

# THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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*More Than 40 Teachers, Administrators And Public Education Stakeholders Plan To Run For Legislature To Help Get Oklahoma Schools Back On Track*



See COVER STORY Page 23



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combine to make them. This seeker,  
is the promise of America.  
- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

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P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-  
0275.

## Observations

### *The Big Lie*

The Oklahoman's opinion page is indeed a Daily Disappointment. Never a beacon of principled, reasoned discourse, it is now – in the post-Gaylord era – even worse: an unbridled propaganda tool of the radical right.

Editorials, for example, persist in repeating the Big Lie that the Oklahoma Constitution's strict church-state separation is scion of a 19th Century, anti-Catholic screed known as the Blaine Amendment.

In truth, Article 2, Section 5 was crafted by a coalition of Christian ministers, Native Americans and other constitutional convention delegates irate that some government-sponsored religious schools in statehood era Oklahoma were seeking to impose Christianity on native students.

Further, it's worth noting the historical timeline [something the Oklahoman willfully ignores]: Blaine was proposed as an amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1875. It was never ratified. Oklahoma did not become a state until 1907 – three-plus decades later.

The Oklahoman's falsehoods cannot be ignored because state voters almost certainly will face a November general election referendum on repealing Article 2, Section 5.

Proponents insist it is a religious freedom issue – all about allowing a Ten Commandments monument on state Capitol grounds. But that is a ruse. Its far more sinister goal is to legalize the direct transfer of tax dollars to religious groups and private schools.

Regrettably, 15 House and two Senate Democrats voted for the proposed referenda earlier this session – many, no doubt, fearing for their political lives if they are somehow cast as anti-Christian in Bible belt Oklahoma. Courage, where art thou?

Alas, it likely will be left to clear-eyed voters to do the right thing – to protect the strong church-state separation that has served Oklahoma so well for more than a century.

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## THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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**Dart:** To State Finance Chief Preston Doerflinger, throwing a public tantrum when Legislature's GOP majority killed this session's voucher bill. Doesn't he have enough to do with a \$1.3 billion shortfall?

We note the passing of Larry Brawner, chief legal counsel for former Govs. George Nigh and David Hall and ex-OU regent. A fine man and a loyal Democrat.

**Laurel:** To state Treasurer Ken Miller, leading fight against SB 298, a windfall for insurers hoping no heirs show up to collect death benefits. Miller's office works hard to find the beneficiaries.

A \$1.50 per pack cigarette tax hike could expand Insure Oklahoma to 175,000 working poor. A smarter approach would be to approve federal Medicaid expansion.

**Dart:** To the Daily Disappointment, repeatedly misleading its readers by blaming state's budget crisis on depressed oil and gas prices. The chief culprit is billions in income tax cuts for rich and corporate welfare.

The late Aubrey McClendon no doubt did some wonderful things for his hometown and state, but his deification by Oklahoma media amounted to journalistic malpractice. Check out Reuters news service for more complete story.

**Laurel:** To Drumright High's Joshua Sylvester and Kellyville High's Paige Pulliam, winners of 2016 Willene Wright and Juanita King Scholarships sponsored by Creek County Democrats. Each will receive \$1,000 to further their collegiate careers.

GOP State Rep. Mike Christian won't seek re-election to his south OKC district, opting instead to challenge incumbent OK County Democratic Sheriff John Whetsel.

**Overkill:** FBI reportedly has 147 agents snooping on Hillary's emails. It assigned 120 to investigate the OKC bombing.

As schools statewide announce teacher layoffs for next year, they continue to enroll more students – up 4,370 in 2015-16 and 6,722 in 2014-15.

Someone who can talk slowly enough needs to explain *Roe v. Wade* to anti-abortion zealot T. Russell Hunter. Oklahoma's Supreme Court rejected Hunter's initiative petition aimed at banning the procedure, saying it would violate U.S. Supreme Court rulings.

**Dart:** To MSNBC, first meddling with the content of Melissa Harris-Perry's excellent show, then firing her when she pushed back. Her voice is sorely missed.

Rep. Chad Caldwell, R-Enid, is correct that on-line retailers should remit state sales taxes on items sold to Oklahomans. But the Legislature can't fix this problem – only Congress can.

Term-limited Democratic Reps. Richard Morrisette and Mike Brown are seeking new offices – Morrisette for Corporation Commission seat held by GOP incumbent Dana Murphy and Brown for Cherokee County Commissioner District 2.

Ex-Sen. Rick Brinkley is sentenced to 37 months in federal prison for embezzling \$1.8 million from Better Business Bureau, where he served as CEO. The Owasso Republican was in line to be Senate's next pro tem.

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# Letters



JUST SAY NO

Editor, The Observer:

Re: Jim Maxey's What's In Your Water? It's Not Just Flint Issue [March Observer]:

Tulsa's drinking water is not contaminated by fluoride. More than 70 years of scientific research has shown that an optimal level of fluoride in community water is safe and effective in preventing tooth decay by at least 25% in children and adults. Simply by drinking water, people derive great benefits from fluoridation's cavity protection.

Fluoride is not a by-product from the phosphate fertilizer industry – it is naturally present in groundwater and oceans. Water fluoridation is simply the adjustment of fluoride in drinking water to a recommended level for preventing tooth decay. It's similar to fortifying other foods and beverages for the health, like fortifying salt with iodine, milk with vitamin D, orange juice with calcium and bread with folic acid.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention named com-

munity water fluoridation as one of the 10 greatest public health achievements of the 20th Century, and more than 125 health organizations recognize the health benefits of water fluoridation for preventing dental decay, including the American Medical Association, the World Health Organization, the American Dental Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Oklahoma State Department of Health. I encourage my fellow Oklahomans to research more about the indisputable benefits of water fluoridation at [www.ada.org/fluoride](http://www.ada.org/fluoride).

Lindsay A. Smith, DDS  
Tulsa

*Editor's Note: Lindsay A. Smith is Tulsa president of the Oklahoma Dental Association.*

Editor, The Observer:

Right to Farm [SQ 777] has nothing to do with family farming or rights. It's boilerplate legislation written by the American Legislative Exchange Council [ALEC] to protect multi-national, large-scale

animal factories from reasonable regulation and ultimately legal action by family farmers and other neighbors.

The question is what problem does Right to Farm solve? Who wants to farm and can't do it? Nobody.

Right to Farm deregulates agribusiness and moves corporate farming beyond the reach of the law. Forever. Nothing would stop corporate factories from driving even more family farmers out of business with lower prices and turning them into serfs working their own land for the corporations rather than themselves.

If we're not concerned about how the animals are mistreated in those monstrous Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations with 30,000 hogs or 100,000 chickens – or the hormones and antibiotics in CAFO meat – then we should worry about the destruction of water quality and quantity, property values and the health of our families.

Jackie Gaston  
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

Oklahoma state senators should vote no on SB 1413, which would kill Oklahoma's successful wind industry by abolishing the zero-emission tax credit before it is supposed to end in 2020.

According to state Rep. Casey Murdock, the wind energy industry has:

- Invested more than \$7 billion in Oklahoma since 2003, creating nearly 5,000 jobs.
- Produced 17% of Oklahoma's electricity.
- Returned more than \$40 million to schools and counties each year.
- Is predicted to pay nearly \$1.2 billion to school districts and Oklahoma CareerTech over the life of current and pending wind projects.

Oklahoma is already the fourth-

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# *The Human Toll Of Tinkle Down Economics*

**F**or a moment, let's set aside raw numbers: the \$412 million in additional cuts necessary to balance this fiscal year's state budget and the eye-popping \$1.3 billion-plus budget hole projected for 2017.

Instead, let's consider the people behind the numbers: the thousands of poor and rural Oklahomans who could lose access to cancer or other health screenings and children whose futures could be jeopardized if schools close early or eliminate academic programs.

This is where the debate over Oklahoma's future should be focused – on the human consequences of the Legislature's fiscal mismanagement, not on the abstract, often esoteric numbers invoked in defense of so-called government “right-sizing.”

It's taken two “revenue failure” declarations, three legislative months, and a steady stream of irate constituents, but it appears state leaders – finally – are acknowledging the human toll of embracing supply-side, trickle-down economics.

Gov. Mary Fallin took the lead – and lawmakers eventually followed – on a plan to withdraw nearly \$79 million from the state's Rainy Day Fund to help schools and corrections survive two across-the-board cuts in three months.

Cue the applause sign. Dipping into the state's savings account is absolutely necessary and proper. If this isn't a Rainy Day, what is?

But it must be said – plainly and forcefully – that patching budget holes with Rainy Day funds doth not a long-term fiscal strategy make. It's an emergency stop-gap. Period.

Yes, oil and gas tax revenues eventually will rebound, easing the state's current cash-flow crisis. But remember: Oklahoma's deep cuts in agency budgets and services didn't just happen in the last year when oil prices plunged from \$100 a barrel to \$35. It's been six-years-plus of fiscal carnage.

What that means is state government's budget has serious structural problems. It cannot be balanced indefinitely through a combination of spending cuts,

harvesting agency revolving accounts and tapping Rainy Day funds. Eventually, elected leaders are going to have to face the reality it is necessary to generate more revenue if state services are to be properly funded.

State government's dominant GOP elected elite breaks out in hives at the mere mention of a tax hike. They might be surprised to learn that many taxpayers are not similarly afflicted. No one wants to pay more than necessary, of course. But taxpayers recognize that tax dollars dedicated to schools, roads, mental health, child welfare and other vital state services are investments in Oklahoma's future, not cost centers.

They know that cutting taxes and streamlining government makes for good campaign sound bites, but reality is often much different. Lost services impact real people – neighbors, family, friends. And as lawmakers have been acutely reminded: constituents.

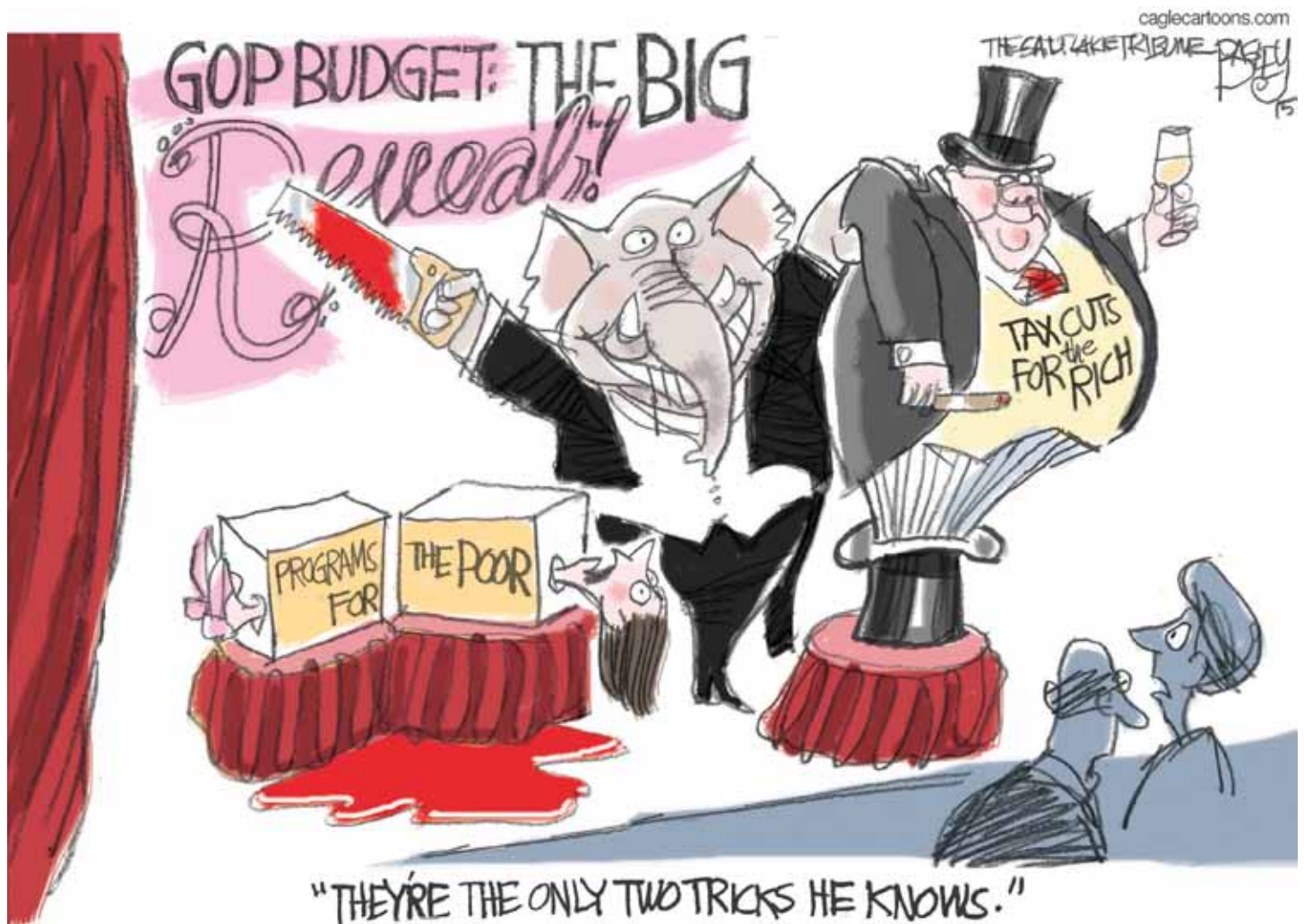
It is worth noting that Oklahoma isn't the only Ship of State to be steered into a giant fiscal iceberg by the GOP's obsession with Trickle Down – make that “tinkle down” – economics. Louisiana and Kansas are buckling under similar foolishness. Louisiana's new Democratic governor even warned his state's beloved LSU Tigers could be casualties.

What is important now is that political sanity shows signs of life.

In Kansas, for example, three influential Republican senators want to roll back 2012 legislation that exempted 330,000-plus farmers and business owners from state income taxes.

In Oklahoma, Sen. Mike Mazzei, R-Tulsa, continues to urge postponement of a .25 percent income tax reduction that took effect Jan. 1. Plus, Fallin and GOP leaders embraced a \$51 million infusion to common education and \$27.58 million to corrections, acknowledging the devastating consequences of two rounds of mid-year budget cuts.

Now, the governor and GOP-dominated Legislature must find the political courage to stand up to big campaign donors who benefited most from the trickle down shenanigans. It won't be easy.



# Why Tax Hikes Harm Oklahoma's Economy Less Than Budget Cuts

BY GENE PERRY

**W**ith the oil and gas industry in free-fall and a state budget hole that has grown to \$1.3 billion, Oklahoma lawmakers' best budget scenario this year is to find the least bad among many terrible options.

Do we close the budget hole with deep cuts to core services like schools, public safety, infrastructure, and health care? Do we make what is an unpopular choice even in good economic times by raising taxes?

While almost no one wants to cut core services or raise taxes if it can be avoided, the budget won't be balanced without one, the other, or both. But we can ask: between these bad options, what is likely to do the least harm?

Besides taking away important public services from

the citizens of Oklahoma, state spending cuts will hurt our economy at a time when we can ill afford it. A large majority of money spent by state government goes directly to Oklahomans who are part of our state economy – whether they are government employees like teachers and child welfare workers, state-funded health care providers like doctors and nursing home aides, or one of the many private businesses that contract with government to provide office supplies, vehicle maintenance, lawn care, technology, and much more.

These dollars spent by state government become income for hundreds of thousands of Oklahomans both inside and outside government, who can then go out and spend on their own needs so that it multi-



plies throughout the economy.

Of course, we get some of that same effect when a dollar goes untaxed. However, when states must choose between taxing higher-income households or cutting spending in a downturn, the dollars lost to spending cuts will not go nearly as far as they would have otherwise. That's because these high-income households are more likely to save rather than spend a significant portion of that money. They are also more likely to spend the money on out-of-state purchases by going on vacation or purchasing from businesses located out-of-state.

Another factor to remember is that Oklahoma has already cut budgets substantially while also cutting taxes. Even during good economic years, Oklahoma never fully restored funding lost during the Great Recession, so that today most state agencies are funded at 10% to 30% below 2009 levels. Nearly every state agency has been forced to dig deep to cut less important and less efficient programs – the easy savings are already squeezed out.

Now we're contemplating taking drastic measures like throwing tens of thousands of low-income parents off Medicaid, buying out or laying off hundreds of DHS workers, teachers, and other state workers, increasing class sizes even more and cancelling advanced courses, and eliminating school bus service, among other difficult cuts.

We're considering these disastrous cuts even as quite a few sensible revenue options have been left untapped. Meanwhile, we've repeatedly cut the top income tax rate so that the share of income we are paying in state taxes is near a 30-year low.

In this context, the least bad options to get us through this crisis are almost all on the revenue side. Oklahoma should prioritize tax increases on those who can most easily afford them over doubling down on budget cuts.

That's the best option for our economy and for struggling Oklahoma families.

Gene Perry is policy director of Oklahoma Policy Institute; [www.okpolicy.org](http://www.okpolicy.org).

# *Tilting At State's Wind Turbines*

BY DAVID PERRYMAN

*Just then they came in sight of 30 or 40 windmills that rise from that plain. And no sooner did Don Quixote see them than he said to his squire, "Fortune is guiding our affairs better than we ourselves could have wished. Do you see over yonder, friend Sancho, 30 or 40 hulking giants? I intend to do battle with them and slay them. With their spoils we shall begin to be rich for this is a righteous war and the removal of so foul a brood from off the face of the earth is a service God will bless." – The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha, Part 1, Chapter VIII.*

**M**iguel de Cervante's 17th Century tale of misguided heroism involves a hidalgo, a nobleman without a hereditary title, but whose status has exempted him from taxes. The story's specific hidalgo is Don Quixote, whose tax-free status allows him to collect and read a rather large library of books of chivalry.

Quixote's literary diet of all things chivalrous transforms him from a rational man to a knight-errant seeking adventures with which to feed an insatiable desire to prove his own chivalric virtues.

So distorted is Quixote's judgment that excursions with his faithful squire, Sancho Panza, become crusades to right wrongs existing only in his mind.

According to a 2002 survey of 100 renowned authors, *Don Quixote* was selected as the world's best novel and gained 50% more votes than any other book, eclipsing works by Shakespeare, Homer and Tolstoy.

Twenty-first Century Oklahoma now has its own version of windmill tilting as anti-renewable energy

proponents assail wind turbines and the state's tax policy associated with wind energy.

Last month, the Oklahoman detailed a report that a group of oil and gas executives and industry leaders had formed the Windfall Coalition to campaign to end Oklahoma's zero-emission tax incentive for the wind energy industry.

Quixotism is associated with a concept that ignores consequence or absurdity and the Windfall Coalition's "altruistic" concern about Oklahoma's budget certainly fits the bill as it refuses to discuss the hundreds of millions in annual tax credits, incentives and other tax breaks enjoyed by the oil and gas industry.

