

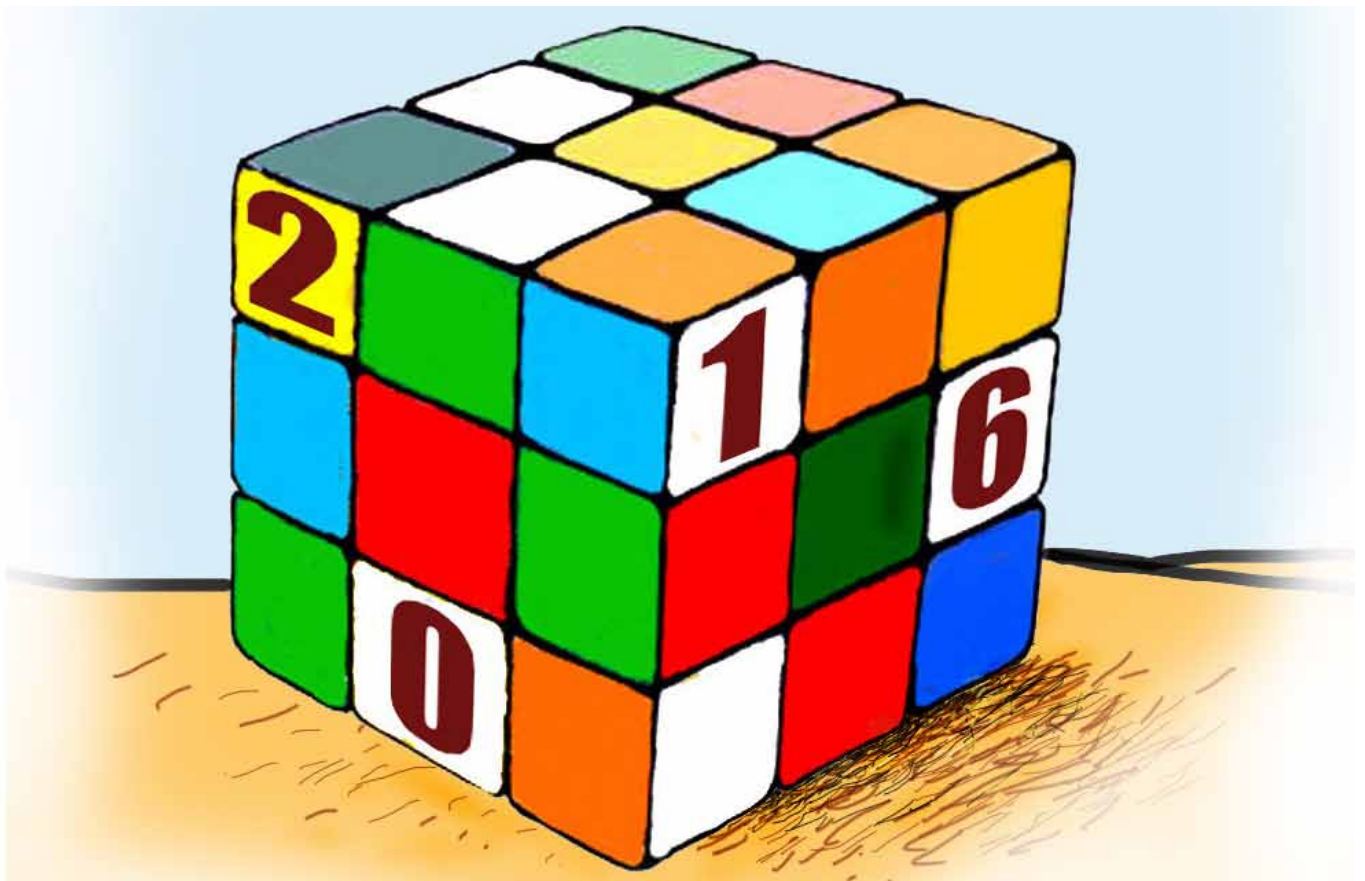
THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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SOLVING THE PUZZLE

*Five Simple Steps To Ease
State's Crippling Budget Crisis*



Special Report:
Oklahoma's Revenue 'Failure'

– Pages 12-17



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OUR MOTTO

To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

OUR CREDO

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

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LETTERS TO EDITOR

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Observations

Greetings!

As we embark on our 48th year together, we welcome more than 100 new readers – many joining us through the generosity of loyal subscribers who help keep this journal of free voices alive.

It won't take long to discover The Observer is unlike anything else available in Red State Oklahoma.

Most of the state's mainstream media allow but one voice – their owner's. With few exceptions, they're archconservative, toadies of the corporate elite.

We love to stir the proverbial pot. We don't protect sacred cows. We're not in the hip pockets of either party. We welcome different viewpoints.

Make no mistake: We are social liberals. But we are far more conservative fiscally than our mainstream media brethren who worship their undeserved tax exemptions and routinely promote corporate welfare. We think all should pay their fair share of taxes.

We believe in the separation of church and state. We believe government ought to stay out of private lives. We believe in fairness and equality and habeas corpus.

As an independent journal of commentary, we strive to be provocative, entertaining and informative. You won't agree with everything you read, but it will get you thinking.

If you share our conviction that more information and debate are essential for a healthy democracy, we urge you to invite family, friends and neighbors to become Observer readers, too.

Welcome aboard!

Killing The Brand

Southern Baptists remain the largest religious denomination in Oklahoma, but their influence – thankfully – is waning, particularly in the state's high-growth urban centers.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 43

THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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No surprise that ex-Gov. Frank Keating's loopy brother Dan signed on as Donald Trump's OK co-chair. But furniture peddler Bob Mills? He traded the "working man's friend" moniker for the "Bigot's Best Buddy."

