to keep off the stage when the debates are held. Instead of popularity in the polls, perhaps each candidate should answer a constitutional quiz. The first question? Do you believe there is a serious need in 2016 to revisit the decision made in Marbury v. Madison?

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



The Revolt Of Small Business Republicans

BY ROBERT B. REICH

Can it be that America's small businesses are finally waking up to the fact they're being screwed by big businesses?

For years, small-business groups such as the National Federation of Independent Businesses have lined up behind big businesses lobbies.

They've contributed to the same Republican candidates and committees favored by big business.

And they've eagerly connected the Republican Party in Washington to its local business base. Retailers, building contractors, franchisees, wholesalers, and restaurant owners are the bedrock of local Republican politics.

But now small businesses are breaking ranks. They're telling congressional Republicans not to make the deal at the very top of big businesses' wish list – a cut in corporate tax rates.

"Given the option, this or nothing, nothing is better for our members," the director of legislative affairs at Associated Building Contractors told Bloomberg News. [Associated Building Contractors gave \$1.6 million to Republicans in the 2014 midterm elections and nothing to Democrats.]

Small businesses won't benefit from such a tax deal because most are S corporations and partnerships, known as "pass-throughs" since business income flows through to them and appears on their owners' individual tax returns.

So a corporate tax cut without a corresponding cut in individual tax rates would put small businesses at a competitive disadvantage.

And since a cut in the individual rate isn't in the cards – even if it could overcome the resistance of Republican deficit hawks, President Obama would veto it – small businesses are saying no to a corporate tax cut.

The fight is significant, and not just because it represents a split in Republican business ranks. It marks a new willingness by small businesses to fight against growing competitive pressures from big corporations.

In case you hadn't noticed, big corporations have extended their dominance over large swaths of the economy.

They've expanded their intellectual property, merged with or acquired other companies in the same industry, and gained control over networks and platforms that have become industry standards.

They've deployed fleets of lawyers to litigate against

potential rivals that challenge their dominance, many of them small businesses.

And they've been using their growing economic power to get legislative deals making them even more dominant, such as the corporate tax cut they're now seeking.

All this has squeezed small businesses – undermining their sales and profits, eroding market shares, and making it harder for them to enter new markets.

Contrary to the conventional view of an American economy bubbling with innovative small companies, the rate that new businesses have formed has slowed dramatically.

Between 1978 and 2011, as big businesses expanded and solidified control over many industries, the pace of new business formation was halved, according to a 2014 Brookings Institution study.

The decline occurred regardless of the business cycle or which party occupied the White House or controlled Congress.

Contributing to the drop was the deregulation of finance – which turned the biggest Wall Street banks into powerhouses that swamped financial markets previously served by regional and community banks. Not even Dodd-Frank has slowed the pace of financial consolidation.

In consequence, many small businesses can't get the financing they once got from state and local bankers. Over the past two decades, loans to small businesses have dropped from about half to under 30% of total bank loans.

That means the Fed's rock-bottom interest rates haven't percolated down to many small businesses.

Tensions have also grown between giant franchisors – restaurant chains, fast-food corporations, auto manufacturers, giant retailers – and their franchisees.

Franchisees have found themselves trapped in contracts that siphon off profits to parent companies, give franchisors the right to unilaterally terminate the agreements, and force franchisees into mandatory arbitration of disputes.

Complaints are mounting about parent corporations closing successful franchisees for minor contract violations in order to resell them at high prices to new owners.

Meanwhile, small businesses are feeling the same financial pinch the rest of us endure from big corporations whose growing market power is letting them

jack up prices for everything from pharmaceuticals to Internet connections.

So the willingness of small business groups to take on big business on its top legislative priority could mark the start of a political realignment.

If small businesses were willing to ally themselves with consumer, labor, and community groups, they could press for stronger antitrust enforcement against giant corporations.

As well as for breaking up Wall Street's biggest banks and strengthening community banks.

They could also get legislation banning take-it-or-leave-it contracts requiring mandatory arbitration.

Such an alliance might even become a powerful voice for campaign-finance reform, containing the

political clout of giant corporations.

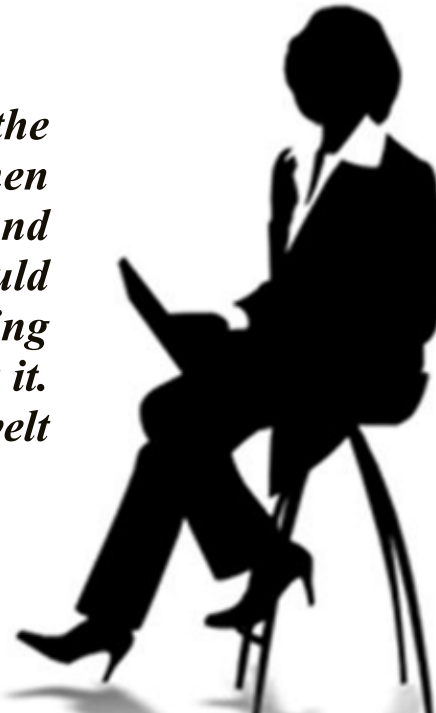
Don't hold your breath. Small business groups have done the bidding of big business for so long that the current conflict may be temporary.

But the increasing power of big corporations cries out for new centers of countervailing power.

Even if the political realignment doesn't happen soon, small businesses will eventually wake up – and could play a central role.

Robert B. Reich is Chancellor's Professor of Public Policy at the Goldman School of Public Policy at the University of California-Berkeley. The author of 13 books, he has served in three national administrations, most recently as secretary of labor under President Bill Clinton.

*The battle for the
individual rights of women
is one of long standing and
none of us should
countenance anything
which undermines it.
~ Eleanor Roosevelt*



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Letter Carrier's Special Delivery To Congress



Neither rain nor sleet nor snow – nor even the likelihood that he'd be killed en route – could stop this letter carrier from making his appointed rounds.

Doug Hughes is one gutsy and creative mailman. In April, this rural letter carrier from Florida stunned the Secret Service, eluded federal aviation authorities, embarrassed Washington's haughty all-seeing security hierarchy and threw members of Congress into a chaotic panic.

Hughes did all this by boldly flying his tiny, home-made, gyrocopter right through the heart of our nation's most restricted airspace, then landing it on the front lawn of the U.S. Capitol.

Far from a terrorist or a kook, Hughes was just a mailman on a mission, a patriotic citizen who – like most of us – is disgusted that Big Money interests are able to openly buy lawmakers and laws. But he did more than write a letter to his congress critter – he wrote letters to all 535 of them, loaded the missives in his mailbag and – as postal workers do – literally went the extra mile to make a “very special delivery” in his gyrocopter.

This was no flight of fancy. Doug planned his mail delivery for months, and he was fully aware that he might crash, be killed by a scramble of military jets or be gunned down by guards when he landed.

Nor was it a sneak attack – he repeatedly posted his intentions in blogs; a reporter was covering his preparations; and the Secret Service had investigated and interviewed him about his plans more than a year earlier.

