

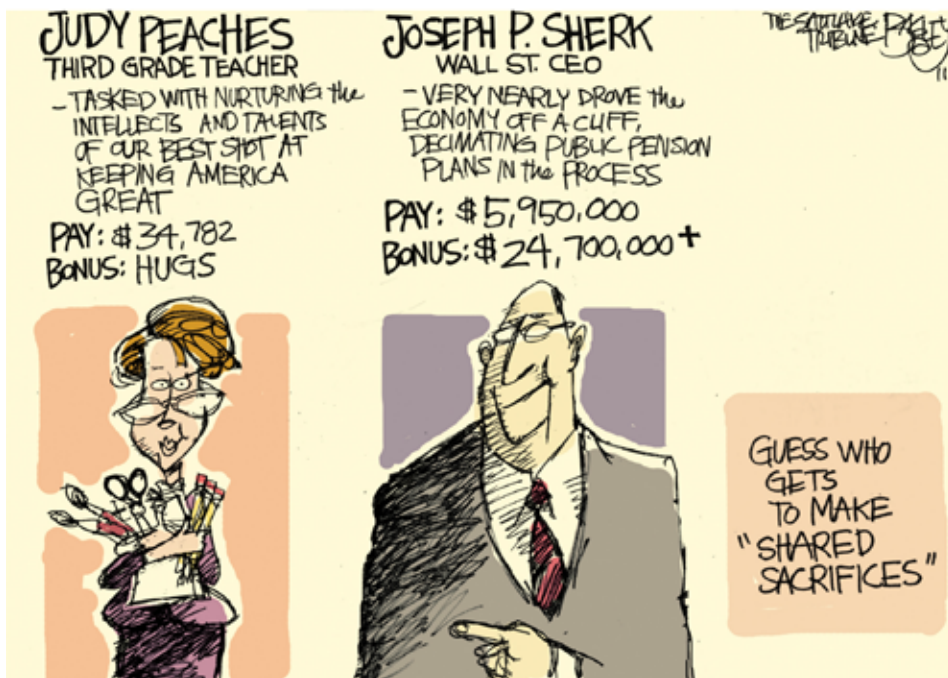
# THE OKLAHOMA Observer

• AN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL OF COMMENTARY •

AUGUST 2015 • VOLUME 47 NUMBER 8 • \$5.00

## SERVANTS' HEARTS

*Besides Teaching, What Other Profession Requires  
Multiple Degrees, Pays Such Low Wages And Asks  
Employees To Bring Their Own Supplies?*



BY SHARON MARTIN

In the 1990s, teachers could sign up for state health insurance and the premium would be taken from their checks. There was a larger premium for the spouse, and another larger amount to cover the teacher's child or children.

Service personnel – custodians, cooks, and aides – received their insurance as part of their pay package. Good thing, too, because the custodians barely cleared \$1,000 a month. But it was about the same for teachers, with one or two degrees, if they purchased state insurance for themselves, their spouse, and their children.

Legislators received state insurance as part of their part-time pay package. Their families were covered. And their salary is still among the highest in the nation for state legislators.

Teachers don't get to vote on their pay packages. They have very little say in job matters. Why? Because the very union that Carly Fiorina and Chris Christie both bashed in recent interviews has too little power.

**ANNUAL EDUCATION ISSUE**

*Special Coverage Pages 1, 22-29*

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VOLUME 47, NO. 8

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So then to all their chance, to all their  
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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

#### FOUNDING PUBLISHER

Helen B. Troy  
1932-2007

#### [ISSN 0030-1795]

The Oklahoma Observer [USPS 865-720] is  
published monthly by AHB Enterprises LLC,  
13912 Plymouth Crossing, P.O. Box 14275,  
Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275. Periodicals  
postage paid at Edmond, OK and additional  
entry office.

#### POSTMASTER

Send address changes to The Oklahoma  
Observer, P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City,  
OK 73113-0275.

#### SUBSCRIPTIONS

1-Year [12 issues] \$40. Send check to The  
Oklahoma Observer, P.O. Box 14275,  
Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275. Online: Visit  
www.okobserver.net to use a credit card.

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## Observations

### Ditzy Ritze

State Rep. Mike Ritze is nothing, if not predictable.

Not long after a hidden camera video purported to show that Planned Parenthood sells aborted fetal tissue, Ritze announced plans to introduce legislation next year aimed at banning the practice.

Never mind that the video produced by an anti-choice group was heavily, suspiciously edited. Never mind that Planned Parenthood does not perform abortions in Oklahoma. Never mind that state law already forbids sale of fetal body parts.

Yes, it turns out the Ritze's proposal has been state law for 37 years – 37! – enacted by a Democratic-dominated Legislature and signed into law by a Democratic governor, David Boren.

It can be found in Title 63, Article 7, Section 1-735:

*A. No person shall sell a child, an unborn child or the remains of a child or an unborn child resulting from an abortion. No person shall experiment upon a child or an unborn child resulting from an abortion or which is intended to be aborted unless the experimentation is therapeutic to the child or unborn child.*

*B. No person shall experiment upon the remains of a child or an unborn child resulting from an abortion. The term "experiment" does not include autopsies performed according to law.*

Ritze, a Broken Arrow Republican, clearly views himself as the leading protector of public decency and morals in Oklahoma.

An osteopath who's delivered more than 2,000 babies and a virulently anti-choice religious fundamentalist, Ritze used his news release to rail against a U.S. Supreme Court that "has allowed for the murder of innocent unborn children."

He also is the brains behind, and financier of, the Capitol's Ten Commandments monument that the state Supreme Court ordered removed because it violates a separation of church-state clause in the Oklahoma Constitution.

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## THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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# Observerscope



**Laurel:** To U.S. Rep. Tom Cole, R-OK, denouncing the Confederate flag waving during President Obama's Oklahoma visit as "disrespectful" and "embarrassing." To which we add: racist.

**Editor-in-Chief Dick Pryor** is leaving OETA after 25 years. He helped produce the state's best news programming, despite draconian budget cuts imposed by the Legislature's anti-public broadcasting majority.

**Dart:** To U.S. Rep. Jim Bridenstine, who wants to bar federal contracts with companies that donate to Planned Parenthood. This, from the hypocrite who prattles endlessly about federal overreach.

**Gov. Mary Fallin** spent \$1 million-plus on her second inaugural. Why? Imagine the good that could have been done if she'd skipped the party and asked donors to support worthy causes instead.

**Laurel:** To state Democrats, voting to open their primaries to registered independents. It may not be a game-changer, but it's important outside-the-box thinking in an age of apathy.

**Mind-boggling:** There are 11,000 arrest warrants in Oklahoma for failure to pay child support – \$397 million in payments and interest. DHS' Amnesty in August offers those in arrears an opportunity to catch up.

**Dart:** To OK GOP Chairman Randy Brogdon, urging that Oklahoma ignore the law of the land, *Roe v. Wade*. Republicans will rue the day they gave Brogdon a platform.

**Via Twitter,** state Sen. David Holt, R-OKC, compared political parties to long snappers in football: "Usually, they're kind of invisible unless they do something stupid." He's talking about you, Randy Brogdon.

**Laurel:** To the Oklahoma PTA, urging students and parents to boycott tests not federally mandated – a sure sign public ed supporters have had enough of anti-public ed tinkering.

**We mourn** the passing of our dear friend and longtime UCO professor Darwin Waterman, who taught and mentored hundreds of the state's teachers, counselors and school psychologists. He was a jewel!

**Dart:** To Attorney General Scott Pruitt, incessantly wasting tax dollars appealing court rulings against his ideologically-driven, legally-specious anti-fed suits. Too bad courts can't make him pay out of his own pocket.

**Midwest City's Dustin Brown** – son of state Rep. Mike Brown, D-Tahlequah – is one of 20 finalists in America's Favorite Veterinarian contest. Online voting ends Sept. 1 at [www.avmf.org](http://www.avmf.org).

**You're mistaken** if you think calls for revising the state Constitution only impact the Ten Commandments monument. Knocking down the church-state firewall could legalize vouchers – crippling public education.

**Sen. James Lankford's** attack on Planned Parenthood wouldn't have impacted abortions in Oklahoma – the agency doesn't perform them here. It would have hurt thousands that rely on Planned Parenthood for reproductive health care.

**Rep. John Montgomery,** R-Lawton, thinks it might be worthwhile to create a central state bank to help make student loans and finance projects for schools or municipalities. Isn't that growing government?

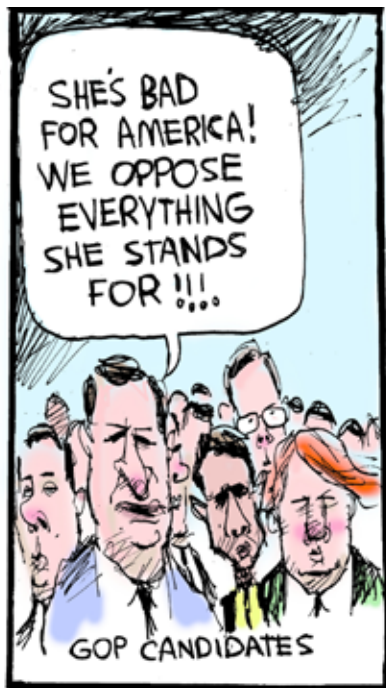
**Gov. Mary Fallin and Co.** are forever promoting the wonders of Oklahoma's economy. They didn't know that nearly one-fourth of the state's children – about 223,000 – live in poverty? – Annie E. Casey Foundation

**Rightwing budget cuts** are crippling the IRS. Only 37% of people who called the agency for help during tax season were able to reach a person – average hold time 23 minutes. Lines were so overloaded the system hung up on 8.8 million callers, so-called "courtesy disconnects."

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# Letters



Editor, The Observer:

This will be pretty short and it's aimed, primarily, at Scott Pruitt. From everything that I have heard and read recently, Oklahoma is approximately \$611 million down the toilet.

So, Mr. Pruitt, how is it that you have the audacity [better known as brass balls] to spend thousands of our tax dollars on numerous, frivolous, useless law suits against the federal government. And not only do you feel you have the right to indulge in this idiocy but you feel that when you have lost you should just turn right around and appeal the ruling – to the tune of a few more thousands of wasted dollars.

Mr. Pruitt, we are at the bottom of every list that would give this state a decent chance in today's world and you still feel you have the right to throw away our very hard earned dollars on your inflated ego? It's not your dollars, although I am sure you have much more personal money than most of the average people of Oklahoma, so you don't care, because it isn't out of your pocket.

Could you please answer this question? Thank you.

Linda Maloney  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

I'm a veteran not offended by Trump. Take a look at McCain's flying record. Survival in prison camp, while admirable, is not heroic. Had he not been a legatee of an admiral he probably would not have been allowed in another military plane.

Homer Hulme  
Chickasha

*Editor's Note: The author is a former USAF Strategic Air Command pilot.*

Editor, The Observer:

The Obama Administration, along with other major powers, persuaded Iran to subject itself to the most thorough inspection regime ever imposed on any country in the history of the world. Iran will be dismantling vast portions of its nuclear energy program.

Those who oppose the nuclear deal with Iran seem to be locked inside a box that depends upon

military violence to achieve our nations objectives. Bombing Iran or going to war will not rein in the bad behavior of the Iranian regime.

Richard Nixon reached meaningful deals with China. Ronald Reagan made deals with the Soviet Union, otherwise known as the evil empire. Many will oppose the deal simply because Obama is the primary architect of the Iran nuclear deal.

The United States will still have the option of military action in the event that Iran develops nuclear weapons or presents a serious threat to Israel. No one is asleep at the wheel.

We cannot bomb our way to peace. Diplomacy has a much better track record of resolving disagreements than war.

The mindless opposition to anything proposed by the president doesn't serve us well. Those who continually criticize the president at every turn no matter what need to put aside their concerns over who will get the credit for this giant step toward improved relations with an old enemy.

James Stovall  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

This year, the Republican-led Legislature slashed \$611 million in critical services to fragile elderly, poor children and people with disabilities as well as funding for roads, bridges and programs citizens rely on at all but eight state agencies.

Yet, state senators and representatives found plenty of money to give permanent, unprecedented tax breaks, effective July 1, to the oil and gas industry that will cost taxpayers an estimated \$252 million in 2015 alone. All new oil and gas wells will be taxed at only 2% for the first 26 months and 6% after that. Odds are the wells will be depleted before higher tax rates ever kick in. In the past, horizon-

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## *The Real Story*

**I**s there a sadder example of what passes for “news” these days than Trailergate?

For about 72 hours last month, mainstream and social media were abuzz that Gov. Mary Fallin’s adult daughter was living in a travel trailer parked on the mansion grounds and plugged into state-provided electricity.

Was it legal? Was she paying her portion of the utilities? Would it sully the state’s image? Inquiring minds demanded to know!

It was such a tempest that Fallin took the unusual step of appearing live on Oklahoma City TV to answer questions and to argue she merely did what any parent would if asked for help: she welcomed her daughter home.

As it turned out, the temporary arrangement did indeed violate an obscure state code, so the governor pledged to have it removed ASAP. Case closed.

That’s too bad, because in my view, mainstream media and the oft-snarky social media wags missed the real story.

We don’t know – nor do we need to know – why Christina Fallin needed her parents’ help. Nor why Fallin’s adult stepson lives in a garage apartment on the mansion grounds.

What we do know is that the Boomerang Generation is reality: Far too many young adults, across the socioeconomic and political spectrums, are unable to make ends meet, mostly because of low-wage jobs and crippling college loans [an average \$35,000 each for 2015 grads].

According to a recent Federal Reserve Bank of New York report, 30% of 25-year-olds lived with their parents in 1999. By 2013, the percentage had risen to nearly 50%.

As governor, Fallin is uniquely positioned to help put Oklahoma families on a better, more self-sufficient path. But it would require a 180-degree turn from the policies she embraced during her first 4½ years as the state’s chief executive.

In 2014, for example, Fallin signed legislation that prevents local governments from establishing man-

datory minimum wages and employee benefits, such as sick leave or vacation days.

By contrast, municipalities across the country are taking action, guaranteeing workers a living wage – New York, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Washington, DC all raised the minimum pay to \$15 an hour.

In late July, Minnesota enacted the highest minimum wage in the Midwest – \$9 an hour, which will jump to \$9.50 next August and automatically climb with inflation in years following.

Oklahoma’s minimum wage is a pitiful \$7.25 an hour.

Even working more than one job, it’s difficult for young people mired in low paying positions to make it on their own, especially when repaying student loans.

Yet, rather than regarding college as an investment in a brighter economic future, Fallin and Oklahoma lawmakers this year imposed a \$24 million cut on higher education, leading to a 4.8% tuition hike at OU and a 4.5% increase at OSU.

This isn’t a one-time belt-tightening necessitated by a sagging economy and a \$611 million budget hole: the state’s share of educating OU students 20 years ago was 32% – now it’s 16%.

Many Oklahomans also are no doubt thankful for the Affordable Care Act – something the governor has fought tirelessly against – because of a provision allowing adult children up to age 26 to remain on their parents’ health care plans. It’s the only way most could afford coverage given low wages for many entry-level jobs.

I saw the importance of that provision last month when a neighbor’s 24-year-old son, a college graduate who works full-time in the hospitality industry, was diagnosed with melanoma. His prognosis is good – but only because he is on his father’s policy, allowing him to get a mole checked early.

If the adult children of a well-heeled governor need to move home, even temporarily, imagine what it’s like for most Oklahoma families.

## Don't Give Up

*It's just so that 90% of the people of this country don't give a damn. Politics ain't worrying this country one tenth as much as parking space. – Will Rogers*

**A**pathy is as American as apple pie. Historians will tell you that the majority of colonists favored the Crown, not Patrick Henry and his fellow revolutionaries.

There are those who crow that the country handed the November 2010 winners a mandate from a majority of Americans. Wrong! Only about half of eligible voters turned out, and the GOP received a majority of that vote. Too many progressives of both parties failed to vote.

The truth is far from the idyllic scenario painted by too many social studies teachers. Purists don't want to admit it, but except on rare occasions [i.e., civil rights, the Vietnam protests] this country – for good or ill – is run by a minority of activist individuals.

Today, the national agenda is fueled by those who are rich enough to capture the media, often through paid advertisements. Lazy voters would rather believe a 30-second attack ad than research the issue.

There are hundreds of rightwing talk shows. Most television is a mindless morass. Most newspapers are little more than revenue machines for chains.

So what's a body to do? Be part of the few who are

involved! That's a gospel I have preached across Oklahoma and America.

The claim that one person can't make a difference is hooey. It is the tiny Oklahoma Observer that crusades relentlessly against censorship in public and school libraries, exposing those who promote it.

How to fight? Find organizations that will come in with real firepower – People for the American Way, the American Library Association, etc. [The Observer won the First Amendment Award for our work.]

The wonderful aggregation that met in Philadelphia didn't say they'd formed a more perfect Union, they said we must strive to create such a Union. America is a work in progress.

Never give up if you think you're right. Never surrender to the forces of darkness that would pervert the Constitution to fit their narrow political or religious views.

The day this country stops being a pluralistic society is the day America dies.

*This Best of Frosty column first appeared in the Aug. 25, 2012 Oklahoma Observer.*



## Note From An Oklahoma Teacher

I am a Pre-K teacher at a Title I elementary school in Bartlesville, OK. You spoke to the teachers in Bartlesville at our beginning of the year gathering.

Your words were inspiring. I jotted many of your thoughts down on the program that morning. I kept them near my computer throughout this school year. I read many of those comments again and again.

Little did I know that I was in for the most challenging year of my teaching career when the school year began. I have a variety of teaching experiences [all in early childhood education].

The last seven years have been in public schools. I had a new assistant this year, Mrs. Alexander, and she is wonderful.

I will tell you that the behavioral challenges that came packaged in the form of 4-, 5- and 6-year-old children had my assistant and me wondering if working with Pre-K students was anything more than serving as a bodyguard.

The anger and aggression that I witnessed in my students this year exceeded anything that I have ever experienced [more than 20 years of working in this field].

I spent countless hours documenting behaviors to ensure proper channeling for these students. I am hoping what I experienced/survived this year was a fluke.

I'm going to be optimistic. This past school year was filled with so many moments that took my breath away. My assistant and I came to understand just how critical we are to each of our students. We were most definitely critical lifelines. We were their flag every single day.

We are re-energizing for next year so we can continue to be life changers because I am going to "be a teacher all my life."

Thank you, Mr. Troy, for your words and thoughts.  
– Aug. 25, 2012 Oklahoma Observer

# Is State On Verge Of Executing An Innocent Man?

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

If you look up arbitrary in the dictionary, you won't see photos of Richard Glossip and the Oklahoma State Penitentiary death chamber.

That's too bad, because nothing sums up the state's plan to execute Glossip on Sept. 16 quite like the word arbitrary ... or capricious ... not to mention unfair and immoral.

Glossip, now 52, was convicted of and sentenced to death for the 1997 slaying of OKC motel owner Barry Van Treese – even though there was no evidence he swung the baseball bat believed to be the murder weapon.

Worse, the man who actually carried out the bludgeoning sits in a medium security prison, his life spared in exchange for testifying that Glossip masterminded the killing.

Arbitrary, defined.

Glossip's case was spotlighted at a recent Capitol news conference featuring his lead attorney, Donald Knight, and the renowned death penalty foe, Sister Helen Prejean, author of *Dead Man Walking*.

Both Prejean and Knight concede they are waging an uphill battle to save Glossip's life – but the fact is, it shouldn't be their fight alone.

Whether pro- or anti-death penalty, Oklahomans claim to agree on one thing: They don't want an innocent executed. After all, there are no do-overs if you later determine an individual was wrongly convicted.

So all Oklahomans should demand immediately that the state take a closer look at Glossip's case. And Gov. Mary Fallin and Attorney General Scott Pruitt should focus not on vengeance but on truth seeking.

The governor and AG often defend their pro-death penalty zealotry by declaring they stand with victims' families in seeking justice.