Laurel: To Sen. Kyle Loveless, R-OKC, urging Oklahoma ditch the wildly unsuccessful, anti-divorce initiative Project Relate, aka Frank Keating's Folly. The state wasted millions proving yet again you cannot legislate morality.

Rookie Rep. John Montgomery, R-Lawton, sorely needs a civics refresher. He wants the state to establish a foundation to help fund public schools. Why? Oklahomans already pay taxes to support common ed – it's the Legislature that diverts the cash to corporate welfare instead.

Dart: To Gov. Mary Fallin, whose refusal to accept Medicaid expansion helped drop Oklahoma to 50th in the Commonwealth Fund's annual health-care ranking. How much longer will we be able to say, "Thank God for Mississippi?"

Jan. 12 is the District 34 special election to replace disgraced ex-Sen. Rick Brinkley. Democrat J.J. Dossett is battling Republican David McLain for the Tulsa area seat.

Laurel: To Rep. Eric Proctor, D-Tulsa, urging paid maternity leave for state workers and school personnel – four weeks for moms, one for dads. Wanna bet where the family values Republicans stand on this?

Oklahoma's political IQ took a hit when KOTV welcomed teanderthal ex-U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn as a regular analyst. The Tulsa station's new slogan should be *Unfair, Unbalanced and Unhinged*.

Dart: To Oklahoma's U.S. Sens. Jim Inhofe and James Lankford, both NRA toadies who opposed legislation that would have banned those on terrorist watchlist from purchasing guns or explosives.

Texas-based journalist and author Jim Moore, offers a perfect moniker for the super-patriots that seized the federal bird sanctuary in Oregon: Yeehawdists.

Laurel: To Norman City Council, approving anti-discrimination resolution that protects LGBTQ residents – a first in Oklahoma. OKC Council later extended protections against discrimination in housing.

Feb. 5 is deadline to register to vote for Oklahoma's March 1 presidential primary. For details, visit https://www.ok.gov/elections/Voter_Info/Register_to_Vote/.

Dubious distinction: Oklahoma suffered more earthquakes last year than every other state combined, save Alaska – nearly nine times our size. Oklahoma also set a record with 30 4.0 or greater temblors.

Green the Vote's medical marijuana petition drive fizzled. Oklahomans for Health will mount a similar effort next month. Isn't it time for pro-pot forces to unite? Legalization could help so many with agonizing chronic health conditions.

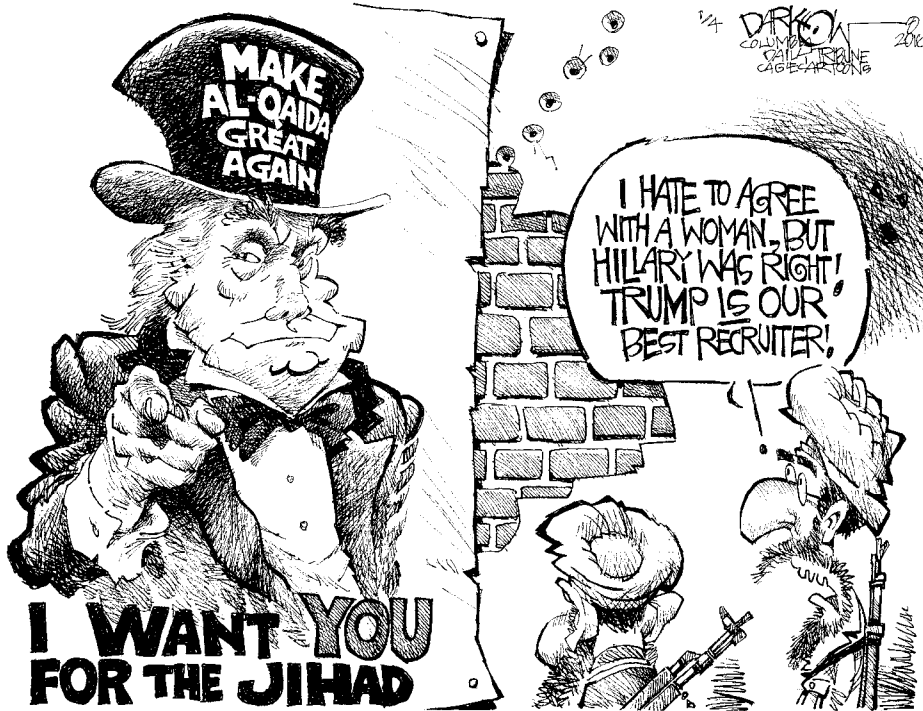
Two Oklahoma lawsuits target gun manufacturers for allegedly selling faulty products that accidentally discharged and wounded their owners. It's past time for a law requiring gun owners carry liability insurance – just like motor vehicle owners.

OU will keep a Nazi-looted painting at its Fred Jones Museum of Art. Camille Pissarro's *Shepherdess Bringing in Sheep* was stolen during World War II from a Jewish businessman, whose daughter sued for its return. Settlement details were not disclosed.

"You know how you make America great again? Tell Donald Trump to go to hell." – South Carolina Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham, responding to Trump's call for the U.S. to ban all Muslims from entering the country

CONTINUED ON PAGE 44

Letters



Editor, The Observer:

Where are all the good guys with guns that Mr. La-pee-air seemed to want to be providing us in his speeches opposing any type of gun safety regulations?? Kinda seems as if what he really provided is a whole bunch more bad guys with guns. Happy New Year, Mr. NRA. You gotta lotta deaths on your conscience.

Tom Ellis
Okeene

Editor, The Observer:

Deadly Christmastime tornadoes in Texas and elsewhere in the Southeast and equally deadly flooding in Oklahoma, Texas and the Southeast took our Oklahoma Sen. Jim Inhofe to the air to inspect the damage here. The senator exclaimed that he did not remember a time when perhaps our entire state deserved federal disaster relief!