I co-authored a bill in 2015 forming a committee to review all tax credits and incentives. Unfortunately, it will be several months before an initial report is completed, and in addition to a likely third budget failure in this fiscal year, early projections for the 2017 budget indicate that a \$1.3 billion hole will make next year worse than this one.

Oil and gas as well as wind energy need to be reviewed; however, attempts by the oil and gas industry and executives to abolish wind energy's zero-emission tax credit without stepping up and putting its own credits on the table is less than genuine.

After all, wind energy has invested nearly \$10 billion in the state in the past 15 years and annually returns millions of dollars to county government, school districts, CareerTech and more than \$22 million each year to property owners, according to a November 2015 State Chamber report utilizing OSU economists.

At the end of 2016, there will be only one Oklahoma tax credit remaining for companies that produce electricity using zero-emissions facilities, and despite that credit being scheduled for mandatory sunset over the next four budget years, the tax breaks for oil and gas go on and on and on.

Scores of school districts are enjoying new classrooms, state-of-the-art technology and safe rooms by virtue of revenue from the wind energy industry and those districts where wind turbines are located take less money from the school finance formula thereby freeing up state funds for use in school districts that

do not have a wind energy presence.

All that said, clean, renewable wind energy provides 17% of the electricity powering our state, is currently Oklahoma's cheapest form of electricity and will save Oklahoma ratepayers over \$2 billion in fuel costs.

The Windfall Coalition's Quixotic crusade to joust Oklahoma's clean energy turbines is less about Oklahoma's budget and more about the profits of oil and gas executives, but don't all causes claim chivalry?

*David Perryman, a Chickasha Democrat, represents District 56 in the Oklahoma House.*

# *More Holes In State's Safety Net: Ends Uncompensated Care Fund*

BY CARLY PUTNAM

**T**he state's already ragged health care safety net has frayed a little further.

To cope with mid-year budget cuts, the state Department of Health announced that it had eliminated the Uncompensated Care Fund, which covered some of the health care costs for low-income, uninsured Oklahomans at the state's federally-qualified community health centers.

Federally-qualified health centers, or FQHCs, are an integral part of Oklahoma's health care safety net. In 2014, Oklahoma FQHCs provided health care to more than 176,000 people, one in three of whom were children. Almost 70% had incomes at or below the federal poverty level [\$19,790 per year for a family of three that year], and four in 10 were uninsured.

These health centers draw funding from a wide range of sources, including Medicaid and Medicare, private health insurance, grants, philanthropy, and individual patients. However, the payer of last resort for patients with no ability to pay was the Uncompensated Care Fund.

For the state's largest FQHCs, ending the Uncompensated Care Fund may amount to over \$100,000 in lost revenue per month.

Federally-qualified health centers are highly efficient providers, and they consistently outperform other providers in health care bang for the buck. But operating for years with constrained budgets means they've already cut what can be cut without seriously hindering patient care.

Further cuts and restrictions will harm all patients, not just those without insurance. When FQHCs close locations and eliminate services due to lack of revenue, everyone they serve is affected.

Perhaps the most tragic component is that several of these birds could be killed by a single stone. The federal government is offering billions in funding for

the state to expand health coverage for the low-income uninsured – the same uninsured Oklahomans served by FQHCs and endangered rural hospitals. However, Oklahoma has so far refused the federal funds: SB 1372, which would have expanded coverage, died without being heard in committee.

In states that did accept federal dollars to expand coverage, uncompensated care is declining quickly. Residents of these states have also gotten more preventive screenings and primary care visits, which reduce overall health costs and promote health by detecting conditions before they become too serious.

In her January 2013 State of the State address, Gov. Mary Fallin promised to develop an "Oklahoma Plan" to improve access to health care. Since then, we've seen no plan; only more cuts that put quality health care even more out of reach for hundreds of thousands of Oklahomans.

Refusenik states like Oklahoma still have the option to expand coverage with federal funds – Montana's expansion began in January, and South Dakota will likely expand next year. It's past time for Oklahoma to stop the bleeding of our health system by bringing our federal tax dollars back into our state.

*Carly Putnam is a policy analyst with Oklahoma Policy Institute; [www.okpolicy.org](http://www.okpolicy.org).*

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# *Grandpa Who Spent 22 Years In Prison For Ounce Of Cocaine Finally Gets Clemency*

**BY ANTHONY PAPA**

**A**ctivists have fought hard for many years to get Larry Yarbrough back his freedom. Their prayers were answered when Gov. Mary Fallin granted Yarbrough executive clemency on March 18.

Several years ago I wrote about Larry in an Alternet piece titled, "How Three Joints and an ounce of Coke Got an Oklahoma Grandfather Life without Parole."

Behind the scenes many individuals have fought hard for Larry, even meeting with Gov. Fallin and ask-

ing her to show compassion for him.

Mark Faulk did a moving documentary about Larry that showed the injustice of his case. And his lawyer Debbie Hampton fought tooth and nail for Larry, never giving up hope.

While in prison Larry Yarbrough has never had a single write-up. He has received commendations from the Department of Corrections and nonprofits for training guide dogs for the blind and disabled. He and his wife Norma are still married after 46 years.

They have five children and 13 grandchildren, ranging in age from nine months to 19 years.

Before his incarceration, Larry and Norma owned and operated a popular BBQ restaurant in Kingfisher where he was known for giving back to his community.

Attorney General Scott Pruitt questioned a recent recommendation by the Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board to commute the sentence of Larry, calling the decision a stab at public safety. Even though the medical cost of taking care of Larry last year was estimated to be over \$1 million dollars, the AG refused to support Larry's bid for freedom.

"The board's decision to commute the sentence of a drug trafficker who pumped LSD, cocaine and marijuana into a community for more than 10 years is of grave concern," Pruitt said.

"Larry Yarbrough is not someone who made one bad choice and deserves a second chance; he is a five-time felon who was given multiple chances to do the

right thing and continued to bring drugs, theft and intimidation into an Oklahoma community."

Yarbrough was sentenced to life without parole in 1997 after being convicted of his sixth felony. Gov. Fallin ignored Pruitt and granted Yarbrough his freedom through executive clemency. He had served 22 years in prison already.

Yarbrough was in very bad health and a commutation was the only way that he would leave the prison alive. Through the kindness of Gov. Fallin, Yarbrough can live out his days as a free man now.

Gwendolyn Black, an advocate for Larry, was in tears when she heard the good news, saying, "Thank God it's over and Larry now will be free to be with his family."

It is not known at this time when Larry will be released.

*Anthony Papa is the manager of media and artists relations for the Drug Policy Alliance. He is the author of This Side of Freedom: Life After Lockdown.*

# TRIAL AND ERROR

## *Prosecutors Rarely Pay Price For Mistakes And Misconduct*

BY JOAQUIN SAPIEN

**T**he Innocence Project released a report recently alleging that prosecutors across the country are almost never punished when they withhold evidence or commit other forms of misconduct that land innocent people in prison.

The Innocence Project, a nonprofit legal group that represents people seeking exonerations, examined records in Arizona, California, Texas, New York and Pennsylvania, and interviewed a wide assortment of defense lawyers, prosecutors and legal experts.

In each state, researchers examined court rulings from 2004 through 2008 in which judges found that prosecutors had committed violations such as mischaracterizing evidence or suborning perjury. All told, the researchers discovered 660 findings of prosecutorial error or misconduct. In the overwhelming majority of cases, 527, judges upheld the convictions, finding that the prosecutorial lapse did not impact the fairness of the defendant's original trial. In 133 cases, convictions were thrown out.

Only one prosecutor was disciplined by any oversight authorities, the report asserts.

The report was issued on the anniversary of a controversial Supreme Court ruling for those trying to achieve justice in the wake of wrongful convictions. In a 5-4 decision in the case known as *Connick v.*

Thompson, the court tossed out a \$14-million dollar award by a Louisiana jury to John Thompson, a New Orleans man who served 18 years in prison for a murder and robbery he did not commit.

The majority ruled that while the trial prosecutors had withheld critical evidence of Thompson's likely innocence – blood samples from the crime scene – the Orleans Parish District Attorney's office could not be found civilly liable for what the justices essentially determined was the mistake of a handful of employees. The decision hinged on a critical finding: that the District Attorney's office, and the legal profession in general, provides sufficient training and oversight for all prosecutors.

The Innocence Project study echoes a 2013 ProPublica examination focused on New York City prosecutors. In 2013, ProPublica used a similar methodology to analyze more than a decade's worth of state and federal court rulings. We found more than two dozen instances in which judges explicitly concluded that city prosecutors had committed harmful misconduct.

Several of the wrongfully convicted people in these cases successfully sued New York City. In recent years, New York City and state have doled out tens of million dollars in settlements stemming from such



lawsuits. Former Brooklyn District Attorney Charles Hynes was voted out of office, in part because of wrongful convictions gained through misconduct on the part of his prosecutors or police detectives working with them.

But only one New York City prosecutor, ProPublica's analysis found, was formally disciplined: Claude Stuart, a former low-level Queens Assistant District Attorney, lost his license. He was involved in three separate conviction reversals.

Just as we found in New York, the Innocence Project's report found that appellate judges and others almost never report findings of misconduct to state

panels and bar associations that are authorized to investigate them.

"In the handful of situations where an investigation is launched," the report found, "The committees generally failed to properly discipline the prosecutor who committed the misconduct."

The report concludes with several recommendations on how to improve accountability for prosecutors. It suggests, among other things, that judges ought to be required to report all findings of misconduct or error and that state legislatures pass laws requiring prosecutors to turn over all law enforcement material well before trial.

But perhaps most powerful is the report's introduction, a 2011 letter to then-Attorney General Eric Holder and two national prosecutor associations. It was written in response to the Connick ruling and signed by 19 people whose wrongful convictions were secured in part by prosecutorial misconduct.

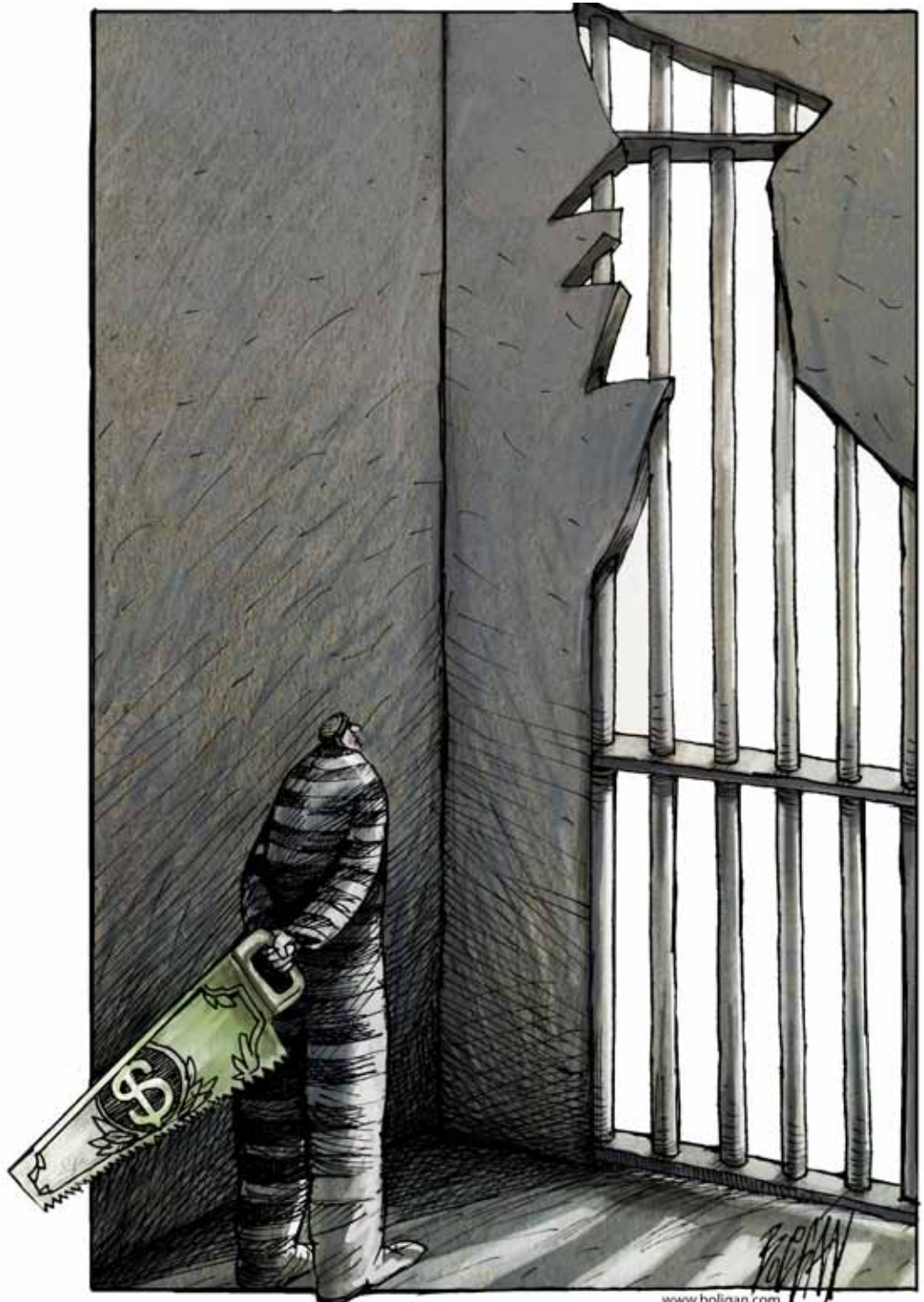
"We, the undersigned and our families, have suffered profound harm at the hands of care-

less, overzealous and unethical prosecutors," the letter said. "Now that the wrongfully convicted have virtually no meaningful access to the courts to hold prosecutors liable for their misdeeds, we demand to know what you intend to do to put a check on the otherwise unchecked and enormous power that prosecutors wield over the justice system."

According to the Innocence Project, the Justice Department never responded to the letter.

*Joaquin Sapien has covered criminal justice, military healthcare, and environmental issues for ProPublica since 2008.*

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# *The President, The Penny ... And Progress*

BY CAL HOBSON

**W**ill his work ever end? David Lyle Boren has given a lifetime of service to Oklahoma, our nation and, indeed, the world. From 1966-94, he held important state and federal positions. Subsequently, he wisely accepted a new public responsibility – the presidency of our flagship institution of higher learning, the University of Oklahoma.

DLB will soon surpass former President George Lynn Cross' length of tenure – 25 years at the held in Norman. He and First Lady Molly have transformed OU in every way imaginable – from the quality and content of instruction to the appearance of the grounds [named among the 25 most beautiful in America] to the multitude of new buildings and infrastructure functioning throughout the campuses, including the Health Sciences Center in Oklahoma City and OU-Tulsa.

On a personal note, yours truly was in the overflowing Holmberg Hall on the North Oval the morning in 1994 that then-U.S. Sen. Boren was introduced

by regents' Chairman G.T. Blankenship as the new president. Rumors had circulated for weeks that he was the choice, but I didn't really believe David would resign from the world's most exclusive club to return home.

Taking a cue from Cross, who often had coffee in the union with anyone who wanted to join him [including me], student support and success have always been foremost in Boren's approach to matriculation. Thus, the brilliance and character of each class has set the standard for the next.

Unfortunately, it wasn't always that way. For example, in 1984, of 54 National Merit Scholars produced by this state's high schools, only two enrolled in Norman, four in Stillwater and the rest went elsewhere, including 16 who chose the University of Texas-Austin. By contrast, OU's 2015 freshman class featured 320 of these budding geniuses who became Sooners because Boren believes it is even more important to recruit brains than brawn ... well, just as important!

Our premier educator continues to teach a large

undergraduate course each semester, invites world-class thinkers and leaders to Oklahoma on a regular basis, and ensures easy access for the rest of us to their thoughts, wisdom and opinions.

Due to his work as a state representative, governor, U.S. senator and university president, many informed observers believe Boren already has secured his place in history as the most effective leader ever to emerge from the 46th state.

Therefore, such high praise requires me to proffer a question: Why in the world, at the age of 70-plus, has he taken on the additional, enormous responsibility constitutionally-assigned to the 149 members of our Legislature to fund a quality public education system in Oklahoma?

The answer is painfully simple: The current Republican politicians in charge are easily distracted by irrelevant issues, cannot add and subtract, won't listen to those who can, and are doing everything possible to ruin what's left of our learning network – Pre-K through graduate school and including career technology.

Even one of their colleagues, state Sen. Ron Sharp, R-Shawnee, proclaimed during debate over adopting

new state guidelines for schools: "We're not experts. We have no idea what we're doing up here and the Legislature doesn't trust the professionals to do their job."

He should know. Sharp, a lawmaker for only three years, is a highly-regarded and widely-honored, retired, 38-year classroom teach.

He also apparently was unaware that freshman legislators are to be seen and not heard uttering the truth.

Our dedicated educators can only do so much with so little in financial resources. Because of meager funds, some schools such as Bixby are closing early this spring and four-day weeks have been implemented in Bridge Creek and Newcastle, with more districts soon to follow.

Oklahoma City Public Schools already have sent 208 teacher pink slips, which reveal only the tip of the crushing financial iceberg looming ahead. When it fully arrives July 1, it will sink salaries for our remaining professionals to the bottom.

Only then can the Republican caucuses at the state Capitol finally warble their long-cherished chant: We're No. 50! We're No. 50!

Returning now to ground zero of this devastation – classrooms – it has become routine to pack 25, 30 or even 40 children into them, especially in grades one through four. Trailers, temporary buildings and even still-standing 1930s-era WPA structures must be used by many growing districts.

Spring has now sprung in tornado alley, and few if any of these facilities were designed to withstand the damage or destruction inherent in Mother Nature's unpredictable wrath.

Regardless, a dozen bills were filed this session to implement vouchers and so-called Education Savings Accounts, both purposely designed to further reduce money for public education. Fortunately, and only because of the monstrous and still-growing ocean of deficits, these proposals were – to paraphrase goofy grouch Grover Norquist – drowned in their own bathtub of blarney. [This is a family newspaper, so editor Arnold Hamilton wouldn't let me use the more accurate word: bull----.]

Now, about that one, red cent.

As Observer readers undoubtedly know, Boren, educators, administrators, school board members, business executives, civic leaders, students and concerned parents have banded together to gather enough signatures to put SQ 779 on the November ballot. It would raise and earmark for education a penny increase in the state sales tax.

Space in this column does not allow me to go into the pros and cons of this source of revenue. So let me



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just close by offering the following: The signatures gathered are already double the number required by law; the state question has been declared legal by the Supreme Court; and in the fall, the citizens will, in my admittedly biased opinion, overwhelmingly adopt the proposal.

What voters may not be so anxious to do is re-elect the same slipshod solons who, through ineptness, indifference or both, have created this classroom crisis in the first place.