His landing jolted the Capitol into lockdown. Guards rushed out to arrest Doug and haul him off to some deep cellblock; a bomb squad arrived; and spooked lawmakers were scared silly. They ran around screeching that they were threatened by terrorists.

Of course, the real threat to America is not some guy flying a gyrocopter in protest but the utter corruption of Congress, the courts and democracy itself by the plutocratic elites whom this mailman targeted with nothing more [nor less] dangerous than a bagful

of truth-telling letters.

Actually, Hughes was not alone on this heroic mission of civil disobedience – the great majority of Americans are totally on board with him, his message and his bold effort to shake up and shape up Congress.

It's not surprising that when the activist mailman delivered his powerful message to Congress he drew saturation coverage from the mass media.

Not coverage of his message, mind you, but a ridiculous spasm of media scaremongering over the non-existent terrorist threat that our self-absorbed members of Congress say his visit posed to them.

While Hughes carried no weapons of terrorism on his flight, the message he brought to Washington is politically explosive. So, congressional leaders, who're always terrified about anything that might ignite public outrage over their pay-to-play corruption, quickly rushed to divert attention from the message – to the messenger.

Shazam! In an instant, the politicians fabricated a sob story about themselves, recasting their role from for-sale villains to pitiable victims. We're threatened by a security network so porous, they squealed, that this dangerous terrorist can easily fly right up to the Capitol building. They convened emergency hearings, went on talk shows and imperiously demanded that they be made safe from such a horrific threat. And the media meekly bought into the whole hubbub, entirely losing sight of the damning message that the mailman was carrying.

Hughes did not commit an act of terror; it was an act of civil disobedience. His flight was a thoughtful, well-planned, non-violent stand against the tyranny of money, undertaken in the spirit of Henry David Thoreau and Martin Luther King Jr.

Hughes is standing up for We the People, and like freedom fighters before him, he's fully aware of and prepared to pay the price of civic defiance.

On May 20, a federal grand jury indicted this messenger of democracy on a mess of charges that could add up to more than nine years in prison. Far from backing away, however, he's now calling out you and

me: “We spend billions protecting the United States from terrorists,” Hughes recently wrote. “It’s time for Americans to spend time protecting democracy from plutocrats.”

One time when Thoreau was in jail for his defiance of authority, his friend Ralph Waldo Emerson happened by and asked: “Henry, why are you here?” Thoreau retorted: “Why are you not here?”

To help save our democracy from plutocracy, go to www.DemocracyIsForPeople.org.

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Obama's Ugly Show Of Presidential Petulance

When the going got tough, Barack got in a huff, and then he got gruff.

President Obama has worked himself into such a tizzy over the TPP that he’s lashing out at his progressive friends in Congress. He’s mad because they refuse to be stereotypical lemmings, following him over this political cliff called the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

It masquerades as a “free trade agreement,” but such savvy and feisty progressive senators as Sherrod Brown, Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren have ripped off the mask, revealing that TPP is not free, not about trade and not anything that the American people would ever agree to.

It is a stealth power grab, written in top-secret negotiations by and for multinational corporations from the U.S. and 11 other nations. This raw deal effectively empowers these profiteering corporate giants to overrule actions by the governments of any of these countries – including ours – that protect consumers, workers, the environment and other interests from corporate abuse.

This gift to the Trans-Pacific Titans is going to expand the rules of trade deals of the past such as NAFTA, WTO and Korea FTA.

A few examples of what we have to look forward to with this turd of a deal the president is trying to polish and force onto the American people are: more off-shoring of American jobs, which in turn leads to greater income inequality; higher costs for lifesaving and sustaining medicines; our environmental protections will be under threat of corporate attack; food

and product safety regulations will be undermined; net neutrality will once again be challenged; Wall Street reform will be nothing but a memory; and say so long to Buy American initiatives.

Why an American president – especially a Democrat – would embrace this private usurpation of our people’s sovereignty is a mystery, but the great majority of congressional Democrats are not going along. So he’s been publicly scolding them [as though they’re disobedient children], huffily whining that they’re playing politics, “whupping on me” and making up “stuff” about how this deal allows corporations to challenge and even change American laws.

Yet, rather than offer any evidence that they’re making up stuff, Obama gruffly made up stuff about them. By opposing the TPP, he prevaricated in a recent speech, the Democrats are anti-trade and want to “pull up the drawbridge and build a moat around ourselves.”

The president is on such thin ice with this ponderous giveaway to global corporate giants that his appeals for support have turned desperate, including this recent claim that TPP “is the most progressive trade deal in history.”

Wow, that’s a low bar! Does he mean more progressive than the thoroughly regressive NAFTA? Or maybe he’s comparing TPP to King George III’s East India Trading Company, which was such a bully that it sparked the American Revolution.

Indeed, Obama is doing some bullying of his own. He’s pushing the lie that such Democrats as Warren are lying when they point out that TPP would let foreign corporations sue the USA in corporate-run international tribunals to force our officials to weaken or kill laws that might pinch a corporation’s profits.

“There is no chance, zero chance” of that happening, the president barked.

But, as he knows, it already has happened!

In April, under another trade agreement, his own administration was directed by a WTO tribunal to change – and essentially gut – a U.S. food-labeling law that dramatically reduced the killing of dolphins by commercial tuna-fishing fleets.