Since no part of our country is in the typical "tornado and flood season," one would think that some curiosity about "climate change" might have occurred to the senator. If so, he let that "sleeping dog"

lie.

Likely he has also not read the widely publicized internal [and thus absolutely astonishing] ExxonMobil scientific study made in the 1970s which concluded that fossil fuels were contributing significantly to global warming. Just think, about 40 years ago, a major polluter thought the world might be approaching the point of no return! Not surprising, ExxonMobil subsequently did nothing to change their output of fossil fuels. Stockholders, you know, always take priority over the general public.

Even if the senator didn't, one would think that somebody on his staff would have noticed a recent well-publicized exposition of Exxon. In his public stance, Sen. Inhofe is clearly on their side. Could it be the principle of "never bite the hand that feeds you" is operative!

Frank Silovsky
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Is it possible the Texas GOP could get more stupid? Some peo-

ple say "no," but I think there is no hole too deep for the Texas GOP to explore.

First, they want to declare a fertilized egg – a zygote – to be a citizen and now they want to declare anyone below voting age a non-citizen, except those still in their mother's uterus. Only those of voting age get representation. That is true already because all you have to do is check out the re-writing of textbooks.

Think back to other times when rural Texans did not consider themselves fairly represented. After claiming African Americans were property and not human, much less citizens, they decided to make them one-fifth human and counted them in order to gain more representation in Congress and the Legislature.

The entire South was still counting them to be represented, but not considering them human enough to vote when John F. Kennedy was elected president.

So now, no one not old enough to vote gets representation, except those still unborn and they have more rights than their mothers'.

I would love to say that the Texas GOP is at its limit for stupidity, but since I am a [native] Texan, I know better.

Karen Webb
Moore

Editor, The Observer:

OG&E's star rate increase witness, Ashley Brown, said Oklahoma's current policy for net metering is unfair during his testimony in support of the utility monopoly's proposed rate increases for homeowners with solar or wind systems. Mr. Brown said OG&E must take back excess power from customers at the retail rate rather than the wholesale rate.

Maybe in some states, but not Oklahoma.

We can't sell what is known as distributed energy generated by

CONTINUED ON PAGE 45



Dumb On Crime

Why would anyone want to serve as Oklahoma's corrections director?

The state's prisons are dangerously overcrowded – at 112% of capacity – and woefully underfunded – nearly a third of authorized staff positions are unfilled.

Lawmakers tout criminal justice reform, yet do little about it, clinging instead to a politically pleasing lock 'em up and throw away the key mentality.

And when a system set up for failure fails, whose head rolls? The director, of course.

This is not a defense of Robert Patton, who quit after less than two tumultuous years that will be remembered best for a series of bungled execution.

Rather, it is an indictment of the state's elected leadership that knows it has a serious problem, yet refuses to invest the money and embrace the strategies necessary to create a truer system of correction.

Oklahoma taxpayers have not been served well by years of starvation budgets that shoved the state's prisons to the brink – one violent incident away from a possible federal takeover.

Many of the facilities are archaic and decaying. Most correctional officers work 60 hours weekly because of short staffing. Starting salaries rank in the bottom five nationally. Mental health services and rehabilitation opportunities for inmates are often spotty.

What's a director to do? So many holes in the dike, so few tools to plug them. Success is measured chiefly by an ability to avoid negative headlines.

There was a glimmer of hope in 2012 that Gov. Mary Fallin and state lawmakers were coming to grips with the reality that only a strategic, innovative and, yes, well-funded plan could solve the state's corrections crisis long-term.

The governor signed the Justice Reinvestment Initiative aimed at bolstering public safety and easing prison crowding, in part through programs designed to improve post-incarceration supervision and reduce recidivism.

Unfortunately, the program was never funded – vic-

tim of cash-strapped state budgets resulting from short-sighted income tax cuts and corporate tax incentives.

Not long after, in 2013, the state's then-corrections director, Justin Jones, was forced out – mostly because he insisted on speaking truthfully, in public, about the corrections crisis while the state's elected elite sang in unison from an all-is-well hymnal.

In came Patton, but Fallin and Co. – and Oklahoma – ended up with more headaches, especially from execution screwups that yielded a public relations' black eye internationally and a grand jury investigation that undoubtedly figured into the departures of both Patton and the Oklahoma State Penitentiary warden, Anita Trammell.

There's talk again of real criminal justice reform but, frankly, it's hard to imagine anything more than window-dressing coming out of the 2016 legislative session. It will be an election year, after all. The only thing that scares most Oklahoma lawmakers more than voting for a tax increase is being labeled "soft on crime."