The fact is, justice equals truth. No one can seriously argue America's criminal justice system is foolproof.

The Oklahoma Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty reports 150 death row inmates have been exonerated nationally, including 10 in Oklahoma. The Innocence Project reports 330 DNA exonerations in the last 23 years – 18 from death row.

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer clearly sees the arbitrary ways in which the death penalty is applied – read his dissent in *Glossip v. Gross*, the case in which SCOTUS gave Oklahoma the go-ahead to use the controversial sedative midazolam as part

of its three-drug execution cocktail.

Speaking of arbitrary, consider this: OKC bombing conspirator Terry Nichols was convicted in state court of 161 counts of murder – yet was sentenced to life in prison.

Yes, it's been nearly two decades since Van Treese's murder. But speed isn't the most important factor when it comes to investigating crimes and assessing punishment – getting it right is.

Glossip's first conviction was thrown out because of a successful claim of ineffective assistance of counsel. He was represented the second time by an understaffed, under-financed Indigent Defense System.

You think Glossip and most Americans of modest means or less get the same quality of defense as, say, real estate scion Robert Durst, whose wealth clearly shielded him in at least three murder cases?

Glossip's pro-bono attorney Knight told reporters he took the case at Prejean's urging. Once he began reviewing it, he said, "chills ran down my spine" because it was a "deeply flawed investigation from the start."

The case, Knight said, "relies solely on the evidence and testimony of one man [Justin Sneed]."

Prejean and Knight said they hope someone with new information about Van Treese's murder will step forward, giving a judge pause to consider whether the case deserves further scrutiny.

"It's going to take a miracle," said Prejean.

Added Knight: "I'm scared to death, quite frankly."

Organized by the Oklahoma Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, last month's news conference attracted a standing room only crowd in the Capitol's fourth floor press room, suggesting Oklahomans are paying closer attention to the death penalty debate in the wake of last year's botched execution of Clayton Lockett and the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision.

Prejean joined the coalition's chair, former state Sen. Connie Johnson, and state Rep. George Young in noting that too many Oklahoma lawmakers seem more concerned about preserving the Ten Commandments monument on the state Capitol grounds than adhering to the fifth commandment – thou shalt not kill.

Prejean also said she believes most Oklahomans want the death penalty applied in only the most heinous cases – the "worst of the worst," as she put it. Glossip's case, she said, does not fit.





# Please Don't Feed The Stereotypes

BY DAVID BLATT

The Oklahoma Republican Party recently ignited a local and national firestorm with a Facebook post pointing out a so-called irony of signs in national parks warning that feeding animals can create dependence on handouts at a time when a growing number of Americans are receiving federal food stamp benefits.

The post, which was later deleted, displayed a callous and mistaken understanding of the food stamp program and the people it serves. The program, now known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, is among the most effective ways that the United States helps hard-pressed families to stay afloat and ensure they can afford enough to eat.

SNAP's main purpose is to increase the food purchasing power of eligible low-income households in order to alleviate hunger and malnutrition.

As its name suggests, the program is intended to supplement other sources of income, rather than cover a household's entire food budget. In 2014, the average participating individual in Oklahoma received \$122 in monthly benefits, or about \$4 a day, according to data from the Oklahoma Department of Human Services.

Here is the state GOP's Facebook post in its entirety:

*The Food Stamp Program, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is proud to be distributing this year the greatest amount of free Meals and Food Stamps ever, to 46 million people.*

*Meanwhile, the National Park Service, administered by the U.S. Department of the Interior, asks us "Please Do Not Feed the Animals." Their stated reason for the policy is because "The animals will grow dependent on handouts and will not learn to take care of themselves."*

*Thus ends today's lesson in irony #OKGOP.*

Chairman Randy Brogdon later apologized, sort of – insisting there was no intent to offend. But the damage was done: according to reports, the post already had been shared nearly 2,000 times and attracted nearly 1,000 comments, most negative.

Currently in Oklahoma, just over 600,000 people receive SNAP benefits each month and close to 900,000, or nearly one in four Oklahomans, receive assistance at some point during the year.



Of these, the vast majority are low-income seniors, people with chronic disabilities, or children. The smallest category of recipients are working-age adults without dependent children and without a disability, who are limited to three months of benefits while unemployed before being subject to a 20-hour-per-week work requirement. Just 2% of the SNAP population in Oklahoma falls under this category, according to DHS.

Contrary to the stereotypes expressed by the Facebook post, SNAP has become quite effective in supporting work, not undermining it.

"The overwhelming majority of SNAP recipients who can work do so," noted the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities in a 2013 study of the labor force participation of SNAP benefits.

Among SNAP households with at least one working-age, able-bodied adult, more than half work – and more than 80% work in the year prior to or the year after receiving SNAP. The rates are even higher for families with children.

The fact that so many working families still need help to buy food tells us it is not moral failure or government bureaucracy run amok that is causing Oklahoma's high SNAP enrollment. Rather it is that our economy is not creating enough good-paying, full-time jobs to allow families and individuals to get by without support.

In a two-parent household with two children, for example, both adults must earn \$13.55 per hour working full-time to meet their basic expenses without assistance in the Oklahoma City area, according to the MIT Living Wage calculator. That is far above the hourly wage for most service sector jobs, as well as many blue-collar jobs in other sectors.

Even in state government, low pay and wage freezes have left up to 30% of corrections officers eligible for food stamps, according to Oklahoma House Speaker Jeff Hickman.

Overall, nearly one in every three jobs in Oklahoma is in an occupation where the median annual pay is below the poverty level for a family of four [\$23,283].

So many low-paying jobs and underemployment are why SNAP participation levels have barely fallen

from their highest levels during the deep recession of 2008-10. Community food banks and local food pantries and soup kitchens similarly report sustained high need for their services, even as the state's overall economy has improved.

Oklahoma's uneven recovery is leaving many families behind.

Rather than spreading false stereotypes about those Oklahomans who benefit from public safety net programs, we should be focused on creating more opportunities for workers to earn a decent living. Raising the minimum wage and boosting overtime protections, as well as investing more in quality education and job training, are indispensable parts of this strategy.

Still, while unemployment and underemployment, stagnant wages, and myriad personal and family challenges leave many Oklahomans earning too little to get by, the safety net is succeeding in keeping many afloat. A recent report from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities found that thanks to SNAP, the poverty rate was reduced to 10.5% for all Oklahomans from 14.3% and to 10.2% for children from 17.7%. Social Security and refundable tax credits for low-income working families also have a major impact in lifting family incomes above the poverty level.

Beyond all the data, the insensitive food stamp comment raises more fundamental questions about how we treat the less fortunate. It so happened that the controversy erupted on July 14, the birth date of native son Woody Guthrie.

In the second-to-last verse of his most famous and beloved song, *This Land is Your Land*, Guthrie asked a question and posed a challenge that still resonate with a deep moral urgency today:

In the shadow of the steeple I saw my people,  
By the relief office I seen my people;  
As they stood there hungry, I stood there asking  
Is this land made for you and me?

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

# ***If Feeding The 5,000 Involved Oklahoma GOP***

As evening approached, the disciples came to Jesus and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."

Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

"We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," the Oklahoma GOP disciples answered. "And

it would create dependency on our handouts. These people are just like animals – they should fend for themselves. It's their own fault they didn't bring food."

"Bring them here to me," Jesus said.

"But Jesus," yelled the Oklahoma GOP disciples, "we have not drug tested any of them. They are probably hungry because they're drug addicts who

blew all their fish and loaf money on marijuana and liquor.

"If we feed them, we are just supporting their filthy habits," railed the disciples, as they sipped whiskey and energy drinks, smoked cigars, and took their evening doses of anti-depressants, Viagra, and legally-prescribed opiate painkillers.

And Jesus directed the hungry people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves.

"Jesus, you must not feed them!" said the chief GOP disciple, Randy, son of Brogdon. "We have heard from the talking Fox in the village that many of the hungry people are illegal Samaritan immigrants. All they do is take our jobs, steal chariots, and form criminal street gangs, and our gutless governor, Pontius Hussein Pilate, refuses to defend our borders. We need to demand their papers, check their immigration status, then form a militia to deport the illegals."

"That's right!" said the other Oklahoma GOP disciples. "We have to handle it ourselves. Jerusalem is out of touch!"

Then Jesus gave the loaves and fish to the disciples, and asked them once again to feed the hungry people.

"But Jesus," said Brogdon, "do you have any idea how much we are spending on entitlement programs? And don't get me started on all that healing the sick free of charge crap when they're the ones who wouldn't get off their asses and pay for health insurance themselves!"

The other Oklahoma GOP disciples all agreed, and began to rebuke Jesus: "That's right. Your ridiculous JehovahCare program is going to stifle competition and destroy the free market health care system!"

"In my day, miracles were a hand-up, not a hand-out!" yelled one disciple, rebuking Jesus. "And I may be pro-life, but you and I both know that if Lazarus didn't want to be dead, than he shouldn't have gotten himself dead! That deferred-action death amnesia thing you pulled was just ridiculous!"

"Yeah, the real problem is the demise of personal responsibility and traditional family values!" yelled another. "You and your liberal media outlets – John, Mark, Matthew, and Luke – are trying to force your liberal views and make everybody be politically correct."

"Yeah, what is this 'love thy neighbor as yourself' crap I heard the other day?" asked Brogdon. "Sounds like socialism and the free-love movement had a baby!"

Jesus once more asked the Oklahoma GOP disciples to distribute the loaves and fishes to the people, but the disciples could not hear. They had taken the bread and fishes for themselves and turned away from Jesus to go build gated communities to keep the hungry people out, taking with them some of the illegal Samaritan immigrants to do all the construc-

tion and landscaping work.

The disciples then used political leverage in the local villages to get tax breaks and government subsidies to pay for their new housing developments.

As the Oklahoma GOP disciples settled into their new custom executive homes in Galilee Greens and Capernaum Commons, they all ate loaves and fish and were satisfied, then sold the remainder and put the money into derivatives. And then the disciples picked up the basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over and threw them in a landfill.

The number of hungry people who did not eat was about 5,000 men, besides women and children, to which the Oklahoma GOP disciples said, "F--- 'em." *The author, an Oklahoma City Republican, wishes to remain anonymous.*

# *Where Women Are Winning Political Office In Oklahoma*

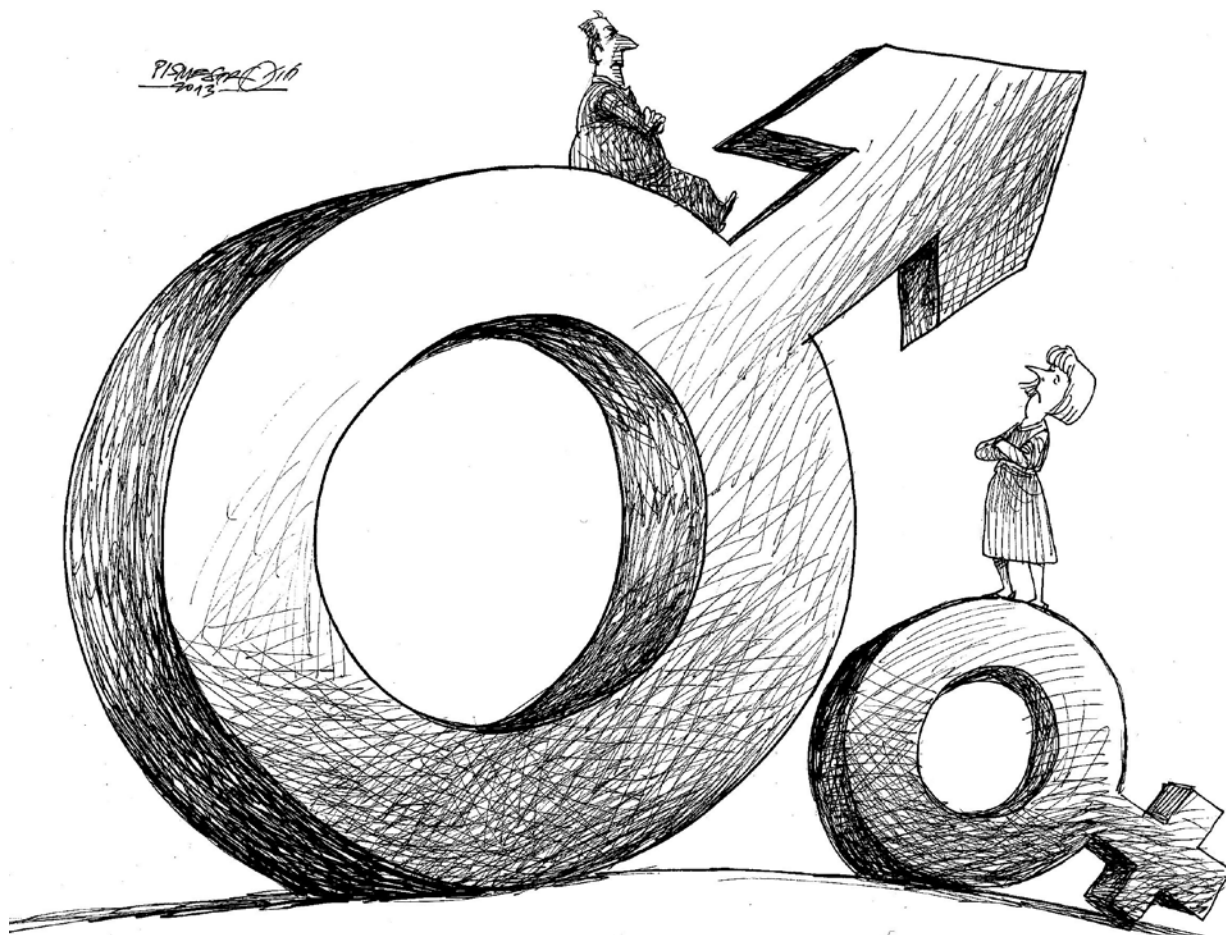
**BY GENE PERRY**

**I**n a new report from the Center for American Progress on the Health of State Democracies, Oklahoma was awarded a D-plus across the board for ballot accessibility, a representative state government, and average citizens' influence on the political system. These ratings should come as no surprise if you've seen OKPolicy's previous work on Oklahoma's broken democracy.

However, one line about Oklahoma in the report made me do a double take. In a section on how well elected leaders reflect state demographics as a whole, the authors write, "doing well in one measure is no guarantee of doing well in the other: Oklahoma, which ranks first in female elected representation, ranks last in communities of color elected representation."

It unfortunately was no surprise that we do so poorly in electing people of color, but how could we possibly rank first in female elected representation? Even though we have a female governor and two other female statewide elected officials, women comprise just 12.8% of the state Legislature.

After the most recent elections, our percentage of legislators who are women went from third lowest to the second lowest in the nation, ahead of only Louisiana. Yet the report claims that 42% of Oklahoma's



elected officials are women, more than in any other state.

So what's going on? Diving into the data behind the report shows that the Legislature is not the only office in Oklahoma where the gender balance does not reflect the population as a whole. Political offices in Oklahoma do appear to be gendered across the board – but just as there are “men’s offices,” there are “women’s offices,” too.

Very few women are serving as legislators, sheriffs, district attorneys, or county commissioners, but women make up large majorities of the state’s county assessors, county treasurers, election board secretaries, county clerks, and court clerks.

Unfortunately, we can’t conclude from these numbers that Oklahoma does not have a problem with electing women to political office.

The positions currently dominated by men are those with the most influence over policymaking, while the positions filled mostly by women are more administrative in nature. We seem to be electing men to make policy and women to implement it.

It’s a division that also shows up in the private sector – upwards of 90% of office clerks and about two-thirds of accountants and auditors are women, while men comprise nearly two-thirds of all managers and three-fourths of all chief executives in the United States.

These disparities continue despite evidence that companies with more diverse leadership are more

profitable. The diversity bonus shows up both for gender diversity and ethnic diversity, because people with different backgrounds and perspectives bring new ideas and insights about underserved markets.

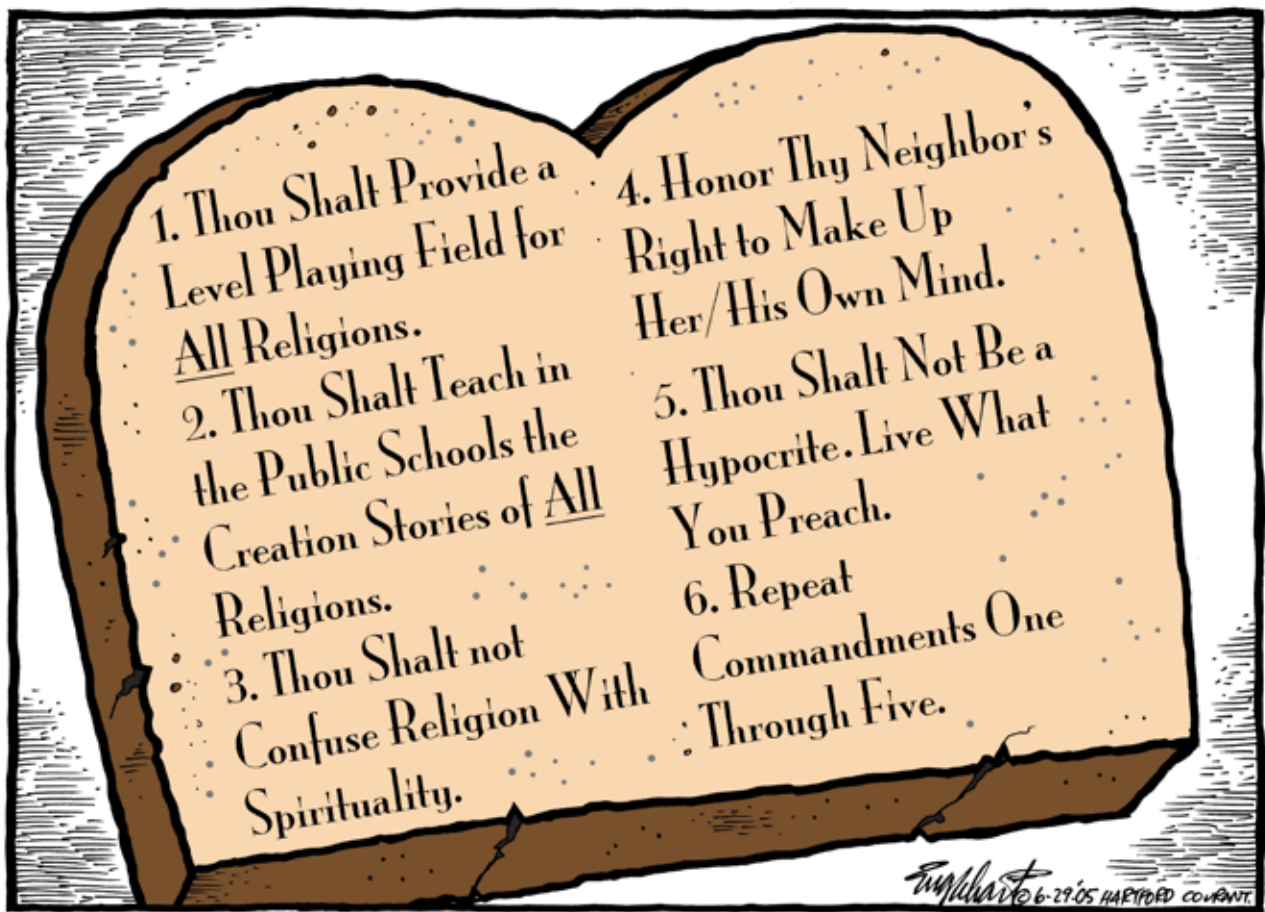
In politics, a lack of diversity also means policies are likely to neglect the interests of underrepresented groups, such as federal economic policies made by and for millionaires, or life-changing decisions about filing criminal charges and negotiating prison sentences made by disproportionately white male prosecutors for disproportionately minority defendants.

At least when it comes to women in political offices, there’s evidence that when women run, they are just as likely to win as men. However, they are still much less likely to be encouraged or recruited to run in the first place, a “gatekeeper” effect that is keeping out candidates from more than one underrepresented group.