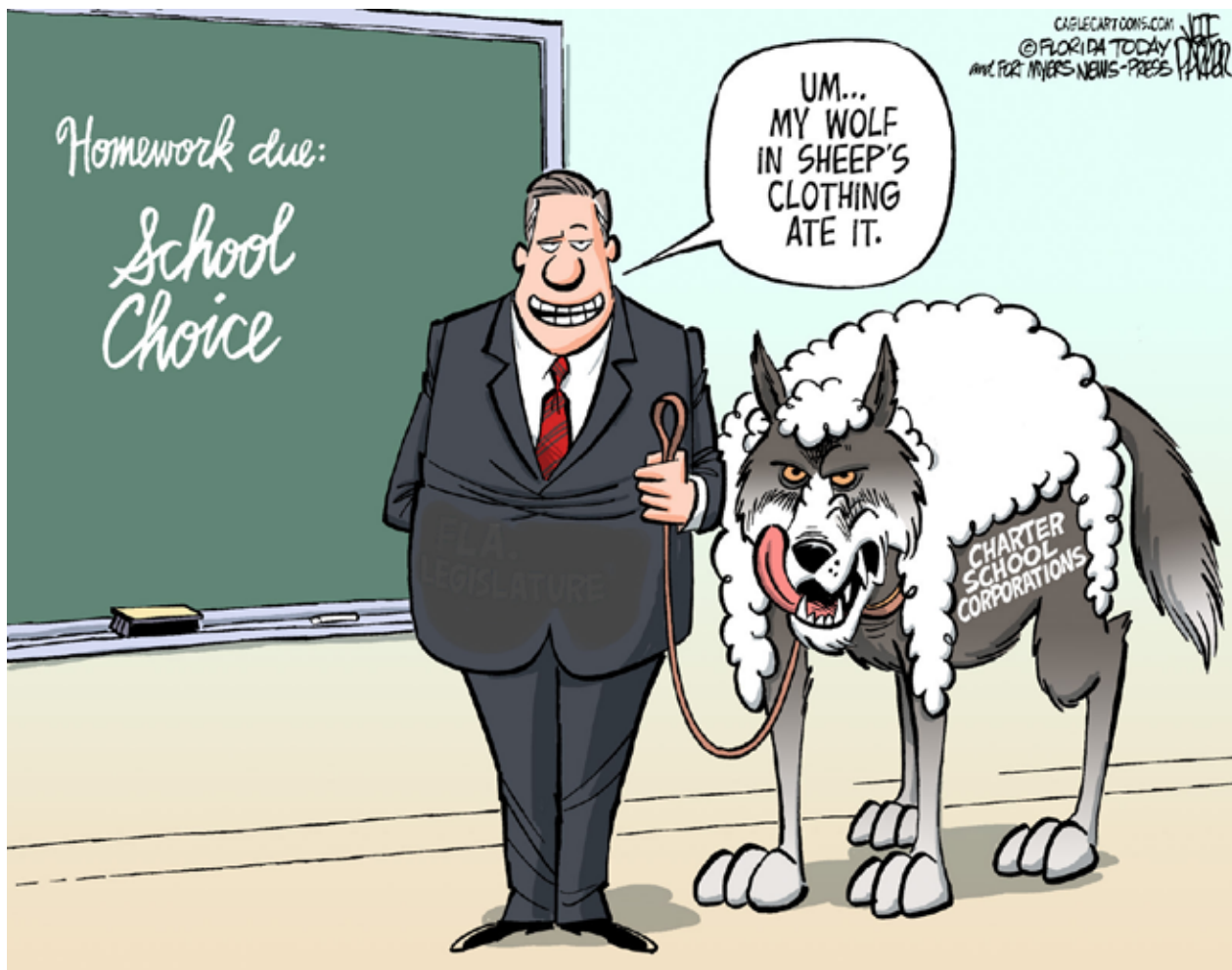
Responding to public outrage over the mass slaughtering of the mammals, our Congress passed an effective dolphin-free law. But some tuna operations in Mexico complained that using dolphin-free nets hurt their profits, and the WTO ordered our sovereign nation to surrender our law to the dolphin-killing Mexican profiteers.

And more recently, the WTO ordered the USofA to change its country-of-origin labeling laws, effectively saying our consumers do not have a right to know where the meat they eat is coming from.

By claiming that “no trade agreement is going to force us to change our laws,” Obama is either lying, or he doesn’t know what’s in his own agreement.

What a pathetic show of presidential petulance! It’s time for Obama to question himself – not his friends.

– *Jim Hightower*



What Did Feds \$3.3 Billion For Charter Schools Buy?

The federal government has spent more than \$3.3 billion over the past two decades creating and fueling the charter school industry, according to a new financial analysis and reporters' guide by the Center for Media and Democracy [CMD].

Despite the huge sums spent so far, the federal government maintains no comprehensive list of the charter schools that have received and spent these funds or even a full list of the private or quasi-public entities that have been approved by states to "authorize" charters that receive federal funds.

And despite drawing repeated criticism from the Office of the Inspector General for suspected waste and inadequate financial controls within the federal Charter Schools Program – designed to create, expand, and replicate charter schools – the U.S. Department of Education [ED] is poised to increase its funding by 48% in FY 2016.

CMD's review of internal audits reveals that ED did not act quickly or effectively on numerous reports

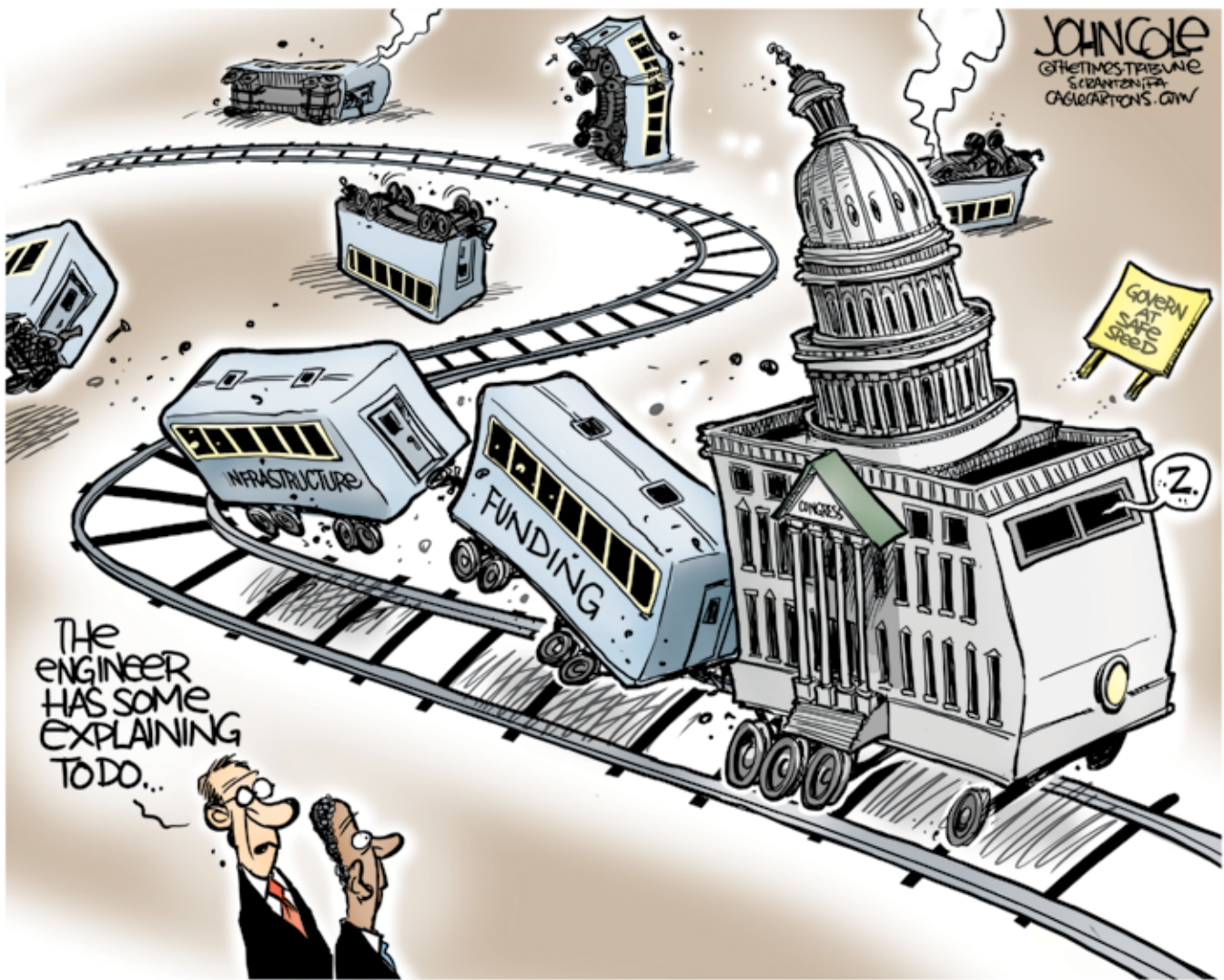
that state education officials had no idea where the federal funds ended up.