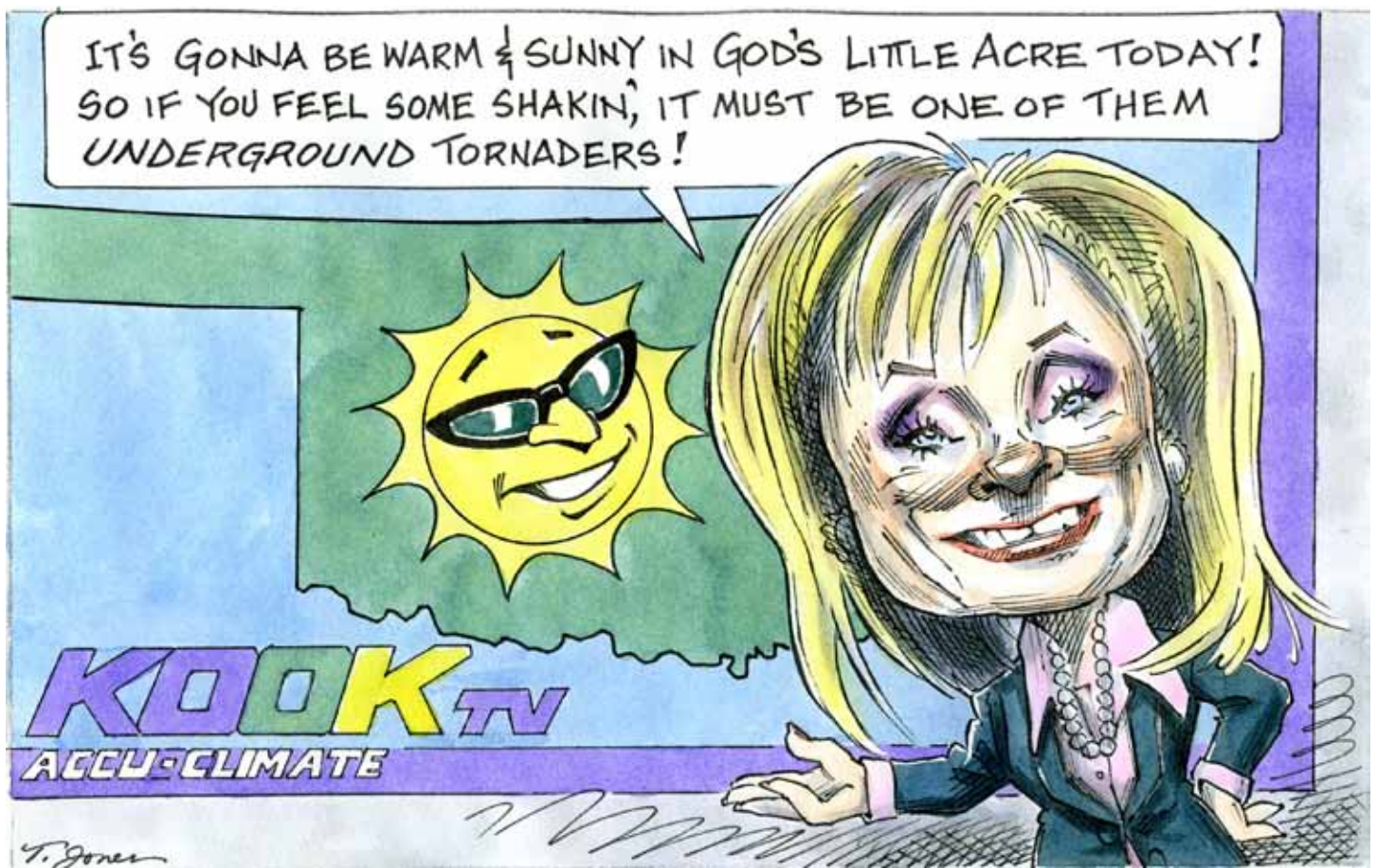
So what is Oklahoma to do? It needs a new, top-flight, creative, energetic corrections director, but offers little incentive – just an underfunded, overcrowded and understaffed agency chained to laws that keep the prison population soaring.

Is it a dead-end job?

Jones now is director of the Tulsa County Juvenile Bureau, which at least allows him to continue the "smart on crime" efforts that got him into trouble with state leaders.

Patton leaves his \$160,000-a-year job here to work for the private prison company GEO Group as deputy warden at a Kingman, AZ prison – an obvious step down professionally, but a step way up when seeking to reduce headaches and stress.

Perhaps Oklahoma's elected leaders can convince director prospects that they're serious this time about criminal justice reform. Perhaps they really are. Perhaps Oklahoma finally will get "smart on crime."



GREAT BALLS OF FIRE

How Much Longer Will Energy Titans And Their Legislative Lapdogs Gamble Oklahoma Can Avoid The Big One?

BY BOB JACKMAN

The person who believes he or she can rise to a position of wealth and power in the state of Oklahoma and not do business with the devil probably knows nothing about the devil [the petroleum industry] and even less about Oklahoma. – a paraphrasing of Crusader's Cross by James Lee Burke

Many Oklahomans – especially those living in central and north central Oklahoma's man-made earthquakes' red zone – feel rage because their lives and damaged homes are treated with total disregard by Gov. Mary Fallin, the Oklahoma Corporation Commission [OCC] and Big Oil – plus their bent legislators.

For proof of the reckless abandonment of citizen

welfare versus oil's profits, see SandRidge Defies OCC to Close Disposal Wells, a Dec. 27 article in the on-line news service EENews on the operator's decision to ignore the Oklahoma Corporate Commission's orders, implying they don't have to do so.

The petroleum industry in Oklahoma formulates the OCC's disinformation-propaganda press releases, spreading confusion over earthquake's causes and often making false claims of unsettled seismicity [earthquake] science designed to leave the public confused.

Meanwhile, the Oklahoma press never uses contrary independent scientists as sources – always quoting instead conflicted state employees and the

petroleum industry's expert spinners.

That's called falsely balanced reporting.

The reality is that on Jan. 1, we entered our seventh year of oilmen-made swarm earthquakes. Way to go quake-bangers!

Their propaganda efforts succeeded in making it difficult for Oklahomans to understand that man-made earthquakes are clearly caused by big disposal wells – and that swift actions by Gov. Fallin, state legislators and the OCC could stop daily earthquakes.

Think cover up on all OCC press releases. Example: Former OCC Commissioner Patrice Douglas' emails on earthquakes were all wiped clean – by whom? Bet it wasn't Russian hackers!

With one party dominating the Oklahoma statehouse and governor's office, with the oil and gas industry's virtual control over state government, and with the state's unofficial official religion dominating elections – the Bible trumps science – it's no wonder Oklahoma has been financially squeezed to the bottom in national and international ratings on health and child care, infectious disease prevention, roads, and public education.