The election of Gov. Fallin as the state’s first female governor certainly shows Oklahoma voters are willing to elevate women to important positions. But our track record going down the ballot shows we have a long way to go to fully utilize the talents of Oklahomans who don’t look like the traditional model of a politician.

*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>*





# *Despite Political Rhetoric, U.S. Law Isn't Based On Ten Commandments*

BY BOB DARCY

**I**write reluctantly. Any of the faculty at Oklahoma's three law schools or their students could explain in broad strokes, better than I, the difference between the Ten Commandments and the American legal system.

Instead, they have left the field to politicians, who assert the Ten Commandments "represent the moral and legal foundation of society, and are appropriate to be displayed as a historical source of present day legal codes."

The Ten Commandments make no reference to government or government's role in administering them. Throughout the biblical narrative God punishes individuals who violate commandments and or societies that tolerate their violation. And it is God that rewards the righteous.

The Ten Commandments are not God's only commandments given on Mount Sinai. Twelfth Century scholar Moses Maimonides, with great authority, listed the 613 "mitzvot" or God's commandments

recorded in the Pentateuch.

If the Ten Commandments, along with associated biblical passages, are "the historical source of present day legal codes," rabbinical, Christian and Qur'anic scholarship becomes the basis for legal interpretation. That is the way it is in Israel and several Muslim nations. But which rabbis, mullahs or Christian authorities get to make society's rulings and interpretations? The answer in Israel and the Muslim nations is the government so designates.

If not the Ten Commandments, what is the historical source of today's legal codes? In much of Europe it is Roman law as it evolved over 2,500 years, codified in the 12 Tables [449 BC], the Corpus Juris Civilis [AD 529] and the Napoleonic Code [AD 1804], among others. In English speaking nations it is a mixture of constitutional, statutory and common law.

Thus, the British and American Constitutions provide parameters guaranteeing or forbidding certain legal procedures. Jury trial is guaranteed, taking

property without compensation is forbidden. Statutes, consistent with the constitution, regulate tobacco use, specify what is a crime and the associated punishment, and procedures to create a marriage, for example.

Common law is the sum of centuries of judicial decisions. An example is product liability. Take a person injured because of a defective carriage or automobile wheel. In the 19th Century, if the injured person purchased the defective wheel directly from the maker, he or she could recover damages.

But if the manufacturer sold it to a dealer who, in turn, sold it to the injured person, the dealer was not liable, nor was the manufacturer. The injured person could make no recovery. Gradually courts began holding the maker of something defective liable for damages.

In 1909 the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed an Oklahoma Territorial Supreme Court product liability decision. In 1903 a Guthrie oil company mistakenly mixed gasoline and coal oil. It nevertheless knowingly sold the explosive mixture as coal oil.

A store in nearby Orlando purchased a barrel and, in turn, sold a pail of it to Albert Deselms. The practice then was to dip kindling in coal oil prior to placing it into a stove and lighting it. Mrs. Deselms did just that. The result was a flash and explosion destroying the home, killing Mrs. Deselms and her two small children.

The oil company contended "Deselms bought the oil, not from the oil company, but from [the store], and therefore was only a remote vendee, there was no legal liability on the part of the oil company." The U.S. Supreme Court ruled a company knowingly selling a dangerous and mislabeled product is liable for the harm the product subsequently causes. Thus, product liability law in the United States evolved.

I suspect rabbis, mullahs, or Christian leaders would, over time, eventually come to something similar. But they might not. Religious courts produce doctrines exotic to our law.

In Israel, the Ten Commandments lead to Jews being forbidden to operate, but not to use, elevators on the Sabbath. In Islam, religious painting, sculpture and "graven images," generally, are forbidden.

Biblical scholars find the Ten Commandments anticipated in Urukagina's Sumerian code [ca. 2300 BC], Hammurabi's code of laws [1754 BC] and Hittite law [ca. 1650]. The Sumerian, Akkadian and Hittite legal codes circulated within vast empires of significant duration. They directly influenced legal codes of subject peoples, neighbors and successors.

The Hebrew books containing the Ten

Commandments, Exodus and Deuteronomy, in contrast, had limited circulation until the Third Century BC. Greek translation made it accessible, in theory at least, to the wider world.

Well before the spread of Christianity circulated Exodus and Deuteronomy throughout Europe and the Middle East [ca. AD 300], the Athenians had their first written code of law [612 BC] and, soon, trial by jury. Rome sent embassies to Greek cities to study their laws and in 449 BC published Rome's first written legal code, the Twelve Tables. Over the next thousand years Roman law developed.

Roman law did not simply forbid, say, murder. It set forth procedures to determine the guilt or innocence of the accused and the appropriate punishment. Roman law, filtered through another thousand years of English judicial decisions, was compiled into Common Law.

The British and American constitutions largely stem first from King John's signing a charter [1215], modified and re-issued by Henry III [1216] and finally again in 1217, creating today's Magna Charta; and, second, from the Glorious Revolution [1688] and its associated Bill of Rights [1689]. The wording of the



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American Declaration of Independence [1776] and the Bill of Rights [1791] stem from the British Bill of Rights.

The Magna Charta and the Glorious Revolution established in law limited government and the rights of persons relative to government. To these traditional sources for the rule of law I would add the American Fourteenth Amendment [1868] which guarantees to all due process of law and the equal protection of the law.

We can notice American law does not concern the proper way to worship God as does five of the Ten

Commandments. We can also notice American law has nothing to say about what a person thinks, as does the Tenth Commandment – only what a person does. Killing, adultery, theft and lying under oath are forbidden acts originated in law independently of Exodus and Deuteronomy. Adultery is gradually being removed from American law.

The basis for the American rule of law, then, is Common Law, the British Constitution and the American Fourteenth Amendment.

*Bob Darcy is retired regents professor of political science at Oklahoma State University.*

# *Court's Courageous – And Correct – Decision On Ten Commandments*

BY TOM GOODWIN

**T**he recent published attacks on the Oklahoma Supreme Court deserve a response. Politicians of all stripes have agendas. There is currently in Oklahoma a recognition on the part of certain politicians that an independent judiciary is an impediment to the implementation of a particular agenda.

The response of those politicians is that we need to get rid of that independent judiciary. They advocate replacing independent judges with politicians who share their agenda.

Those politicians want to establish a system of government whereby the executive, legislative and judicial branches are all politically driven, thereby insuring that their agenda is established as the law in Oklahoma.

The politicians who want to eliminate our independent judiciary recognize that religion is very important to the majority of Oklahomans. The suggestion that the Oklahoma Supreme Court has attacked religion is powerful. It is also utter nonsense.

When our government was formed in Oklahoma, that government was formed by statesmen. Those statesmen recognized that the notion that the government

should be in a position to promote one religion over another was an evil that had to be prevented.

Our state Constitution is the foundation of our law. The statesmen who wrote our Constitution placed in it a clear and uncomplicated provision that accomplished that purpose.

Article 2, Section 5 of the Constitution says, "No public money or property shall ever be appropriated, applied, donated, or used directly or indirectly, for the use, benefit or support of any sect, church, denomination, or system of religion, or for the use, benefit or support of any sect, church, denomination, or system of religion or for the use, benefit, or support of any priest, preacher, minister or other religious teacher or dignitary, or sectarian institution as such."

Section 5 was not written by the justices of the Oklahoma Supreme Court at the end of June – it was adopted by the state of Oklahoma over 100 years ago.

The Ten Commandments monument was built with private funds, but the Oklahoma Legislature authorized its placement on the grounds of the state Capitol. The grounds of the state Capitol are, of course, public property.

Predictably, the action of the Legislature produced a lawsuit that eventually wound its way to the Oklahoma Supreme Court. The court held that placement of the monument on the grounds of the state Capitol constituted use of public property for the "support" of a "system of religion" in violation of Article 2 of our state Constitution.

I know some of the justices on the Oklahoma Supreme Court. I know that they are not stupid. The justices were, of course, aware that the monument was a monument to commandments included in the system of religion that is practiced by the vast majority of the people of Oklahoma.

The beauty of our system of government is that when it comes to the application of our laws, those laws protect people in the minority as well as people in the majority.

The court had the courage to apply the law as clearly stated in the Constitution. The courage of an independent judiciary is something that should be treasured and is something that should be protected.

*Tom Goodwin is a Cheyenne attorney now in his 37th year of practice. This essay first appeared in the Cheyenne Star.*



# What You Should Know About Supreme Court's Monument Ruling

*Editor's Note: From wingnut state Rep. Kevin Calvey to former Gov. Frank Keating, the uber right has spread – often with the Daily Disappointment's help – a cornucopia of outright lies and misinformation about the state Supreme Court's Ten Commandments ruling. In order to set the record straight, we are publishing a condensed version of a Ten Commandments ruling primer prepared by the American Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma. The full version – with embedded web links – can be accessed at <http://acluok.org>.*

**Q: Why did the [Oklahoma Supreme Court] order the Ten Commandments monument in Oklahoma be removed when an earlier decision by the United States Supreme Court let a similar monument in Texas stay put?**

A: It's true that in 2004 the U.S. Supreme Court allowed Texas to keep its Ten Commandments monument. The court's ruling was based on the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. In what the deciding justice called a "borderline case," a slim majority of the court found that the context of the monument meant that it did not violate the First Amendment. On the very same day, the Supreme Court looked at the context of another monument in Kentucky and ruled it had to be removed.

However, these rulings were not at issue in the Oklahoma case. The Oklahoma Supreme Court held that the Oklahoma Ten Commandments monument violated Article 2, Section 5 of the Oklahoma Constitution.

**Q: What is Article 2, Section 5 of the Oklahoma Constitution?**

A: It is an original part of our state Constitution introduced and adopted with support from community leaders, Christian clergy, and Native American representatives. It is an important limit on government power. It tells the government that it cannot discriminate among religions by supporting any one religion [or several], churches, or clergy with public property or public funds. The full text of Article 2, Section 5 is short, clear, and easy to understand.

**Q: Why did the founders of Oklahoma include it in our Constitution?**

A: Many Christian ministers and Oklahoma Constitutional Convention delegates supported it to keep politics out of religion, knowing, based on previous experience, that when churches or pastors were funded by the government, political forces often ended up compromising or corrupting their faiths. Many Native Americans and their non-Native allies supported it [and had proposed similar language at the earlier Sequoyah Convention] in response to abusive practices in which some government-funded

religious schools forcibly Christianized Indian children.

**Q: Some people are talking about the "Blaine Amendment." What is that?**

A: The Blaine Amendment was a failed federal constitutional amendment proposed in the 1880s by a Republican Congressman, Speaker of the House, and failed presidential candidate from Maine named James Blaine. The amendment was aimed at ensuring that public schools could not be operated by a church or otherwise under the control of any particular religion. The proposed amendment failed to get enough votes in the U.S. Senate in 1875, effectively killing the proposal.

**Q: So what does the Blaine Amendment have to do with Oklahoma?**

A: In a word, nothing. It was proposed by a national politician from Maine and failed in Congress more than 30 years before Oklahoma was even a state.

**Q: Sure, but several states put similar language to the Blaine Amendment in their state Constitutions. Is Article 2, Section 5 a state "Blaine Amendment?"**

A: No. In fact, Oklahoma's Article 2, Section 5 is not an amendment at all – it was proposed early in Oklahoma's Constitutional Convention and adopted as one of the first provisions in our Bill of Rights. It was written and adopted at the Oklahoma Constitutional Convention that began in 1906 and uses language different from the original Blaine Amendment. Our courts and scholars have long understood that the language and ideas of Article 2, Section 5 come from the same basic premise as the First Amendment – freedom from government interference in matters of faith and prohibiting discrimination based on religion.

**Q: But does Oklahoma have a state equivalent to the Blaine Amendment?**

A: Yes, but it is in a different part of the Oklahoma Constitution and played no part in the Ten Commandments monument decision. Article I of the Oklahoma Constitution has a provision about public education that contains a phrase requiring that public schools be "free from sectarian control." This provision was required by the Republican-controlled U.S. Congress as a condition of statehood.

**Q: I've heard that the Blaine Amendment was bigoted and targeted Catholics. Is that true? What does this mean about Oklahoma's Constitution?**

A: Both the failed federal and several state Blaine Amendments have been alleged to have been motivated, in part, to exploit the anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant political environment that existed in the

late 1800s. However, there is no credible evidence that religious bigotry had anything to do with the adoption of Article II, Section 5 of the Oklahoma Constitution. It came from an entirely different people, place, and time.

But that doesn't mean we don't know why the framers included this provision.

Based on the actual records and reports of the Oklahoma Constitutional Convention and the preceding Sequoyah Convention we know full well that the delegates wanted to protect religious liberty from threats by politicians and the government. In addition, the several Native American Tribes in Oklahoma and their non-Native allies were also concerned about publicly-financed programs that paid schools run by Protestants and Catholics to forcibly Christianize Native American children in hopes of breaking their young students' historical bonds with their tribes and assimilate the students into white society. Delegates understandably wanted a constitution that prevented the exploitation of religion for political purposes.

So while Oklahoma's Constitution may have provisions that share some language with so-called Blaine Amendments in other states' constitutions, our Constitution is informed by our own unique history and our framers' efforts at preventing the use of religion as a weapon used by government, while preserving the right of religious liberty for future generations of Oklahomans.

**Q: If Article 2, Section 5 is repealed does it mean that the state can keep the Ten Commandments monument?**

A: Not necessarily. If the provision is repealed and the monument re-erected at the Capitol, it's likely the new monument will be challenged almost immediately under the U.S. Constitution. Such a challenge would have a significant probability of success at removing the new monument, though at the expense of a great deal more wasted tax dollars and unnecessary division and pain for Oklahomans on all sides of the debate.

**Q: Would amending the Oklahoma Constitution open the door for a Satanic Statue or other religious monuments?**

A: Here's what we know for sure: With its decision in the Ten Commandments Monument Case, the Oklahoma Supreme Court shut the door on the proposed Satanic statute and other obviously religious monuments. Case closed.

Repealing Article 2, Section 5 and re-erecting a new Ten Commandments monument would re-open that door. That doesn't automatically mean that the Satanic Temple would be successful, but it would restore the possibility. Almost certainly there would be additional chaos, new applications, and a host of unintended consequences that go along with removing longstanding and fundamental law.

**Q: OK, just so I've got this straight:**

**• The Ten Commandments Case was brought**

For more on the case, see plaintiff Bruce Prescott's July 7 essay *On Removing Oklahoma's Ten Commandments Monument[s]* at [www.okobserver.net](http://www.okobserver.net).

**by three Christians who objected to politicians using religion for their own political agendas.**

**• The plaintiffs relied on a part of the Oklahoma Constitution that our founders included to limit the government from exploiting religion for political purposes.**

**• Even though that part of the Oklahoma Constitution shares a few similar words to part of the Blaine Amendment, most of it is completely different, it is decades removed from the failed Blaine Amendment and adopted for entirely different reasons – coming about because of our state's respect for religious freedom, informed by our own unique history, including early attacks on Native Americans and their rich culture.**

**• Amending the Constitution would remove this 100-plus-year-old protection and invite further chaos and more severely divide Oklahomans along religious lines.**

**• Even then, it's still likely that any new Ten Commandments monument would be removed as a result of a challenge under the Federal Constitution. And the comments of the monument being destroyed and threats to Native American art are as outrageous as they sound.**

**Sounds like a bunch of politicians are making over-the-top statements to get headlines and aren't really thinking this thing through. Right?**

A: Correct you are.

## ***Sunday Driver***

A Sunday School teacher of preschoolers told her students she wanted each of them to have learned one fact about Jesus by the next Sunday.

The following week she asked each child in turn what they had learned.

Susie said, "He was born in a manger."

Bobby said, "He threw the money changers out of the temple."

Little Johnny said, "He has a red pickup truck but he doesn't know how to drive it."

Curious, the teacher asked, "And where did you learn that, Johnny?"

"From my Daddy," said Johnny. "Yesterday we were driving down the highway, and this red pickup truck pulled out in front of us and Daddy yelled at him, 'Jesus Christ! Why don't you learn how to drive?'"

– Thanks to A.J. Henshaw for this gem



# THREAT FROM WITHIN

## *11 Hate Groups Are Based In Oklahoma. How Should We Respond To The Challenge?*

BY BOB ROUNSAVELL

**T**he Southern Poverty Law Center, as its name indicates, attempts to overcome poverty through vigilance in upholding the law. Most significant is its mission of fighting hate by teaching tolerance both in our schools and society in general so that justice would be extended to all, regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation or any other difference that may separate individuals from one another.

Based in Montgomery, AL, the center has become the leading authority on hate and extremism. Law enforcement agencies all over this country utilize its vital intelligence and free training sessions.

The SPLC's latest report documents an alarming number of active neo-Nazi, KKK, anti-LGBT and other far-right extremist groups at large in our nation today. The biggest threat, however, is the deadly

violence coming from "lone wolf" activists because they are the most difficult kind for law enforcement to counteract or spot until too late.

Oklahomans need to be aware of the threat to our social order. Currently there are 784 active hate groups in America. Eleven of these hate groups are based in Oklahoma.

Nationwide these hate groups have been categorized into eight different types of groups:

- Neo-Nazi: 142
- Racist Skinhead: 119
- White Nationalist: 115
- Black Separatist: 113
- Ku Klux Klan: 72
- Neo-Confederate: 37
- Christian Identity: 21
- Anti-LGBT/other: 165



Last year the FBI published an amazing statistic: there are 90 guns for every 100 people in the United States.

If anything, this number is an underestimate due to loopholes in the nation's laws regarding gun possession. These guns possessed by Americans run the gamut from small handguns to assault rifles.

One has to wonder how many of those guns belong to members of hate groups. Needless to say, the Second Amendment to our Constitution has been grossly exaggerated in terms of its intent to protect gun owning rights.

Look at what has been happening lately in our country. The Colorado movie theater shooter and the Boston bomber. Ferguson and Baltimore. Incidents of police violence, many of which include police officers shooting unarmed citizens or being shot at, have escalated.

Often it's white cops shooting or strangling blacks or so-called illegals and setting race relations back 25 years or more. It seems as if we have come to expect such an incident every week.

Tulsa has its own problems. Allegedly donations to the Tulsa County Sheriff's office were treated as bribes to curry favors for a donor who wanted to play cop but also wanted to shortcut the process of training for law enforcement.

As they say, in America if you have enough money you can buy anything. Unfortunately for all concerned, especially Eric Harris, the shooting victim and his loved ones, shortcutting the system brought about his being shot and killed. Worse yet, he was black and reserve officer Bates white.

The question is: where is America headed? Answer: the same place other countries find themselves.

Far too many citizens find themselves going nowhere. The unemployed, homeless and hungry have inadequate health care and are tired of being excluded from the American Dream, for whatever reason.

If we but look closely we just might see an America on the brink. A corrupt political process at every level disappoints daily. Far too many people, especially elected officials, seem not the least bit interested in helping constituents.

In Oklahoma we don't want to provide needed medical services nor fund quality education in our public schools. And the leadership seem not to care one whit whether more citizens come out to vote at elections; as a matter of fact, a few states are actively suppressing this constitutionally mandated right. It's not just they, it is also us, all of us seemingly uninterested in whether we vote or not, whether we have a say in who runs our government or not.

At present what we appear to have is a group of power-hungry politicians who care only about their own futures. Disappointed citizens are so distraught they will not go to the polls to vote. If we look closely, not very many people run for office who will work for the public good when elected.

In our chase for the great American Dream it turns

out there is no pot of gold at the end of that rainbow. As it turns out there is only more hard work and problems so large we feel intimidated by our inability to make a dent, much less solve them. But there is no way we can conquer them unless we all band together into that sense of community America once had.

We are all in the same boat and the water is rough. Those big waves represent challenge. If we recognize obstacles as challenges, then we see the need to get engaged in the political process: to work together to overcome them. That's where we are in America today.

Do we accept a challenge that will produce improvement in our lives? We better before we find ourselves living in a North Korea or a Syria, with only daily despair of meeting the challenge and changing our future.