The documents also show that ED knowingly awarded grants to states with no statutory oversight over charter authorizers and schools as the grant applications are evaluated based on how much "flexibility" from state laws charter schools have.

As a result of lax oversight on the federal level, combined with many state laws that hide charter finances from the public eye, taxpayers are left in the dark about how much federal money each charter school has received and what has been wasted or spent to enrich charter school administrators and for-profit corporations who get lucrative outsourcing contracts from charters, behind closed doors.

"The Department of Education is pushing for an unprecedented expansion of charter schools while paying lip service to accountability, but independent audit materials show that the department's lofty rhetoric is simply not backed up by its actions," noted

CONTINUED ON PAGE 37



Amtrak's Spectrum Gap

BY DAVID SIROTA

In the public eye, the disaster on the rails last month in Philadelphia was not only tragic but also shocking. As a crowded Amtrak train approached a bend in the track, it was barreling along at more than 100 miles an hour – twice the mandated speed for that section. The resulting derailment killed eight people, highlighting grave deficiencies in Amtrak's safety system.

But while Amtrak officials may have been devastated, they could not have been surprised: The accident confirmed clear vulnerabilities in the safety system, shortcomings that the rail company's internal watchdog had been warning about for more than two years.

In a December 2012 report, Amtrak's inspector general wrote that "formidable" and "significant challenges" were delaying deployment of a safety system known as Positive Train Control, which identifies cars that are traveling at excessive speeds and auto-

matically slows their progress.

Four years earlier, Congress had required that Amtrak and other American rail companies add the technology to their operations, but only a fraction of the rail systems were by then covered. Had the PTC technology been in place in Philadelphia, federal regulators say, the derailment might well have been prevented.

The inspector general's 2012 report zeroed in on one missing element that was crucial to the broader deployment of the safety system: Amtrak had for years failed to acquire adequate rights to broadcast communications signals through the public airwaves.

Without these so-called spectrum rights, Amtrak's trains could not communicate with the electronic brains of the safety system, preventing its use along key stretches of track.

This lack of spectrum had become the "most seri-

ous challenge” in the railroad’s efforts to deploy the safety equipment more broadly, Amtrak’s watchdog warned.

The failure to more quickly address this challenge seems like a story that the political world can oversimplify into a standard tale of cut-and-dry blame, featuring singular villains. But in this saga, many factors appear to have contributed to the disaster.

For one, there was a lack of adequate resources. Flush with profits, private freight companies had the cash to buy the spectrum they needed for their own PTC system. By contrast, Congress did not provide Amtrak with the same resources.

There was also a lack of political will. When public transportation officials begged Congress to pass a bill ordering the FCC to give the railroad unused spectrum for free rather than selling it to private telecommunications firms, lawmakers refused.

But some technology experts argue that Amtrak itself was also to blame for doggedly sticking to an outdated plan. They say that because communications technology has advanced so quickly, the railroad officials did not need to build a PTC system on exclusive spectrum – whose scarcity makes it difficult and expensive to obtain. Instead, they assert, new technologies would have allowed Amtrak to more

quickly construct a system using shared spectrum, existing telecommunications infrastructure or even unlicensed frequencies that are used for things like in-home Wi-Fi.

“We have boatloads of fiber running alongside train tracks in the rights of way,” said Harold Feld, a senior vice president of the think tank Public Knowledge. “If I were architecting this system, I could deploy it tomorrow using unlicensed spectrum.” Amtrak’s “obsession with exclusive licensing kills,” he concluded.

How much each of these factors contributed to the catastrophe can certainly be debated. What is not debatable, however, is the existence of warning signs. The 2012 inspector general report proves they were there for all to see.

That, then, raises two pressing questions: Why were those warning signs not more urgently addressed? And will such warning signs be acted on in the future? America deserves answers.

David Sirota is a senior writer at the International Business Times and the best-selling author of the books Hostile Takeover, The Uprising and Back to Our Future. Email him at ds@davidsirota.com, follow him on Twitter @davidsirota or visit his website at www.davidsirota.com.

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Charter

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35

Jonas Persson, a writer for the Center for Media and Democracy, a national watchdog group that publishes PRWatch.org, ALECexposed.org, and SourceWatch.org.

“The lack of tough financial controls and the lack of public access to information about how charters are spending federal tax dollars has almost inevitably led to enormous fraud and waste.”

CMD’s guide, *New Documents Show How Taxpayer Money Is Wasted by Charter Schools – Stringent Controls Urgently Needed as Charter Funding Faces Huge Increase*, analyzes materials obtained from open records requests about independent audits of how states interact with charter school authorizers and charter schools.

These documents, along with the earlier Inspector General report, reveal systemic barriers to common sense financial controls. Revealing quotes from those audit materials, highlighted in CMD’s report, show that too often states have had untrained staff doing unsystematic reviews of authorizers and charter schools while lacking statutory authority and adequate funding to fully assess how federal money is being spent by charters.

In many instances, states have no idea how charter schools actually spent federal monies and they have no systematic way of obtaining that information or making sure it is accurate.

Meanwhile, charter school advocates within state agencies and private entities have sought to prevent strong financial controls and reporting systems backed up by government oversight.

“It is astonishing that the federal government has spent more than \$3 billion directly on charter schools and is poised to commit another \$350 million on their expansion this year, even though charters have failed to perform better than traditional public schools overall and have performed far worse when it comes to fraud and waste,” noted Lisa Graves, CMD’s executive director.

She added: “This result is not surprising since many charter school advocates have pushed to create a system that allows charters to get federal funds without federal controls on how that money is spent – but it should not be acceptable for so much of taxpayers’ money to be spent this way, with no requirement that the public be told how much money each and every charter school receives, how much each spends on high-paid charter executives, how much money makes it to the classroom, and how much is outsourced to for-profit firms.”

In CMD’s view, she said, “there is no doubt that American school children and American taxpayers are getting short-changed by the charter school system that is siphoning money away from traditional public schools.” – *Truthout.org*

What A Beautiful Mind Can Teach Us About Treating Mental Illness



BY BRIAN WARFIELD

When my wife, Misty, told me that the Princeton professor, John Nash, and his wife, Alicia, were tragically killed in a late May car accident, it struck a chord in me for more than one reason.

First, I had a geographical connection to the man who was awarded the Nobel Prize for his work in economics and mathematics; I lived in Princeton during my time in seminary and it's possible [though unlikely] that I could have brushed shoulders with the intellectual giant on my way to the university library, which I used on occasion.

Secondly, I am the chaplain for Integris Mental Health, so I am interested in Nash's well-documented journey through mental illness and what lessons his experience might teach us.