We are No. 1 in football and man-made earthquakes.

[Relax, Tea Partiers, the federal government doesn't want to regulate college football or man-made earthquakes.]

Recently, in federal court, Donald L. Blankenship, whose West Virginia coal company's 2010 mine disaster killed 29 miners, was convicted of conspiring to violate public safety and deceiving safety regulators. It's expected he will serve prison time.

Blankenship's years of being unobstructed by West Virginia's mining authorities and elected state and federal officials allowed his dangerous pursuit of profits ahead of public welfare and safety.

Evidence uncovered by outside-of-Oklahoma media investigations makes a similarly strong case that the University of Oklahoma, the Oklahoma Corporation Commission, billionaire Harold Hamm, the Oklahoma Independent Petroleum Association and others also conspired to violate public safety by withholding from the public major facts on oilmen-made earthquake's potential and actual damages.

Will their defense be “we love the shock and awe of earthquakes?”

An Inconvenient Warning: On Dec. 15, at the American Geophysical Union Conference, a USGS Seismicity Report abstract was released, noting:

Results indicate that next year's hazard is significantly higher by more than a factor of three in Oklahoma, Texas, and Colorado compared to the long-term 2014 hazard model. These results have raised concern about the impacts of induced earthquakes on the built environment and have led to many engineering and policy discussions about how to mitigate these effects for the more than seven million people that live near areas of induced seismicity.

And recently, the Oklahoma Geological Survey's new director, Dr. Jerry Boak, became the first and

Earthquake Hearing Jan. 15 At Capitol

State Rep. Richard Morrisette, D-OKC, is hosting a day-long public hearing at the state Capitol Jan. 15 to give Oklahomans an opportunity to express concerns about earthquakes rattling the state.

Morrisette calls the 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. event in Room 412 an “open mic” forum for citizens to share temblor experiences and accounts of damage, and to “make requests” of public officials, including Gov. Mary Fallin, legislators and the Oklahoma Corporation Commission. Seismicity and energy experts also are invited to speak.

“My phone is ringing off the hook and my email account is loaded,” Morrisette said, “with messages from Oklahomans praising my office for taking action.”

only state-employed scientist/official to suggest publicly that years of induced earthquakes did, in fact, cause widespread damages! Wonder how long he will last at OGS?

The long suppressed solution to stop all Oklahoma's man-made earthquakes: an estimated 200 identified disposal wells must be shut down completely in the 12 counties' earthquakes hot zones. Each disposal well closed also shuts down an average of four oil producing wells which send their briny wastewater to be disposed – a total of 800 producing wells would be shut down.

Using estimated volumes on producing wells that would be closed, this would reduce Oklahoma's state-wide production by 5%. Since the majority of these wells were drilled horizontally, the state taxes them only 1% gross production tax rather than regular 7%. Horizontal oil production is virtually tax-free in Oklahoma, and the current billion-dollar budget hole certainly reflects that.

Why hasn't our tax-hatchet governor ordered a quake damage survey? How much did earthquakes contribute to our crumbling Capitol – repairs and rebuilding costs estimated at \$300 million-plus?

What we're seeing is the biggest gamble in Oklahoma history.

Big oil and its elected sycophants can immediately close down 200 quake making disposal wells and stop the earthquake insanity. Or they can continue their bet with the devil that a major earthquake causing widespread destruction and death – imagine great balls of fire at Cushing and Medford – will not happen.

By any measure, their gamble is a non-war record for an inhumane, moronic, and irresponsibly stupid bet.

Bob Jackman is a petroleum geologist living in Tulsa.



MISSING MAYBERRY

State's Social Order Threatened By Growing Income Inequality

BY DAVID PERRYMAN

Rascal Flatts' 2003 song *Mayberry* laments a society of constant toil and unmoderated pursuit of "more of everything" and is reminiscent of a slower time where houses had porches that were actually used to visit with friends and neighbors.

Mayberry means many things to many people. A good number of us were raised during a time when parents worked to "get ahead" and make things better for their children. Society's structure and our shared values actually fostered upward social mobility and pursuit of the American Dream.

However, over the past 35 years, the bedrock American principle of equal opportunity has been under

siege. An increasingly regressive economic system is imperiling the success of children of families who have nothing to sell except their labor.

As a result, in this second decade of the 21st Century, income inequality in Oklahoma is greater than at any time in the state's 108-year history. The top 1% of Oklahomans has an average income that is 26 times greater than the average income of the other 99%.

During the 33 years between 1979 and 2012, the average income of the bottom 99% grew by only 8% while the average income of the top 1% grew by 143.2% [Economic Policy Institute].

This is not a new phenomenon. It is at least the

third time in our nation's history that our economic system has failed the poor and each failure threatened social order.

Initially, in America's early years, it became apparent that our republic would not survive if the general population did not possess the educational skills to be effective citizens. Class divisions and disparity in wealth and influence threatened the fabric of this young nation. Horace Mann argued that universal, non-sectarian, free public education was essential to turn the nation's unruly children into disciplined, judicious republican citizens. Mann's vision instilled social efficiency, civic virtue and character.

In the waning years of the 19th Century, unchecked industrialism imposed income inequalities once again, stagnating upward social mobility and threatening social order. Through the collective courage of civic-minded Americans, universal and free high schools were established and the dream was restored.

Each time through history that our society has betrayed its focus on equality in economic opportunity, the injustice has been recognized in time for rectification. Time is running short.

Robert Putnam, author of *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*, asks, "When did poor kids stop being 'our' kids?" Dr. Putnam's research focuses on the web of formal and informal resources provided by parents of adequate means and the effect of those resources. He studies what happens when that support system is missing for children in poverty.

His conclusion is that income inequality, poverty, and a generation or more of lost dreams are intractably interwoven into a "connection gap" that isolates poor children and robs them of the ability to function at any productive level in our society.