In order for Oklahomans to rise to the challenges before us, we need to resurrect hope. First and foremost, we need to strengthen our familial structure by trying to be good parents or not having children at all. Then we adults need to work on strengthening the government. Those over the age of 18 can register to vote and then on election days go out to vote.

We also have to support a quality education system – we better ensure that our children and grandchildren do not just stay in front of the boob tube. Then we require that they get trained; better yet, we imbue them with the desire to learn and succeed.

If we are to continue being the America that inspires hope around the globe, then we ought to participate in a working democracy that ensures such basic freedoms as free speech along with all the other freedoms our forefathers have sacrificed much to earn for us as Americans.

Freedom is never a given, it involves much blood, sweat and tears, as our warriors have experienced and the result is oh, so sweet for us to savor.

*Bob Rounsavell lives in Oologah and is the president of the Carrie Dickerson Foundation.*



# *Sometimes You Just Can't Fix Stupid*

BY WALTER JENNY JR.

One thing noticeable about President Obama's recent visit to Oklahoma was the fact that the purposes of his visit had nothing to do with anything noticeable in the state of Oklahoma.

His first stop was to visit the Choctaw Nation in Durant and highlight his initiative to help expand Internet service to rural America. The second stop was to a federal prison which apparently has progressive programs designed to help inmates prepare to return to public life.

He used both opportunities to highlight federal programs that are focused on improving the quality of life for segments of American society generally, but not Oklahomans in particular.

When JFK visited Big Cedar, OK on Oct. 29, 1961 – his first major presidential visit after his inauguration – it was ostensibly to dedicate a new highway, but in reality it was to cement ties with Oklahoma's powerful lawmakers, including Robert S. Kerr, Mike Monroney and Carl Albert.

Kennedy also got an education from Kerr [while

Kennedy was his guest at Kerr's ranch] on the importance of the cattle industry and the Arkansas River. It's no coincidence that the McClellan-Kerr Navigation System began construction in 1963. Kennedy's last trip to Oklahoma was to honor Kerr after his death on Jan. 1, 1963.

Nobody from Oklahoma's congressional delegation met with Obama while he was in Oklahoma. None invited him here. Gov. Mary Fallin greeted him at arm's length at Tinker Air Force Base, and issued a scathing press release about federal immigration policy.

When Confederate battle flags marred both Oklahoma events, only two of the lawmakers [Reps. Tom Cole and Frank Lucas] found them worthy of criticism.

None showed any interest in making nice with the most powerful man in the free world or building political bridges. And apparently there's nothing worthwhile going on in Oklahoma [such as energy production] that they wanted to promote to the president.

Sometimes you just can't fix stupid.

*Walter Jenny Jr. lives in Edmond.*

## *Pruitt's Motto: Have Briefs, Will Travel*

BY CAL HOBSON

Scott Pruitt has recited the same oath of office numerous times – first as a state senator and twice now as Oklahoma attorney general.

Without reprinting it here, the main requirement is to “support, obey, and defend the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the state of Oklahoma.”

The oath does not give him – or any other person – the option to pick the paragraphs he likes and ignore the rest.

As attorney general, Pruitt is our top law enforcement officer, leading a staff of 194 state employees, including a hand-selected cadre of 80 lawyers. His agency operates with an annual budget of \$25.2 million, almost all of it derived from taxes. The Firm is located in an opulent office building just west of the state Capitol.

The attorney general is our top law enforcement officer. As such he and his band of barristers represent most state entities in various legal venues, including Oklahoma courts, those in the federal system and on

tribal lands.

He can impanel grand juries, request dates of execution for those found guilty of capital offenses, prosecute other miscreants, file lawsuits and, of growing importance and consequence, issue opinions on almost any regulation or law generated by the other 149 legislators and the U.S. Congress.

In many ways his inherent, implied and expressed powers exceed even those entrusted to our governor.

When his litigious juices are flowing – and based on voluminous press releases they always are – he routinely has filed lawsuits in other states upon concluding that Okie values and mores were violated.

For example, he has intervened at our expense on topics ranging from the size and functionality of chicken coops in California, religious observances of a soldier in North Carolina, and the now-legal sale of marijuana in Colorado. Additionally, during a break in his “war upon the states,” Pruitt went after our animals by suing the Humane Society of the United States, thus guaranteeing he is more unpopular with

pooches than fireplugs.

His motto is: Have briefs will travel – and I don't mean underwear.

The priorities, policies and resultant benefactors of this attorney general's record of work over the last five years are dominated by an undisguised extreme right wing agenda that he proudly advocates in word and deed.

Unfortunately, it is one not driven by the rule of law or constitutional intent. Rather, its underpinnings are derived from the thoughts, or the lack thereof, of such deep thinkers as Limbaugh, Hannity, Norquist, Laffer, Thomas, and others.

And that is the problem. It's one thing to be a radio/TV talking head, discredited economist or even fringe jurist. If you disagree with what is said or written by them just change the channel or read something more beneficial like perhaps Mad Magazine.

However, it's quite another for Pruitt to use the power of the purse – to wit, your hard earned money – to propagate and promote HIS personal ideology. As he has pursued this expensive and generally unsuccessful concept of justice, numerous state and federal courts have consistently ruled his conclusions lack legal basis whether in precedent, common law, common sense, or, just as important, the common good.

Before listing a handful of the most recent reversals rendered by jurists upon Pruitt's opinions, readers might find it helpful if I provide a brief synopsis of his background and experience. Therein, with the all-important exception of how Pruitt interprets and then implements our laws, I have always found his personal traits and professional accomplishments to be quite admirable.

A Kentuckian by birth he first enrolled at UK on a baseball scholarship but subsequently earned his degree in political science from Georgetown College, also located in the Bluegrass state. He later received a law degree from the University of Tulsa then joined a local firm where he specialized in – wait for it – labor law and the Constitution.

In 1998 he defeated incumbent state Sen. Gerald "Ged" Wright by painting him as soft on crime. That characterization was a wild exaggeration because the incumbent authored many law and order initiatives, including a state question that proposed – and now imposes – the sentence of life without parole for those who commit the most heinous offenses. Thousands have received that punishment; therefore, if Wright was soft on crime, Attila the Hun was a Mongrel missionary motivated by mercy.

While serving in the state Senate, Pruitt focused on two priorities – the first being election to higher office. He soon ran for both a Tulsa area congressional seat and the statewide post of lieutenant governor. Both campaigns ended in bitter defeats.

When elected attorney general, money mattered greatly – Pruitt spent more than \$1 million to defeat his unknown and underfunded democrat opponent Jim Priest. Pruitt raised even more cash in 2014, just in case a doomed Democrat filed. Those surplus bucks, mostly given by well-heeled special interests, will jump start his 2018 gubernatorial race – one he will most likely make.

His other interest as a senator also met with mixed



Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt, right, and U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia at a meeting last year of far-right ideologues in Washington, DC.

results: Then Gov. Frank Keating, R-Tulsa, designated Pruitt as point man for the state Chamber of Commerce's No. 1 obsession – the alleged need for reform of workers' compensation laws.

This anti-employee initiative, as well as passage of a so-called Right To Work proposal, were the governor's and, thus, Pruitt's legal quid pro quo for support from business bigwigs. By a narrow margin the voters approved RTW while the comp statutes remain muddled even today, regardless of the fact that Republicans enjoy super majorities in both the House and Senate.

The losers in this high stakes game of politics and power were, and are, working stiffs, as measured by their most important economic yardstick – spendable income.

Enough already about his past. Today what matters most are Pruitt's legal filings and interventions as he seeks to modify, enhance, alter or potentially degrade our public and private lives. Obviously, my opinion of them is politically biased and, some say, distorted through my non-lawyer lens. Point well taken.

Regardless of my shortcomings, numerous legal jurisdictions, including the U.S. Supreme Court, have ruled time after time that Pruitt's understanding of the constitutions guiding the other states as well as our United States is flawed, biased, and frequently flat-out wrong.

Wide ranging examples of his foul balls, mostly dinged in the direction of right field then followed by subsequent strikeouts, are listed below:

1. In June the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 5-4 that gay marriage is legal in the 50 states. Extremely unpopular here in God's country, and especially with the political elite, this decision will eventually be as acceptable as interracial marriage and civil rights for minorities and women have very slowly become. Unfortunately, much like two egregious icons from the political past, Strom Thurmond and Jesse Helms,

I fear our attorney general will opt to lead the twin terrors of intolerance and ignorance in a long and losing war of wounding words with only division and disruption the inevitable outcome.

2. By a 6-3 vote this nation's high court finally put an end to all legal barriers erected against the Affordable Care Act, aka ObamaCare. Therefore, the winners are millions of Americans who now will have health insurance – and accessible medical care – much like that long enjoyed at taxpayer expense by Pruitt and other pols of similar, short-sighted and frankly selfish persuasions.

3. Oklahoma's Supreme Court courageously ruled 7-2 that the Ten Commandments monument on the Capitol grounds must be removed due to unambiguous language found in this state's Constitution. Regardless of its original political purpose when adopted over 100 years ago, the words are as clear as those in the Ten Commandments themselves. Of course, Pruitt appealed the decision and was denied July 25 by the same seven who told him no the first time. Talk about the classic definition of insanity.

4. Even when our AG wins we lose. For example, our country's highest court did partially concur with him that the Environmental Protection Agency stretched its interpretation of "how to regulate greenhouse gases" but left intact EPA's recently announced carbon emissions goals. The lawsuit Pruitt joined, supposedly on behalf of us, was *Texas et al v. EPA*. Therefore his and the Lone Star state's pyrrhic victory only guarantees more pollution laden particulates will float northward for Okies to suck in.

5. Female readers might especially be interested to know that Pruitt not only is a lawyer, but also thinks he's a medical doctor as well. Our general, without exception, has defended to no avail every effort of lawmakers – mostly men – to legislate what should be private medical decisions better made by women in consultation with their doctors. Rock-ribbed conservative lawmakers who allegedly abhor the intrusive hands of "Big Brother" routinely pass and Gov. Mary Fallin affixes her signature to unconstitutional laws that are clear violations of the Supreme Court's 1974 decision known as *Roe v Wade*, a woman's right to choose. No one I know "likes" abortions, including me, but if and until overturned it must be enforced even and especially by those in power who oppose it.

6. On top of being a lawyer and doctor, Pruitt must also have a real estate license because he alone among the 50 attorneys general refused to join the Obama Administration's successful national settlement for mortgagees who were financially ripped off by Wall Street lenders during the real estate bust of 2007-10. His Don Quixote mentality garnered much smaller individual awards for Oklahoma property owners, totaling only a miniscule \$19.1 million. Nationwide over \$25 billion was extracted from six New York banks in reparations for purposeful damages done to their customers in the other 49 states. Pruitt's excuse for his "go it alone approach" so detrimental to Oklaho-

ma homeowners? The answer is found in *Scientific American* magazine dated Feb. 9, 2012 where – and I quote – The Lone General declared, "I will not participate with other states in supporting President Obama's efforts to restructure the mortgage industry." Huh?

Coincidentally, realtors and bankers have been among his most reliable and generous political donors, giving about \$175,000 of the \$3.1 million raised in support of various campaigns or causes. With 2018 elections approaching more will be needed and, of course, provided.

7. Perhaps the most ethically egregious action of our AG, as reported extensively by the *New York Times*, was placing his signature to a letter on official state letterhead which then was sent, post haste, to the federal Environmental Protection Agency. So far so good. However, Pruitt didn't write a syllable of its substantive language nor did any of his legal staff. A prominent Oklahoma energy lobbyist authored it, wherein he claimed that the "agency wasn't properly measuring pollution from natural gas drilling in Oklahoma."

Maybe he's right; maybe he's wrong – but that's not the point. Couldn't one of Pruitt's 80 attorneys, or even an intern, take five minutes to cut and paste what has become his routine five-word response whenever and wherever he is challenged on a matter of law? When you boil down all the legal mumbo jumbo, his basic retort is, "I'm right and you're wrong."

As Pruitt heads into the seventh inning stretch of his tenure as attorney general, he understandably has grown weary of just being a good team player stuck way out in right field. Fortunately for him, the general manager's job – occupied by a woman for the first time in franchise history – will be vacant in two years when her contract thankfully expires.

With the organization routinely stuck in the basement of state standings, listlessly playing in a run-down facility long overdue for repairs, Pruitt thinks he is ordained with "The Right Stuff." All that's necessary for him to deliver the timber is to be given a four-year contract by the owners, who, in their spare time, are also indifferent and infrequent voters.

The general's game plan is to implement popular pennant pursuing policies that have been evolving for years, formulated by and revealed only to him through a Christian God. He – or She, if you prefer – must be the source as evidenced by Pruitt's continuous and dangerous disregard for the wisdom conveyed in the documents penned by our Founding Fathers.

Therefore, as the real possibility of theocratic governance shadows the Sooner State, an important question looms: It's not *What Would Jesus Do?*, but rather *What Did Jefferson Write in 1776 and How Will You Vote In 2018?*

In your spare time think about it.

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



# *What Mr. Holland's Saga Can Teach Us About Keeping Quality Educators*

**BY CHRISTIAAN MITCHELL**

**I**t's hard not to sympathize with Austin Holland. In June, the former head of the Oklahoma Geological Survey announced his departure for bluer waters. His stated reason was that he was tired of working 80 hours a week, and wanted to spend time with his family. It also couldn't have helped that the OGS has about half the staff it needs to do its job. And that's not to mention that Mr. Holland recently began to suffer pretty intense political backlash for simply doing his job.

With that vast array of obstacles and disincentives, who could blame him for leaving?

Overworked, under-resourced, and attacked for doing the best you know how. Not many of us would stay around at a job like that. And nearly all of us would scoff at the notion that leaving just shows that we weren't committed enough, or that asking for more means that we don't care.

Certainly, it would be almost crazy for him to stay given those circumstances. And yet here we sit, scratching our heads over why we have a hard time keeping teachers in the state.

As Dean Lawrence Baines of OU's Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education [full disclosure, JRCOE is one of my almae matres] recently pointed out, teachers routinely spend 50-60 hours a week on the job, not including the mounds of work they take home with them every evening.

Despite this, teachers in Oklahoma can expect a starting salary somewhere in the low \$30,000 range, even if they're coming in with an advanced degree.

Fortunately for them, their low salary means their kids will at least qualify for reduced-price school lunches. And, of course, they can always make up the difference by taking one of those "we're perfectly fine with you only working for two months in the summer" jobs that we all know are in such abundance.

In addition to being massively overworked and intentionally under-resourced, our teachers also have the privilege of working in one of those few fields where having gone through the system as a child makes you a policy expert.

It's similar to the way that taking your car to the shop qualifies you to be a mechanical engineer. This authorizes policymakers and other public commentators to insist that our teachers be treated with the deepest suspicion and, of course, generally blamed for any student failure.

Should they be so irresponsible as to quit their jobs, or move to another place that pays them enough to support their families, it's little more than evidence that they aren't sufficiently committed to their work or to Oklahoma.

And of course, how dare they be so presumptuous to ask for more ... Don't they care about the children?!?

I think it's safe to say that, just like with Mr. Holland, few of us would put up with what we put our teachers through. And there's little mystery about what we need to do to retain more high quality teachers in Oklahoma.

First, we need to stop treating them like children and instead treat them like the highly trained professionals they are. Our policymakers need to spend more time figuring out how to sufficiently fund our schools, and less time trying to devise schemes to interfere with the implementation of what educators know are the best practices in their fields. Surely there are ineffective teachers and administrators in the system, but to allow a handful of incompetents to throw an entire field into suspicion is as silly as it is disrespectful.

Secondly, we simply need to pay teachers more. Teacher pay, perhaps better than any other example, belies the belief that salaries are proportional to a job's importance. Education is perhaps the most important social function of the state, and it is utterly embarrassing that we reward it so meagerly.

Of course, this will mean more funding for education, which is tricky to do when your elected leaders are intentionally bankrupting the state. [That's a little harsh, but I don't know how else to characterize a situation where they looked at a budget deficit and said "Let's fix it by cutting revenues!" And so, instead, in an effort to make-due, we're seeing reductions in hours.

Dean Baines' suggestion that teachers be given a humane and completely normal lunch break aside, we've instead started to experiment with shortening the school week. So the logic goes if we can't afford to educate them for five days a week, let's shoot for four.

From a purely budget perspective that may make a lot of sense. And so far, in the few districts that have tried it, it hasn't seemed to cause any tremendous problem, at least for those families that can afford

childcare arrangements. But we have to ask ourselves what message a shorter week sends to our children?

Anyone who has ever worked in education or has kids in school can tell you that kids learn much more in a school day than the material we try to teach them. They learn lessons from the way their teachers react to kids of different races or social class, they learn lessons about our priorities from the order things get fixed in the building, and they learn things from the structure of the school day.

Educational theorists call this “the hidden curriculum,” and it is a part of education that everyone involved has to acknowledge if they hope to understand what’s actually going on in a classroom.

Cutting the school week teaches children a very clear lesson: education is of secondary importance to the other things that we have to do.

And yet without a quality education, how can we

hope that our children will be able to do the other things that we have to do, much less actually be well prepared to participate in our democratic institutions?

Teachers also receive plenty of hidden curriculum in their work day. Our ingratitude at their Herculean efforts, our unwillingness to provide them with that they need to do their jobs effectively, and our perpetual insistence that even those who are managing to be effective are suspect sends them an unequivocal message: we don’t really need you.

We should little wonder that so many of our best and brightest simply don’t hang around.

*Bartlesville resident Christiaan Mitchell, a lawyer who holds master’s degrees in philosophy and education, is a regular contributor to The Oklahoma Observer. More of his essays can be found at [www.okobserver.net](http://www.okobserver.net).*

# *Freeing Oklahoma Children From Education Reform’s Malpractice*

BY JOHN THOMPSON

**T**he Oklahoma Parent Teachers Association [PTA] voted to boycott all non-federally mandated tests “in an attempt to pressure lawmakers to cut back the number of high-stakes tests students take,” according to Oklahoma Watch’s Nate Robson.

The PTA also asked that the state Department of Education not use the test scores to calculate school A-F grades, and called for the exemption of all schools from A-F grading if less than 95% of their students are tested.

As the Tulsa World’s Andrea Eger reported, the Oklahoma PTA acted in “direct response” to its members’ concerns about the Legislature’s failure to reduce standardized testing.

“Parents have had enough,” said PTA President Jeff Corbett said. “Parents want more for their children than for them to be great test takers. The fact of the matter is this: Our children deserve better.”

Corbett further explained, “In Oklahoma, we know what it is to respond to disaster – and it is time that we responded to the disaster that high-stakes tests have made of our public education system.”

A grassroots Opt Out movement and a bipartisan resistance to bubble-in accountability have demanded a state government response to the testing mania. Parents, students, and teachers rallied at the state Capitol but the Legislature did not listen. So, Corbett promised, “Together, we will take our classrooms out

of the wallets of the testing companies and turn them back over to our teachers.”

Tracye Love, president of the Tulsa Council of PTAs, added, “We see the stress this causes students and parents and teachers – all students are learning is how to pass the test.” Moreover, Etta Taylor, who was voted president-elect of the statewide PTA organization, said that the testing boycott was prompted by the narrowing of instruction students receive and “the host of unintended consequences.”

Taylor cited the way tests are used as an unfair evaluation tool for teachers, and how the damage from inappropriate accountability metrics rolls down on children. The testing not only affects instruction in a negative manner, but also things like discipline.

She said, “They are more likely to send a kid out if they are having issues because they’ve got to get as many kids to pass that test as possible.”

I would add that the Oklahoma PTA hit a nice balance. It did not undermine the efforts of State Superintendent Joy Hofmeister to work with the rest of state government and the USDOE in crafting alternatives to test, sort, reward, and punish. The PTA did not ask students to boycott the End of Instruction [EOI] tests they need to graduate. But they will boycott enough tests to throw a monkey wrench into the worst test-driven policies.