As I read through a lengthy biography on the New York Times website and remembered watching the popular film *A Beautiful Mind*, which dramatically tells his story, I was reminded of one dominant theme: Nash survived his tumultuous journey through Schizophrenia in part because he received incredible support from a nurturing community – namely the Princeton University campus, and the enduring love and kindness of his wife.

To be sure, there had to be seasons where the grace and benevolence of the campus were tested by his bizarre and erratic behavior, just as his marriage undoubtedly was strained to the point of breaking. [It's worth noting that he and his wife did divorce at one point, and later remarried.]

And this is fairly typical for individuals with any

kind of illness: while they experience the illness in a unique way – as it is their body/mind which is undergoing change – so also their family, friends, and support system have their own experience of the illness as supporters and bystanders.

The family has to clean up their messes, make phone calls to doctors, and explain to strangers why their loved one is acting the way they are. But somehow, some way, the community surrounding Nash remained with him and made space for him to be himself, whether that happened to be the mentally stable professor and mathematician or the mentally unstable psychiatric patient.

We need more communities like this. We need communities where the mentally ill can share their diagnoses and experiences and not be made to feel that they are strange or different for having these diagnoses.

People who are mentally ill need community because we all need community; God made us as social beings who were not meant to be alone. But mental illness exacerbates the feelings of alienation and loneliness; so it is even more important that the mentally ill belong to a community that can love them and reassure them when they feel a sense of disconnect or when they feel like they are spiraling downward in their disease process.

And the families of mentally ill persons need community because they get weary. They have limitations, and they need others to support them as they endeavor to support their family member.

Another theme that struck me as I read through

the biography of Dr. Nash was that the Hollywood version of his story seemed to highlight the “exceptional” dynamics, and there are plenty. Dr. Nash was exceptional in his intelligence as he solved mathematical problems that no one had solved before him, exceptional in his suffering through mental illness as he was clearly very ill at times to the point of being hospitalized, and exceptional in his recovery as he was able to progress to the point where the Nobel Prize committee felt he was well enough to receive the prestigious award.

But I would like to suggest that the latter two “exceptions” are more common than exceptional in terms of how many individuals experience this kind of suffering and recovery.

First, Nash’s suffering, though severe and tragic, is much more common than we would like to think, and this type of suffering happens to people across the spectrum [e.g., poor, wealthy, intelligent, mentally retarded, male, female, moral, immoral, old, young, hard-working, lazy, religious, agnostic, etc.] In short, I am saying that his suffering was not more or less exceptional than any other psychiatric patient, but that his suffering [like others] deserves to be understood and appreciated for how terrible it really is.

Every day I am at work I walk onto our adult psych unit and speak with people who are truly hurting in ways that are both imaginable and unimaginable. They hear voices telling them to hurt and/or kill themselves. They feel like their lives and their bodies are not worthy of living. They see shadows or figures that haunt them.

They are paranoid and think that *everyone* is talking about them behind their back, the water in the water fountain is poisoned, they are never getting out of here, and their family is trying to kill them. They feel guilty and ashamed for trying to end their lives, even though that seemed like the most unselfish thing at the time, as they felt hopeless and desperate for some end to the excruciating pain.

They are grieving multiple losses which have piled up to the point where they feel overwhelmed and cannot seem to get out from underneath the avalanche of trauma and tragedy that has befallen them.

The website www.mentalhealth.gov gives examples for how prevalent mental illness is in our country. As recent as 2011, the government found these statistics:

- One in five American adults experienced a mental health issue
- One in 10 young people experienced a period of major depression
- One in 20 Americans lived with a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or major depression

We need to appreciate both the ubiquity of mental illness and the depths of suffering that people experience, and we must ask what we can do to help. Often the best support we can provide is emotional. When we learn that someone is experiencing anxiety, de-

pression, or grief, one of the best responses is to say, “Wow. I can’t imagine what this has been like. Tell me how you’re doing with all of this.” And then just listen without giving advice.

As a society, though, we need to be doing more for the mentally ill among us. Our state and federal governments need to spend more on educating people about and treating folks with mental illness. Our mental health hospitals should look like palaces and not old, worn out buildings that are decades behind needed renovations.

Secondly, Nash’s recovery actually resembles the recovery a lot of individuals experience in at least the following ways:

1. It took significant amounts of time [i.e., it took longer than the 135 minutes that the movie portrayed; mental illness is often chronic and long-lasting recovery and healing are life-long journeys where progress is measured in slight increments]. Mental illness is unlike many other illnesses that have simple cures or solutions. Often individuals will try several different medications or a variety of “drug cocktails” until they find the drug or drug cocktail that fits best with their body’s unique chemistry, and this often takes time to find through a process of trial and error.

2. There was not a linear progression toward healing but a choppy and circuitous route; Nash likely cycled through many bouts of illness and recovery, getting better and then getting worse, and then getting better and then worse again. The cycle can be discouraging and exhausting but it simply is what it is.

3. There is not a single thing that is responsible for his healing. It would be lovely to point to a single medication or “fix” that helped him move from “irrationality” to “rationality,” to borrow his words. But, as he said, it may have actually been the changes in hormones as he aged that allowed him to leave some of the illness behind. How strange to think that with all the possibilities for healing that he may have simply outgrown his illness. Mental illness is like that, though. Life is like that, though. Sometimes the “answer” eludes us and is mysterious or enigmatic. The main point to grasp here, though, is that recovery happens. It happens. People get better. People find ways of living with mental illness and they manage their symptoms. That’s something to be encouraged and hopeful about. As dark as mental illness can be, there is light shining through the darkness, and the darkness cannot comprehend it.

In sum, I can think of no better way to honor and remember this exceptional man than to appreciate what kind of struggle he endured with mental illness, and to do our best to make sure that people who are suffering like he did have the best possible resources so that they can have the best outcomes.

Brian Warfield lives in Oklahoma City where he serves as chaplain for Integris Mental Health. Photo of John and Alicia Nash courtesy of Danielle Alio/Princeton University.

Oklahoma Infamy

OKLAHOMA'S MOST NOTORIOUS CASES

By Ken Frates

The Roadrunner Press

338 pages, \$24

BY JOSEPH H. CARTER SR.

Masterfully written and exhaustively researched, this award-winning book by the scion of an Oklahoma City family, an insider, attorney and political figure is a rich and enlightening contribution to state history.

Kent Frates exercises distracting literary license occasionally and his six subjects are at best arguably "Oklahoma's Most Notorious Cases," but each rattles the entrails of the nation's 46th State, 108 years old.

Reflecting his fine Stanford education and legal studies at Arizona State, the author's fluid style admirably recites ugly history with prose that often reads like fiction.

A shortcoming is a failure to openly state his personal position as a predicate. In his 41-page treatment of the federal conviction of former Gov. David Hall, Frates properly shows that the 1971 tax hikes Hall proposed and won had left Hall "politically scarred and with many powerful enemies."