Numbers just released by the National Low Income Housing Coalition show that a parent living in Oklahoma must work 76 hours per week at minimum wage, 52 weeks per year, to earn enough wages to afford to rent a two-bedroom apartment.

Even if they have the parenting skills to keep their children on track, they likely do not have the social network or the disposable time to put them "back on track" when they suffer the inevitable setbacks.

When did poor kids stop being "our kids?" When did they stop being "good enough" to receive guidance and support? When did it become acceptable to let children fall through the cracks?

Each time that our economic system has threatened social order by inhibiting the ability of working parents to provide opportunity to their children, our country has given focus to our children's needs.

We all have our own version of Mayberry. Mine involves loving parents who frequently helped "adjust my direction" and never for a moment left me without a vision for the future.

It is time to be students of history. The price of social order is the same commitment from us.

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

The Seduction Of Oklahoma Lawmakers

BY JASON MURPHEY

I was recently asked about my point of view regarding term limits. It was a timely question as I am likely to file a proposal within the next few weeks designed to term limit Supreme Court Justices.

In response to the question, I sent this description of how term limits has played an important role in the Legislature as originally described in one of my past articles entitled "The Assimilation."

As each legislative session comes to a close, it is my job to filter incoming bills. Lobbyists are notorious for putting dramatic last-minute proposals into bills in the final days of session. They hope their changes will go unnoticed and may write the new law so that it is difficult to understand. They are counting on the anxious-to-adjourn legislators giving the bill a pass and hoping the legislation will be camouflaged among the other last-minute proposals. I don't want to find out weeks from now that I voted for one of these bad bills by mistake.

As part of the filtering process, I attempt to find last-minute fee increases, new regulations or carefully targeted tax giveaways. Some bills are harder to filter than others. For example, I can almost predict the content of a bill simply based on the identity of the legislative author.

There are certain legislators whose work product I instantly feel comfortable supporting. Based on past experience, I know these legislators sponsor good policy and are not likely to let a lobbyist insert bad proposals into their bills. I call this factor my credibility index.

Consider this observation: I have noticed that certain new legislators quickly earn a high credibility index. They have fresh ideas directly from their constituencies. With pure motives, they eagerly seek to make a difference.

And then the assimilation starts to occur.

Lobbyists and bureaucrats move in such a way that would make the Borg proud. You may remember the Borg as the collective entity from Star Trek who seek to assimilate entire civilizations into their collective. To the Borg's credit, they give their intended victims advance warning of the assimilation with their famous "You Will Be Assimilated" catch phrase.

The special interests do not provide the same courtesy. Instead, they befriend the naive new lawmakers and take them to the nicest restaurants and bars.

Legislators from out of town do not have much to do during the evening when the Legislature is finished for the day. Lonely and far away from home, they enjoy the opportunity to make new friends, not realizing they have just started down the road to assimilation.

Over the next few years, these relationships become stronger until the legislator is a mindless extension of the special interest. The assimilation has been completed and the legislator is now a small cog in the industry of big government.

I can tell when a legislator has been officially assimilated because he/she starts sponsoring very bad legislation as requested by government agencies and lobbyists.

When I see this happen, I have to provide extra scrutiny to that legislator's bills, even though the same author sponsored excellent bills in previous sessions. The very author who may have voted against bad proposals, like fee increases or bigger spending, now attempts to place that same bad language in his/her bills.

Fortunately, I have also made a positive observation. Thanks to the people of Oklahoma, there are now term limits on legislators. In my time in the Legislature I have observed the conveyor belt of term limits take away a growing pile of assimilated politicians. They have been replaced with enthusiastic new elected officials who have good ideas and want to do the right thing.

And then the assimilation process starts all over again.

Jason Murphey, a Guthrie Republican, represents District 31 in the Oklahoma House. He accepts no gifts or anything of value from lobbyists or lobbyist-represented entities.

Making Mental Health A Priority

BY DAVID SLANE

Two mass shootings in San Bernardino and Paris may have distracted some people from an Oklahoma tragedy that left the entire state shocked and dismayed when four people were killed and dozens more injured at the end of the Oklahoma State University homecoming parade in October.

Adacia Chambers, the driver of the car, has been charged with four counts of second-degree murder and 46 counts of felony assault.

Formal felony charges have been filed, but this horrific case is far from over. Families will continue to grieve and mourn the loss of loved ones and those who were injured will likely have long recovery peri-

ods. When the trial begins, the entire ordeal will be replayed over and over in a courtroom and in the media. People will once again want Chambers to pay the price for her actions because in every case like this someone must be held accountable.

However, Chambers may be a victim of mental illness and the inability to receive help for her disorder. Her attorney claimed she would be unable to assist in her defense and was mentally ill at the time of the crash.

Emotions will inevitably run high on both sides. Chamber's family has said she is not an alcoholic or addicted to drugs. Police reported she was not drunk when the crash occurred.

So how did this happen? That is the \$64 million question that has not been answered two-plus months into the investigation. However, the best advice for those who are suffering and those who want questions answered is to maintain a calm demeanor as police, prosecutors and the defense team continue their investigations.

Chambers remains in jail on a \$1 million bond and isn't going anywhere. According to her attorney and media reports, she wants to know what happened and why her car rammed into a group of parade spectators and caused an enormous amount of carnage.

As evidenced by recent statistics, Oklahoma ranks low in the nation in the amount of resources it allots toward mental illness. Chambers may, in all likelihood, be a victim herself and one of those unfortunate souls who falls between the mental health cracks and hasn't gotten the treatment she desperately needs.