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

# *My Advice To The Next House Speaker*

**BY JASON MURPHEY**

**A** lawmaker recently stopped by my office. We were elected in the same year and reflected on the performance of the numerous speakers of the House who have served during our time as legislators. He had no problem sharing his honest point of view and his critique was mostly negative.

He doesn't have fond memories of most who held the office. "They were great when they were just normal members of the House, but once they became speaker, everything changed," he opined.

It's not the first time I have made this observation: no matter how benevolent or heavy-handed the speaker, most are not remembered fondly.

Why is this?

The speaker is arguably Oklahoma's most powerful politician. For all practical purposes, the speaker of the House has authority over the life and death of all proposed legislation, he appoints all House committee chairmen and committee members, presides over the expenditure of the \$15 million annual House budget, and much more.

How does someone with all this power routinely become so disliked?

Enormous power is a curse. Most speakers are incapable of adjudicating hundreds of pieces of policy, directly overseeing \$15 million of spending, and having the savvy and thoughtfulness to understand the many cause and effect implications of their actions. They can't be blamed. Most of these items are not within their natural skill set, training or professional ability.

Worse, they don't always get the best help in carry-

ing out these duties.

In order to win the votes to become speaker, this person routinely surrounds himself with those who are not adept at deliberately adjudicating policy or offering wise leadership strategies. Those close to the speaker are often favored because of their perceived loyalty to the governing faction, or their ability to broker a deal to vote for the speaker in exchange for a powerful appointment.

This deprives the speaker of what he needs most: an inner circle of honest and skilled individuals who are not afraid to push back against the speaker's actions and suggest an alternate – and frequently, the actual – reality.

Numerous members of the House see the follies of leadership but are reluctant to publicly criticize the speaker while he is in office. They filter just about everything they do through the unhealthy prism of: "How will the speaker retaliate against me if he dislikes what I say, do or how I vote?"

They wait until he is gone, breathe a sigh of relief, hope the next guy is better and only at that time do they feel comfortable enough to start sharing their honest opinion about the previous speaker.

No one wants to tell the speaker the truth until he is long gone and can't retaliate.

My advice to the next speaker is twofold:

Firstly, reach out to two or three of your smartest critics and ask of them a huge favor: "Tell me the truth! Give me your most honest advice and never acquiesce to my point of view unless you really believe it."

Secondly, transform the House of Representatives. Take the power from the office of the speaker and give it to the House members.

If he follows this advice, the next speaker will not be feared by the members of the House because he will have no power to retaliate against them; his soul won't be nearly as vulnerable to the corruption of absolute power because the power will reside with the members; and the institution of the House will greatly benefit as no longer will its members constantly calculate for the power of the corner office.

And, should he follow this advice, the next speaker might just end up being one of the few past speakers who is remembered warmly.

*Jason Murphey, a Guthrie Republican, represents District 31 in the Oklahoma House.*

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"I do not believe that just because you're opposed to abortion, that that makes you pro-life. In fact, I think in many cases, your morality is deeply lacking if all you want is a child born but not a child fed, not a child educated, not a child housed. And why would I think that you don't? Because you don't want any tax money to go there. That's not pro-life. That's pro-birth. We need a much broader conversation on what the morality of pro-life is." – *Sister Joan Chittister, summing up hypocrisy in the "pro-life" movement*



# Desperate Need For Foster Families

BY MARY FALLIN

I can still remember the late-night telephone calls. My mom worked for the Department of Human Services and was needed to deal with an emergency placement of a child. As my mom prepared to leave, I would hope there would be a safe home to take care of those children.

I still have that wish today. A new initiative that DHS and I recently launched is helping make my wish a reality.

Oklahoma Fosters is a combined, coordinated campaign to renew our efforts to find foster families for the hundreds of children in state custody and coming into state custody.

Our goal, simply put, is to recruit more foster families.

These children are in state custody through no fault of their own. These children need foster families to love and support them during their time of need.

There are nearly 10,500 children in the foster care system, and we desperately need the help of all Oklahomans.

Oklahoma Fosters is a statewide campaign uniting state, tribal and local governments, businesses, nonprofits and the faith-based community to end the foster care crisis in Oklahoma. Oklahoma Fosters is about rallying different groups to a call to action.

This is a crisis. And we need to respond.

Oklahomans are listening. Since Jan. 1, Oklahoma Fosters has received 665 inquiries from those considering being foster families.

The faith community is also stepping up. So far, the state denominational leaders of the United Methodist Church, the Southern Baptist Church, the Assemblies of God Church and Oklahoma Council of Churches have said they will help participate in the campaign. Together, they represent over 2,500 Oklahoma churches.

All churches and denominations can get involved. If you haven't heard about Oklahoma Fosters in your place of worship, ask your pastor or rabbi.

In the coming months, the Oklahoma Foster campaign will be on the road to make communities aware of the program as well as recruit new foster families. These events will include town hall-type settings, recruitment fairs and large awareness events.

Why is all this necessary? In 2012, Oklahoma recognized it had a crisis when it came to its foster care system and children in state custody. In response, the state Pinnacle Plan was launched. It has a variety of goals intended to improve services for Oklahoma's vulnerable children, increase safety and prevent abuse and neglect.

It has been successful on several fronts, but unfortunately, what the Pinnacle Plan has not been as



successful in achieving is perhaps its most important goal: reducing the number of children in state custody and getting them into safe and loving homes. In fact, we're falling behind. We've gone from just under 8,000 children in state custody in May 2012 to nearly 10,500 today. There are a lot of families in various forms of crisis or need in our state.

To reduce that number, we *must* recruit new foster families.

I'm encouraged by early results of Oklahoma Fosters. For the first time since the Pinnacle Plan began, DHS in February recorded an all-time high of 160 families in a month enter the certification process to become foster parents. They have actually begun the process of background checks and training.

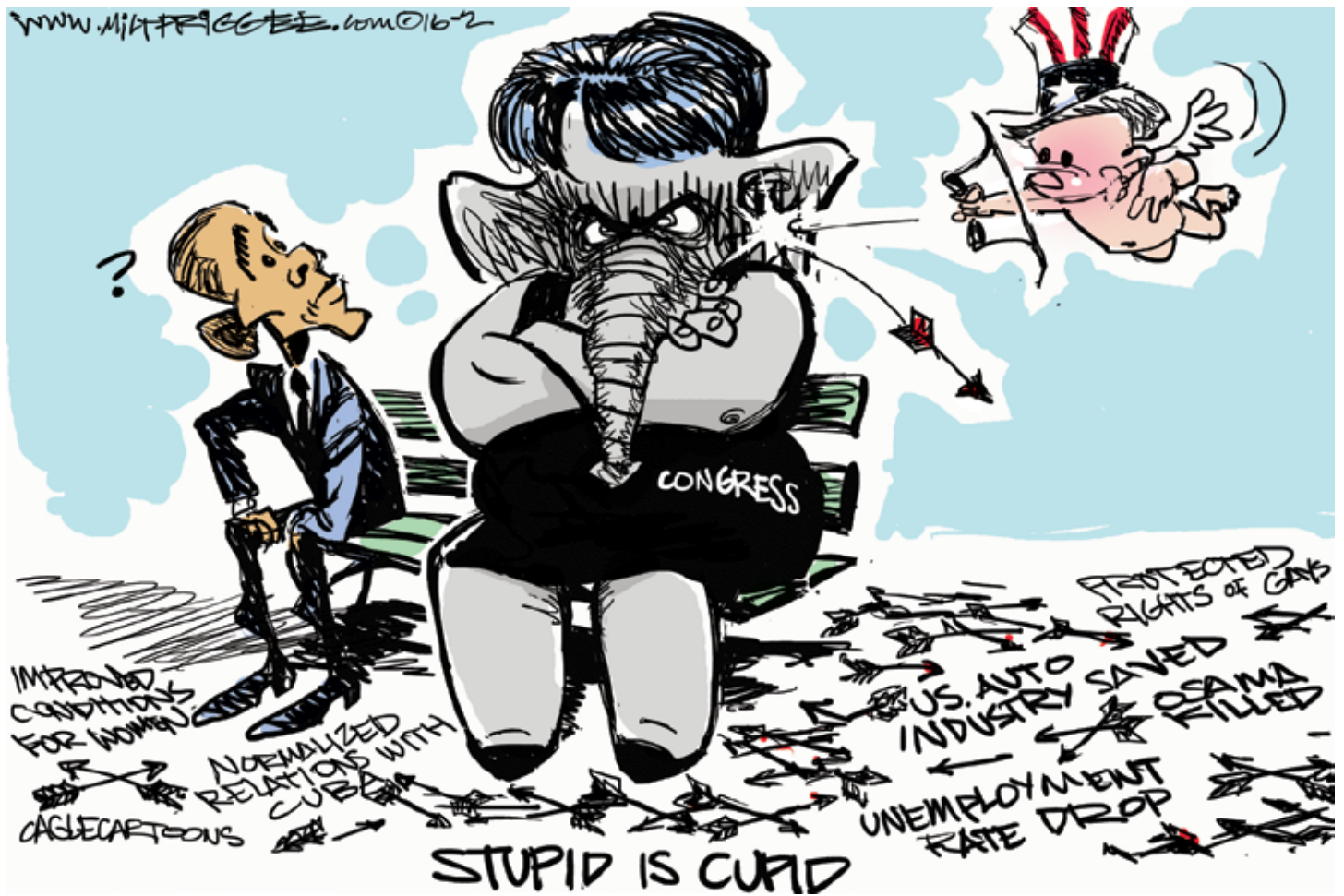
Ultimately, the hope is that the Oklahoma Fosters campaign is the birth of a statewide movement around the foster care crisis.

If the right family match is made for a child in state custody, Oklahoma will see a reduction in abuse and neglect in care, placement instability, use of shelter care and older youth aging out of the system without a permanent family.

Interested? Check out the Oklahoma Fosters website: [OklahomaFosters.com](http://OklahomaFosters.com).

It's my wish – and hopefully yours, too – that with your help, we can usher in a new day in our state: one where no child is ever waiting on a family, but rather a long line of families is waiting to take care of our children.

*Mary Fallin is governor of Oklahoma.*



# *Let Obama Be Obama*

BY VERN TURNER

**E**very so often I'll watch an old television or series that intrigued me and left a lasting impression. A few weeks ago I started watching [for the third time] the brilliant series *The West Wing*, Aaron Sorkin's masterpiece about the White House we'd all love to see.

The first season was produced in 1999, but still speaks to current events, because those problems haven't been solved or, in some cases, ever addressed. There were two bits that stick in my mind from this latest viewing of season No. 1: Sam Seaborn's take on what public education should really be doing and the episode entitled: *Let Bartlet be Bartlet*.

Seaborn's monologue about public education smacked me in the head since I wrote a book [*A Worm in the Apple: The Inside Story of Public Education*] with most of the items mentioned by the actor, Rob Lowe, in this sequence. I had not seen this episode the first time until after I had written the essay

that ended up in the book. Among the issues listed were paying teachers like they were doctors, allowing free college to those who chose to teach for five years after graduating college and installing a curriculum that was as challenging to today's students as it was to us when we were students in school.

I came across an article by Diane Ravitch today that underscored the horror show that the Republicans have been visiting upon public education for the last 40 years or so.

Ms. Ravitch, you might recall, was George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind ramrod before she realized that that scheme was a con and a huge lie designed to destroy teachers, their unions and the public school system. The con was in the testing required to assure federal funding. The trick was that there was no funding for this mandate and teachers and principals were left holding the bag and their unemployment paperwork should their students fail the arbitrary test-

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ing regime.

The scheme becomes more sinister when we see that corporate/banking America is behind the demise of public schools. Why? Well, there's a few billion dollars to be made off the backs of the taxpayer for private schooling, vouchers, texts of choice by the moguls and charter schools that sound great, but offer nothing more than the same curriculum dressed up in flowery language.

This con and destructive scheme to public education is rampant among most of the Republican-controlled state legislatures and governorships. There must be a pattern there somewhere. Oh, right. Public schools are socialistic and therefore evil to the hedge fund billionaire who is after still more of the public's

for who he was. He had forsaken his ideals for political expediency and couldn't understand why his approval ratings sank so low.

Similarly, President Obama, for the first five to six years in office, treaded ever so lightly on Republican recalcitrance that his approval ratings dipped to frightening levels. His coattails shrunk and in 2010, the voters returned the House to the Republicans and, in 2014, the Senate. Voter turnout had rarely been lower. You'd have thought we were voting for the national dog-catcher.

This is what you get when you abandon your principles for political expediency.

Anyway, after President Bartlet laments his plight and asks how it came to be, the Bartlet chief of staff,

Imagine what the last eight years would have been like if Obama would have been Obama. What if he had called the bluffs of Republican filibuster and fed the ever-hungry media the red meat of Republican foolishness?

money while giving nothing back.

The second part of this essay relates to the episode title where the Bartlet Administration, in its first year in office, is floundering in the political minefield so perfectly represented in the script of *The West Wing*. Bartlet's character is a most intellectually agile chief executive who tries to please everyone and ends up pleasing nobody. Simply put, he's trying to prepare to be re-elected instead of governing. His entire staff runs around like scalded cats trying to plug all the leaks caused by the administration's enemies and a hostile Congress. Sound familiar?

Well, it should. The Obama Administration has, for all its successes, performed like this for six of its eight years in office. The high-minded rhetoric of the incoming president in 2009 has fallen on ears of stone.

Why? Well, among other faults, Barack Obama held the delusion that he could work with the Republicans in Congress. He assumed they were rational and had the best interests of the country – as a whole – in mind at all times. He couldn't have been more wrong.

The Republicans even humiliated the president from Day One by pledging to do nothing that made him look like he was accomplishing anything, then blaming him for failure. "But this isn't Obama's fault," you might say. I disagree.

In *Let Bartlet be Bartlet*, the president's chief of staff chews out his boss and blames him for letting himself be pulled from pillar to post by everybody instead of sticking to what brought him to office and

Leo McGarrey, finally writes down on a sheet of paper in large letters, *Let Bartlet be Bartlet*. He adds that the entire staff serves at the pleasure of the president and that they expect him to be the man they signed on to work for and respect.

Somehow, I can't imagine that conversation occurring in Obama's White House. It saddens me deeply to have to say that Obama has not been Obama since the first term except for a few shining moments when circumstances required his leadership.

When those moments and events presented themselves, President Obama *was* Obama and displayed his intelligence, poise, implacable decisiveness and even-handedness. But when it came to the Republicans threatening to filibuster a proposal or some legislation, President Obama backed down and didn't push for his agenda.

He didn't use the bully pulpit when he could have, thus putting the shame of the Republican Party on the front page every day. Had he done that, we wouldn't be having to endure the abject embarrassment our nation now has to with the likes of Trump and Cruz smearing our media with their slime and lies.

I've written before about what a Gore presidency would have looked like and what our nation would have been like had not the scandal of Florida voting been swept under the rug of Republican corruptive influence in 2000.

Imagine what the last eight years would have been like if Obama would have been Obama. What if he had called the bluffs of Republican filibuster and fed the



ever-hungry media the red meat of Republican foolishness?

We would have leaped out of the Great Recession much more quickly. There would be more banking controls in place. We would have at least one good jobs bill.

There would probably not have been the idiotic Tea Party shutdown of government [\$25 million of taxpayer money up the spout].

There would have been the public option in the Affordable Care Act, thus approaching the ideal of universal, single-payer health care that over 60% of the public wanted. But for committed leadership from the president and the Congress, we would have sane and intelligent gun controls in place and being enforced. Wayne LaPierre would be speaking to small groups in backyard garages instead of national stages.

We might even have had the overturning of No Child Left Behind and some real education reform.

There is a lot to be said for people in leadership positions being confident in their own agenda and abilities to enact it. We had leadership between 2001 and 2008 that was misguided and socially and governmentally illiterate. It thought war was the answer to everything. From 2009 until now we have national leadership that is a mystery of lost expectations to most of its followers in that President Obama wasn't being completely himself.

Juxtaposing Bush and Obama is an obvious exercise in absurdity with Obama being the far better individual to be president [or anything else] than George Bush.

Imagine what things would be like if Obama were Obama.

*Vern Turner lives in Marble Falls, TX and is a regular contributor to The Oklahoma Observer. His latest book, Racing to the Brink: The End Game for Race and Capitalism, is available through Amazon.com.*

# *No, Canada! ... Just Stay Home And Vote*

**BY BOB BEARDEN**

**G**reat piece in the Washington Post by Garrison Keillor titled, "Think Moving Abroad Will Save You from Trump? Think Again!" A definite must-read if you are wondering what you will do if The Donald makes it all the way to the White House, besides commit ritual suicide on the White House lawn.

I know I have considered the moving to Canada thing. The other thing, well, even Trump couldn't bring me to that.

Living in a country with The Donald is a really scary prospect, when you wake up in the morning and your first thought is, "Gosh, The Donald isn't president yet" and then you think, "OMG, he could be." That is when the prospect of waking up to a new world every day seems the best idea you've had in a long time. But that's what geese do – wake up in a new world everyday.

As much as I admire the wild geese, it just ain't in me to join up with them as they fly off to climes not yet known to them.

Canada would welcome me. I know the Canadians are that kind of people, and they have a prime minister who is ... dare I utter the L word in mixed company? Yeah, what the heck, I will! Their prime minister is unabashedly Liberal! Liberal! There I've said it again! Just like Bobby Vinton did in his song. Of

course, he wasn't talking about liberal prime ministers or living in Canada.

Garrison, though, nails it as he always does when speaking of these kinds of "Come to Jesus" moments. Leaving the good ol' USA ain't an option we should be thinking about because there just ain't no better place on earth to be and, hey, we're about the only place on the planet where they play real football. Not some game they call football and then bat it around with their heads.

Garrison remembers a trip to Houston during the George W. Bush years and how Texans avoided the subject of Dubya and all the terrible things he created like tanking the economy and the horrors of the Iraq war. Texans instead discussed more important things – like the weather, fishing and their next dental appointment.

We are all scared of what The Donald would be, but Garrison thinks maybe we are overthinking the whole thing. And he intimates that The Donald might tire of the presidency rather quickly, once he discovers you actually have to lead and be a leader of the free world.

Kind of like he did when he bought that 282-foot yacht for \$29 million, sailed in once, got seasick and never sailed again.

Yeah, The Donald is scary. Why, even what now passes for the establishment of the Grand Old Party

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of Lincoln is sore afraid of him. So much so that they are looking to an even scarier guy – Ted the Crucifix, who is worse than blunt-force-trauma-to-the-head kind of scary – to stop The Donald from getting to the White House.

But I think Garrison has the answer: stay here, go vote in November and wake up the day after election day to a whole new world that won't include The Donald as leader of the free world 'cause you voted just like that Democratic fellow you know named Mac. And, hey, put that paper right back in the stack, Jack.

A world without The Donald? As Garrison Keillor

says, "The Donald likes tall models with foreign accents. He dyes his hair. He likes to read about himself. What else do you need to know?"