Frates claims a "combination of many" Democrats opposed the bill. Oops. The only "no" votes from registered Democrats were by state Rep. David Boren and Sen. Clem McSpadden. Both soon would run for governor and beat-out Hall's 1974 re-election bid.

The "united Republican minority" that opposed the tax bills included then-state Rep. Kent Frates – a fact not reported by the politician who wrote the Hall chapter and other books. Disclosure adds credibility.

In such a disclosure, this reviewer admits he was Hall's press secretary at the time and materially assisted in writing the tax bills. This reviewer believes the greatest chagrin of wealthy corporate owners was that the bill closed a loophole that gave income exemptions to dividends from Oklahoma corporations. Did a crooked lawmaker slip that loophole into earlier tax laws?

Opponents predicted a new 3% tax on oil and gas

production would prove to be the death of the state's petroleum industry – an assertion that has proved false. Otherwise, how would today's earthquakes be happening?

Also, that press secretary recalls the main newsmen antagonists of David Hall were Jim Standard and Mike Hammer. Both reporters for the Daily Oklahoman. Not, as Frates indicated, Jack Taylor. Nor the Tulsa World. In fact, the Tulsa papers admitted that Hall faced a financial crisis when elected and tax adjustments were essential.

Frates wrote detailed accounts of money in the Hall investigation. However, he never showed where even a nickel was exchanged in the course of matters that led to the four criminal charges prosecuted by former GOP state Rep. Bill Burkett, the U.S. attorney who was appointed by Republican President Richard Nixon.

Recounting the 1933 kidnapping of wealthy Oklahoma City oilman Charles Urschel by Machine Gun Kelly, Frates rightfully disclosed that the victim was his uncle. He wrote about the kidnapping in a fine, solemn tone. The ordeal ended with nobody injured, no machine gun blasts, and lots of the ransom money recovered. It's great reading.

During years this reviewer worked as a newspaper and wire service police reporter covering crime in Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Sapulpa, Honolulu, Kansas City and the JFK assassination in Dallas, many much more ghastly crimes can be vividly recalled.

Frates admirably recounted the 1999 Oklahoma City bombing that killed 168; the 1978 Sirloin Stockade slaughter of six by the wretched and executed Roger Dale Stafford; and the 1974 Karen Silkwood case. Each is recounted with adroit facts and vivid writing well worth the price of the book. Good jour-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 42

Becoming Color Conscious

WHITE LIKE ME

*Reflection On Race
From A Privileged Son*

By Tim Wise

Soft Skull Press Inc.

208 pages, \$14.95 [paper]

BY JOHN WOOD

When it comes to race, we have really overcome some major obstacles – slavery, civil war, segregation, and even electing a black man to the White House.

This societal transformation doesn't mean we have miraculously paradigm-shifted into a racially color-blind society. For example, in reality, there are more African Americans in prison or on parole today than the number in slavery before the Civil War.

Tim Wise is an anti-racist educator and author who I met at a speech he gave at Middle Tennessee State in 2004. His passion was infectious, his words seemed to glide amazingly off his tongue. It was a pleasure to listen and learn from him. I felt he challenged me; he made me understand that I can be a white guy "who gets it" – conscious of color – and that's essential to a more tolerant world.

Wise tells us in his book *White Like Me* how he found his color consciousness early on while in Nashville, TN where his parents placed him in a historically black preschool program at Tennessee State University. It was unusual because he was a minority in a class of around 20 black students and black faculty. He learned what it was like to be in the minority

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and respect black authority figures from early on – an unusual experience in America for a white kid, certainly affecting his worldview.

By the late 1980s, Wise found himself at Tulane, where as a student he was involved in the anti-

apartheid movement aimed at persuading the university to divest from companies doing business in South Africa.

While he felt he found his calling, it was certainly premature – a black student directly asked him at

CONTINUED ON PAGE 47

nalism.

In recounting the ghastly 1977 rape and murder of three pre-teen Girl Scouts camped out near Locust Grove, Frates came across less objectively. Imported Tulsa District Attorney Buddy Fallis failed to gain the conviction of a renegade Cherokee named Gene Leroy Hart, the only suspect charged with the crimes. Hart was sent to McAlester prison on other charges and died of a heart attack.

Frates' yarn concluded with his opinion: "Science could not solve this mystery. The answer died with Gene Leroy Hart." Hart's jury of peers disagreed. The rape-murders remain legally unsolved.

The book's sterling editing, layout and production in hardcover is the proud work of Oklahoma City's four-year-old Roadrunner Press and its seasoned, professional editor Jeanne Devlin. The design invites readers.

In a worthy postscript, Frates cites "several historic events" not covered in the book including the 1960s Supreme Court and the 1980s County Commissioner scandals among others. As a fellow Oklahoma history and crime buff, this reviewer hints a list of equally "most notorious" cases for sequels:

The half-million dollar theft of oil from Osage Indians by Koch Industries where brothers were sued notoriously by their brother.

Tulsa's ghastly "Hex House Murders" uncovered by Tulsa Tribune reporter Nolen Bullock.

John Dillon's chain-wrapped body found in a deep Rogers County well when Dillon was a fugitive facing federal drug peddling and burglary charges.

The uninvestigated casualties that since have occurred at the 435 Oklahoma "death traps" that were due to be fixed with money from Gov. Hall's Freeway 77 bond issue that was defeated after press attacks led by the same forces that opposed the tax bills.

The fall on sex deviate charges of Tulsa evangelist Billy James Hargis who hosted the 1962 campaign announcement to impeach Supreme Court Justice Earl Warren.

The 1921 Tulsa Race Riot that left at least 39 dead

and a mystery of why copies of the reported inflammatory Tulsa Tribune editorial vanished from archives.

The 1868 massacre of more than 100 Cheyenne women, children and old men on the wintry banks of the Washita River by cavalry troops led by George Custer.

State Sens. Gene Stipe's and Denzil Garrison's voluntary legal defense and exoneration of Oklahoma Marine Randell D. Herrod who was on trial in Vietnam.

The celebrated "hog trap killings" of southeast Oklahoma.

A comprehensive overview of wealth accumulated by Oklahoma bootlegger families earned before Gov. Howard Edmondson got prohibition repealed.

An investigative review of the millions of taxpayer dollars and federal agent hours wasted investigating Stipe and Leo Winters yet failed to find sufficient evidence to gain petit jury convictions after grand jury/DA-rigged indictments.

The unsolved murder of Tulsa beat cop Jim Peters at the lumber yard in Red Fork in about 1940.

Joseph H. Carter Sr. is a regular contributor to The Oklahoma Observer. Reared in west Tulsa in the 1930-50s era, he is author of Never Met A Man I Didn't Like: The Life and Writings of Will Rogers [HarperCollins] and The Quotable Will Rogers [Gibbs Smith Publishers].

Caregivers Conference Set June 12 In OKC

The 17th annual Caregiver Survival Skills Conference – the Power to Persevere – is set for June 12 at OKC's Mercy Conference Center from 8:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. The conference is designed to give caregivers the resources to help them make it through each day.