My sense, which grew stronger during last month’s

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## Teachers

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Teachers must share some of the blame for this. In my district, union membership is less than 20%, yet 100% of the teachers [but not spouses or children] now get their health insurance premiums paid because of the efforts of Oklahoma's teachers' unions.

The Oklahoma Education Association, for example, ensures a member gets due process when he is fired. Contrary to the lies that anti-unionists spread, unions don't keep bad teachers from being fired, they just ensure due process.

While teachers may be lax in joining the organization that is their voice at the Capitol, they got together to defeat a superintendent who viewed teachers as adversaries. They spoke with one voice to say that superintendents are servants, not dictators.

The job of superintending public education should not be a Democratic or Republican affair. Educators and their students should never be political pawns. Education is too important for the state's economy and the citizens' wellbeing.

Superintendent Joy Hofmeister is listening to teachers. Already she has made some needed changes that were in her power.

It doesn't appear that legislators and the governor are following suit. Many have no education training or experience outside of once being students themselves, but they try to dictate curriculum. The less earnest and more sinister sponsor fake reforms that take money from the school systems and put them in private pockets.

Privatization is not the answer. Neither is a curriculum based on standardization and testing.

Teachers aren't against testing; they're against over-testing and an over-reliance on numbers by which legislators would have us judge each child. Consider the Reading Sufficiency Act.

A third grade teacher recalls two students in her class this past year. According to the state test, one showed four months of growth for the year; she passed the test. Another student showed almost two years growth; she started so far back that she didn't pass the test. Guess whom legislators want to hold back?

Growth counts. A single score shouldn't.

Oklahoma third grade teachers meet the Reading Sufficiency Act with grace and hard work. They build

portfolios to show that students have met certain benchmarks. They do regular testing to see where the holes are in a student's abilities. They find ways to let students know how important these tests are to their futures, even when they don't believe they should be, and to ease student fears.

Oklahoma's third grade teachers are under a lot of stress. Perhaps legislators should shadow them for a couple of weeks in the fall to see how they teach and again in spring to see how everything changes to accommodate state-mandated testing madness.

Holding third-graders back because of one test given on one day is a bad idea. Unnecessarily holding back any student puts her future schooling in jeopardy.

"Retention should happen by first grade," said one of the administrators with whom I spoke. "I'd like to see research that compares reading issues of first graders and third graders."

So would I. Are the struggling first graders, the struggling third graders? In the reading lab, we can identify kindergarteners likely to have reading issues. Most of these issues can be rectified with individualized lessons.

The Reading Sufficiency Act addresses this, but that doesn't make any difference if the child still has to pass a single test on a given day.

Meeting each child's needs requires manpower. Manpower requires dollars. Teachers and dollars are both in short supply.

When you have the same amount of education dollars as you had the year before, but you have more students, that counts as a funding cut. Dollar cuts for education are paired with tax cuts for those with a more powerful voice in the state.

Don't tell us that the problem is too many school districts. The problem is not too many administrators, either. Most administrators with whom I've worked have earned every penny they were paid. The problem is money.

The state mandates millions of dollars worth of testing. It squanders resources on unnecessary data collection and worthless evaluations. Money is siphoned off for voucher schemes and other privatization ploys. Meanwhile, we have a teacher shortage. We're even short on necessary aides.

Legislators know this. Consider this from the Reading Sufficiency Act:

"Classroom assistants, which may include parents, grandparents, or other volunteers, shall be provided in kindergarten classes to assist with the screening of students ... "

How many of those parents, grandparents, and volunteers are trained to screen? And how many of the emergency licenses granted this year ensure that a highly qualified teacher will be in the classroom? It isn't enough to know one's subject matter. One needs

to know how to teach.

Oklahoma teachers spend their own time and money to equip their rooms. They search for high quality professional development to become better teachers, always looking for ways to reach the unreachable and challenge the geniuses in their charge. And they do this despite the low pay and lack of respect.

Our teachers stack up against any in the country. Teachers trained in Oklahoma are welcomed in states that pay much higher wages. Too many teachers move out of Oklahoma because they need to be able to support their families.

Someone said recently, "Most teachers have servants' hearts."

This is their strength and their weakness. What other profession do you know where you can require multiple degrees, pay low wages, and ask employees to bring their own supplies? And what other profession does so much to shape the future?

If these servants would join the union and demand as much for themselves as they do of themselves, maybe then the governor and other members of her party would listen to what they have to say.

*Educator Sharon Martin lives in Oilton and is a regular contributor to The Oklahoma Observer. More of her essays can be found at [www.okobserver.net](http://www.okobserver.net).*

## Malpractice

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23

EngageOK state education conference, is that almost all of Oklahoma's stakeholders are disenchanted with test-driven reform.

In conversations with district and state leaders, as well as educators, it seems that corporate school reform has been repudiated by liberals, conservatives, parents, students, educators, and local government representatives.

It is the USDOE – and its misuse of federal power through the NCLB waiver – that is keeping output-driven reform on life support.

As Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's term winds down, and after next spring's test boycott, it will clearly be time to pull the plug on the failed experiment. And we will have parents, more than anyone else, to thank for freeing our children from the education malpractice known as "reform."

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



# *Walton-Backed Charter Schools Marred By Fiscal Mismanagement*

**BY STEVEN ROSENFELD**

A quarter-century ago, when progressive educators and teachers union leaders first proposed creating charter schools as a way to innovate and improve public schools, they never imagined that one of the nation's biggest conservative foundations would hijack their idea and leave a trail of profiteering and financial crimes, political corruption, lawsuits blocking audits, and lobbying against basics as simple as installing fire extinguishers in schools or offering lunch to poorer students.

But those and other problems are the legacy of the Walton Family Foundation's billion-dollar effort to create a parallel school system – charters mostly funded by tax dollars – that has become known for a stunning lack of transparency and accountability, according to a recent report, *Cashing in on Kids*, by In The Public Interest and the American Federation of Teachers, representing 1.6 million educators and staff.

"I may disagree with having two parallel school systems – and I do – but if you're going to actually undertake this, you have to do it for the public good," said Randi Weingarten, AFT president. "This is not a private corporation where you can wheel and deal any way you wish. That's what this report is about ... It's about what's going on about how the Walton Family Foundation is damaging even their own brand through unregulated growth, allowance of fraud, and lack of transparency and accountability, and what that does to children and what that does to the public good."

The U.S. has 6,400 charter schools with 2.5 million students supported by upwards of \$20 billion in taxpayer funds annually and multi-millions from foundations. The Walton Family Foundation was created by the family that brought America Wal-Mart. Like its commercial roots, it believes in "flooding the market with schools," the report said, but without many of the regulations or oversight that have accompanied public schools for decades.

The foundation has ties to 1,500 of the charter school across the country. It gives more than \$200 million a year to a range of charter school initiatives, typically spending one-third to open new schools, and millions more to support existing schools and lobbying to avoid regulatory and public scrutiny.

"We're committed to investing \$1 billion over the next five years," its website says. High-profile recipients include Florida's Foundation for Excellence in Education [FEE], which received \$4.8 million since 2009 and was founded by ex-governor and now GOP presidential candidate Jeb Bush.

FEE's Mike Thomas, quoted in the *Cashing In On Kids* report, explained the philosophy, saying, "Charters are competitors. They steal customers, deplete [public tax] revenues and increase costs. When charters siphon off kids, they not only take the money that comes with them, they often cause nearby schools to operate under capacity."

This business model and intentionally disruptive mindset has led to foundation spending that has not only fueled the rapid growth of unregulated charters, said Donald Cohen, In The Public Interest executive director, but also "hundreds of millions of dollars in fraud, mismanagement and poor oversight, and how the foundation's grantees have lobbied against adequate oversight of this growing charter sector."

"We found that the free market charter advocates supported by Walton Foundation typically refer to charters as public schools in discussions about funding levels and access to public facilities," he said. "In almost every other instance, the same lobbyists and advocates argue that charter school governing boards are actually private corporations that should not be subject to same regulations and transparency that govern traditional public schools."

Even though the Walton Family Foundation does not publish independent audits, its fast and loose education strategy has left a stunning trail of press reports of mismanagement, financial fraud, lawsuits blocking accountability to state governments.

Consider the following examples:

- The New York Charter School Association, a Walton grantee that has received \$3.6 million has been lobbying state legislators for seven years to block audits of charter schools and even "took to the courts, arguing that the state did not have the authority to audit the schools because they were run by independent – not public – boards. Lawsuits by other multi-million dollar grantees prompted the Legislature to require audits, which, even after the new law took effect, are still being flouted.

- The California Charter Schools Association, re-

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ceiving more than \$31 million since 2004, successfully lobbied that state's Legislature in 2011 to defeat a proposal that would have required the schools to the same public safety standards as public schools. In 2014 in Pasadena, city officials shut down one school in mid-year because of fire code violations. In 2012, the CCSA opposed a bill requiring the schools offer free- and reduced-priced meals. Meanwhile, its lobbying arm has opposed public school construction bonds, and efforts to institute universal early childhood education.

- Illinois Facilities Fund, a Chicago-based charter school finance and real estate advisory firm, which has received more than \$9 million since 2007, released a report in 2012 that recommended Washington, DC, close several public schools and consolidate students into other buildings under private managers. The Washington Post reported that "IFF's research director could not provide a single instance in which its strategy of transferring a low-performing school to a charter management organization has resulted in academic gains for the students." But as was the case in many other examples given, such private management became an invitation to financial malfeasance and taxpayer ripoffs.

- In Indiana, the former state superintendent of public instruction, Tony Bennett, when running for re-election, received a \$200,000 campaign contribution from Alice Walton. Though he lost that race, he changed the state's assessment grade for another foundation grantee, Christel House Charter Academy – which received \$441,000 – from a "C" to an "A" before leaving office. Bennett, who was appointed Commissioner of Education in Florida after that, was forced to resign from that post after the media broke the story.

- The record of financial fraud and undue enrichment stretches from coast to coast. The chief financial officer of The Brighter Choice Foundation, an Albany, NY, charter group that received more than \$9.4 million, was arrested and charged with embezzling more than \$200,000. In Washington, DC, a city official on a board charged with financial oversight of charters, was arrested and charged with taking \$150,000 from the trustees of one school under its jurisdiction. In the Miami, FL, region, Academia Corp., a chain that runs more than 60 schools and received more than \$1.1 million in grants, was exposed by the Miami Herald for "millions of dollars of profiteering" in transactions tied to buying and leasing school buildings.

- Other eyebrow-raising examples include: a technology charter school in Philadelphia that "doubled as a nightclub until it was shut down in 2010;" two Los Angeles schools closed in the middle of last year due to "fiscal mismanagement;" concept schools in Ohio and Illinois that are under state and federal investigation "for a range of concerns around contract-

ing, hiring, management of funds, and others;" and Detroit school operators indicted for fraud, self-dealing and lack of oversight.

Meanwhile, according to Lisa Ranghelli, of the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, too many Walton grantees cherry-pick students for their schools, which is an effort to boost test scores and reputations while leaving students with learning challenges in traditional public schools.

"The foundation says that it cares about quality, accountability and access in its charter school work," she said. "But as this report finds, their advocacy suggests quite otherwise, particularly children with disabilities, English language learners, other students are being siphoned out of the charter school pipeline or just not being served well."

The report's authors want the Walton Foundation to commit to a series of principles that amount to opening their books and policies – so that, as the initial charter school vision suggested, the schools' failures could be rooted out and best-practices emulated.

"Charter schools were inspired after a speech by the former AFT president Al Shanker in Washington," Weingarten said. "Charter school should be a public school that allows parents and teachers to come up with different ways, new ways, innovative ways of educating our children. Let the innovators take risks. And if that worked, that you would share that with the public school at large."

But Weingarten said charter schools run by movement conservatives – especially Walton Family Foundation grantees – will aggressively attack traditional public schools for their lapses while hiding their own management failures and pushing to remain unaccountable for using billions in taxpayer funds.

"The Walton Foundation and others of the charter school constellation often talk about this transparency and accountability. And they will often look at their scores at the end of a cycle and say, 'See, look how good those scores are.' And yet they fight to be as non-transparent as they possibly can," she said. "What is going on with charter schools?"

"The question becomes what are they afraid of?" she continued. "What are they hiding? And why are they doing this? And why are they not out there as rigorously and vigorously as we are, when they see fraud in the charter sector? And why are they not out there as rigorously and vigorously as we are when they see that there are some instabilities that are created because of the rapid growth of charters? I find it quite ironic that some of the people that they fund will do that in a nonosecond when it comes to criticizing the public system, and legitimately criticizing what the public system is not doing. But there's a stone cold silence and underneath that silence the network of trying to thwart any transparency."

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# *Reviving Urban Schools Requires Building Trust, Rebuilding Families*

BY JOHN THOMPSON

**W**hen writing her excellent *Project Fatherhood*, the UCLA gang expert Jorja Leap exposed herself to a daunting risk. Leap accepted a degree of physical danger but it was the professional risk that could have been intimidating. Leap defied academic convention and spoke honestly about race, family, child-rearing, domestic abuse and, even, the “P-stuff” or post-traumatic shock.

Much of the credit for *Project Fatherhood*’s open and candid discussion of some of the third rails of social policy must go to “Big Mike” Cummings, who guided her and the quest they shared with felons and fathers in Watts. Big Mike was exceptionally astute in coaxing the project’s participants into an honest appraisal of the causes and the effects of domestic abuse, as well as fathers not holding up their share of family responsibilities.

Scholars and educators often shy away from the issues tackled by Leap and Big Mike, and correctly argue that it is not just fathers – of whatever backgrounds – who have failed our kids. The horrific conditions of the inner city are a legacy of history, of economic exploitation and oppression, and of abusive political and criminal justice systems. It is often feared that a conversation about child-rearing will be seen as “blaming the victim” or excuse-making.

We cannot improve inner city schools without building trusting relationships, however, and neither can we establish those bonds with students and patrons without dialogues about fatherhood.

As Leap writes, “These men – who routinely used guns and dealt drugs and brutalized women and went to prison and had no clue how to father their own children – needed first to be fathered themselves.”

One of the first things that an inner city teacher seeking to build relationships should learn is that students will test them. It should be clear that much of the chronic disorder of urban classrooms is due to high-risk kids acting out their pain.

A crucial reason is less obvious, however, and it is made much more understandable by the chapter entitled “Are You Gonna Leave Us, Too?” Teachers aren’t being tested to see if we are tough enough; students, like their fathers before them, want to see whether mentors are “for real.”

These fathers also doubt whether outsiders, who

may seek to do good, will care enough to stick it out when the going gets rough.

The key lesson of the chapter “Big Mama” should be equally apparent to teachers and social workers, but the way that Big Mike and Leap drew out the fathers produced an incredibly nuanced explanation of why the fathers pass on contradictory attitudes towards the women in their lives.

On one hand, the normative mentality was illuminated by the father who observed, “My daddy hit my mama, and my stepdaddy hit my mama, I guess I was used to it.”

But, men [and male students] who perpetuate a cycle of violence towards women have very different feelings about their mothers. Project Fatherhood explains how and why “no one utters a negative word about his mother.”

The universal commitment to each person’s own mother is the “protected territory of the hearts, demilitarized zone in lives of conflict.”

But this attitude also helps pass down a simplistic mentality among people in the hood that is the mirror image of the quick fix mentality of too many education and social policy advocates.

“What’s really wrong with Watts,” it is maintained, “is we don’t have any more big mamas and grannies to take care of our kids.”

After decades of wrestling with the challenges of the inner city, I still can’t completely understand why sincere education reformers and social activists have been so allergic to open communication about the deep wounds produced by families cracking under the stresses of poverty, racism, and inequality. Teens certainly want to discuss these issues that frighten adults.

As Father Greg Boyle says, “Everyone longs to connect.” Why can’t we admit that many men and [most?] serious felons need help to “teach them to be the fathers they never had?”

On the other hand, the World War II generation of combat veterans was silent about post-traumatic shock, and even today it is not easy to confront PTSD. So, everyone should read *Project Fatherhood* and pay attention to Big Mike’s wisdom about the PTSD revealed during discussions of child abuse.

In fact, to a greater or lesser extent, the “P-stuff” comes out when the fathers discuss virtually every

topic, ranging from domestic violence, sexism, racism, the criminal justice system, and the role of men in raising children.

Although *Project Fatherhood* doesn't articulate a single, concise political agenda for eradicating poverty and its legacies, it shows how the decency of individuals and groups can make a difference.

As the climax of *Project Fatherhood* approaches, the chapter "We Are Your Daddies" foreshadows the story which should inform policy discussions. Previously, the collective wisdom was that raising kids is the woman's job, but now the fathers are "trying to redeem themselves."

The group finally tackles the challenge of fathering the next generation with the confident [though also oversimplified] appraisal of what is wrong with today's kids, "all they understand is instant gratification."

The group takes a high school student, Jamel, under their wings, but he is again suspended from school for fighting. Then, another father tells the group that his daughters have been suspended for

fighting each other.

He acknowledges, "I can't handle this. I wanna hit them, but I know that's wrong."

In both situations the fathers engage in heart-to-heart discussions that show that these men "most of whom never knew their own fathers – have learned how to father one another." After group discussions that could serve as advertisements for the Restorative Justice program, all three kids end up crying.

The future remains uncertain, but the last words before the Epilogue were:

"He's your daddy – but we're all your fathers."

Jamel lifts up his head.

"I love all of you. I won't let you down."

*Dr. John Thompson, an education writer whose essays appear regularly in The Oklahoma Observer, currently is working on a book about his experiences teaching for two decades in the inner city of OKC. He has a doctorate from Rutgers University and is the author of Closing the Frontier: Radical Responses in Oklahoma Politics. This essay first appeared at Andrew Russo's This Week In Education.*

# Driving Teachers To Drink!

The following questions were [allegedly] asked on last year's GED exam. Answers are [allegedly] from 16-year-olds:

Q. Name the four seasons.

A. Salt, pepper, mustard and vinegar.

Q. How is dew formed?

A. The sun shines down on the leaves and makes them perspire.

Q. What guarantees may a mortgage company insist on?

A. If you are buying a house they will insist that you are well endowed.

Q. In a democratic society, how important are elections?

A. Very important. Sex can only happen when a male gets an election.

Q. What are steroids?

A. Things for keeping carpets still on the stairs.

Q. What happens to your body as you age?

A. When you get old, so do your bowels and you get intercontinental.

Q. What happens to a boy when he reaches puberty?

A. He says goodbye to his boyhood and looks forward to his adultery.

Q. Name a major disease associated with cigarettes?

A. Premature death.

Q. What is artificial insemination?

A. When the farmer does it to the bull instead

of the cow.

Q. How can you delay milk turning sour?

A. Keep it in the cow.

Q. How are the main 20 parts of the body categorized [e.g. the abdomen]?

A. The body is consisted into three parts – the brainium, the borax and the abdominal cavity. The brainium contains the brain, the borax contains the heart and lungs, and the abdominal cavity contains the five bowels: A,E,I,O,U.