A forensic psychologist hired by Chambers' attorney said she presented signs of severe mental illness which would impair her competency. At one point during the examination, Chambers suggested the psychologist was Jesus and that Jesus died so they could be married. The psychologist reported her emotional state ranged from uncontrollable sobbing to inappropriate hysterical laughter.

Her attorney believes Chambers does not exhibit a steady mental state. Of course, prosecutors had their own psychologist examine Chambers. A judge ultimately ruled she is competent to stand trial and scheduled an April 7 preliminary hearing.

Mental illness may or may not have played a role in this case. Had Chambers been deemed mentally incompetent then she deserved treatment as prescribed by medical professionals and allowed by law. Since she wasn't, prosecutors should use every tool in their arsenal to prosecute her to the fullest extent of the law.

Regardless of this case and its outcome, Oklahoma needs to make mental illness a priority and avoid these tragedies in the future. We must stop the carnage and death.

David Slane is an Oklahoma City criminal defense attorney who has practiced law for more than 20 years and handled murder cases involving a defendant's mental competency.

Twenty Years After His Death, Would Mike Synar Even Recognize Oklahoma ... Or America?

BY MARGARET FRENCH

The last time I saw Mike Synar was at his Washington, DC condo in December 1995. He passed away a month later. He was in a wheelchair, directing the traffic that was constant his last days – friends, former staff and colleagues pressed for audiences with him as long as his stamina held. Even at the end, Mike was his characteristic “in a hurry” guy.

Newt Gingrich put forth in his book about how the Republicans won the majority in the House of Representatives in 1994, that he knew when Synar lost his primary in August that they were on their way to their takeover.

Newt wasn't the only one who saw this; Mike knew his loss was coming. Mike lived out his year and a half after his defeat performing at least three noteworthy jobs: Ambassador to Geneva to negotiate “Radio Spectrum” for the next generation of satellites, foundation chairman and bankruptcy chairman.

In his words: “keeps me too damn busy.”

As this 20-year mark of Synar's death approaches, I thought it might be interesting to offer my take on events both nationally and on the state level that have occurred, wondering how he would have acted or reacted. What follows is by no means a definitive list, but some of the most obvious.

CLINTON IMPEACHMENT

Mike supported President Clinton. His support of the man would not have wavered during the impeachment hearings [in either the House or Senate]. Mike's loyalty to his party was steadfast. He would have been bewildered in later years by Democrats who politely asked President Obama not to campaign for them.

POLITICAL BREAKTHROUGHS

A number of “firsts:” First African American president, first female speaker of the House, first female governor of Oklahoma.

While political winds saw the Republican Party move ever further to the right, significant elections occurred in the 2000s that seemed impossible even 10 years earlier.

It would not have surprised Mike that Barack Obama was elected the first African American president without Oklahoma's help. Progress was made closing the gender gap with the elections of Nancy Pelosi and Mary Fallin.

Synar would have supported these Democrats mak-

ing history. And perhaps as a longtime supporter of women's rights, given a nod to the first female governor of the state.

TEA PARTY

Emergence of the Tea Party, and the swing to all Republican statewide officeholders in the state.

Now that I think of it, Mike would probably not have been too surprised at the current political climate in the state. He knew that the days of five Democrats and one Republican in the congressional delegation were destined to be Oklahoma history – not just the breakdown by party, but also the loss of a member because of declining population.

As for the effects of gerrymandering, he knew them all too well from his 16 years in office.

TEXTING

I have no doubt that Michael would have embraced all forms of social media – particularly texting. Mike was obsessive about keeping in touch with every friend he had. I can envision Mike's phone lighting up with messages from politicians of all stripes every time the Republicans messed something up.

Knowing how he loved to explain how he would solve a problem, texting was invented for him! Or Twitter ...

LGBT RIGHTS, DODT, DOMA

Oh my! Probably no other policy issue [individual rights, specifically gay and lesbian rights] has seen such a dramatic shift in public acceptance in just the last five years, much less the 20 years that Synar has been gone, as this combination of acronyms represents.

Mike's strong sense of justice for every person would have led him to cheer these new attitudes. Period. As he often reminded his friends, you don't have to agree with everyone's views, just recognize that they have a right to their views.

TOBACCO

Mike was your classic reformed smoker who growled at anyone brave enough to light up in his presence. The shift to almost no public smoking during the last 20 years is nothing but remarkable.

A more recent development is the announcement by some drugstore chains that they will discontinue selling cigarettes and other tobacco products.

The tobacco lobby can barely remember the fero-

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BUDGET SQUEEZE

Five Ways To Erase Much Of \$900 Million Revenue Shortfall – Without Raising Taxes

BY CAL HOBSON

People of a certain age may fondly remember the 1970 flick *Five Easy Pieces*, primarily because it showcases one of Jack Nicholson's best performances. As an unemployed California oil field worker named Bobby Dupea, he is not a very likable person – brash, arrogant, cynical – a fellow with not just a chip on his shoulder but something more akin to a log.

Few who saw the film would ever forget the diner scene when Jack tries to order a simple sandwich and the waitress just can't seem to get it right. Instead of consuming the grub presented to him, Jack violently sends it flying through the air to its temporary resting place scattered all over the cafe floor.

Of course, the unemployed and angry Mr. Dupea refuses to pay for his now discarded meal, which leads

only to additional mayhem.

Speaking of mayhem that's about all Oklahomans may witness in a few short days when our math-challenged legislators convene in February. Awaiting them will be a nearly \$1 billion budget shortfall, the bitter fruits of their reckless and irresponsible money mismanagement over the last six years.

So now what?

Knowing any proposed tax increase is dead on arrival at the Capitol let me offer five easy pieces of policy initiatives that will dramatically narrow the \$900 million dollar financial gap. All of these budgetary steps could be quickly adopted early in the session and none of them contain even a shilling of new taxation.

Too good to be true? You decide.