Speakers include Laree Reidenbaugh, the state Department of Human Services coordinator of Volunteer Chaplaincy services; elder law expert Lee Wats-

key; and Sunbeam Family Services counselors David Swope and Teresa Deck.

Keynoting the event is Bruce Intyre, associate director of the Parkinson Foundation of Oklahoma.

The event includes lunch and a resource fair featuring more than 25 local organizations and services. For more information or to register, please call 405.752.3803. Registration ends June 5. A \$10 donation is requested.

Oklahoma Friends Meetings (Quakers)

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

- Author unknown

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Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

pervisors. Some teens are emotionally disturbed or substance abusers.

Hopefully, this law does not come back to haunt Fallin and lawmakers – or a single Oklahoma family.

Progress?

OKC attorney E. Melvin Porter became Oklahoma's first African-American state senator in 1965. Sadly, it took 18 more years before another black joined him in the Legislature's upper chamber.

Even worse, only nine blacks have filled Senate seats since Porter took office a half century ago.

Porter's barrier-shattering moment was commemorated recently during the legislative session's final hours. The now 85-year-old Porter, flanked by his family, spoke with great emotion as he thanked current senators for marking the anniversary and honoring his 22 years of Senate service.

What went unspoken, however, was just how far we have to go before the Oklahoma Legislature more accurately reflects the racial and gender makeup of our state.

For example, African-American representation in the state Legislature remains far below what it should be – primarily because of a frontier era redistricting system that gerrymanders districts to protect incumbents as well as the economic and political status quo.

Today, African-Americans comprise nearly 8% percent of Oklahoma's overall population, yet fill a mere 4% of the Legislature's 149 seats – two of 48 in the Senate and two of 101 in the House [though a vacant Tulsa district is a historically black seat].

At 50.5% of the state population, women are woefully underrepresented in the legislative halls, as well – six of 48 in the Senate and 13 of 101 in the House, a measly 12.8%.

Wouldn't it be healthy for our democracy to elect a Legislature that more accurately reflects us as a people?

And wouldn't that be a more tangible way to honor Sen. Porter's legacy?

Liberal Redux

Long regarded a political epithet, especially by the right, the term "liberal" is making a comeback.

According to a recent Gallup Poll, the percentage of self-styled "liberals" and self-styled "conservatives" in America is now almost exactly the same – about 31% each on social issues.

It's the highest percentage of "liberals" and lowest percentage of "conservatives" in the 15 years since

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Gallup began measuring the nation's ideological perspectives.

Why the change? It's possible liberals simply tired of the dissembling – the polite company practice of invoking "progressive" or "populist" as code words to avoid the politically charged L-word.

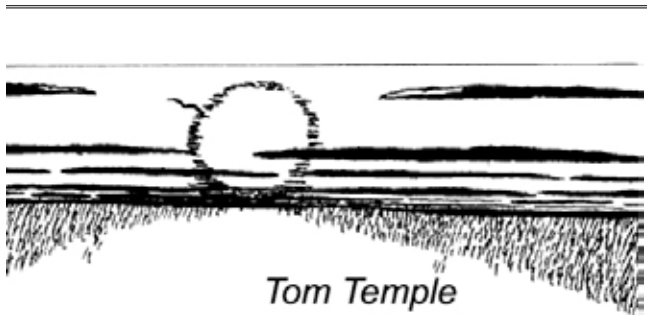
They also may have concluded it doesn't work – in fact, it makes liberal principles seem squishy when in reality they are kind, generous and open-minded, certainly worth promoting unabashedly.

It may be difficult to imagine in Oklahoma, where the mainstream media are mostly reactionary right editorially, but Gallup provides clear evidence the pendulum is swinging toward a more forward-thinking, caring and just America.

Liquor wholesalers and retailers are gearing up to fight efforts to expand strong beer and wine sales beyond package stores. It's a losing battle. The current system is a 20th Century relic.

AARP Oklahoma names Gov. Mary Fallin, Tulsa Sen. Brian Crain and Weatherford Rep. Harold Wright as Capitol Caregivers for their efforts in passing a first-in-the-nation law helping family caregivers provide post-hospital, follow-up care for patients.

City Council voted recently to designate Stillwater a Purple Heart City – one of 927 now across the U.S. In addition to highway signs at the city limits, the council encouraged residents to show appreciation for the sacrifices of Purple Heart recipients.



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U.S. Rep. Jim Bridenstine claimed to be clueless his 2013 junket to Azerbaijan was paid by the country's state-owned oil company – an apparent violation of House rules. He also accepted two rugs – valued at about \$6,000 – which he returned ... after he got caught.

Seven years after lawmakers approved it, the state finally is erecting a sign along I-35 in Logan County, memorializing the state's first African-American state representative, Albert Comstock Hamlin, elected in 1909.

We hate to say “told you so” ... but we “told you so.” Tulsa County taxpayers will pay nearly \$300k – and perhaps more – in attorney fees because of destined-to-fail defense of state’s ban on same-sex marriage.

Oil and gas development stripped 7.5 million acres of vegetation between 2000-12 – the equivalent of three Yellowstone National Parks. – High Country News

State Democrats honor former legislator and Corporation Commissioner Jim Townsend of Shawnee with the party's 2015 Carl Albert Award. Bravo!

OKC Democrat Forrest Bennett is first to formally announce 2016 candidacy for HD 92 seat held by term-limited Rep. Richard Morrisette. Bennett is a college government teacher and member of St. Paul's Episcopal Church.

Oklahoma isn't only state where independent judiciary is under attack. Kansas Republicans threatened to cut off funding to judicial branch if state Supreme Court overturned a new law mandating how chief judges in district courts would be selected. Scary.

The death rate for Hispanics is 24% lower than for whites, according to Centers for Disease Control. Lower smoking rates help explain the difference. – Time

Nearly 23% of U.S. adults do not claim any religious affiliation, up from 16% eight years ago and outnumbering both Catholics [nearly 21%] and mainline Protestants [nearly 15%]. – Pew Research Center

Oregon joins California and New Jersey in outlawing so-called “conversion therapy” for minors – the quackery that attempts to change sexual orientation or gender identity. A bill to ban the practice also has been filed in Congress.

Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

Editor, The Observer:

Tom Guild's excellent article in the May 2015 Observer explains how, since statehood, Oklahoma has gone from a reliably Democratic state to a very conservative Republican bastion.

Guild says that "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 ... Democrats 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."

I remember when and why Republicans gained control of the Oklahoma House for the first time since 1921. In 2004, the state Senate, with the vote of 19 Democrats and 19 Republicans, passed HB 2259 which established State Question 711. The state House had already passed the measure with a "yes" vote from 46 Democrats and 46 Republicans. In the 2004 general election, that state question passed with 76% percent of the vote statewide. It established that marriage is between one man and one woman, did not recognize out-of-state marriages between same-sex couples, and made it a misdemeanor to issue a marriage license to same-sex couples in Oklahoma.

In my opinion, as a result of SQ 711 on the November 2004 ballot, bigots came out in force to vote. In fact, 66.4% of those registered actually voted; and Republicans gained control of the Oklahoma House for the first time since 1921! Then in 2008, Republicans took control of the Senate.