Just that I wake up on Wednesday morning, the day after the November election, and the Donald is pissed off that he lost. Yeah, I'm staying 'cause now I got something to look forward to! Thanks, Garrison, for setting me straight!

*Bob Bearden is a trustee of the Central Labor Federation, a member of Mayflower Congregational Church, UCC, and a regular contributor to The Oklahoma Observer.*

# *Save The Fight For Fall*

BY SHARON MARTIN

**W**hether George W. Bush won the 2000 election or not is still debatable, but he took the oath of office. I knew what he stood for, and I was afraid.

When the unthinkable happened on Sept. 11, 2001, Young Bush began a campaign to finish his father's war. The Bush gang didn't even try to find a peaceable solution despite the many reasons war in Iraq was a bad idea.

1. There was no al-Qaeda in Iraq.
2. Saddam was a monster, but take him out and likely another would take his place.
3. Taking out a strong man upsets the balance of power in a region.
4. It isn't our place to decide who leads countries other than our own.

We went to war anyway, with false justification. While we were spending on war, we cut taxes on the wealthy. The economy dived. We devastated families in the U.S. and in the Middle East. We didn't have a plan in place to rehabilitate soldiers coming home. Things were bad, so we voted for hope in 2008 and 2012.

Now we have choices again. The Democrats have two good candidates still in the race. The only thing that can be said about the Republicans is that the one currently in third place isn't as bad as Nos. 1 and 2.

And what are some Democratic supporters doing? They're tearing down one good candidate because they believe so strongly in the other.

No! No! No!

No candidate is perfect, but if we want to have any chance to prevent a real catastrophe from befalling this country, Democrats have to support their candidate without tearing down his or her opponent. Save the fight for the fall.

When I suggested we stop spreading rumors, some-



one told me not to be afraid of the truth. It's not the truth I fear; it's the dishonesty and the meanness. And it's reality.

Look what's happening in this state that we love. It is being destroyed by an administration that was elected by less than a quarter of the eligible voters in the state. Our education system is being dismantled and our healthcare system chiseled away.

And the good people? I have little faith that hurting, hardworking, overwhelmed people who get tainted news from corporate sources are suddenly going to start voting for their own self interest.

The best we can do, those of us who have the time and energy to devote to politics, is not tear each other down. I have my reasons for supporting my candidate. You have your reasons. But we mustn't supply the ammunition for either candidate to be shot down in the general election.

The country we save will be our own.

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

# *Right-Wing's Latest GOTV Gambit*

BY KAREN WEBB

Putting a Ten Commandments monument at the state Capitol will be on the ballot in Oklahoma.

If there is a single verse in the Bible that says it is OK to force God's word on non-believers as a way of saving a nation, I would like to see it. It is a monument or graven image, some might say, to make sure everyone sees how pious we are, regardless of how we treat others, or a get-out-the-vote effort.

The first time I carried a picket sign was in college. I was a religious education major at a Baptist college in Texas and we were protesting mandatory chapel. My sign said, "*You can't preach a free gospel to a captive audience,*" and I still believe that.

We were aware that when you enrolled you agreed to attend chapel; we just thought it wasn't a very Christian way to bring people the word, by forcing them to attend church services. By the way, we won.

The Ten Commandments ballot measure will probably win just like the one on gay marriage did in the past. Both have been ruled unconstitutional and it will happen again and it will cost the state millions when we need that money for other things, like fixing roads and buildings.

We could hire those in need to help do it because most – and I mean *most* – would love to be able to support their families. People who work 40-60 hours a week should be able to support families, but not today.

The same Christians that are upset about how Christians are treated in other countries are hypocrites in their own country.

I might be more inclined to allow such a thing if I thought it would make them stop beating up on "the least of these" and stop siding with all the "rich young rulers," but they won't.

They think they are honoring God by doing this and they will continue "bearing false witness" on a daily basis, they will continue playing golf on the Sabbath, committing adultery, "honoring all of our mothers and fathers" by turning their security over to the unregulated Wall Street Casino [the rich young ruler]) and they will continue to worship the god of avarice and greed.

Most of all they will be tossing the Bill of Rights out of the window by saying that the majority rules, except when the majority elects the wrong guy, in their eyes.

I am not sure it is all racism, but I have never in my nearly 70 years seen the kind of white hot hatred and unwillingness to compromise that I see today and it

doesn't matter at all what the issue is.

The day Barack Obama was elected Republican leaders in Congress said they would not do anything Obama suggests and they have done exactly that.

I have always been taught and still believe that the founders of this country left Europe because of state-sponsored religion or a majority-rule religion. What they need is a monument with the Bill of Rights on it, instead of a graven image that tells them they shouldn't worship a graven image. There are pictures all over the place of people bowing down to these monuments.

They think they are persecuted when not one Christian in this country has been deprived of his right to attend the church of his choice or build his own church. Not one has been deprived of his right to worship. Not one has been deprived of his right to share his religion.

However, there is a limit. You can knock on a person's door and ask if he would like for you to share your religion with him because you love him and care about him, but you cannot barge in, whether he likes it or not, and force him to read it or listen to it.

You can start a before- or after-school prayer group. We had prayer in school when I went, but I was taught that God answers prayer even if every child isn't forced to participate, listen or recite it. If God can hear it in your closet, he can hear it in your car in the drop-off lane or silently over your geography test. For God to answer prayer it is not necessary that everyone is forced to participate or listen.

Putting a monument or graven image the size of Mount Rushmore will not make this country any more Christian, and forcing religion on people will drive them away and not bring them to God.

It is a get-out-the-vote effort for the right wing.  
*Karen Webb lives in Moore and is a frequent contributor to The Oklahoma Observer.*

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# The 'Dividend' In Fee And Dividend

BY MARY FRANCIS

**A**merica needs more jobs and a raise. A carbon fee and dividend gives us both.

The fossil fuel industry must stop costing us billions by using our skies as their garbage dump. A revenue-neutral carbon fee, which gives the money back directly to people, is simple, transparent and politically viable. It's also fair compensation for all the asthma attacks and other medical problems caused by burning dirty fossil fuels.

Furthermore, if all the revenue from a carbon fee is given back to the people via direct deposit or a check, as Reagan's Secretary of the Treasury George Shultz recommends, then the fee cannot be spent on growing more government programs. It becomes a strong price signal to help the free market avoid volatility and gravitate toward clean energy and greater energy efficiency.

Best of all, a carbon fee, rebated back to households, will add millions of jobs. Labor-intensive businesses experience growth when there is an increase in local consumer spending. See the economic analysis by highly acclaimed Regional Economic Modeling Inc., whose clients include Tennessee Valley Authority, Texas Legislative Budget Board, AARP, Provincie Oost-Vlaanderen [Belgium], Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Oklahoma Department of Commerce, Los Angeles World Airports, Cambridge Systematics and many others.

Don't accept the climate science? It doesn't matter. You get a monthly check anyway.

The Congressional Budget Office [CBO] reported that returning only 11% to 12% of revenues would make the lowest income quintile [20%] "whole" again despite changing energy prices. Therefore, limited-income families suffer no harm from a carbon price.

In fact, at the recommended 100% return, about two-thirds of all American households get wealthier because they receive more each month than the increased price of utilities and gasoline. See the study at [www.citizensclimate.org/remi-report/](http://www.citizensclimate.org/remi-report/)

What about protecting our American businesses from China and other countries?

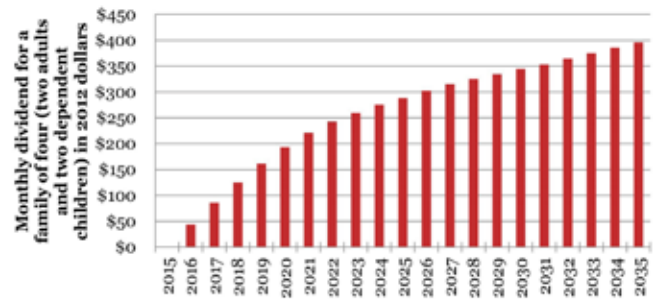
If implemented as planned, a fee and dividend, forces foreign governments to either:

1. Go along with our plan by enacting an equivalent fee on their own products which are made or transported with fossil fuels, or

2. They pay a border adjustment to Americans on everything they try to sell us that required fossil fuel to make and transport. [Yup – all those Barbie dolls and cheap shoes no longer get across the border free.]

This border adjustment would both discourage

Monthly Dividend by Family



Total Employment (national level)

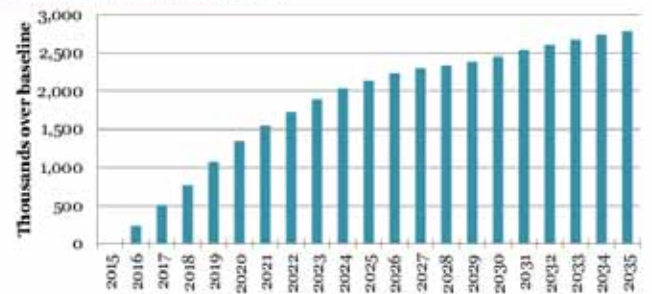


Figure 3.3 – This is the same data as that in Figure 3.2 agglomerated up from the regions to the nation. Thus, net employment levels at the national level from the F&D carbon tax are between 2 million and 3 million over baseline (approximately a 1% increase) when counting higher energy costs versus rebates to households and changed investments.

– Regional Economic Modeling Inc. [REMI]

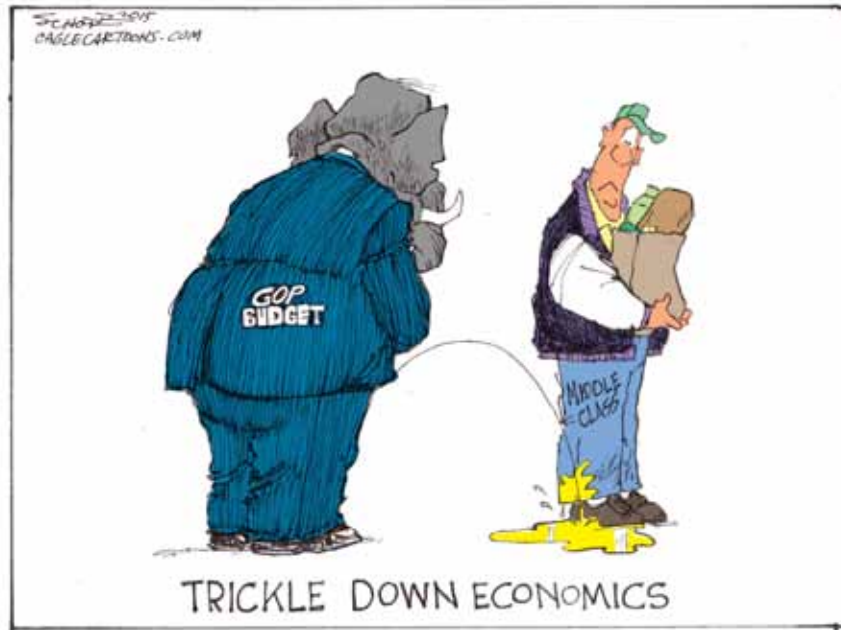
businesses from relocating offshore where they can emit more CO2 and, conversely, encourage other nations to adopt an equivalent price on carbon, thereby avoiding paying Americans at the border.

Since all companies compute how much energy they need to produce their product, they therefore budget accordingly. This makes it easy to figure what the foreign businesses must pay America at the border. It's all WTO and GATT compliant.

Taken together, the fee on foreign imports and refund on American exports makes this plan a win for U.S. companies, while putting money back into the pockets of consumers. Oklahomans will spend it locally and create a more resilient local economy, which naturally results in job growth.

Getting a monthly dividend check is the American consumer's icing on the carbon fee and dividend cake. Ask U.S. Rep. Tom Cole to talk to Secretary Shultz about fee and dividend. Cole's local office phone is 405.329.6500.

As a former economics professor at MIT, George Shultz knows a thing or two about revenue-neutral budgeting, market volatility and political viability. *Norman resident Mary Francis is a Citizen's Climate Lobby member and retired educator.*



# *Bottom Line Isn't Only Measure*

BY RUTH ASKEW BRELSFORD

**R**ecently, Eastern Oklahoma State College, under the direction of Dr. Steve Smith, made the courageous decision to save the Eastern Music Department which has brought joy, excellent musical training, entertainment, and positive extracurricular choices to the Wilburton campus and the Wilburton community for over 89 years!

Dr. Smith and his academic vice president, Dr. Janet Wansick, decided, after hearing from both Eastern students and Wilburton community leaders, to buck the horrible trend in education in Oklahoma and support a program whose merits far outweigh its numbers.

Not everything can be measured by the bottom line! And Dr. Smith knows this. I wish our leaders in Oklahoma City knew this simple basic fact.

Oklahoma is fast becoming a cultural wasteland and soon even our beloved athletics will be cut from local school budgets as the people in Oklahoma City argue about where the Ten Commandments should be placed.

Do Gov. Mary Fallin, Senate President Pro Tempore Brian Bingman and House Speaker Jeff Hickman not realize that without adequate education funding, no one will even be able to read those commandments much less live by them?

I am grateful that Rep. Brian Renegar, D-McAlester,

works hard for education in the House and I know that Sen. Larry Boggs, R-Red Oak, has our best interests at heart, also.

It is, however, sadly true that the Republican leadership continues to make decisions that are affecting our very quality of life in this state. I can't understand why concerned parents, grandparents, employers, business men and women, Chambers of Commerce, preachers, teachers, students – in short, every one of us – are not bombarding the governor's office with our concerns and worries about the state of our precious, beautiful state, Oklahoma.

I don't understand why Mary Fallin is the "Teflon governor." Why doesn't the buck stop at her desk?

Oh, I know why – there are no "bucks" in Oklahoma! Under this leadership, we are \$1.3 billion in the hole. And our students and our bridges and our poor people and our commerce suffer! I can only hope and pray the damage is not permanent!

I am asking everyone who wrote a letter to try to save the meat lab and the music department at Eastern to write a letter to the governor's office and demand action for our kids and our state! Let's write while we still know how to write! An uneducated populace is a danger to democracy!

*Ruth Askew Brelsford, a proud teacher for 29 years, lives in Red Oak.*

# *Guess Who's Running For Office?*

**BY ARNOLD HAMILTON**

**H**istorians will long debate when – and what – finally awakened the sleeping giant.

Was it when Oklahoma's Republican-dominated Legislature imposed the nation's deepest education budget cuts over six consecutive years?

Was it when lawmakers imposed one unfunded mandate after another on teachers and school districts?

Was it when tens of thousands descended on the Capitol two consecutive years to demand legislators treat teachers, administrators, parents and students with r-e-s-p-e-c-t?

Was it when GOP senators and representatives sought to destroy the teachers' unions by eliminating dues check-off?

Was it when lawmakers worked session-after-session

to establish a voucher system to siphon taxpayer funds out of public education and into private, for-profit or parochial schools?

Was it when districts across the state began cutting the school week from five to four days or when they began notifying teachers they would not be rehired next year because of budget cuts – 208 in OKC alone?

Whenever it was, it is now official: The political sleeping giant that includes teachers, parents, students and public education advocates has returned full-throttle to the public policy debate, demanding Oklahoma's elected elite offer more than lip service.

So far, more than 40 teachers, administrators, PTA leaders and/or their spouses have announced they will be candidates for the Oklahoma Legislature this year – most touting public education as the cornerstone of their candidacies.

## **Questions Worth Pondering**

When a body of water gets polluted enough, the fish in it, breathing it through their gills, die.

We are a shallow sea of air, breathing it through our lungs. And it is killing us! Is anyone unaware of the enormous increase in breathing diseases and "allergies" over prior years?

Air pollution is getting worse as I write.

•

Where is this slippery slide to socialized medicine? I'm ready to do some slipping and sliding!

Nothing can be worse than our for-profit medical care. I'd rather have a government doctor tell me to get out of here, there's nothing wrong with you, than a money-maker doctor doing an unnecessary surgery, test, etc., because he could use a few extra dollars.

Medicine for money, like for-profit education, is simply a bad idea.

•

Who put "no government negotiation of prices" into Medicare?

What is the lawmaker [lawmakers] name[s]?

When will everyone be told how many billions of dollars this has cost taxpayers?

Why is a tax-paid lawmaker not guilty and in jail for bribery and conflict of interest?

How is it I and everyone I ask don't know his [her] name?

I really want to know.

*Paid for by Al Engel/Oklahoma City*

This on the heels of Owasso teacher J.J. Dossett capturing the Senate District 34 special election to succeed disgraced former Sen. Rick Brinkley, slapped with a 37-month federal prison sentence for embezzling \$1.8 million from his former employer, the Better Business Bureau.

How stunning was Dossett's victory? He ran as a Democrat and an unabashed supporter of public education in what long was an arch-conservative, solidly GOP district – represented previously by the uber rightwing Randy Brogdon.

Long answerable primarily to the likes of the public ed-hating Koch Brothers and the stink tank known as the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, the Legislature's Republican majority has taken notice.

Consider what has happened this session alone:

The Republican state superintendent, Joy Hofmeister, publicly opposed her party's latest voucher scheme – benignly labeled Education Savings Accounts. The proposal died for lack of legislative support.

She demanded GOP lawmakers and Gov. Mary Fallin withdraw \$51 million from the state's Rainy Day Fund to keep public schools afloat. They did.

Teachers, administrators and parents have kept the heat on legislators with around-the-clock opposition to SB 1187 which authors, Sen. Clark Jolley and House Speaker Jeff Hickman, sought to cast as a local-control measure that actually was anti-teacher and anti-public schools.

It included everything from elimination of the teacher's minimum salary schedule to elimination of negotiations between school districts and employees – even elimination of continuing education for local school board members.

The Legislature, of course, always has had its share of former educators or school administrators. Some – like Reps. Ed Cannaday, D-Porum; Jerry McPeak, D-Wagoner; and Eric Proctor, D-Tulsa – have waged uphill battles against funding cuts and unfunded mandates. Others – including Reps. Ann Coody, R-Lawton, and Sally Kern, R-OKC – seemed more interested in setting up public schools for failure, with the ultimate goal of steering students into religious schools or for-profit academic enterprises.

This year, for example, Coody, who chairs the House Common Education Committee, carried legislation that would have required schools to teach that life begins at conception – even though that is a religious, not scientific assertion.

Just how many teachers, administrators, PTA leaders and their spouses end up as legislative candidates won't be known until the three-day filing period ends April 15. Unofficial counts by education insiders put the numbers at 40-plus – which translates into roughly one-third of the 101 House and 24 Senate seats on the ballot this year.

That's phenomenal, especially given that so many educators checked out of the political system a decade or so ago – some because Washington gridlock

mis-shaped their perceptions about the Oklahoma Legislature, others because their ministers asserted that abortion and marriage equality were of soul-saving importance while pocketbook issues were not.