Q. What is the fibula?

A. A small lie.

Q. What does "varicose" mean?

A. Nearby.

Q. What is the most common form of birth control?

A. Most people prevent contraception by wearing a condominium.

Q. Give the meaning of the term "Caesarean section."

A. The caesarean section is a district in Rome.

Q. What is a seizure?

A. A Roman Emperor.

Q. What is a terminal illness?

A. When you are sick at the airport.

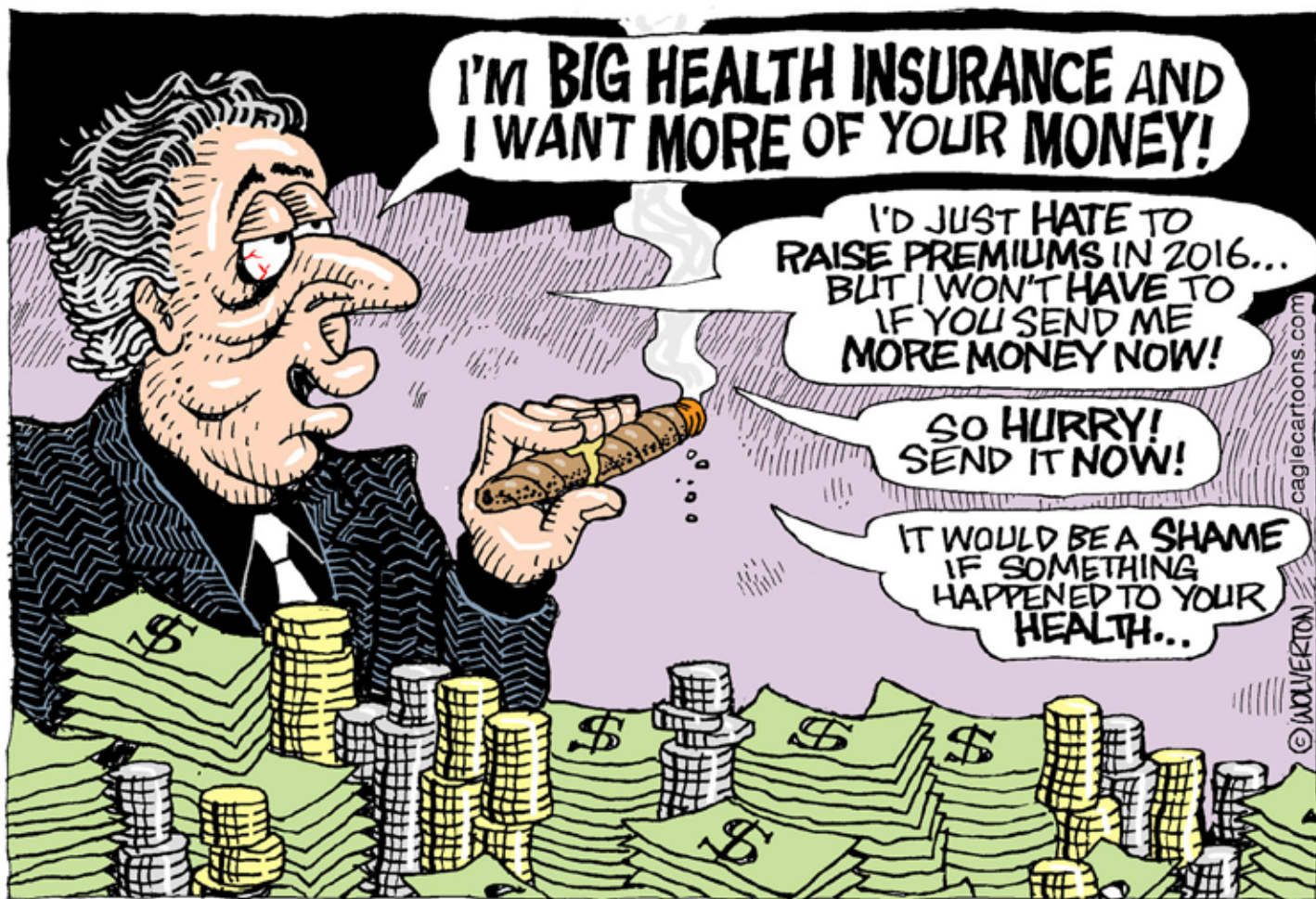
Q. What does the word "benign" mean?

A. Benign is what you will be after you be eight.

Q. What is a turbine?

A. Something an Arab or Sheik wears on his head.





# *Medicare Isn't The Problem – It's The Solution*

BY ROBERT B. REICH

**M**edicare turned 50 last month. It was signed into law July 30, 1965 – the crowning achievement of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. It's more popular than ever.

Yet Medicare continues to be blamed for America's present and future budget problems. That's baloney.

Recently Jeb Bush even suggested phasing it out. Seniors already receiving benefits should continue to receive them, he said, but "we need to figure out a way to phase out this program for others and move to a new system that allows them to have something, because they're not going to have anything."

Bush praised Rep. Paul Ryan's plan to give seniors vouchers instead. What Bush didn't say was that Ryan's vouchers wouldn't keep up with increases in medical costs – leaving seniors with less coverage.

The fact is, Medicare isn't the problem. It's the solution.

Its costs are being pushed upward by the rising costs of health care overall – which have slowed somewhat since the Affordable Care Act was introduced but are still rising faster than inflation.

Medicare costs are also rising because of the growing ranks of boomers becoming eligible for Medicare.

Medicare offers a way to reduce these underlying costs – if Washington would let it.

Let me explain.

Americans spend more on health care per person than any other advanced nation and get less for our money. Yearly public and private healthcare spending is almost two and a half times the average of other advanced nations.

Yet the typical American lives 78.1 years – less than the average 80.1 years in other advanced nations. And we have the highest rate of infant mortality of all advanced nations.

Medical costs continue to rise because doctors and hospitals still spend too much money on unnecessary tests, drugs, and procedures.

Consider lower back pain, one of the most common ailments of our sedentary society. Almost 95% of it can be relieved through physical therapy.

But doctors and hospitals often do expensive MRI's, and then refer patients to orthopedic surgeons for costly surgery. Why? Physical therapy doesn't generate much revenue.

Or say your diabetes, asthma, or heart condition is acting up. If you seek treatment in a hospital, 20% of the time you're back within a month.

It would be far less costly if a nurse visited you at home to make sure you were taking your medications, a common practice in other advanced nations. But nurses don't do home visits to Americans with acute conditions because hospitals aren't paid for them.

America spends over \$19 billion a year fixing medical errors, the worst rate among advanced countries. Such errors are the third major cause of hospital deaths.

are in the range of 3%.

That's well below the 5% to 10% costs borne by large companies that self-insure. It's even further below the administrative costs of companies in the small-group market [amounting to 25% to 27% of premiums].

And it's way, way lower than the administrative costs of individual insurance [40%]. It's even far below the 11% costs of private plans under Medicare Advantage, the current private-insurance option under Medicare.

Meanwhile, as for-profit insurance companies merge into giant behemoths that reduce consumer choice still further, it's doubly important to make Medicare available to all.

Medicare should also be allowed to use its huge bargaining leverage to negotiate lower rates with pharmaceutical companies – which ObamaCare barred in order to get Big Insurance to go along with the legislation.

These moves would give more Americans quality health care, slow rising healthcare costs, help reduce federal budget deficit, and keep Medicare going.

Cutting back Medicare won't affect any of this. It will just funnel more money into the hands of for-profit insurers while limiting the amount of care seniors receive

The answer isn't to shrink Medicare. It's to grow it – allowing anyone at any age to join.

One big reason is we keep patient records on computers that can't share the data. Patient records are continuously re-written and then re-entered into different computers. That leads to lots of mistakes.

Meanwhile, administrative costs account for 15% to 30% of all health care spending in the United States, twice the rate of most other advanced nations.

Most of this is to collect money: Doctors collecting from hospitals and insurers, hospitals collecting from insurers, insurers collecting from companies or policyholders. A third of nursing hours are devoted to documenting what's done so that insurers have proof.

Cutting back Medicare won't affect any of this. It will just funnel more money into the hands of for-profit insurers while limiting the amount of care seniors receive.

The answer isn't to shrink Medicare. It's to grow it – allowing anyone at any age to join.

Medicare's administrative costs

Let me say it again: Medicare isn't the problem. It's the solution.

*Robert B. Reich is Chancellor's Professor of Public Policy at the University of California-Berkeley and senior fellow at the Blum Center for Developing Economies. Secretary of Labor in the Clinton Administration, Reich is author of 13 books, including the best sellers Aftershock and The Work of Nations. He is also a founding editor of the American Prospect magazine and chairman of Common Cause.*

### **Oklahoma Friends Meetings (Quakers)**

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

- Author unknown

#### **MEETING FOR WORSHIP SCHEDULE AND CONTACTS**

**OKLAHOMA CITY:** 333 SE 46th St, 73129. Worship Sunday evening at 7pm. FMI 405.632.7574) <http://www.rsaf-okc.com>

**STILLWATER:** Sunday morning. Call 405.372.4839

**TULSA:** Sunday afternoon. Call 918.743.6827

**NORMAN:** Sunday morning. Call 405.321.7971

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



## *This Bud's For You!*

**E**arlier this year, music legends Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard teamed up to make a pro-marijuana video titled *It's All Going to Pot*.

And, apparently they were right, for I've now learned that even the state fair is going to pot – literally.

A press release from the organizers of the DC State Fair exclaims: “It’s true! For the first time ever, we’re hosting a new contest for local cannabis growers to show off their plants’ finest buds.”

They’re not just blowing smoke, for it turns out that Washington, DC, voters passed a referendum in November to legalize marijuana – even to allow locals to grow up to six plants at their residences.

With the nationwide renaissance in urban agriculture, why not invite the proud cultivators of the happy weed to show off the finest produce from their pot plots? After all, state fairs already have contests for the best ice cream, pickles, homebrew, compost, flower arrangements, crafts and such – so it’s not a stretch to see who can win the Marijuana Bud Blue Ribbon.

The buds are to be judged on characteristics such as appearance, smell and stickiness, but not such consumer-satisfaction qualities as “duration of high” or “development of mellowness.” In fact, contrary to the judging of the Tastiest Tomato category, the entry form for the Best Bud Contest specifies rather sternly that judges “will not sample or consume your submission.”

That’s probably smart, since the whole panel of judges could dissolve into uncontrollable giggles halfway through the sampling.

From the demonization of marijuana to legalization and now to celebration – it’s a trajectory of progress that reflects some mellowing in society itself. As the DC State Fair people put it, “Now that it’s legal, we wanted a way to highlight this new freedom while also showing off the agricultural talents of the District’s people.”

And with marijuana prohibition finally ending in states and cities across the land – including full legal-

ization and/or commercialization not just in Washington, DC, but also Alaska, Colorado, Washington state and Oregon – who better than our friend Willie Nelson to lead the way for weed quality and social responsibility?

The iconic musician and intrepid fighter for justice has announced that he will market his own marijuana brand, “Willie’s Reserve,” and open a group of stores selling top-quality pot and paraphernalia.

“I feel like I was buying so much of it, it’s time to start selling it back!” Willie excitedly said of his new weed venture. “I am looking forward to working with the best growers in Colorado and Washington to make sure our product is the best on the market.”

A tireless champion of small farmers, civil liberties, the environment, common sense and the common good, he plans to start rolling out his stores and products [including hemp goods] this year, and he’ll expand further as states’ laws allow.

In the typical Willie way, the stores will be “the anti-Walmart model,” with a core purpose of helping expand the market for small, energy-efficient, environmentally sound growers.

Over the years I have cited Willie’s work in calling for legalization and restoration of hemp farming in America. I’ve also called repeatedly for an end to the Orwellian, Kafkaesque drug war that has criminalized the cannabis equivalent of cocktail hour – 750,000 people are arrested each year for marijuana-related offenses.

And now, I salute the innumerable grassroots activists who’ve steadily pushed America from the darkness of marijuana madness to being able to light up a “Willie” without getting busted!

So to Willie, Merle, the DC State Fair and all the longtime champions of this struggle for normality, “This bud’s for you!”

Find out more about marijuana legalization at the Marijuana Policy Project [mpp.org] and the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws [norml.org].

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# *The Growing Rebellion Against Big Money's Political Game*

**I**f you are one of those cynics who think that none of today's presidential candidates for the White House care about people like you and me, check out Republican wannabe Scott Walker.

The Wisconsin governor, who is presently a full-time campaigner for the GOP presidential nod, not only cares, he wants to sit down with you, get your ideas and stay in close touch. No matter who you are, Scottie wants you to join his team, so his presidency can be *your* presidency! Not a Republican? No problemo, amigo. Walker doesn't check your papers. Well ... except for that million-dollar check you have to write to his Super PAC.

That's the ticket price for entering Walker's inner circle, where you can discuss all of your policy concerns and seek personal favors – straight from your lips to the candidate's ear! Even if you're a common working stiff, just give a million dollars, and you're in, baby! Is this a great country, or what?

Maybe you're wondering what, specifically, your million dollars buy. Well, Scott's Super PAC even prints out a handy purchasing slip showing that you'll get to be an "Executive Board Member" of the Walkerites' campaign. Thus, you'll have two private dinners with The Man, a Walker staffer dedicated to your needs, special briefings, weekly emails, bimonthly conference calls, bi-annual retreats, and – best of all – an "Exclusive Executive Board Pin."

Golly, I haven't been this excited or felt so included since the 1950s, when I became a member of "The Mickey Mouse Club" and got my own set of mouse ears.

When the Supreme Court descended into the *Alice in Wonderland*-like fantasy that corporations are people and money is speech, it was inevitable that American politics would devolve into a frivolous game that shuts out the workaday majority and enthrones a Koch-brothers plutocracy sustained by secret-money Super PACs and whorish candidates such as Walker.

I think we can all agree that news stories like this that highlight the ever-rising flood of big money in politics do not tend to have a lot of laughs in them.

But a recent item from The New York Times unintentionally got a good guffaw from me. It was a seriously serious piece about how Karl Rove's Super PAC of corporate political cash has been surpassed both in cash and clout by the billion-dollar electioneering network of the Koch Brothers. The reporter stated that the Kochs have "leapfrogged" Rove.

There is nothing factually funny in that, but the image of the multibillionaire brothers, Charles and David, laughing and leaping over a bent-over, frog-like

Karl Rove is the delightfully ridiculous stuff of slapstick.

In fact, today's whole political game, run by an absurdist's nightmare of moneyed elites, is ridiculous – a game in which corporations are people and money is magically empowered to speak; candidates trek to the corporate suites and secret retreats of the rich, shamelessly selling their political souls; super-wealthy interests clandestinely pump unlimited sums of money into disgustingly negative campaign ads that turn off most voters; candidates "win" with only a small minority of the electorate choosing them; winners then claim to have a democratic mandate to enact the plutocratic agenda.

This could be hilarious in a slapstick routine, but it is tragic in a country with democratic aspirations. But don't despair, for a backlash is building all across the country among voters who are fed up with the money-rigged game that excludes them.

One group called the New Hampshire Rebellion is bird-dogging presidential candidates in that state to demand action to get Big Money out of politics. To help start your own rebellion to end this corrupt mockery of our electoral democracy, you can get a free online toolkit from these modern-day Paul Reveres by going to [www.nhrebellion.org](http://www.nhrebellion.org). – *Jim Hightower*

## *The Venality Of Campaign '16*

**A**lready, results of the first election of the 2016 presidential race are in!

It's the Money Primary, controlled not by voters, but by super-wealthy donors. In this exclusive election, Jeb is way out front of the GOP pack with a record haul of \$100 million, while Hillary has bagged \$45 million to lead among the Dems.

But wait ... here come the Koch Brothers from out of nowhere, overwhelming all the other campaigns with nearly a billion dollars for their secretive effort to put the presidency under their private control.

Thanks to the absurd Citizens United decision by the Supreme Court's corporate minions, running for America's highest office in our democratic republic has been perverted into the venality of a gold rush. Candidates shamelessly grub for cash in the suites of corporate plutocrats, molding their issues, policy



proposals and the election debate to fit around the narrow interests of those moneyed elites.

The handful of donors and political sycophants involved in this obscene, open corruption of the system are blithely playing with dynamite.

By using money to shove the vast majority of people out of the democratic process, they're mocking America's essential egalitarian ideal that we're all in this together; destroying their own moral legitimacy; and fueling an explosive fury, aimed right at them, among alienated voters.

In a recent nationwide poll, 84% of Americans say that money has too much influence in elections, resulting in those who are elected to push policies that favor the donors. The majority also rejects the Supreme Court's coddling of fat cat donors, with three-fourths of the people wanting limits on how much any donor can give and wanting to make "dark money" front groups publicly reveal the sources of their money.

Of course, the aloof political-money class won't stop their own corruption, but We the People can – and must.

Our voices are drowned out by the political-money elites and Republican politicians who say that taking unlimited sums of campaign cash from corporations and billionaires is the American way, absurdly claiming that money is "free" speech. Democrats disagree, but say they can't unilaterally disarm, so they join the ever-escalating arms race for fat-cat money.

Is politics of-by-and-for moneyed interests the only way – i.e., is democracy doomed?

Not if you run a campaign for a candidate of real

substance, offering ideas that actually appeal to workaday people, getting them excited enough to become involved in the grassroots work of democracy – including putting in small bits of their own money.

"That's populist poppycock," squawk the political pros and fundraising consultants, "impossible in the real world."

Well, welcome to Bernie's world. Bernie Sanders, the unabashedly progressive senator from Vermont, is running an all-out people's campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination. He's proposing a genuinely bold agenda for change, summing it up as "the revolution we need to rebuild our middle class, reclaim our democracy, and save our planet."

To the shock of the political know-it-alls who had dismissed him as a non-contender, Sanders is catching on big time. With straight talk and rejection of politics as usual, he's drawing huge crowds, generating a groundswell of enthusiasm that other candidates can only dream about, and moving up in the polls as more people learn about him.

Even more shocking to the cognoscenti, Bernie's supporters are chipping in serious money into his campaign pot – more than \$15 million in only three months.

More impressive than the amount, Sanders notes, "We did it the right way." No billionaires, Super PACs or dark money. Instead, more than 99% of his funding is coming from people giving under \$250. Indeed, the average donation is just \$33.

For information on this unique, unincorporated presidential campaign, go to [www.berniesanders.com](http://www.berniesanders.com). – *Jim Hightower*

# *Issues Unknown To The Founders*

BY HAROLD V. SARE

## *Last In A Series*

**B**ecause of the increasing complexity of technology and in the makeup of our population, we have many issues to be concerned about as we anticipate the future.

Years ago it took considerable time for information to reach the people. Today something that happens is instantly communicated and the populous, if interested, has the information almost instantly.

The Internet, telephone, radio or television or word-of-mouth enables instant communication. Instant messaging also enables quick mobilization of opinion and political organization, and it can generate violence, fraud, or invasion of civil rights.

Civil rights are challenged by a need for secrecy required to provide security. Secrecy in government by its very nature can threaten the constitutional rights of individuals and organizations that are supposed to be protected under the Constitution.

Essential safeguards are critical to protect basic

human rights.

Those safeguards under a constitutional system are extremely difficult to assure to a public. Revelations that the National Security Administration was collecting and storing telephone numbers caused great concern among both Democrats and Republicans.

Yet, to provide protection of the public against foreign terrorists, the U.S. government cannot operate in the total light of day. Protection against criminal violations also requires a measure of secrecy.

We are faced with the necessity of trusting congressional, executive and judicial oversight. Civil rights groups also will play a critical role, but there will be continuous tension because of the need for secrecy.

The problem of secret government behavior clearly will be a continuous problem as additional technological changes speed up the efficiency of secret communications.

Also, we must adjust our constitutional order to a population that is more heterogeneous, and will con-

tinue to become even more so as the years pass.

We have a large African-American population because of our history of slavery. This population has been difficult to integrate into our society on a basis of equality, as has been noted in other parts of this series of articles.

Indians were here, of course, when whites showed up. They were pushed around and congregated in places like Oklahoma. While they enjoy a number of benefits, they are a community that has not been fully integrated.

Yet, like the African-American population, they should enjoy equal benefits of the Constitution.

In our expansion to the West we encountered Hispanic populations, and immigration has brought many to our country because of work opportunities. They do not fully enjoy the equal rights provided under the Constitution.

As with other minorities, such as Asians, we still have problems of guaranteeing equal rights to minorities.

Clearly, these populations are increasing in numbers relative to the white population, voting patterns are changing, and tensions are increasing over voting regulations.

States are controlled by political groups that are attempting to find ways to limit voting of minorities and poorer populations. These activities constitute major challenges to our constitutional system.

Changes in population cannot be controlled easily in a large and complex society; we must adjust and make every attempt to assure equal rights and opportunities for all.

In addition, the complexity of our economy has structurally changed the distribution of income, which increases the income dramatically for the top 5%, but leaves the majority of the middle class in a deteriorating economic plight. Michigan lost 43,600 jobs when car manufacturers moved to Mexico, and they lost another 80,000 jobs to China.