Our heroic state legislators who voted against this bigoted measure were all Democrats: Sens. Cal Hobson, Lexington; Bernest Cain, OKC; Maxine Horner, Tulsa; Angela Monson, OKC; Ben Robinson, Muskogee; Dick Wilkerson, Atwood; and Penny Williams, Tulsa. Also House members Darrell Gilbert, Tulsa; M.C. Leist, Morris; Judy Eason McIntyre, Tulsa; and Opio Toure, OKC.

In conclusion, this is the story of how Democrats, just as bigoted as Republicans, helped equally in changing Oklahoma from reliably Democratic to a very conservative Republican bastion.

Wanda Jo Stapleton
Oklahoma City

Editor's Note: Wanda Jo Stapleton represented



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South Oklahoma City in the state House from 1986-96.

Editor, The Observer:

Democracy, of itself, does not ensure that everyone is free or has equal rights – not even basic human rights.

The era of slavery was a dictatorship within a democracy. One man's dream was another's nightmare, as the powerless scrambled to maintain the predatory false notions, fantasies, and faux realities of those who were in power.

In our world as we know it – of seemingly endless, perpetual interface of both good, and oft-times subtle evils as well – democracy only enables us to effect change. Democracy enables us to keep those who seem to have more power than others of us from becoming too predatory.

We also need to keep democracy from becoming a travesty. Our world is too “macro-scale” for any of us to know it all, but with the free press giving us windows into the small situations and plights of others, it's difficult for us to be kept too blind.

Recently I came across the book *Ed Kennedy's War: V-E Day, Censorship, and the Associated Press*, the memoir of a World War II news correspondent, found posthumously by his daughter, Julia Kennedy Cochran. It's published by the Louisiana State University Press [LSUPress.org].

Edward Kennedy's war-time memoir is not only a very interesting glimpse into a historical time and place, but also illustrates the details involved in making conscientious decisions in a democracy. I recommend this book to anyone wanting to grasp a better understanding of the importance and place of the free press, and keeping the press free, within a democracy.

Militaries, perhaps of necessity, don't seem to always function quite entirely like a democracy, even if their ultimate mission is to preserve democracy. It's making me think that we should never become too steeped in how a military must function to achieve its goals, to a point of thinking that this is normal for everyday society.

Stephanie Hershberger
Oklahoma City

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one of his speeches what he was doing about racism in his own backyard? This was certainly a wake-up call for Wise. It hit him that while he had the privilege of studying at an elite college in Tulane, his focus was an abstract menace nearly 8,000 miles away.

Wise then focused closer to home. In 1990 he campaigned against would-be Nazi and former Klan leader David Duke, who was running for U.S. Senate in Louisiana. Duke eventually lost, yet received 60% of the white vote. As a white person, Wise felt he had particular work to do because these were his fellow whites, his people, who voted for Duke.

From his experience, Wise dedicated himself to change this mentality in his community.

For Wise, what's important is when white Americans are blind to white privilege. For example, when he was in college, Wise read *Black Like Me* by John Howard Griffin, who changed his skin color to black in order to understand how blacks live in the South. He found that blacks were considered second-class citizens.

In the book, Griffin writes: "The best way to find out if we had second class citizens and what their plight was would be to become one of them."

However, Wise is critical because Griffin became a person of color for only a brief time. Wise turns this narrative on its head as he asks whether we should ask ourselves what it is like to be white?

For Wise, white privilege means the structural advantages built in our system, but what is most important is that when we don't acknowledge these white advantages, we are being dishonest with ourselves.

This is true from the very beginning of our nation, with the U.S.'s first law – the Naturalization Act of 1790 in which only free white persons could be citizens, meaning immigrants of color would be excluded. This disadvantage is similar to events a century and a half later, with blacks excluded from eligibility for such benefits as Social Security, FHA loans, or the GI Bill – giving working-class whites a clear economic advantage.

Also, Wise points out that we have had 20 or so years of research where we find students of color are afraid of living up to stereotypes, which directly affect their performance. This is something white people do not typically have to worry about, says Wise.

White privilege means we don't have to think about difference. We don't have to think about being different. We, as whites, are instead the standard for which everyone else is measured. Blacks have to be cognizant of this difference because they are always compared to the white standard.

With Barack Obama as president, racism is history, right? Amazingly enough, this new mantra symbolizes for conservatives that this one black man's tri-

umph means we can get rid of affirmative action, but that's not necessarily true. Wise asks, can we really believe this single success moves us toward a post-racial nation? One doesn't have to go far to debunk this idea. Just look at the actual election results. In 2008, Obama lost the white vote overwhelmingly, [57% to 43%].

And I find that in Oklahoma, he received less than 15% of the white vote – the fifth lowest in the country. Indeed, in only eight states did Obama receive more than 50% of the white vote.

Wise also finds that the median wealth of white families is still 20 times greater than the median wealth of black families. At the same time, 70% of students of color attend schools where the majority of the students are brown or black. In addition, studies show that white job applicants who claim to have criminal records are more likely than blacks to be called for interviews as black applicants without criminal records. Even today, there are huge gaps between blacks and whites in education, income, wealth, and health and narrowing this gap seems illusory.

Therefore, from the reading, I argue that while we don't have De Jure [by law] segregation, we do have De facto [in reality] segregation.

From what I understand in *White Like Me*, unlike Stephen Colbert, we can't really be colorblind, instead we need to see ourselves as "color conscious." We need to confront the truth of racism in this country, to ask the tough questions about our history with racism in America and how it shapes us today. We need an awareness of how we can create black-white alliances.

We can do this through learning more about our history about whites that stood up against racism. For example, our history textbooks are not paying attention to people like Will Campbell, a white man who walked with blacks in protest.

Or, to further illustrate, I did some extra research, finding a largely forgotten story about Juliette Morgan, a white woman, who wrote letters to the Montgomery Advertiser, more than 15 years before the famous Montgomery Bus Boycott, critical of the injustices she witnessed on the city buses. As a result, she lost her job at a local bookstore – but she did stand up to injustice.

Whites are the focus of this brave book by Tim Wise. I read this book in 2007, and again in its updated version. I can honestly say that I hope you read it because it might even challenge you to think differently. It certainly has challenged me both times I have read it.

John Wood, PhD, is assistant professor of political science at the University of Central Oklahoma and a frequent contributor to The Oklahoma Observer.

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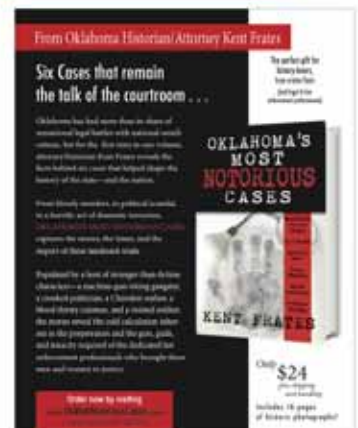
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Congress Acts

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