Interestingly, the education-connected candidates running this year seem almost evenly divided between Republicans and Democrats. One unofficial list, for example, was able to identify party affiliation of 31 announced candidates – 17 Republicans, 14 Democrats.

The party breakdown seems to support the notion that roughly half the teachers in Oklahoma vote Republican, despite the GOP's non-stop assault on public education since seizing control of all levers of state government power in 2010 – both houses of the Legislature and all statewide elected offices.

Two teachers running as Democrats for the Legislature this year – John Waldron in Tulsa's Senate District 39 and Mickey Dollens in OKC's House District 93 – appear to have excellent chances of winning.

Waldron, seeking the seat vacated by the term-limited Republican Sen. Brian Crain, is a highly-regarded, well-known, long-time Booker T. Washington High School teacher running in a district that is trending purple – somewhere between conservative GOP red to Democratic blue, depending on the turnout.

Dollens, who teaches freshman English at U.S. Grant High School, played football at SMU and vied for a spot on the U.S. Olympic bobsled team, got a big boost recently when the district's Republican incumbent, Mike Christian, opted not to seek re-election, but instead challenge Sheriff John Whetsel.

Then, Dollens received lots of media attention when he learned he was one of the 208 teachers in the OKC district that won't have jobs next year because of budget cuts.

Another teacher, Ada's Eric Hall, plans to announce his candidacy April 11 to succeed former educator and term-limited state Sen. Susan Paddock, in Senate District 13. But Hall's bid may be more uphill because he could face a famous name Republican opponent – Jet McCoy, who starred along with his brother Cord on the reality TV series *The Amazing Race*.

In Oklahoma City, meanwhile, Democrat Will Hollander is seeking to replace Kern in House District 84. He isn't a teacher, but his campaign material emphasizes his commitment to public education, noting he and his wife are members and former officers of the Windsor Hills Elementary PTA where their two sons attend.

The line-up of pro-public education candidates, from both parties, suggests the fate of Oklahoma's schools will be front and center in the 2016 campaign – hardly good news for Republicans who've driven the state into a financial abyss.

It also is good news that teachers, administrators and public school supporters are getting back in the game – not only making their voices heard at the Capitol, but also signing up as candidates.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 33



*It's Easy To Be A ...*

# CHANGE AGENT

MyChange is a new app that makes it easier than ever to support your favorite progressive organizations – like The Oklahoma Observer.

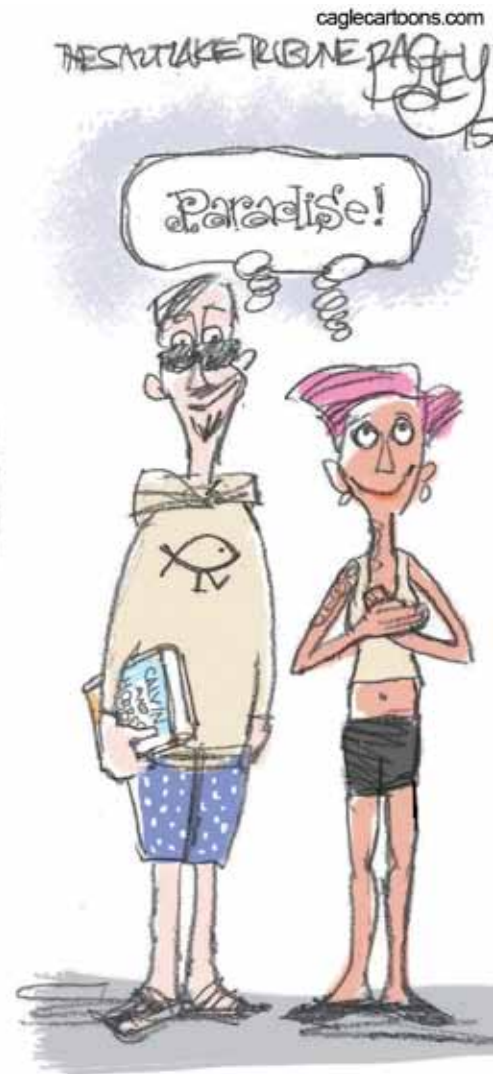
Every time you use your linked debit or credit card, MyChange rounds up your transaction to the next dollar and steers the difference to the Oklahoma Observer Democracy Foundation.

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# Love Affairs With The Apocalypse

BY HARRY T. COOK

One memorable declaration from a terrorist evidently as yet uncaptured and perhaps still living was, “You love life; we love death.” It makes a kind of perverse sense of that for which he and his cohort labor night and day, i.e. the effective end of human life on Earth – a life that has seldom brought them glory and fulfillment in any form. They have therefore set out to create it for themselves.

One could read recently of ISIS-sponsored terrorists poking around the under-secured nuclear power plants in Belgium looking for a way to blow them up or to steal radioactive materials to make their own dirty bombs. The sooner the better, they say, to ignite the tinder that, once ablaze, will bring end to the world.

If you watch religious programs on American televi-

sion or pick them up late at night on the high end of the AM radio waves, it should sound familiar to you. Apocalyptic has infected fundamentalist Christianity even as it has infected fundamentalist Islam.

To those who embrace apocalyptic, the hoped-for blessing seems to be the surety that God or Allah will grant them permanent residence posthumously in an unsullied paradise where grinding poverty, disrespect, disappointment and unrequited desire to be taken seriously will never touch them.

Scratch the psychological surface of some number of those who crowd into megachurches in which preachers call down hellfire on all manner of heathens and heretics, and one can see cataracts of resentment overflowing the banks of sanity. The “Amens” and “hallelujahs” are thinly veiled shouts of hatred. The SOB landlords, the gouging bastards

at the payday check-cashing emporia and the bosses who won't grant enough work hours so his workers can qualify for benefits, etc. etc.

Wouldn't it be better if the world just blew up and the put-upon could go home to be with God whilst the evildoers are left behind to stagger through the ruination of the planet until they starve or go mad?

Now head for neighborhoods in London, Paris and Brussels that have been home to Muslim immigrants for years and multiply to the 10th power such justified complaints and abuses, and you are witnessing the making of terrorists. Somehow a twisted and out-of-context reading of Qu'ranic passages grants permission to the oppressed to act on their own in achieving paradise.

In fundamentalist Christianity, that business is left with God and deliverance is hoped for in God's good time. The resentment is worked out, not in blowing up airports and train stations, but in giving the Heil Hitler salute to the likes of Donald Trump, or embracing the political fascism of a Ted Cruz. Meanwhile, trust in God and the four horsemen of the apocalypse to loose the bonds that tie the unfortunate to a life that cheats them right and left, and you've got apocalyptic American-style.

The question may be not if, but when will come the revolt of the oppressed economic and social classes who, Sisyphus-like, keep trying to push the boulder to the top of the mountain, only to have it roll over them on the way down yet again. We saw what hap-

pened among African-Americans in the mid-1960s, whose centuries of patience had worn thin. We saw American cities set afire just as we now see angry Muslims setting off incendiary bombs here and there across the world.

The cry is: "CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?" And the answer is, "We can hear you and we can talk to you even though we don't understand a word you're saying." Let's convene a commission to determine how under the sun you people could riot in your own streets. Let's get a committee of Congress to go through the political charade of investigating the genesis of it all when the revelation is clear as plate glass.

In the end, you cannot blame people for drifting into apocalyptic. It may be their best bet. And though I cannot imagine such a paradise as they envision, more power to them for envisioning it themselves. In that regard, I do not think so-called terrorism is anywhere near being contained. That dam has been broken. And the on-rush of what has been pent up behind us is almost sure to wash away much of what we relatively secure middle-class folk have ever depended.

"The horse and its rider he hath thrown into the sea," as the ancient Hebrew poet wrote of the destruction of Pharaoh's armies.

I very much hope I am wrong in this pessimistic assessment, but I don't think I am.

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

# Decency Matters

BY MAX LUCADO

**A**s the father of three daughters, I reserved the right to interview their dates. Seemed only fair to me. After all, my wife and I'd spent 16 or 17 years feeding them, dressing them, funding braces, and driving them to volleyball tournaments and piano recitals. A five-minute face-to-face with the guy was a fair expectation.

I was entrusting the love of my life to him. For the next few hours, she would be dependent upon his ability to drive a car, avoid the bad crowds, and stay sober. I wanted to know if he could do it. I wanted to know if he was decent.

This was my word: "decent." Did he behave in a decent manner? Would he treat my daughter with kindness and respect? Could he be trusted to bring her home on time? In his language, actions, and decisions, would he be a decent guy?

Decency mattered to me as a dad. Decency matters to you. We take note of the person who pays their debts. We appreciate the physician who takes time to listen.

When the husband honors his wedding vows, when the teacher makes time for the struggling student, when the employee refuses to gossip about her co-worker, when the losing team congratulates the winning team, we can characterize their behavior with the word decent.

We appreciate decency. We applaud decency. We teach decency. We seek to develop decency. Decency matters, right?

Then why isn't decency doing better in the presidential race?

The leading [Republican] candidate to be the next leader of the free world would not pass my decency interview. I'd send him away. I'd tell my daughter to stay home. I wouldn't entrust her to his care.

I don't know Mr. Trump. But I've been chagrined at his antics. He ridiculed a war hero. He made mockery of a reporter's menstrual cycle. He made fun of a disabled reporter. He referred to the former first lady, Barbara Bush as "mommy," and belittled Jeb Bush for bringing her on

# Trump's Deceptive Message To American Workers

BY RICHARD L. TRUMKA

*Editor's Note: AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka delivered these remarks to an Operative Plasterers' and Cement Masons' International Association meeting in Fort Lauderdale, FL.*

**T**he Plasterers and Cement Masons are a proud union. You are a powerful voice for your members and families, for your trade, for working people in America, and for this great country of ours.

The work you and your members do is hard. It isn't for everybody. It's challenging, both physically and mentally, which is why it's so important you run some of the best training and apprenticeship programs anywhere. You are true leaders in every sense of the word.

I especially want to commend you for your commitment to our veterans. Your involvement with Helmets to Hardhats is second to none, and you've all heard this before, but it bears repeating, you have one of the proudest military connections in our labor move-

ment. After the Civil War, your members returned fresh from America's bloodiest battlefields to rebuild a new nation as members of the National Plasterers' Union.

The challenge then is the challenge now. How do we win fair pay for America's workers? How do we win, and protect, quality healthcare? How do we retire with security and dignity?

That's what 2016 is all about.

One of the reasons I was so excited to come here today is you get it. You're not the biggest union. You don't have the most members or money. But when it comes to politics, you are a powerhouse. You continually punch above your weight class. So I can't think of a better focus group for where we need to take our movement and our nation.

This much is clear: we must come together to elect a president who will raise wages, so working people can build better lives.

Two years ago, when I met with you at your convention, I talked about how America was hungry

for solidarity. Well, we've seen solidarity and the collective voice rise in this country, but we've seen the call for division grow, too.

That is the choice we face in this presidential election.

On the one hand, Republican candidates have used some of the ugliest, most racist and destructive language I have heard in my lifetime. It is equal parts frightening and appalling.

And their attacks on working people are just as bad. Each wants to destroy the labor movement, silence our voice and give away even more to the rich and powerful.

On the other hand, the Democratic candidates have engaged in a substantive and vigorous debate about how best to raise wages.

While Republicans insult each other and the American people, the Democratic race has focused on reducing inequality and expanding opportunity and access to the American Dream.

Brothers and sisters, we did

the campaign trail. He routinely calls people "stupid," "loser," and "dummy."

These were not off-line, backstage, overheard, not-to-be-repeated comments. They were publicly and intentionally tweeted, recorded, and presented.

Such insensitivities wouldn't be acceptable even for a middle school student body election. But for the Oval Office? And to do so while brandishing a Bible and boasting of his Christian faith? I'm bewildered, both by his behavior and the public's support of it.

The stock explanation for his success is this: he has tapped into the anger of the American people. As one man said, "We are voting with our middle finger."

Sounds more like a comment for a gang-fight than a presidential election. Anger-fueled reactions have caused trouble ever since Cain was

angry at Abel.

We can only hope, and pray, for a return to decency. Perhaps Mr. Trump will better manage his antics. [Worthy of a prayer, for sure.] Or perhaps the American public will remember the key role of the president is to be the face of America. When he/she speaks, he/she speaks for us.

Whether we agree or disagree with the policies of the president, do we not hope that they behave in a way that is consistent with the status of the office?

As far as I remember, I never turned away one of my daughter's dates. They weren't perfect, but they were decent fellows. That was all I could ask.

It seems that we should ask the same.

*Max Lucado is a best-selling Christian author and writer and preacher at Oak Hills Church in San Antonio.*



that. We put raising wages front and center. Our activism has shaped the presidential process in ways that will benefit working people for years to come.

Now, that doesn't mean we agree on everything. It's primary season and there are two pro-worker candidates running for the Democratic nomination. As you know, the AFL-CIO has not endorsed. Each member union is going through its own process, as part of a powerful tradition that I have enormous respect for. I know you have backed Hillary Clinton. That's great. Other affiliates are supporting Bernie Sanders. This is how the process works.

But we must and will be united when the primary process ends. The stakes are too high. As we head into the general election, I want every single one of you to get your members registered. Register your families, your neighbors, your friends and relatives. You fight above your weight class. Our entire movement fights above our weight class. When the time comes, I want your members pounding the pavement, knocking doors, leaf-letting worksites, meeting with workers and families, and turning out the vote, because it is our time, and we won't stop until we win!

Brothers and sisters, CEOs have profited from four decades of our rising productivity, leaving us with flat wages and financial insecurity. I'm sure you've seen the charts, but this is not an intellectual exercise. We've felt it. We've seen families struggle. We've seen this national story play out in the lives of our family and friends, union and non-union alike, white collar and blue collar.

During contract negotiations and election years, our members look to us to analyze the facts, to explain what the bad guys are doing, and to provide a path forward.

But our members also look to us to see what's possible, for a positive vision of where we can be, where we will be, when we stand together.

You know, working people

everywhere are realizing that the only organized voice for our interests is us. It's the American labor movement.

This is important because we are not the only voice speaking to working families in America. Donald Trump is talking to us, too. He is deceptive, and very, very dangerous.

Donald Trump is tapping into the very real and very understandable anger of working people. In a recent national survey, 63% of Americans said they don't have enough savings to cover a \$500 car repair or a \$1,000 medical bill. A majority of people in this

In the labor movement, we know it's the *United* States of America. United we stand. Or divided we beg.

country are living paycheck to paycheck. It's a precarious way to live. A car accident or an illness spells disaster.

So when Trump says we're losing, his message resonates with some folks. And when he yells or lashes out, he finds a sympathetic audience who wishes more politicians would express the frustration they feel.

Listen, I know real down-home talk when I hear it, and I know a load of baloney and bluster, too, and I don't think I have to tell you that Trump is full of baloney and bluster.

He is also a bigot. From his anti-American proposal to ban Muslims to his horrendous comments about women and immigrants, Trump is running on hate. It seems the only group he won't criticize is the KKK.

Those statements and positions are bad enough. But what's getting less attention is how Donald Trump really feels about working people. That is the untold story of this campaign, a story we must share with our members and all working people.

First, Trump loves right to work. He said it is "better for the people" and his position is "100%."

Meanwhile, he is fighting tooth and nail against workers at his hotel in Las Vegas.

Second, Trump was a major financial backer of Scott Walker and says he admired the way Walker took on public unions in Wisconsin.

Finally, and most disturbingly, Trump says our wages are already too high. Can you believe that? Trump is advocating the polar opposite of our raising wages agenda.

You see, Trump says he's with the American working class, but when you look close, it's just hot air.

America needs a truth-telling moment here. The answer to economic insecurity isn't right to work and lower wages. It's collective action and collective bargaining.

In the labor movement, we know it's the *United* States of America. United we stand. Or divided we beg. This is a year for the American labor movement to stand up as the leaders we are. This is the year we define America for the ages.

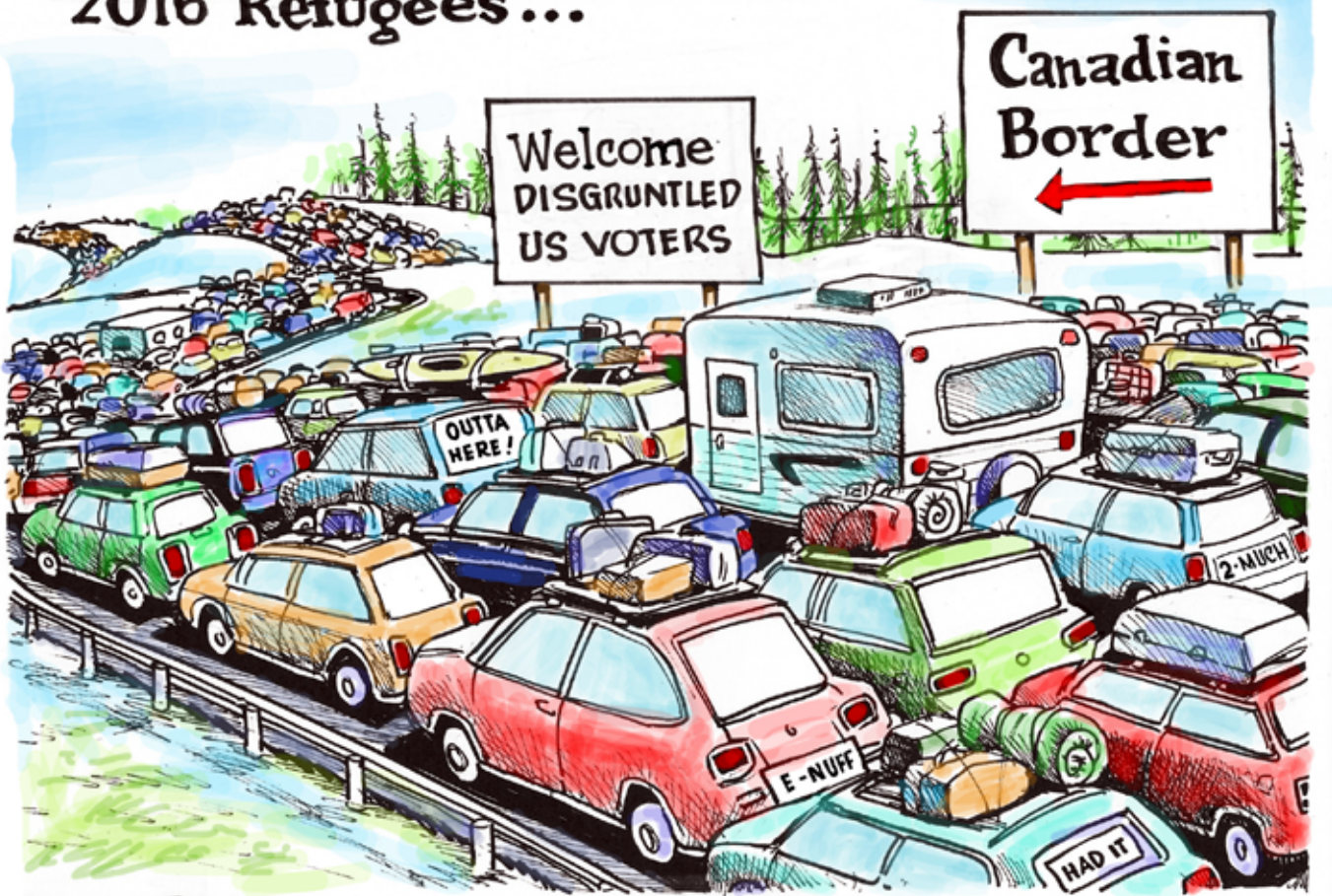
What kind of a country will we be? Will we retreat from each challenge, and sneak back into hatred and fear? Or will we stand strong on our values?