Technology and opportunities in the international economy have brought about changes that negatively impacted employment in our general workforce.

Unemployment, reduced work hours, and unchanging wages have affected the opportunities of the middle working classes. However, the higher levels of management and the wealthier classes have prospered.

Economist Joseph Stiglitz writes that income for the worker has been stagnated for 40 years. The average CEO's salary, in a recent study, was found to be \$12.3 million, while the average worker's salary was \$34,645 per year. Twenty-five percent of our children live in poverty.

This disparity is damaging to the middle class, which is the foundation of the U.S. political order. Stiglitz found in his studies that the average person in the U.S. has less equality of opportunity than those living in all other major economies of the world.

Business and economics professor Luigi Zingales

at the University of Chicago stated that " ... when voters lose faith in equality of opportunity, they turn against free markets."

Income distortion has a negative impact on the economy. If the masses of people do not have the resources to buy products from the business community, this lack of adequate income can contribute, among other conditions, to recession or even depression.

The U.S. has been fortunate that our situation has not gotten more extreme. The European economy, at least for some countries, has provided an example of what can happen. This risk is especially great if very austere economic policies, advocated by many conservatives, are followed.

The problem of income distortion has to be addressed. An effective constitutional government is required to respond to complex economic problems. Even strong private enterprise advocates such as Austrian economist Friedrich Von Hayek noted in *The Road to Serfdom* that governments can and probably should pursue policies that moderate unemployment and income distortion. He wrote that "some minimum of food, shelter and clothing ... can be assured to everybody." Hayek was not willing to go as far as John Maynard Keynes with such policies, however.

If we do not rationally adjust our system to resolve these problems, we will weaken our whole constitutional democracy and experience political disorders that will prevent us from being the greatest nation on earth.

We have great potential! Let's be pragmatic and realistic and bring about greater balance in our private enterprise system and realize its great benefits. Let's recognize the follies of "absolutist" ideologies!

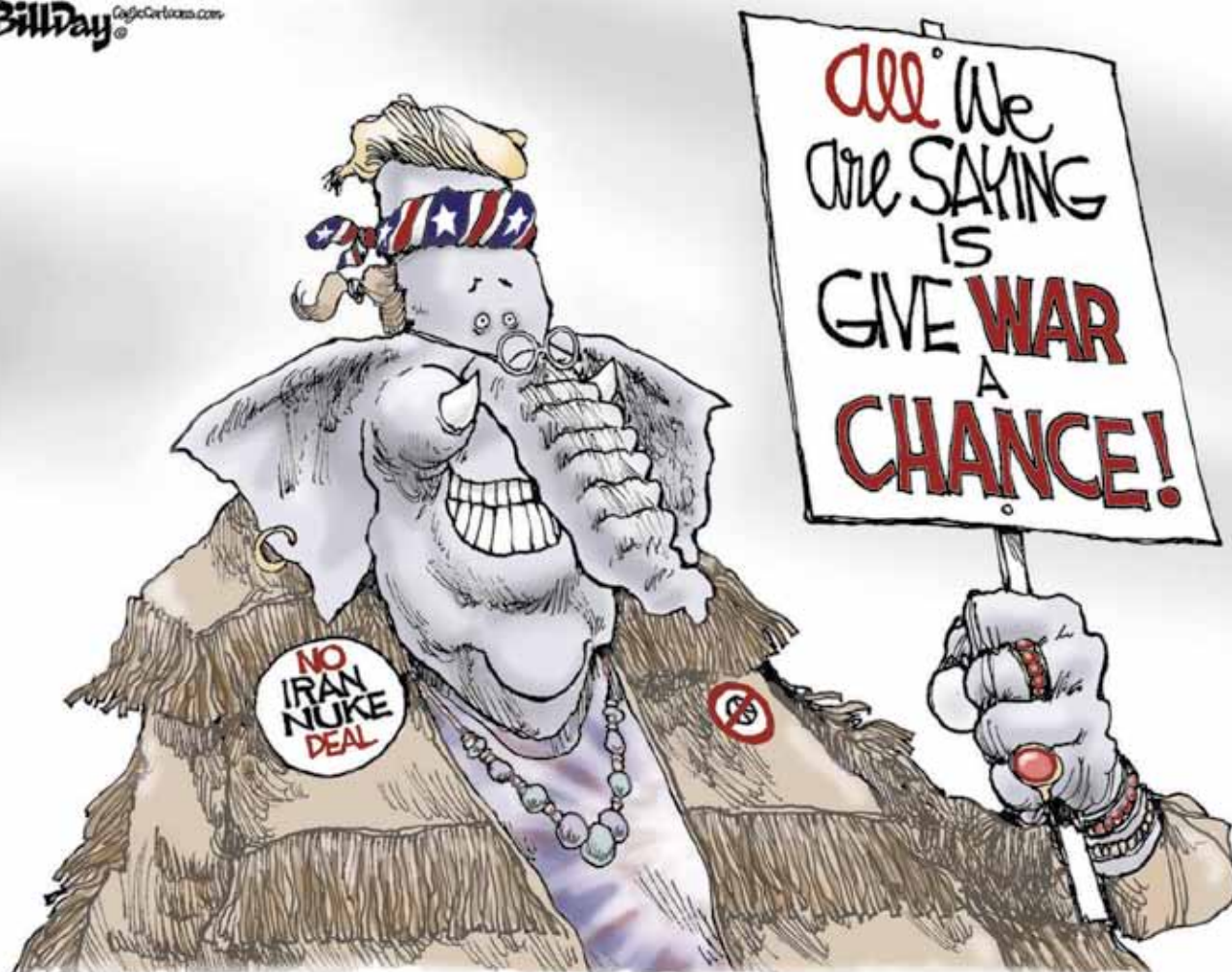
Our Founding Fathers demonstrated for us a practical approach to governing; and they gave us the foundations of a workable political order.

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



**Help keep the truth alive! Make checks payable to the Oklahoma Observer Democracy Foundation, PO Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113.**

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## *GOP Squawking Over Iran Deal Ignores Reagan's Perfidy*

BY JUAN COLE

**T**he Reagan Administration in the 1980s was buffeted by two policy drives toward Iran. On the one hand, Reagan ally Saudi Arabia supported Iraq, which illegally launched a war on the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1980 in order to steal its oil-rich Khuzistan Province. Reagan in 1983 sent Donald Rumsfeld, then CEO of Searle pharmaceuticals, to make friends with Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

From the other side, a section of the Israeli security establishment wanted Reagan to side with Iran against Iraq and to provide Iran weaponry. Before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran had been a major supplier of petroleum to Israel, which was boycotted by the Arab League [Iran is not an Arab country]. Israel

feared Iraq more than it did non-Arab Iran in that decade.

After the 1979 revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini began denouncing Israel and saying he hoped it would vanish from the arena of time. But Iran was at war with Iraq and had mainly American weapons systems, for which it needed spare parts.

The U.S. was boycotting Iran, but Israel had reverse-engineered U.S. spare parts and was manufacturing them, and was happy to trade them to Iran in return for petroleum. The Ayatollahs quietly made the deal, since without spare parts their tanks and armored vehicles and F-14s were so much junk.

While these two points of view were duking it out in Washington, Reagan had two other problems in the

1980s. One was that the Israelis militarily occupied southern Lebanon from 1982. This occupation gradually angered the Lebanese Shiite Muslims who predominate in the south and east of the country and in the urban district of east Beirut. They formed radical guerrilla groups to fight the occupation.

As part of this pushback against Israeli grabbiness, the radical Shiites began taking Americans in Beirut captive. The captured Americans came on U.S. screens in video clips, begging for their lives.

**T**he other problem was that Reagan wanted to roll back leftist movements in Nicaragua and El Salvador. In Nicaragua the Sandinista leftists came to power.

Reagan wanted to support rightwing death squads known as contras. In 1982, however, the Congress enacted the Boland Amendment, which forbade Reagan to spend U.S. government money on rightwing militias in Central America.

Reagan and the people around him, possibly including George H.W. Bush, the vice president, came up with a clever but completely illegal and unconstitutional joint solution to all these problems.

Reagan offered Iraq some naval and other support in its war on Iran, and ran interference for Baghdad at the UN Security Council when there was a danger that the UNSC might condemn Iraq for using chemical weapons on Iranian troops at the front.

At the same time, to prolong the war and make sure no regional power obtained an absolute victory, Reagan shared satellite photos of Iraqi positions with Iran.

On the advice of Israeli official David Kimche, he sent his national security adviser Bud McFarlane to try to establish relations with Khomeini and with then-Speaker of Parliament Akbar Rafsanjani. McFarlane brought a Bible and a cake in the shape of a key to symbolize Reagan's hope of opening Iran.

Then Reagan had his people steal hundreds of T.O.W. anti-tank missiles from the Pentagon warehouses and illegally ship them to Khomeini's Iran, then on the U.S. terrorist watch-list.

**L**et me just underline this. Reagan was prevented by law from selling U.S. weaponry to Iran, and certainly without notifying Congress under the Arms Export Act. There was no aboveboard, legitimate way to do this. So he just had his people pilfer expensive weaponry and ship it to Iran. A notorious Israeli arms dealer was the intermediary.

Note, too, just for the annals of perfidy, that Reagan was at the same time militarily supporting Iraq, and had told Baghdad they were his allies.

Reagan, being a fiscal conservative, made Khomeini pay for the weaponry. Reagan then put that money in secret Swiss bank accounts and gradually sent it to the Nicaragua right wing death squads. That was how he got around the Boland Amendment. He didn't use U.S. government money for this purpose. It was Khomeini's money.

In return for the American weapons, Iran agreed to pressure the Lebanese Shiites to let U.S. hostages go, solving a PR problem for the U.S. Republican Party.

This complicated set of unconstitutional dealings came out in 1986. Reagan denied knowing or remembering much about it. At the time I thought he was lying, but we now know he had Alzheimers. Maybe he really didn't remember it all and it was mainly the work of those around him.

George H.W. Bush skated. A few lower level officials like Oliver North were hung out to dry. North was later given his own television show on Fox by Rupert Murdoch as a reward, I suppose, for arming Khomeini.

Eliot Abrams, who was involved in Iran-Contra, was castigated by Congress for lying to it. Years later W. put him in the National Security Council, where he torpedoed U.S. policy in support of a Palestinian state. He should be in jail.

A lot of documents for the scandal are available at the National Security Archive at George Washington University.

**T**he Democrats decided it would be bad politics to impeach Reagan over having shredded the Constitution into confetti. They were rewarded by the Republicans less than a decade later with the Clinton impeachment, over matters of rather less moment than Reagan had been guilty of.

Ever after, we have had to hear Republicans preach to us how great Reagan, one of the most criminal presidents to hold office, was.

The deal reached by President Obama and the rest of the permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany in Vienna appears to remove after five years a conventional arms embargo imposed on Iran in 2007.

We will hear a lot of squawking from Reagan-worshipping Republicans about this provision. We won't hear that Reagan illegally sold Khomeini weapons. Wouldn't that be worse than negotiating a legal end to an international arms embargo?

There was never any accountability for the constitutional coup conducted by Reagan and his people. Most continued to be powerful in Washington. In the period 2003-08 when non-political appointees in the U.S. government in Washington or think tanks wanted to bring me in for my expertise and advice on how to get out of the al-Qaeda and Iraq messes, Bob McFarlane and Eliot Abrams had me blackballed where they could.

So, we may conclude that Reagan tried to open Iran, but did it all wrong, not to mention unconstitutionally. President Obama will get credit for that opening in history. And ignoramuses on the Hill will shout at him that he should be more like Reagan.

*Juan Ricardo Cole, a public intellectual and essayist, is the Richard P. Mitchell Collegiate Professor of History at the University of Michigan. His blog, Informed Comment, can be found at [www.juancole.com](http://www.juancole.com).*



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# SUPREME DISCORD

## *Latest Term Revives Image Of 'Nine Scorpions In A Bottle'*

BY DANNY M. ADKISON

One would think there wouldn't be a better place to watch fireworks in July than Washington, DC. Yet, the one comment I clearly overheard among the crowd of people gathered onto the rooftop of the Georgetown apartment complex with a clear view of the Washington Monument was that the fireworks just were not that impressive.

I don't know about others, but I was very impressed. Not so much at what I saw from the rooftop, but from the Supreme Court building. That's where the real fireworks were.

It is well known that just before Chief Justice Rehnquist retired from the court the members of the court were acting, as one famous scholar of the court described it, like nine scorpions in a bottle. Scorpions or fireworks, you can pick your favorite simile. The point is the justices of the Roberts Court apparently don't get along any better than those of the Rehnquist Court. In fact, the final decisions issued by the Roberts Court indicate perhaps a new low.

The three most watched cases dealt with ObamaCare, same-sex marriage, and the lethal cocktail used in executions. If you had been in the court on each of the three different days these cases were handed down you would have witnessed some "ohhhs" and "ahhhs." In fact, the retort from some might have caused you to literally jump from your seat.



Let's start with ObamaCare. Or is it ScotusCare? If that sounds sarcastic, don't blame me. I got it from Justice Scalia. The court first ruled on this law in 2012. It kept the law alive then by ruling that a "mandate" was a "tax" and when it comes to taxes the Constitution authorizes Congress to do just about anything. Surprisingly, that is what Chief Justice Roberts ruled.

This time around the chief justice also voted with the majority and ended up again writing the majority opinion, but the chief showed an assertiveness this time that his fellow conservatives didn't appreciate.

Not only did Justice Scalia sarcastically refer to ObamaCare as ScotusCare in his dissent, he read it from the bench right in front of his boss [who had just read the majority opinion]. This caused the New York Times to conclude that the case had caused "bitter disagreement" among the nine justices.

Justice Scalia's sarcasm didn't stop there. He described the majority opinion [again, written by his fellow conservative and chief of the court] as "quite absurd."

While Chief Justice Roberts admitted that the law was poorly written and thus was in need of creative interpretation [if the goals of the law were to be met], Scalia wasn't in a forgiving mood. He called the majority's interpretation of the law "jiggery-pokery." That's Scalia's way of saying the majority was engaged in

dishonest jurisprudence.

On the other hand, the chief did pick up a vote. Justice Kennedy had joined with three other justices in 2012 in voting to declare the entire law unconstitutional. This time he voted with the majority, resulting in a 6-3 vote.

The fireworks didn't stop with *ObamaCare*. The court split 5-4 in upholding lethal injection in the case from Oklahoma. This was also the second time the court had ruled on whether lethal injection [as practiced by some states] violated the "cruel and unusual punishment clause" of the Eighth Amendment.

Justice Scalia was again in attack mode, but this time from the winning side. He attacked the dissenting justices. In all, four justices explained their views in open court, a rare event. The *Washington Post* described the scene as a sign of the vehemence in their disagreements and an expression of raw nerves.

Raw indeed. Scalia described Justice Breyer's dissent as full of contradictions and gobbledy-gook. I think that's called not being jiggery-pokery with your legal punches.

This would be enough legal fireworks for an entire term for most courts, but Justice Scalia wasn't finished: "By arrogating to himself the power to overturn [the Framers' decision], Justice Breyer does not

just reject the death penalty, he rejects the Enlightenment."

The big finish came with the same-sex marriage case. Chief Justice Roberts did something he had never done since joining the Court in 2005; he read his dissent in open court. Perhaps knowing the decision was coming close to the Fourth of July celebration, he used the word "celebrate" five times in his opening paragraph.

Yet, he closed by saying the one thing you couldn't celebrate, based on the court's decision, was the Constitution. Justice Scalia, perhaps not wanting to be outdone by the chief, described the court's decision as a "threat to American democracy."

In fact, Justice Scalia began his criticism by pouncing on the very first sentence in the majority opinion [written by Justice Kennedy]. He saw fit to point out that he would never write a sentence like that, and if he ever agreed to such a comment [say, for political reasons] he would have to hide his head in a bag. No kidding.

The fireworks were good under Chief Justice Rehnquist, but they are even better under Chief Justice Roberts.

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

## *Not So Capital As All That*

BY HARRY T. COOK

**D**zhokhar Tsarnaev, the surviving Boston Marathon bomber, has been sentenced to death, though now his lawyers have asked for a new trial. There is little doubt that the accused Charleston, SC, shooter will be likewise sentenced. The youth who turned a Colorado theater into an abattoir now stands convicted of serial murders with the probability of capital punishment in his future.

Not only will those sentences be appealed, but also eventual executions protested before, during and after their carrying out.

I would be among the protestors if age and illness did not prohibit my presence. I would stand outside a prison wall carrying a placard with a message saying that the execution about to be accomplished would not be carried out in my name.

I am fortunate to live in a state [Michigan] in which there is no constitutional provision for capital punishment, though from time to time lobbies have pushed for a referendum to institute it. Not since Michigan became a state of the Union in 1837 has anyone been executed under its statutes.

The same cannot be said, say, for Oklahoma, where, just as this paragraph was under construction, the use of a questionable and not always effective sedative to keep the state's executions from falling under

the Eighth Amendment's prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment nevertheless was allowed by a five-justice Supreme Court majority.

In dissent, Mr. Justice Breyer asked more broadly "whether the death penalty violates the Constitution." Two of his predecessors on the high court seemed to have thought so.

The late justices William J. Brennan and Harry Blackmun at different times reached the conclusion that capital punishment was an ethical and jurisprudential morass.

Said Brennan: "I feel morally and intellectually obligated to concede that the death penalty experiment has failed." Said Blackmun: "I don't get any damned pleasure out of the death penalty, and I never have. And, frankly, if it were abolished tomorrow, I'd go get drunk in celebration." Since their time, the ranks of such jurists on the court have thinned to a minority on this and many issues.

Justices Scalia, Thomas, Alito and Kennedy and Chief Justice John Roberts are more likely to defer to states' rights in the matter of whether to kill or not to kill in the name of The People. A Louisiana prosecutor came straight to the point, saying recently that "we need to kill more people."

What is there about capital punishment that drives

CONTINUED ON PAGE 47

## *Melding Fundamentalism, Politics Was Anti-New Deal Strategy*

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### ONE NATION UNDER GOD

*How Corporate America Invented Christian America*

By Kevin M. Krause

*Basic Books*

384 pages, \$29.99

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BY JOHN WOOD

**D**id you ever wonder why “One Nation Under God” is in our pledge of allegiance? I did.

Or, when I was taught that *E Pluribus Unum* was our national motto and yet “In God We Trust” was on our money and instead many referred to it as our national motto?

Or, that we pray before city council meetings? Where did the National Day of Prayer come from? Have we always had one? On Facebook recently our U.S. senator, James Lankford, posts pictures about his experience at the 10th Annual Oklahoma Prayer Breakfast in Washington, DC, where he says, “your Oklahoma Congressional delegation prayed for you and our state leaders.”

I had heard stories that President Reagan changed everything, and others actually say these aforementioned references to the almighty were from our Founding Fathers in the 1780s, as American as apple pie and baseball.

Kruse’s fascinating book *One Nation Under God* changes that perception for me. He traces these many public references to God back to President Eisenhower. It is under Eisenhower, Kruse says, “the state no longer seemed ‘pagan’ ... and liberals could present themselves as acting in accord with God’s will, too.”

Not even two years later, Congress agreed to add “one nation under God” to the Pledge. What’s interesting is that the ACLU was too busy for this assumed-battle to defend separation of church and state to even object. How strange.

It was the 1950s, during the anti-Communist era of the Cold War, that these changes took hold.

But the story actually goes back before Eisenhower, who was backed by evangelist Billy Graham and the first presidential candidate to effectively fuse religion and politics in a power combination that we still see today as evidenced by much of the 2016 GOP presidential campaign field, especially with Ted Cruz, Ben Carson, Mike Huckabee, and Rick Santorum.

However, Eisenhower actually did not start this movement himself. It was in the works for a number of years as a reaction to the New Deal under Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

“Every Christian should oppose the totalitarian trends of the New Deal,” proclaimed James W. Fifield Jr., a Congregationalist pastor from Los Angeles.