I know the answer to that question. I know what we're made of. We stand together in solidarity, and we're going to show America how to stand up, too.

I'm proud of our unionism. How we stand together in the good times, and how we stand together when it's hard.

Brothers and sisters, let's stand together for raising wages, for a better America and a better tomorrow. Let's march together. Let's organize together. Let's register together. Let's vote together. And let's win together.

## 2016 Refugees...



DAVE GRANLUND © www.davegranlund.com

# *How The People's Party Prevailed In 2020*

BY ROBERT REICH

**T**hird parties have rarely posed much of a threat to the dominant two parties in America. So how did the People's Party win the U.S. presidency and a majority of both houses of Congress in 2020?

It started four years before, with the election of 2016.

As you remember, Donald Trump didn't have enough delegates to become the Republican candidate, so the GOP convention that summer was "brokered" – which meant the party establishment took control, and nominated the speaker of the House, Paul Ryan.

Trump tried to incite riots but his "I deserve to be president because I'm the best person in the world!" speech incited universal scorn instead, and he slunk off the national stage [his last words, shouted as he

got into his stretch limousine, were "Fu-- you, America!"]

On the Democratic side, despite a large surge of votes for Bernie Sanders in the final months of the primaries, Hillary Clinton's stable of wealthy donors and superdelegates put her over the top.

Both Republican and Democratic political establishments breathed palpable sighs of relief, and congratulated themselves on remaining in control of the nation's politics.

They attributed Trump's rise to his fanning of bigotry and xenophobia, and Sanders's popularity to his fueling of left-wing extremism.

They conveniently ignored the deeper anger in both camps about the arbitrariness and unfairness of the economy, and about a political system rigged in favor

of the rich and privileged.

And they shut their eyes to the anti-establishment fury that had welled up among independents, young people, poor and middle-class Democrats, and white working-class Republicans.

So they went back to doing what they had been doing before.

Establishment Republicans reverted to their old blather about the virtues of the “free market,” and establishment Democrats returned to their perennial call for “incremental reform.”

And Wall Street, big corporations, and a handful of billionaires resumed pulling the strings of both parties to make sure regulatory agencies didn’t have enough staff to enforce rules, and to pass the Trans Pacific Partnership.

Establishment politicians also arranged to reduce taxes on big corporations and simultaneously increase federal subsidies to them, expand tax loopholes for the wealthy, and cut Social Security and Medicare to pay for it all.

“Sadly, we have no choice,” said the new President, who had staffed the White House and Treasury with Wall Streeters and corporate lobbyists, and filled boards and commissions with corporate executives].

Meanwhile, most Americans continued to lose ground.

Even before the recession of 2018, most families were earning less than they’d earned in 2000, adjusted for inflation. Businesses continued to shift most employees off their payrolls and into “on demand” contracts so workers had no idea what they’d be earning from week to week. And the ranks of the working poor continued to swell.

At the same time, CEO pay packages grew even larger, Wall Street bonus pools got fatter, and a record number of billionaires were becoming multi-billionaires.

Then, of course, came the recession, along with bank losses requiring another round of bailouts. The treasury secretary, a former managing director of Morgan Stanley, expressed shock and outrage, explaining the nation had no choice and vowing to “get tough” on the banks once the crisis was over.

Politics abhors a vacuum. In 2019, the People’s Party filled it.

Its platform called for getting big money out of politics, ending “crony capitalism,” abolishing corporate welfare, stopping the revolving door between government and the private sector, and busting up the big Wall Street banks and corporate monopolies.

The People’s Party also pledged to revoke the Trans Pacific Partnership, hike taxes on the rich to pay for a wage subsidy [a vastly expanded Earned Income Tax Credit] for everyone earning below the median, and raise taxes on corporations that outsource jobs abroad or pay their executives more than 100 times the pay of typical Americans.

Americans rallied to the cause. Millions who called themselves conservatives and Tea Partiers joined

with millions who called themselves liberals and progressives against a political establishment that had shown itself incapable of hearing what they had been demanding for years.

The rest, as they say, is history.

*Robert B. Reich served in three national administrations, most recently as secretary of labor under President Bill Clinton. He also served on President Obama’s transition advisory board. His latest book is Aftershock: The Next Economy and America’s Future.*

## For Whom The Bell Tolls

**S**arah was in the fertilized egg business. She had several hundred young pullets and 10 roosters to fertilize the eggs.

She kept records and any rooster not performing went into the soup pot and was replaced.

This took a lot of time, so she bought some tiny bells and attached them to her roosters. Each bell had a different tone, so she could tell from a distance which rooster was performing. Now, she could sit on the porch and fill out an efficiency report by just listening to the bells.

Sarah’s favorite rooster, old Butch, was a very fine specimen but this morning she noticed old Butch’s bell hadn’t rung at all! When she went to investigate, she saw the other roosters were busy chasing pullets, bells-a-ringing, but the pullets hearing the roosters coming, would run for cover.

To Sarah’s amazement, old Butch had his bell in his beak, so it couldn’t ring. He’d sneak up on a pullet, do his job, and walk on to the next one.

Sarah was so proud of old Butch, she entered him in a show and he became an overnight sensation among the judges.

The result was the judges not only awarded old Butch the “No Bell Peace Prize” they also awarded him the “Pulletsurprise” as well.

Clearly old Butch was a politician in the making.

Who else but a politician could figure out how to win two of the most coveted awards on our planet by being the best at sneaking up on the unsuspecting populace and screwing them when they weren’t paying attention?

Vote carefully in the next election. You can’t always hear the bells. – *Thanks to Iris Lochner for this combination rib-tickler and thought-provoker*

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## *Where Does GOP's Right-Wing Grouchiness Come From?*

**I**'ve found it! I've discovered the original document from which today's Tea Party pontificators have drawn their political creed.

Tea-infused Republicans are the "anti" party – anti-science, anti-public, anti-worker, anti-environment, anti-Obama ... anti-anti-anti. Where does all this unrelenting bombastic negativity come from? It turns out that their sour philosophy is rooted in Horse Feathers. It's a 1932 Marx Brothers musical comedy that features Groucho belting out a song with these lyrics:

*Your proposition may be good/ But let's have one thing understood*

*Whatever it is, I'm against it!/ And even when you've changed it*

*Or condensed it/ I'm against it!*

So it's no surprise that the GOP's Senate leaders and presidential seekers have taken a preemptory "we're agin' it," head-in-the-sand stand against *any-one* President Obama would nominate to fill the current Supreme Court vacancy created by the death of Antonin Scalia. We won't let logic, fairness or our duty to the Constitution reverse our petulant, purely partisan, knee-jerk "NO," they vaingloriously proclaim. Maybe if he nominates a corporation or a sack of corporate cash to sit on the court they'd change their tune, but otherwise they're a big, fat no, no, no!

Actually, their recalcitrance is no surprise, for the right wing has consistently been an obstructionist group throughout our history. Indeed, there wouldn't even be a USA if the reactionaries of the 1770s had won the day – their Tory faction adamantly opposed Jefferson, Adams, Washington, and the other "radicals" who broke from the British Monarchy to forge our independent nation. And they've fought every progressive advance since – abolition of slavery, extending the vote to women, civil rights, Social Security and Medicare, women's rights, gay marriage, etc. etc.

The "Grouchos" of today are just singing the same old reactionary song, still trying to shove America

back into a monarchy of the rich. So I really didn't expect this!

The National Republican Party has published an official policy document showing that the GOP really might be more than a gaggle of serve-the-rich plutocrats and wacky, Trumped-up right-wingers. Just when you thought the party was consuming itself in the know-nothingism of its presidential pretenders and the recalcitrant do-nothingism of its congress critters, out comes a sign of sanity.

Right at the top of this 18-page manifesto, the party proclaims that, "Our government was created by the people for all the people, and it must serve no less a purpose." All the people! Forget pontifications by Wall Street billionaires dividing America into virtuous "creators" [like themselves] and worthless "moochers" [like you and me] – this document abounds with commitments to the common good. "America does not prosper," it proudly proclaims on page three, "unless all Americans prosper." Wow – that's downright democratic!

And how's this for a complete turnaround: "Labor is the United States. The men and women, who with their minds, their hearts and hands, create the wealth that is shared in this country – they are America." Holy Koch brothers, share the wealth?

Yes, and how about this: "The protection of the right of workers to organize into unions and to bargain collectively is the firm and permanent policy of the [Republican Party]." Eat your heart out, Scott Walker, and you other labor-bashing GOP governors!

The document also supports our public postal service, the United Nations, equal rights for women, expanding our national parks, "vigorous enforcement of anti-trust laws," and raising the minimum wage. New enlightenment in the Grand Old Party. Hallelujah!

Can all this be true?

Yes – except it's not new. This document is the Republican Party Platform ... of 1956.

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# Who Are Our Rescuers? Us!

**T**he time has come. Six years after the Supreme Court's malignant Citizens United ruling, nearly every American plainly sees how our nation's historic, political ethic of citizen equality – “one person one vote” – has been buried in a roaring avalanche of corrupt, corporate money and voter suppression.

Moreover, nearly nine years after Wall Street thieves wrecked our economy, the great majority also plainly sees that the court's turbo-charge of money politics has produced economic policies that richly reward the plutocratic robbers and coldly abandon the robbed.

There's no need to convince the American people that they've been stiffed. As they reveal in poll after poll, they know it, for they're experiencing it personally, and they're furious at the business-as-usual establishment that has done it to them. A major, non-partisan survey taken last September by Public Policy Polling found:

- 80% of Republicans and 82% of Democrats “strongly agree” that special interest money has too much influence in political campaigns. Only 4% in either party disagreed.
- 85% of GOP primary voters and 86% of Democrats agree that elections would be less corrupt if candidates focused on small donations from ordinary people, rather than on big money from special interests.
- 62% of Republicans and 72% of Democrats agree that America needs public funding of elections. Similarly, a New York Times/CBS poll last summer found that across the entire political spectrum.
- 85% of Americans think that officeholders “promote policies that directly help” the special interests that funded their campaigns;
- 85% say that the present system of financing political campaigns must either be “fundamentally” changed [39%] or “completely rebuilt” [46%].
- 77% say the unlimited amount of money that wealthy interests can now give to candidates should be ... well, limited.

This powerful anti-Big Money sentiment is also part of what has fueled establishment-stunning Bernie and Donnie presidential runs, and it's why we democracy rebels should shift now from complaining about the plutocratic corruption of our country to stopping it.

The people are ready, and this hyper-political year is the time to move, for the presidential and congressional elections will focus public attention on the political system for months to come, and corporate and political cash will be on full display [from the Koch Brothers' Billionaire Money Bash to the garish cor-

porate sponsorship of both parties' national conventions].

While all of the establishment forces [and too many of our progressive leaders] have dourly told us commoners that we must resign ourselves to the new Citizens United order of court-sanctioned rule-by-money, the people themselves have not accepted that.

But where could they turn for help since the leadership of both political parties either enthusiastically welcomed government of, by, and for the 1-percenters [the GOP] or – with a wink and a nod – agreed to go along with it in exchange for getting their own share of big money donations [the Democrats]?

For six years, the broad public has been yearning for someone, something, some moment, to arise and rescue the founding ideals of 1776.

Well, here it is! And who are our rescuers? Us!

This April, the Democracy Awakening and Democracy Spring are bringing together a diverse coalition of labor, business, environmentalists, public interest advocates, media and issue-specific constituencies, along with you, me and thousands of mavericks gathering in Philadelphia, Washington and around the country to fire a new democratic “shot heard 'round the world.”

This will signal to the millions of members of the coalitions that we are not helpless in the face of an American plutocracy.

And we can go on the offensive to inspire many millions more to shuck the idea that the majority is powerless and to step up with a renewed sense of our own possibilities.

The moment is ripe to rally a People's rebellion, intervene in this year's elections with a clear change agenda, and make this moment the turning point for implementing those changes.

Just getting such a myriad of diverse reform forces to join hands in such an effort is an auspicious sign that maybe – just maybe – we can bind our forces into an effective populist movement for the long haul, rebuilding America's democratic promise for the greater good of all.

Given the opportunity, don't we have to go for it? To join the rebellion and get more information on the upcoming actions in April check out [www.DemocracyAwakening.org](http://www.DemocracyAwakening.org) and [www.DemocracySpring.org](http://www.DemocracySpring.org).

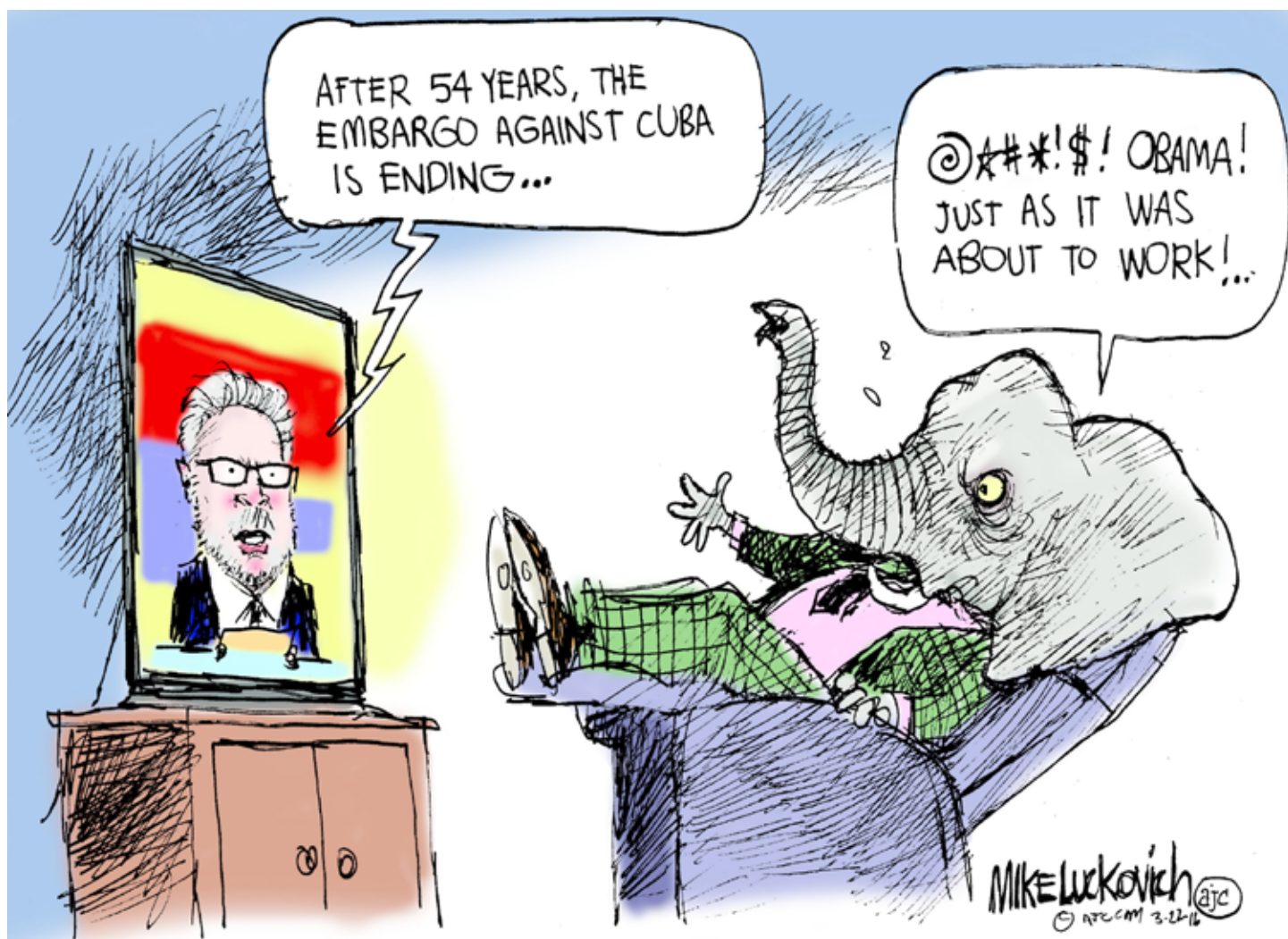
– Jim Hightower

## Candidates

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24

The only question left is this: Will they turn out in big numbers to vote?

That could be the difference between two or four more years of draconian school cuts or a renaissance in public education that would make the likes of Henry Bellmon proud.



# *America's Astounding Human Rights Hypocrisy In Cuba*

BY HARVEY WASSERMAN

Our American president's long-overdue visit to Cuba was a great thing for many reasons. But maybe our elected officials should cease their hypocritical yapping about the human rights situation in Cuba until they come clean about what's happening here in the United States.

To be sure, there is much to say about how this authoritarian regime has handled dissent. The details abound in the corporate media.

But the idea of the United States lecturing Cuba or any other country on this planet about human rights comes down somewhere between embarrassing and nauseating. Consider:

- The U.S. right now has the world's largest prison

population by far. There are 2.2 million citizens in prison here for offenses that include smoking pot and failing to pay off certain debts. At its peak, there were 2.5 million in Stalin's Soviet Gulag.

- The U.S. prison population is hugely over-filled with African-Americans and Hispanics.

• The racial bias of the prison population is directly related to a deliberate Jim Crow strategy of disenfranchisement aimed at keeping people of color from voting.

- There are more citizens in U.S. prisons than there are prisoners in China, another authoritarian country. China's population is four to five times as large as that of the U.S. They do not have an alleged Bill of

Rights.

- The American prison population currently represents almost a quarter of the entire population of Cuba.

- Rape, torture, extended solitary confinement, and other human rights offenses are common in U.S. prisons. In many cases, decent medical care is notably lacking, resulting in avoidable illness and death.

- More than 500,000 Americans are in prison for victimless crimes relating to substances they have chosen to put in their own bodies rather than harm done anyone else.

- On the actual island of Cuba, the U.S. holds a

reserve at Guantanamo that the Cuban people want returned to them. In the interim, prisoners are held there in denial of all human rights, often without trial, in some cases being subjected to what can only be termed torture. Some have been held for years after their release has been authorized. Guantanamo is maintained on Cuban soil precisely so those held there can be denied their human rights.

- The United States still has the death penalty, which has been repeatedly used to execute human beings who later prove innocent. One former president of the United States, George W. Bush, personally

CONTINUED ON PAGE 42

# *Our Elegant Man In Havana*

BY FROMA HARROP

**B**arack Obama walked the cobblestone streets of Old Havana to cheers of "Welcome to Cuba!" After decades of official hostility between the United States and Cuba, Obama has successfully nudged the two toward normal relations.

After decades of craziness, it's heartening to see smart policy regarding Cuba. So Cuba remains a repressive country run by a dictator. We do business with those kinds of places all the time. And nothing is going to change Cuba faster than a surge of American visitors and investors.

America's long-running, robotic animus toward a country with a Castro in charge is not only an emotional response. It's ineffectual, as well. The trade embargo has impoverished the Cuban people, cut off a foreign market for American businesses and sent disorderly boatloads of people packing for the United States.

And the meaner America has been the more the Castro brothers could justify their police-state crack-downs. They needed us to play the villain in their fairy tale.

Obama only frustrates them. By ditching the "with us or agin us" approach to foreign affairs, he actually weakens our would-be adversaries. It is a judo move that turns our foes' dead weight against them, making our rivals lose their balance.

Our political blowhards don't get this at all. They call Obama a wimp when he quietly sits through anti-American protests in Latin America. But as Obama explained to *The Atlantic*, ignoring the ranters helps "right-size" such egotists as Venezuela's late strongman, Hugo Chavez – "rather than blow him up as this 10-foot giant adversary."

Raul Castro did not greet Obama at the airport, not so much out of hostility as out of fear that he'd seem small next to the American president getting the love from his people.

Granma, Cuba's official Communist Party news service, predictably warned Obama not to expect Cuba

to "abandon its revolutionary ideals" with a warming of relations. That's nice.

Cubans who have trouble finding even potatoes in their stores know that elsewhere in the Caribbean, potatoes weigh down Costco warehouse shelves. Small wonder Castro fears overly warm outbursts of friendship.

Thanks to the thaw, Google has apparently signed a deal with Cuba to revolutionize the island's lousy broadband and Wi-Fi access. Imagine the flow of information then.

Back in our more bellicose political quarters, Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida is vowing to continue blocking a U.S. ambassador to Cuba. Castro needs Rubio as much as Rubio needs Castro. For what useful purpose has become increasingly unclear.

Many remember the bizarre case of Elian Gonzalez, the Cuban boy caught in an epic custody battle some 16 years ago. Elian's mother had drowned while trying to bring her 5-year-old onto the shores of Florida. Elian's father in Cuba wanted his son sent back, but the Miami relatives insisted the boy stay with them.

The case for keeping Elian here was that America was a better place to live than the Communist dictatorship of Fidel Castro. Fortunately, U.S. family law prevailed: A man didn't lose the rights to his son because he was a Cuban wanting to live in Cuba.

Now a handsome man of 22, Elian Gonzalez says he'd like to come back to the United States – but only to visit as a tourist. What a fine ending to this story.

Perhaps the most perceptive take of Obama's visit to Cuba came from Carmen Diaz, a 70-year-old resident of Havana. "I feel this visit of an American president to Cuba is being done in the most elegant way possible," Diaz told *The New York Times*, "from his initial campaign to now inspiring a new era of relations with Cuba."

Our elegant president has done us proud.

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# UNCONTROLLABLE

## *Pentagon, Corporate Contractors Are Too Big To Audit*

BY RALPH NADER

**T**he Reuters report put this colossal dereliction simply: “A law in effect since 1992 requires annual audits of all federal agencies – and the Pentagon alone has never complied.”

All \$585 billion and more, e.g., for the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts, of your money – not just unaudited, but, in the sober judgment of the Government Accountability Office [GAO] of the Congress, this vast military budget is year after year *unauditable*. That means that the Congressional auditors cannot obtain the basic accounting data to do their job on your behalf.

Auditing the Department of Defense receives left/right support, from Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont to Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas.

H.R. 942, the “Audit the Pentagon Act of 2014,” is supported by both Democrats and Republicans in the House of Representatives. In the statement announcing this legislation, the sponsors declared, “The Treasury Department’s Financial Report of the U.S. Government for fiscal year 2012 shows the DOD yet again has nothing to audit – its books are a mess. In the last dozen years, the Pentagon has broken every promise to Congress about when DOD would pass an

audit. Meanwhile, Congress doubled Pentagon spending.”

Republican right-winger, Rep. Mike Conaway of Texas used to be a CPA in private life. At a Congressional hearing in 2011, he told Defense Secretary Robert Gates: “I go home to folks in West Texas, and when they find out the Department of Defense can’t be audited, they are stunned.” His constituents may be more stunned to learn that their congressman also voted for all expanding defense budgets, which is why H.R. 942 is going nowhere unless the people rally to make auditing the Pentagon a presidential election issue.

Secretary Gates and his successor Secretary Leon Panetta agree with Rep. Conway’s observations. Yet it has seemed that the military – this huge expanse of bureaucracy, which owns 25 million acres [over seven times the size of Connecticut] and owns over 500,000 buildings in the U.S. and around the world – is beyond anybody’s control, including that of the secretaries of defense, their own internal auditors, the president, tons of GAO audits publically available, and the Congress. How can this be?

Enormous scandal after enormous scandal is reported by newspapers such as Reuters, the New York Times, the Washington Post and the Wall Street Journal and by news services such as Associated Press and ProPublica. Citizen groups from the left and right excoriate this runaway budget, including the national Taxpayers Union, POGO, and Taxpayers for Common Sense. *To no avail!*

Have you heard of the \$43 million natural gas station in Afghanistan that was supposed to cost \$500,000? Do you know about the \$150 million villas that were built for corporate contractors in Afghanistan so they could spend another \$600 million advising Afghans about starting private businesses in that war-torn country?

Or how about purchase of billions of dollars of spare parts because the Army or Air Force didn’t know the whereabouts of existing spare parts in forgotten warehouses here and there? What about the \$9 billion the Pentagon admitted could not be accounted for in Iraq during the first several months of the invasion?

The list goes on, together with massive cost overruns by the private contractors that are rewarded with more contracts. Soldiers get dirty drinking water, bad food, inadequate equipment, and security breaches by these contractors. No matter.

President Eisenhower’s farewell warning about the “military-industrial complex” becomes ever more of an understatement as it devours over half of the entire federal government’s operating budget.

Mike McCord, the Pentagon’s chief financial officer, has some startling explanations for why the department is not ready for an audit. It’s not the department’s “primary mission,” he says, which is “to defend the nation, fight and win wars.” He continues: “We’re too big to just sort of blow up all our systems and go buy one new, gargantuan IT system that runs

the entire department.”

Where are the accounting standards groups when we need them to speak up?

Mr. McCord certainly knows how to enhance his job security. Why no Pentagon audit? Too big to audit? No. Just too many scandals, too much waste, gigantic weapon system redundancies, overlaps between military branches, and many sinecures in bloated, inflexible bureaucracies, so often condemned by commanding generals in the field.

McCord himself has pointed to the areas in which he prefers to cut costs in order to save money: Congressionally-opposed base closures, retiree costs, and consolidating “its Tricare health system.”

In the final analysis, the principal culprits, because they have so much to lose in profits and bonuses, are the giant defense companies like Lockheed Martin, Boeing, General Dynamics, Raytheon, Northrop Grumman and others that lobby Congress, congressional district by congressional district, for more, more, more military contracts, grants and subsidies.

They routinely hire ex-Pentagon specialists and top brass who know how to negotiate the ways and means inside of the government.

President Eisenhower sure knew what he was talking about. Remember, he warned not just about taxpayer waste, but a Moloch eating away at our liberties and our critical domestic necessities.

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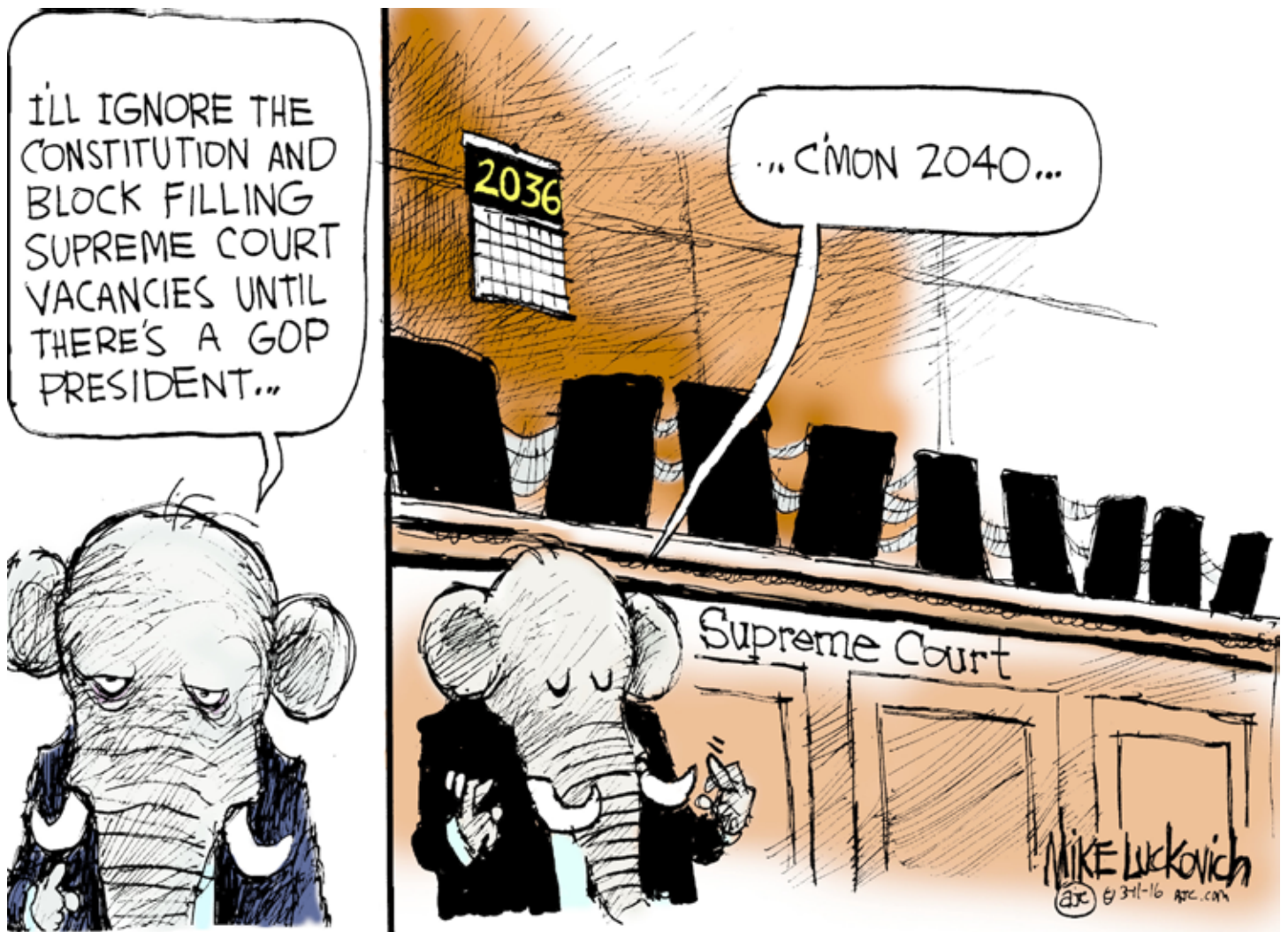
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# *McConnell's Obstinance On Vacancy Is 'Lame' Historically*

BY DANNY M. ADKISON

**H**ere's the argument: Following the announcement of the sudden death of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Scalia, the leader of the U.S. Senate declared that the Senate would not consent to anyone to replace Scalia until after the 2016 presidential election. A short while later, the announcement became clearer: the Senate would not even consider considering an appointment to fill Scalia's vacancy.

Why? Various reasons, but the primary one, according to Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, is that President Obama is lame duck and therefore the appointment should be delayed until after the upcoming presidential election. That would allow, he argues, for the people to have a say in who should be appointed

to the court.

This reaction was immediately suspect given the statement McConnell made on the floor of the Senate during President Obama's first term that the Senate should do everything in its power to block the president.

In spite of all that, is there any validity in the majority leader's argument?

First, there is the problem of asserting that President Obama is lame duck. Originally, that phrase described someone who was defeated in an election but was still serving while waiting for the winner, at some future date, to be inaugurated. Until the 20th Amendment this meant that from the first week in November of a leap year until early March an incumbent who

lost was lame duck.

Using this definition, President Obama won't be lame duck until early November of this year; however, the phrase has also, in modern time, come to be used to describe the last year in office of a president who is term limited [which was allowed by ratification of the 22nd Amendment].

For argument's sake let's assume the president is as lame duck as any president can be. This will allow us to focus on some specific questions and get us further along in the debate.

Not so many years ago a political scientist tested this hypothesis: Do "great" presidents appoint "great" justices to the Supreme Court? Surprisingly, they don't. The question then becomes, "If greatness in the presidency doesn't explain greatness on the Supreme Court – what does?" Would you believe being a lame duck president?

Let's start with anecdotal evidence. Historically, who are some Supreme Court justices who have been appointed by lame duck presidents? Three immediately come to mind: John Marshall, Louis Brandeis, and Benjamin Cardozo. How do experts rate them? Using a five-point scale [great, near great, average, below average, and failure], Brandeis was rated "great." Using the same scale, Cardozo was rated "great." Chief Justice Marshall [the only American etched in stone, along with eight other great lawmakers, directly above where the justices sit] is considered the "greatest."

It turns out that, generally speaking, lame duck presidents are inclined to appoint some top-rated justices. What's the explanation for this?

When it comes to making appointments to the Supreme Court, lame duck presidents view themselves as in a weakened position. This is especially the case when the president identifies with one major political party and the Senate is controlled by the other major political party.

In such situations, presidents are aware that the Senate, even before the president has nominated someone to fill a vacancy on the court, is predisposed to oppose the appointment. One way a president can defuse this situation is to nominate someone of such high caliber that the Senate would look petty [that's putting it mildly] were it to refuse to consent to the president appointing the highly qualified nominee.

The result is that in the one study of this phenomenon the justices appointed by lame duck presidents had an average rating of 3.6 [a score of five would be considered "great"] while all others judicial appointments averaged a score of three.

One final thought: In December 1975, there was a vacancy on the Supreme Court. President Gerald Ford nominated John Paul Ste-

vens to fill the position. He did this on the first day of December of that year [just a few more months remaining in his term than President Obama]. The Democrats, at that time, held over 60 seats in the U.S. Senate [today Republicans control the Senate with 54 seats]. Sixteen days later, the Senate consented to allow Republican President Ford to appoint Stevens, and he went on to serve in a very long and distinguished career.

There was no threat from then Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield to block President Ford in filling the position. There was no talk that the Senate should wait to allow the people to make the call [by waiting for the next election. But, you say, this is not a fair comparison since Ford was not [under any definition] lame duck.

True. But President Ford did have one major distinction. President Ford had never been elected to the presidency. President Ford had never been elected vice president, either. The only people who had ever had the chance to vote for President Ford were about 500,000 people residing in the fifth congressional district of Michigan.

*Dr. Danny M. Adkison teaches honors American government at Oklahoma State University.*

## Perils Of Predictive Text!

A guy sends a text to his next-door neighbor:

"Bob, I'm sorry. I've been riddled with guilt and I have to confess: I have been helping myself to your wife when you're not around, probably more than you. I know it's no excuse but I don't get it at home. I can't live with the guilt any longer. I hope you'll accept my sincerest apology. It won't happen again."

Feeling outrage and betrayed, Bob grabs his gun, goes into the bedroom, and without a word, shoots his wife.

Moments later Bob gets a second text: "Really should use spell check! That should be 'wif'."

- Thanks to A.J. Henshaw for this gem

### Oklahoma Friends Meetings (Quakers)

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

- Author unknown

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## Ayn Rand, For Beginners

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### THE AGE OF SELFISHNESS

*Ayn Rand, Morality, and the Financial Crisis*

By Darryl Cunningham

Abrams ComicArts

240 pages, \$17.95

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BY JOHN WOOD

**D**arryl Cunningham's book is a bit unusual. At first blush, you might think it's a children's book if you only open the cover. But when it's drawn on the page, it's a lot easier to explain.

Try explaining derivatives or the mortgage crisis in words – it's hard, it's complicated. You typically have to be an economist to follow it fully in understandable terms.

This is often why it seems we are reliant on the media to explain these complex economic phenomena, but they notoriously do not give enough background. Comic art seems to creatively fill in the gap and visualize the polemic tension all too apparent in the presidential primary mess we find ourselves in this moment.

Cunningham's book reminds me of the *Ayn Rand For Beginners* and other "For Beginners" books with comics to explain complex ideas for the average reader. Cunningham's book is different from the "For Beginners" version on Ayn Rand as it extends her philosophy into today's most recent economic crisis and explores how liberals and conservatives think differently.

When I read *The Age of Selfishness*, I found it both edifying and disheartening at the same time. Cunningham's book is not just your father's comic found in the garage from the 1960s; instead, it nimbly sums up what led up to the 2008 economic meltdown.

This meltdown originates from Rand's fiction and her philosophy of Objectivism. Her philosophy is embraced by the rich and powerful and it unfortunately still plays out today. Cunningham explores Rand's

legacy, proposing a cautionary tale of the dangers of arrogance of ideologically blind conventions.

The book itself has three parts from: "Ayn Rand," "The Crash," and "The Age of Selfishness." Rand's biography starts from the beginning, her 1905 birth to a relatively middle-class family in St. Petersburg, Russia.

The 1917 Russian Revolution through Rand's life is topsy-turvy. In her family's struggle to get back what they lost were the seeds of her Objectivist philosophy, percolated in fear that others might determine her life course. These events and her new mindset led her to emigrate to the United States and quickly find herself in the fortunate position as a junior Hollywood screenwriter. Soon after, she married a small-time movie actor, Frank O'Connor.

Her Objectivist philosophies played out in her fictional work: *The Fountainhead* [1943] and *Atlas Shrugged* [1957]. Her Objectivism seems to resonate with an upside down world from the New Deal, where selfishness is a virtue, the individual is worshiped over the community, the collective enslaves people through embracing altruism, where those who are inferior and lazy steal from the pockets of rich in a reverse Robin Hood scenario.

In this mindset, I would think Rand would agree with Oklahoma's penchant to cut taxes regardless of the circumstances because taxes to her are theft. The mindset says, the economy is good, give the excess taxes to the people.

Alternatively, when the economy has defaulted, the people need the money themselves more than ever to spur the economy. Why? Because the Yellow Brick

Road is paved with “freedom and prosperity,” from tax breaks as told by the Wonderful Wizard of the Free Market.