Fifield started what he called the Spiritual Mobilization movement, bringing together megachurches and conservative businessmen in the 1930s. In essence, Fifield preached that religion could be a strong weapon against the “evil” of FDR’s wildly popular New Deal, alternatively characterized by the Spiritual Mobilization crowd as a righteous fight against collectivist liberals at home and Communists abroad.

While Kruse doesn’t acknowledge this in this book, this is probably the seed corn of hatred against those darn “liberals.”

Fifield struggled at first, but found preachers like him could carry the mantle. “As men of God, ministers could voice the same conservative complaints as business leaders,” Kruse wrote, “but without any suspicion that they were motivated by self-interest.”

The most interesting part of this book is the advent of this interplay of business and religion called

Christian Libertarianism through Spiritual Mobilization, which didn't seem to gain large-scale momentum until the Eisenhower era.

The most prominent preacher of this movement became Billy Graham, who at one rally in 1951 urged that Americans needed to dedicate themselves to "the rugged individualism that Christ brought" to the world.

The main thrust of Spiritual Mobilization was to recruit to the cause ministers that would actually be spokesmen for big business leaders, such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Sun Oil President J. Howard Pew, General Motors head Alfred Sloan, and the National Association of Manufacturers [NAM].

Within 10 years, Fifield recruited more than 17,000 ministers who would be preaching Christian Libertarian sermons. These sermons were also in competition for cash prizes to spread the gospel that the New Deal is fundamentally evil with the answer to ally with the real American heroes – the "rugged individualists" – to defend what they called "the American way of life."

I think it interesting that Spiritual Mobilization is essentially aligned with what we call today's Prosperity Gospel, which is the doctrine that financial blessing is the will of God for Christians, and is connected to an Oklahoma luminary, the evangelical Oral Roberts.

In *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity*, Simon Coleman writes that the Pentecostal movement is considered the start of this religious philosophy that if your faith is strong enough, you'll gain financially.

Interestingly, this took hold in the U.S. in the 1940s and Oral Roberts himself started preaching this doctrine in 1947. He proclaimed that the laws of faith are a "blessing pact" where God would return donations "seven fold," promising his donors that God would provide back to them when they give him in donations.

Sound familiar, Joel Osteen? How about you, Jim Bakker? But Kruse fails to make this connec-

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tion.

For example, Kruse could also have made a connection to the megachurch, Life Church, with its origins in Oklahoma. Coleman found that the Swedish Word of Life Church members sensed that

they were a part of an intricate gift-exchange system, where one gives to God and in return awaits a gift from God or a fellow church member. The Life Church's website says that it is from the Evangelical Covenant Church [ECC] originally



founded “in 1885 by Swedish immigrants.” Anyway, I think this connection between the Christian Libertarian movement and the Prosperity Gospel was a lost opportunity for Kruse.

I do think, though, that Kruse’s *One Nation Under God* is a great read and really has a lot to say about the cultural battles over public religiosity during the Cold War.

However, he unfortunately waits until the final chapter to get more involved in Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, as if they were not relevant today.

I wish the author could have developed these themes in greater detail – beyond what a mere chapter could present.

My hope is that Kruse writes a second book to elucidate the 1970s and beyond, as well as connect Christian Libertarianism to politics today where presidents since Eisenhower seem to have to end their speeches with “God Bless” and the U.S. Supreme Court backs sectarian prayer before council meetings.

With pitched battles over the Ten Commandments monument at the Oklahoma Capitol and elsewhere, and fights over the words in our nation’s pledge, cultural clashes are still raging over the separation of church and state.

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

# *First Lady’s Remarkable Journey*

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## **MICHELLE OBAMA: A LIFE**

**By Peter Slevin**

**Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group**

**432 pages, \$27.95**

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### **BY WANDA JO STAPLETON**

**T**his book tells the seemingly impossible story of how a little black girl from Chicago’s largely segregated south side became the First Lady of the United States.

Even more amazing, Michelle Obama was a descendant of slaves. She noted that “my great-great-great grandmother was actually a slave.”

#### **INFLUENCE OF FAMILY**

Michelle’s father, Fraser Robinson, worked for the city’s water plant. He was afflicted with multiple sclerosis but dragged himself out of bed and went to work every day. Fraser thought that he had the greatest kids, Michelle and her brother Craig, that God ever gave anyone.

Michelle and Craig grew up being constantly reminded how smart they were and how successful they could be.

#### **EDUCATION**

Sure enough, Michelle applied to Princeton, where Craig was a junior, and was accepted because of her very long essay detailing her educational background and perhaps because of affirmative action. From there, she went to Harvard Law School.

After graduating from Harvard, Michelle took a job in a corporate law firm, Sidley & Austin, in Chicago. There, she was the adviser for Barack Obama, a Harvard student working at Sidley & Austin for the summer.

Along the way, she married Barack and worked for his election to the state Senate, then for the U.S. Senate. The winning slogan for the U.S. Senate primary election campaign was, “Yes, we can!”

Michelle had veto power in Barack’s 2008 run for president. She finally agreed, but insisted that he stop smoking. He did.

To campaign, Michelle took an unpaid leave of absence from her job in January 2008. She kept her trips as short as possible and tried to make it home each night to be with daughters Malia and Sasha, who were at home with her mother. She spent hours reading briefing books in order to speak fluently about the Iraq War and Earned Income Tax Credit. In fact, she possessed political skills her husband lacked.

When Barack won Iowa, he thanked one person by name: “The love of my life, the rock of the Obama family, and the closer on the campaign trail.”

#### **NUTRITION AND FITNESS**

Once in the White House, Michelle emphasized nutrition and fitness.

For her emphasis on nutrition, she had a White House kitchen garden planted by school children. She noted that millions of disadvantaged kids relied on school meals as their main source of nutrition. So she very publicly promoted healthier school meals.

To emphasize fitness, Michelle promoted a “let’s move” campaign. She danced the Dougie, jumped rope double Dutch, hula-hooped on the White House lawn, and won a push up contest on daytime television with Ellen DeGeneres.

#### **MICHELLE FOR SUPREME COURT**

Finally, Courtland Milloy, a black Washington Post columnist, said: “Enough with broccoli and Brussel sprouts – to say nothing about all the attention

CONTINUED ON PAGE 47

# Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

It's obvious where Ritze is getting his mis-information about Planned Parenthood – from the leading purveyor of rightwing demagoguery, Fox News, and from the anti-abortion fringe that is using the doctored videos to fund-raise and whip up an important GOP voting bloc.

Preaching to his rightwing choir, Ritze said: "It's not enough for Planned Parenthood to be the leading abortion provider in the U.S.; now we are hearing that they are selling aborted baby parts."

"One of the first defenses posed by supporters of Planned Parenthood was that the practice of selling the organs of these aborted babies was legal. Well, my legislation, once drafted, would make it a felony in Oklahoma to sell aborted baby parts."

Ritze, chair of the House Public Health Committee, can rest easy. Democrats – yes, the same party that supports Planned Parenthood and its mission in Oklahoma of providing reproductive health care – have done his work for him.

That should leave Ritze plenty of time to find a privately-owned location where he can display his Ten Commandments monument.

## *Not If, But When*

You have to hand it to state Republican Chairman Randy Brogdon.

He's kept himself and his party in the public spotlight during the dog days of a non-general election year summer – no small feat.

In case you missed the drama, Brogdon's four-month tenure began inauspiciously when he hired as GOP executive director a man who pleaded guilty in 2012 to domestic abuse-related charges.

Fellow Republicans scorched Brogdon, arguing his choice sent a terrible message to voters: that the party is tolerant of, if not indifferent to, violence against women.

Last month, Brogdon shot himself – and his party – in the foot again when the party Facebook page compared food stamp recipients to animals [see page 8 for the full text of the message].

It's clear Brogdon failed to learn an important lesson from the 2012 presidential election: Well-heeled white guys don't fare well when they vilify the poor – the "takers" – and deify the rich – the "makers."

As breathtakingly tone deaf as it was, the post was hardly surprising. Brogdon was elected state GOP chair by a noisy, active fringe that would return America to an era before reproductive freedom, before marriage equality, before separate-but-equal was ruled unconstitutional.

Younger Republicans clearly understand the stakes if their party comes to be regarded by millennials and

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future generations as insular, judgmental and sanctimonious.

Can Republicans afford to gamble Brogdon's faux pas will be a distant memory by November 2016? Or should they ramp up the pressure in hopes of forcing him out?

If past is prologue, a bigger question may be when, not if, Brogdon embarrasses the party again.



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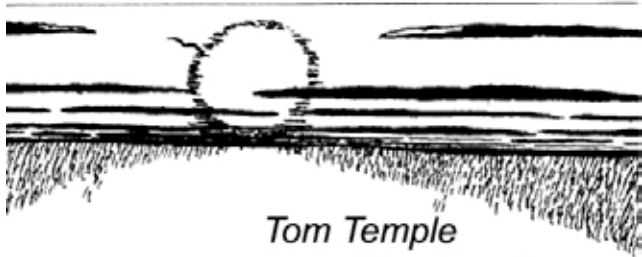
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# Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Oklahoma's public pension system is on solid footing, thanks to four years of fully paying actuarially-required contributions for first time. Treasurer Ken Miller says 72% of OK's pension obligations are paid.

A year after he was victim of a caucus coup, Norman Sen. John Sparks is back as leader of the state Senate's eight Democrats. Lawton's Randy Bass called his surprise July ouster a "lynching."

Good news for those who hope to move Oklahoma's liquor laws into the 21st Century? Anheuser-Busch of Oklahoma pulled its membership from Beer Distributors of Oklahoma after 36 years, part of dispute over proposed sale of cold, full strength beer in convenience stores and groceries.

OKC's homeless population declined an estimated 12% in the last year – including a huge drop in homeless veterans, down 30%, according to city's annual Point-In-Time report.

Democrat Regina Goodwin will represent north Tulsa's House District 73 after winning last month's special election. She succeeds ex-Rep. Kevin Matthews, now serving in the state Senate.

Democrat Cyndi Munson now knows her Republican opponent in Sept. 8's HD 85 special election in north OKC – hard right, OCPA-ex Chip Carter. The winner replaces the late David Dank.

Glacier National Park welcomed its 100 millionth visitor in June, but its future is bleak. Out of 150 glaciers counted in 1900, only 25 remain. By 2030, all are expected to be gone. – Montana magazine

The EPA has agreed to broadly study the herbicide glyphosate, aka Roundup. Its annual use jumped from 10 million pounds in 1993 to more than 300 million pounds now. – High Country News

The Back to School budget includes an average \$81 per child to buy and fill a backpack with supplies.

Yikes! Eighty-three percent of health care workers acknowledged in a recent survey they have showed up to work sick. – Time

Isn't your Christian devil celebrating same-gender





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marriage as much as it celebrates divorce?

Many, but not all, couples marry in a house of worship, but no married couple goes to a church to get divorced – they go to a courthouse.

Why do you not exercise your “deeply held religious beliefs” when divorce papers are filed?

Could it be that you flat-Earthers don’t like happiness, such as a marriage, but you just love to see the frequent pain and despair involved with a divorce?

Why haven’t you exercised your supposed right of refusal based on religious grounds until now?

I realize I’m asking legitimate questions of irrational people who have knee-jerk reactions to reality invading their private fantasies but I enjoy the show of your resistance.

James Nimmo  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

While the Pope’s Encyclical on climate change has ruffled feathers, it is indisputable that sheer human numbers, as well as waste by some, are overwhelming natural systems’ capacity to recover.

Humanity, once able to live off the dividends of earth’s bounty, is now consuming its capital. Satellites reveal that 21 of the earth’s 37 major water aquifers are being depleted.

Nathaniel Batchelder  
Oklahoma City

***Editor’s Note: The author is director of the Peace House in Oklahoma City; [www.PeaceHouseOK.org](http://www.PeaceHouseOK.org).***

Editor, The Observer:

Recently, the state Supreme Court decided that the placement of the Ten Commandments monument on the grounds of the state Capitol was illegal. However, Gov. Mary Fallin has chosen to resist that decision. Other Republican leaders have followed her lead. There has also been a call to remove the enabling language from the state Constitution.

In addition, the Facebook page of the state Republican Party compared those on public assistance to be like dependent animals. Of course, “those people” include the sick, the elderly, the infirm and veterans.

There is genuine hypocrisy involved in the Ten Commandments hype and the Facebook page fiasco.

Why? The Ten Commandments monument is extolled, but how can the Republican Party do that on the one hand and compare the most vulnerable of our citizens to dependent animals on the other?

The Ten Commandments are set in the context of the rebellion of slaves against oppression. The Commandments are a political protest against those who violate the rights of the most vulnerable.

So, the Republican Party affirms those rights in its support of the Ten Commandments monument. But, then, the state party turns around and belittles the most vulnerable of our citizens!

I call that posture hypocritical. Of course, the Republican leadership does not see it that way.

I wonder why?

Jeff Hamilton  
Midwest City

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

Editor, The Observer:

Republicans rallying to retain the flag of the Confederacy would most certainly cause "Old Abe" to hang his head in disbelief.

The Koch Brothers, Sheldon Adelson, et al, presently lead the Republican mission to reassemble an absolute corporate grip on wealth. Imagine the aston-

ishment and shame felt by "Teddy" and Taft if they knew the present-day "malefactors of great wealth" have completely reversed their noble "trust-busting" of the early 20th Century!

Republican Dwight Eisenhower's heart would be broken by the absolute grip the military/industrial complex now holds on his country. He tried to warn us.

Abe, Teddy, Taft and Ike would find it impossible to win a Republican primary in 2016! A reversal of all decent, important Republican Party principles is now complete.

Frank Silovsky  
Oklahoma City

## Capital

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the political and social thirst for its existence and use? Anger, both focused and unfocused, is certainly part of the answer. A combination of fear and the impulse to avenge injury and murder is another.

The urge to kill or to be complicit by consent in the killing of another considered loathsome – and, what's more, to be able to do so or be so under the canopy of the law – seems to be thought of as morally right by a considerable number of Americans. Moreover, certain brands of religion encourage acting on that urge.

Torah's mitzvah "an eye for an eye, a tooth for tooth" [Exodus 21:24] is often taken as divine justification for capital punishment. But as Tevye was made to say in *Fiddler On the Roof*: "That way the whole world will be blind and toothless."

Most prominent denominations in America – among them the Roman Catholic Church, the Episcopal Church, the United Methodist and United Presbyterian Churches – oppose capital punishment on humane grounds. They rely on biblical scholars and historians to deal with the Exodus text and others like it in a "that-was-then-this-is-now" manner.

The more fundamentalist groups whose followers believe that the Bible in its entirety is the literal word of God base their approval of capital punishment on the Exodus text. Some evangelical churches prefer to defer to the deity in the matter of the death penalty, quoting Deuteronomy 32:35 and St. Paul's allusion to it in Romans 12:19 to the effect that vengeance is God's business.

However, since St. Paul is credited at Romans 13:1 saying that "every person should be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God," it is just in the minds of true believers for a government to mete out death sentences in the name of the God who ordained an eye for an eye. See how that works?

The arguments against capital punishment are many and varied, e.g. it is costly in terms of dollars spent on appeals, it tends to brutalize society, it gives

America a bad name among civilized nations and so on.

The most often cited argument in favor of capital punishment is that it serves justice, that it is just to take the life of one who has himself or herself brutalized others, has committed high treason against his or her country, or has been determined by psychiatrists to be a murderous psychopath for whom no length or amount of rehabilitation would be effective.

As an act of justice, it is said, execution sets an example and serves as a deterrent. If that were true, why do serious crimes continue to be committed by those who cannot help but know that life in prison without parole, a firing squad, a lethal injection, or an electric chair awaits them if they were to be apprehended, tried and convicted?

Tevye, Justices Brennan and Blackmun figured it out. Capital punishment does not belong on the law books of a civilized nation. It should be understood that it is included in the Eighth Amendment's prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment. Thinking about it, one wonders if life imprisonment falls into the same category.

*Harry T. Cook is an Episcopal priest, journalist and author living in Michigan.*

## Michelle

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paid to her arms, hair, derriere, and designer clothes. Where is that intellectually gifted Princeton graduate, the Harvard-educated lawyer and mentor to the man who would become the first African American president of the United States? Michelle ought to be under consideration for a seat on the Supreme Court."

Yes, indeed!

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

# VOTE for MORAL POLICY ISSUES

**MONEY IN POLITICS** – Unlimited and unaccountable money in politics is poisoning our democracy. This must be reversed, with campaign finance reform and/or a Constitutional amendment.

**ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY** – Environmental regulations must protect human health and the biological systems that support all life including humanity. Clean energy sources must replace fossil fuels to power the world in harmony with nature.

**WOMEN & PREGNANCY** – As only women become pregnant, women should have the authority to decide when and whether to become pregnant. People must have readily available and affordable access to contraception and birth control information and services. Health insurance should cover reproductive health services.

**LABOR ISSUES** – Workers deserve living wages and equal pay regardless of gender.

**HEALTH CARE INSURANCE** – If the US had a true national health care system, US health statistics could improve to levels common in Canada and European nations. The Affordable Care Act is a step in that direction. If Oklahoma accepted Medicaid Expansion under the Affordable Care Act, Oklahoma would receive an additional \$650 million every year in federal support, and some 150,000 additional Oklahomans would be insured.

**PUBLIC EDUCATION** – Public schools K-12 should be fully funded and teachers paid at rates commensurate with regional standards. State universities should be sufficiently funded that tuition rates are affordable and not exclusionary. A college education should not mean a lifetime of debt. Student debt should be refinanced with today's lower interest rates.

**FAMILY ASSISTANCE** – Day Care expenses of low-income families with children should be supported with public funds. New parents should have at least a year's paid leave between them.

**MILITARY SPENDING** – The Military-Industrial-Congressional complex has overloaded our military with incredibly expensive, highly technical weapons and planes of little use responding to threats like Al Qaeda and ISIS. Defense spending can be cut and the US still be secure.

**PUBLIC INVESTMENT in INFRASTRUCTURE** – America's public infrastructure is in urgent need of maintenance and modernization. Such spending stimulates economic growth. And it results in jobs that benefit working families. In a similar vein, America's National Parks and State Parks should be maintained and modernized with public funds, not user fees.

**TAXES** – Those earning less than \$250,000 a year – that's 99% of us – should be protected from any income tax increase. Taxes on income above \$1 million should be raised 3%; above \$5 million another 3%; above \$10 million another 3%. Adjustments to the inheritance and capital gains taxes would further level America's economic playing field.

**ACCESS TO VOTING** – If America truly believes in democracy, voting by every eligible person should be supported and encouraged. Voter participation would increase with more days and times to vote; same-day registration; and fewer requirements that inhibit voting.

**IMMIGRATION REFORM** – US immigration policy should honor families already here, most of whose members are working, paying taxes, and/or serving in the military.

**HUMAN RIGHTS** – As universal human rights are basic to human dignity, torture must be forever prohibited. Civil and human rights must be extended to LGBT people and all others.

**INCARCERATION, JUSTICE, and POLICE ISSUES** – The "war on drugs" has proven to be a war on impoverished people and people of color. Cities and states need police training and policies to reduce unfair treatment on account of race. Judges must have greater freedom in sentencing. "Three Strikes" laws must be repealed. Prisons must be publicly owned and financed, not privately owned and managed. The death penalty does not reduce violent crime or murder rates; it is applied inconsistently; it discriminates against impoverished and non-white people; it costs too much. It must be abolished.

**MEDICARE, MEDICAID & SOCIAL SECURITY** – All these can be, and must be, sustained by asking more people to pay into them.

## To enact A Moral Agenda, America needs the VOTES of:

African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, Asian-Americans, Middle Eastern-Americans, Native Americans, LGBT Americans, people of all faiths and no particular faith, WOMEN, and everyone with a heart of compassion for the common good and general welfare of all.

**Contact The Peace House for a program on these Moral Policy Issues for America**

**405-524-5577    [www.PeaceHouseOK.org](http://www.PeaceHouseOK.org)**

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