Unfortunately, this scenario is false as our experience with the last century’s market failures shows – “trickle-down,” “tax cuts for the wealthy,” “defund, delegitimize, and destroy” doesn’t provide positive economic futures in Oklahoma or anywhere else. Instead, it just creates mounting debt and a greater inequality.

This also reminds me of the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs’ embrace of the overly simplistic Laffer curve, which unfortunately gains support from those with a Rand-style mindset. Actually, 44 University of Chicago economists in a 2012 study debunked the Laffer Curve’s claims to increase tax revenue after a tax cut.

Much like Rand’s writings, the Laffer Curve is pure fiction. I am not aware of any evidence in recent history where tax cuts actually increased revenue. Sorry, Laffer.

While Rand was before Laffer, her ideas are congruent in that she dismisses taxation as theft, and asserts the path to freedom and prosperity can only come from an unrestrained free market. However, without taxes, would we have a civilization? Would we have roads? Parks? Public schools? U.S. Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr would have said: “NO!”

Rand was a rather charismatic woman with a small, passionate coterie and a growing literary fame. She famously struck up an affair with one of her fans, a younger married man named Nathan Blumenthal. Their affair ruined both his marriage – and hers. What I think is most interesting is who became a devoted Rand follower: Alan Greenspan, who for nearly 20 years under both Democrat and Republican presidents was the chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve.

Greenspan’s thinking, warped by Rand, led to the economic tailspin in 2008. In Cunningham’s second section, he describes the “The

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Crash,” with a rather helpful set of storyboards visually detailing the events that led to the crisis.

On Oct. 23, 2008, in a congressional hearing, Greenspan admitted to the world that his free-market ideology ignoring specific regulations was faulty, including

those regarding derivatives, mutual funds, and credit default swaps [CDSs].

Greenspan’s blind confidence in the self-regulating free market gave space to rather dubious market schemes, such as fraudulent mortgage securities – weakening

the worldwide banking system, leading to toxic mortgages, further bursting the housing bubble. Cunningham's comic narrative helps the reader grasp these rather dense economic terms with a simple and intelligible storyboard.

In the final section, the author explores the psychology of those who hold Rand's radical ideas today in the aftermath of the 2008 market collapse. Cunningham cites studies showing how liberals and conservatives process the information differently: Conservatives are more likely to dismiss science when it runs counter to their beliefs, quicker to judge others, and aren't bothered by inequality. By contrast, liberals are more empathetic overall than conservatives and more likely to change their opinions when confronted by evidence. Further, they view the world as more complex than conservatives.

## Cuba

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35

authorized 152 executions while governor of Texas.

- Access to due process in the United States is significantly restricted by race and class.
- There are numerous political prisoners being held without human rights guarantees throughout the U.S. prison system whose "offenses" are every bit as illusory as many of the prisoners held in violation of human rights in Cuba.

Among them is Leonard Peltier, a native American wrongly convicted of murder four decades ago. Peltier has repeatedly petitioned for a new trial and been turned down by presidents Carter, Reagan, Bush, Clinton, Bush and now Obama, even though the evidence overwhelmingly indicates he is innocent of the two murders for which he was convicted in the mid 1970s.

Peltier is now suffering from advanced diabetes. He's being held under extremely harsh conditions in clear violation of a wide range of laws allegedly protecting the basic human rights guaranteed all prisoners by the U.S. criminal justice code and by international law. Peltier has grandchildren and great grandchildren he has never seen. If he were being held under the same circumstances in Cuba, the U.S. would be screaming for his release.

In 2001, as he was leaving office, Bill Clinton chose to pardon multi-millionaire Marc Rich, with immense direct and indirect benefits later coming to the Clintons and their various interests. Though Clinton was thoroughly and repeatedly briefed about Leonard Peltier, he chose to leave Peltier in prison, to not grant him a new trial, and to do nothing to mitigate the illegal conditions under which he's being held.

- Since Richard Nixon's declaration of the Drug War in 1971, various branches of the U.S. police system have arrested more than 41 million American citizens, almost four times as many people as now live in Cuba. The arrests have been heavily weighted against

Cunningham ends the book with "Ayn Rand was wrong – selfishness is not a virtue. Altruism is not a moral weakness. Taxation is the price we pay for civilization. It's time we rejected this selfish philosophy."

Cunningham's book is childish, it's artistic, it doesn't pull any punches. His ideas are transformed from mere words on a page, to a storyboard that movies are based on. It's a great book for someone who was mystified by the economic crisis, but wants to know more.

I think Hollywood could easily turn this book into a feature film, a story that needs to be told.

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

people of color and low income. With the \$1 trillion or more spent on this mass incarceration, all those arrested could have been sent to college.

- In recent years the incentive to incarcerate American citizens [guilty or otherwise] has been vastly accelerated by the establishment of private prisons, whose profits are based on the number of people they can lock up. Americans charged with crimes are now viewed as "cash flow" by this for-profit prison system, which has every incentive to keep them incarcerated as long as possible, no matter how their alleged crime or violated human rights might stack up.

- Though they recently crashed the entire U.S. economy with a stunning array of criminal activities, no banker or financier who helped devastate the livelihoods of millions of families worldwide has gone to prison.

- American police forces routinely maim and kill innocent citizens based largely on race and class, with little or no legal recourse.

- In the name of fighting terrorism and the Drug War, U.S. police forces now regularly confiscate cash and other property from innocent citizens without due process or reasonable legal recourse. The funds are often used for the personal benefit of the officers involved.

- A nationwide program of electronic spying on private citizens has been in place in the U.S. for many years, leaving the Fourth Amendment right to privacy in shambles.

There is, of course, much more. But at very least we wished that President Obama had admitted to some or all of the above amidst his cringe-worthy lectures to the Cubans on the sacred nature of human rights. *Harvey Wasserman is author of America at the Brink of Rebirth: The Organic Spiral of U.S. History and co-author of The Strip & Flip Selection of 2016: Five Jim Crows & Electronic Election Theft.*

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

If they don't, Oklahoma must brace itself not only for the likelihood that Satanists and others will be allowed to erect monuments at the Capitol, but also that precious tax dollars will be funneled into sectarian endeavors of all sorts, no matter how specious.

## *Pruitt Politics*

Two seemingly unrelated news stories recently underscored Oklahoma's current plight.

First, the U.S. Supreme Court declined in a 6-2 decision to hear the state's [and Nebraska's] proposed lawsuit challenging Colorado's laws that legalized marijuana.

Then, Oklahoma City public schools announced elimination of 208 teaching positions next year, part of \$30 million in cuts over a two-year period necessitated by the Legislature's woeful mismanagement of state finances.

Where doth the twain meet? At the intersection of public policy and public dollars, of course.

Since gaining control of state government in 2010, Republicans allowed their coalition's most aggressive ideologues to pursue myriad specious – and often unconstitutional – policies, including bans on Sharia law and same-sex marriage.

The windmill tilting accomplished two things: It squandered precious tax dollars, diverting them into courtroom battles defending the indefensible and away from vital state services, such as public education. And it made a series of political statements that appealed to the most strident elements of the GOP base, but did nothing to address the state's most vexing problems.

It's not clear how much it's cost the state to fight so many losing battles in court. The attorney general's office doesn't break down the hours and expenses connected with each case.

We do know this: A review three years ago found 18 measures were declared unconstitutional between 2006-13, most after Republicans took control of both legislative houses and all statewide offices.

Moreover, it cost taxpayers \$303,333 in plaintiff's legal fees when a federal judge declared the Sharia law ban to be unconstitutional – a ban initiated by GOP lawmakers who knew the referendum would drive a xenophobic segment of their base to the polls in big numbers.

Some back-of-the-envelope math suggests \$300,000 could have saved as many as 10 Oklahoma City teaching positions to be eliminated next year.

The lawsuit against Colorado's marijuana legalization laws was particularly perplexing, given that At-

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torney General Scott Pruitt is a proponent of states' rights and styles himself as Oklahoma's chief protector against the dreaded "federal overreach."

Rather than celebrating Colorado sovereignty, Pruitt played politics in anticipation of a 2018 gubernatorial run. Nothing bolsters GOP primary cred more than to battle against both the feds and pot.



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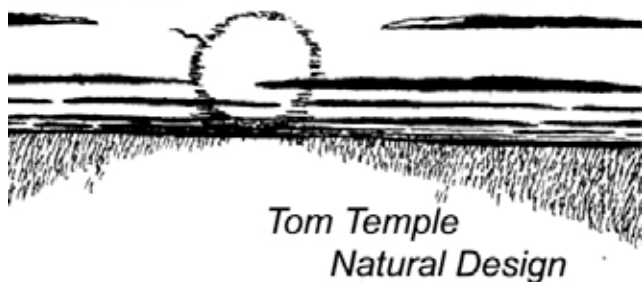
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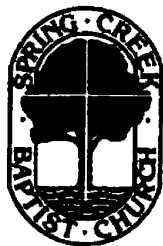
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# Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Tulsa Democrat Mike Workman hopes to derail incumbent U.S. Sen. James Lankford's political career after only two years. Workman was Democratic nominee for state Labor Commissioner in 2014, the year Lankford won election to fill ex-Sen. Tom Coburn's unexpired term.

Hubris or clueless? GOP Rep. Todd Thomsen attended a recent public education rally in his hometown, Ada – despite supporting income tax cuts and corporate welfare that are crippling school budgets.

The race to replace term-limited House Speaker Jeff Hickman is heating up. Veteran Bartlesville Rep. Earl Sears, the House Appropriations and Budget chair, and two-term Atoka Rep. Charles McCall are announced candidates. Norman Rep. Scott Martin is mulling his chances.

In the Senate, term-limited Brian Bingman is expected to be succeeded as President Pro Tem next year by veteran Altus Sen. Mike Schulz.

Gov. Fallin's and the GOP Legislature's disdain for all things Obama has consequences for real people. Medicaid expansion would extend health care to 71,000 working poor Oklahomans experiencing mental illness and substance abuse disorders, according to a new fed report.

Top GOP leaders swoon over House Speaker Paul Ryan as brokered-convention alternative for president. Isn't it odd an evangelical Christian-dominated party would embrace a guy whose bible is authored by Ayn Rand?

Ratepayers, beware: OG&E and PSO, the state's two largest utilities, are pursuing rate hikes – \$92.5 million for OG&E and \$172 million for PSO. – AARP

Oklahoma Factoids: 10 of 12 largest earthquakes in state history have been recorded since 2011; it's been 300 million years since some of state's faults were last active; the current number of state-employed seismologists: 0; 20% of jobs in Oklahoma are oil-gas related. – Time

# Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

largest wind energy state with more than 5,000 megawatts of capacity. Now is the wrong time to destroy an industry with so much potential.

We do need to reduce tax giveaways to Oklahoma business and industry, which total more than \$2 billion each year. But it would be shortsighted to destroy the new wind industry with its good, steady jobs. Instead, let's cut back where tax incentives are not effective.

Phyllis Bryant  
Bethany

Editor, The Observer:

I suggest that they are not insane but are very cold heartedly sane in implementing their trickle down budget. ALEC has their commentaries on their website covering some of their various theories. One of their theories is that the personal income tax hurts the ability of a state to be financially at their best. They maintain the states that have no income tax performed better than those with income taxes as proof of the theory. So when they report on Oklahoma's tax cuts, they project that we will prosper in the future. They had no concern with how much trouble these tax cuts bring to the current Oklahomans. OCPA is perfectly in agreement with ALEC on this. Isn't the Oklahoma GOP? So, the quickest way to conservative nirvana is slashing the income tax quickly.

The other point is their desire to reduce government size. Decreasing the revenue stream requires decreasing the size of government to balance the budget. The quicker the reduction in revenue, the quicker the shrinkage occurs. The quicker you shrink the government, the more cold hearted you must be.

Cunning is a form of sanity, regardless of its viciousness.

Chadwick Cox  
Norman

Editor, The Observer:

I am always amazed at teachers who support Republican legislators. My friend, former state Sen. Dave Herbert, reported that some teachers told him that they did not vote for cuts; Dave, in his subtle manner, said, "Yes you did, you voted for Republicans."

I was dumfounded while campaigning one day to

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bump into teachers who were carrying material for my Republican opponent. However, I did win the contest!

Jeff Hamilton  
Midwest City

*Editor's Note: Jeff Hamilton served in the Oklahoma House of Representatives from 1986-94.*

Editor, The Observer:

The Republican majority in the House and Senate have run this state \$1.5 billion in the hole and now seek to destroy the people who need help the most.

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The state House of Representative voted Mar. 2 to toss 110,000 Oklahomans off the state Medicaid rolls. Today, one in five Oklahomans have no health insurance in a state that desperately needs to expand health insurance coverage. HB 2665, by Rep. Doug Cox R-Grove, passed the House on a 65-34 vote and proceeds to the Senate. Thirty House Democrats were joined by four Republicans in opposition to the measure.

The affected Oklahomans make no more than \$7,332 family of two, \$9,200 family of three or \$11,400 for a family of four. More than 800,000 [two thirds of them children] were enrolled in the state's Medicaid program for low-income families.

Sayre Memorial Hospital, a rural hospital in Beckham County, closed its doors Feb. 1 due to declining Medicare reimbursements and Oklahoma's decision not to expand Medicaid. Seven other hospitals, Vinita, Drumright, Prague, Haskell, Fairfax, Seiling and Pauls Valley have filed bankruptcy since 2010.

*"Far too many Oklahomans have no insurance because they can't afford it. What little medical care these people are receiving they get at hospital emergency rooms which costs everybody. We're shifting the cost of health care from the front end to the back end. We need to expand Medicaid and take care of Oklahomans."* – Rep Regina Goodwin D-Tulsa.

Rep. Cox said his bill would save the Health Care Authority \$111 million. House Minority Leader Scott Inman, D-Del City,, pointed out that the measure would cost the state \$222 million in matching federal funds. Rep Claudia Griffith D-Norman, a nurse, indicated that the bill would cost \$3 billion in federal funding Oklahoma receives for health care.

*"While the Legislature seeks to kick 111,000 low-income Oklahomans off the Medicaid rolls, Republican legislators and the Republican governor have voted to reduce state income taxes by \$1 billion and have authorized \$2 billion in tax credits and exemptions for oil/gas industry, businesses and corporations. The Republican priority is their pocketbook, not the health and well-being of Oklahomans."* – Mike Ray, Media Director, House Democratic Caucus

In addition to the governor calling for more taxes on the working people of this state, she also blames the people for their lack of understanding of her situation. We understand her situation point blank: she's incompetent for the role of governor. Where is the call for impeachment?

What we need now more than ever are clear-headed decision-makers coming to terms with the disastrous problems plaguing our state. These wrong-headed decisions indicate that a Republican majority at the Capitol is not interested in The People. The Republican majority only seeks favor from lobbyists.

Les Brelsford  
Red Oak

*Editor's Note: On March 28, the Senate Health and Human Services Committee wisely killed Cox's Medicaid bill on a 5-3 vote. However, the fate of more*

than 100,000 Medicaid recipients remained in jeopardy at press time.

Editor, The Observer:

In light of the wonderful success Freedom Oklahoma had to head off the "Slate of Hate" – 26 anti-gay and lesbian bills in the 2016 Oklahoma Legislative session – I can never know for sure but I think I feel like a black person might have felt after the signing of the 1964 Public Accommodations and 1965 Voting Rights Acts when black people were still abused and subjected to discrimination.

Just as the 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* ending segregation in public schools did not immediately change the social environment, so will *Obergefell v. Hodges* not bring an immediate acceptance of marriage equality to America's gay and lesbian taxpayers. We will hear the echoes and see the shadows of these cases for many years to come.

The lifetime views and hatreds of some people won't change overnight. Just because the law can change so quickly, words on paper rarely seem to calm as quickly as they inflame.

Just as discrimination based on skin color was not limited to the slave states, gay people are being dissed not only in the classic South. Many states across the country [Oklahoma, Missouri, Ohio, and Georgia, just off the top of my head] also are trying to head off civil equality with laws using religion as a smokescreen for unequal treatment by government.

Used in this way it does a disservice to those religious observers who object to the calumny used against fellow citizens in the guise of freedom of thought. Does the old fable of wolves in sheep's clothing conjure any memories?

As Dr. Martin Luther King said, "It may be true that the law cannot make a man love me, but it can keep him from lynching me, and I think that's pretty important."

James Nimmo  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Reports from around the country of white high school sports fans chanting "Trump, Trump, Trump" and "Build a Wall" at games against mixed race high schools display Donald Trump's influence.

His insults and attacks follow naturally several decades of coarsening political speech on America's radio and TV networks by Rush Limbaugh and his ilk.

To Rush, not just President Clinton, but his family were game for contempt, including 13-year old Chelsea. "You know Socks is the White House cat," Limbaugh said in 1993, showing Socks' photo. He went on, "Did you know there's a White House dog?" and showed Chelsea's picture.

Such savagery appeals to mean-spirited adolescent personalities, but is generally corrected by parents and other adults, until young people grow up themselves.

Fox networks apparently have not. Ridiculed 24/7 by the shock jocks on Fox are liberal thinkers and social issues: feminists, environmentalists, labor unions, immigration reformers, defenders of voting rights, racial protections, and suggestions that government should rebuild the middle class its policies have helped to destroy.

For 40 years, covertly and overtly, conservatives have cultivated a voting population religiously fundamental, nationalistic, racist, homophobic, anti-feminist, anti-environment, angry and poorly informed. Now they appear shocked that their voters choose Trump.

Nathaniel Batchelder  
Oklahoma City

*Editor's Note: Nathaniel Batchelder is director of the Peace House in Oklahoma City.*

Editor, The Observer:

In the last 135 years, no president has been refused a vote on a nominee for an open seat on the Supreme Court. Over that time span, no less than seven justices have been nominated and confirmed during presidential election years.

Perhaps most remarkable and earlier in our history, one justice was nominated and confirmed after an election. Defeated in the 1800 election, President John Adams nominated John Marshall to be chief justice. A genuine "lame duck" at the time, Adams especially relished the Senate confirmation of Marshall.

Our current president is not a "lame duck." That designation is reserved for an officeholder who is leaving his/her seat after a current election but before a replacement is sworn in. President Obama cannot qualify as a "lame duck" until after this November's election of a new president.

Lastly, the sole federal officeholder elected by all of the people is the president. Elected twice by convincing margins and enjoying majority approval in current respectable opinion polls, who better represents the views of all of the American people than President Obama?

Frank Silovsky  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Sen. Jim Inhofe should be impeached for failure to obey his constitutional obligation to consider the nomination of U.S. Court of Appeals Judge Merrick Garland to the U.S. Supreme Court.

After eight years in Congress and 22 years in the Senate, the 81-year-old Inhofe has gotten too big for his britches.

Snubbing his nose at the Constitution is abuse of power and grounds for impeachment.

He needs to retire to Grand Lake, write his memoirs and spend time with his grandkids.

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