1. Delay for a couple of years the .25% income tax cut that took effect the first day of January. This common sense action would retain in state coffers approximately \$147 million. Since no one has yet to reap the benefits of this ill-conceived bonanza no one should miss it. When the economy rebounds implementation of this haywire tax reduction could and most likely would be revisited.

2. Defer for two years just a few of the credits, gimmicks, and giveaways found sprinkled throughout the state tax code. They total about \$1.7 billion.

Yes, the current recipients will scream like stuck hogs at the trough so if this suggestion is too difficult for legislative budget writers, an alternative would be to reduce the existing corporate welfare schemes by 10% to 15% across the board.

Either approach would accomplish the same goal – a retention of money to apply against the nearly \$1 billion shortfall. It also has the added benefit of smoking out the special interest groups who would then be required to explain their largess at a time of record deficits.

Even the most silver-tongued lobbyists would be challenged to justify their pork and any legislator who sides with them may have the opportunity to look for a new job after the November 2016 elections.

3. To solve the endless budgeting shortfall at the Department of Transportation, simply change the formula for funding ODOT from the current one that earmarks a standard gasoline and diesel tax per gallon [14 cents for diesel and 17 cents for gasoline] to a percentage applied per gallon sold.

Now is the time to do this while the price of oil is the lowest in a generation. Therefore, when it rebounds – and it always does – the percentage per gallon approach will generate much more revenue for roads and bridges without a tax increase.

Many states have already adopted this forward thinking proposal, and we should as well.

4. With money saved from suggestions one or two above, or both, the Legislature should pass a \$1 billion bond issue. That's right. More debt.

Besides the obvious fact our infrastructure is falling apart, primarily at universities, colleges and in other state buildings, this initiative would put to work thousands of currently laid off oil patch hands, most of whom are quite used to difficult, outside work. Although construction jobs don't pay as well as those in the energy industry most folks I've talked to would jump at the chance for any meaningful employment.

Not withstanding the Federal Reserve Board's action to raise interest rates by one-quarter of 1% now would still be the perfect time to make this common sense adjustment.

Note to legislators: For a priority listing of infrastructure needs, which now runs into the billions, contact Jim Joseph, the state bond oversight director. His phone number is 405.602.3100.

5. Lastly – but most importantly – please, please, please policymakers accept the Medicaid expansion envisioned in ObamaCare. The Leavitt study con-



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firmed that by doing so Oklahoma health care services would net – repeat *net* – a \$750 million injection of new revenue over the next five years.

Doctors, nursing homes, hospitals, mental health facilities and care givers would be the monetary beneficiaries. More importantly at least 200,000 citizens would slowly but surely become healthier, more fit and live longer because they would receive care in doctors' offices instead of at the last minute, when sickest, in overcrowded emergency rooms.

Should solons remain reluctant about using the described revenue sources outlined above, an alternative for the state match under ObamaCare would be to tap the Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust [TSET]. Nearly \$1 billion resides in the fund and the money must be spent on health care. Therefore, it is a perfect fit for matching federal Medicaid dollars courtesy of ObamaCare.

As a reminder, tens of millions of our Medicaid dollars are currently being spent in other states to provide health care to their uninsured and poor populations. That is insane.

Now, let me toss in one more cost-free suggestion for legislators to consider as the 2016 session looms: Get an appointment with the smartest person currently working in the state Capitol. His name is Treasurer Ken Miller and his phone number is 405.521.3191.

He is imbued with remarkable wisdom and common sense, is a workhorse, not a show horse, holds a doctorate in economics, cannot be cowed by the dimwits at the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, or any other special interest group that comes to mind, and has served as the chair of the House Appropriations and Budget Committee. Instead of ignoring his common-sense advice, budgeteers should adopt it – lock, stock and barrel.

In closing, Gov. Mary Fallin and the Republican leadership in the Legislature most likely will disregard my list of policy adjustments while offering none of their own. Unfortunately the result of their inaction will be further degradation of core services – education, health care, public safety and transportation – to name a few.

But, hey, 2016 is an election year and that means there are campaigns to fund and run, press releases to distribute at taxpayer expense extolling fabricated progress, promises to make and then break, doors to knock, mail to be distributed and voters to be swayed. And if history is any guide over 90% of the incumbents will be re-elected, most by a wide margin.

Déjà vu, anyone?

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

Higher Pay Would Ease Teacher Shortage, Boost Student Outcomes

BY DAVID BLATT

Evidence of the teacher shortage crisis facing Oklahoma has become overwhelming and undeniable.

Since 2008, Oklahoma has cut per pupil state aid funding for public schools by almost one-quarter after inflation, the most of any state in the nation.

As a result, Oklahoma has not increased the pay schedule for teachers since 2009. The average pay for Oklahoma teachers is now third lowest in the nation and well below that of neighboring states.

At the same time, Oklahoma has had extreme challenges in filling classroom positions: districts started this year with 1,000 teacher vacancies, even after eliminating 600 positions last year.

More than one in six teachers in Oklahoma is “unqualified,” meaning they are teaching without a standard certification, according to the Oklahoma Equity Plan submitted to the State Department of Education. This year the state issued close to 1,000 emergency teaching certifications.

An important new study of the teacher shortage by

University of Tulsa economist Matthew Hendricks spells out some disturbing consequences for Oklahoma students. More hopefully, the study also provides evidence that a substantial increase in teacher pay, such as the one being proposed by the “Oklahoma’s Children, Our Future” education funding initiative, would significantly address the shortage and improve the quality of education in Oklahoma’s schools.

Here are the report’s main findings:

The report shows that Oklahoma teacher pay is falling further behind. Hendricks shows that “teacher salaries are nearly universally lower in 2015 relative to what they were in 2016” when adjusted for inflation. The average teacher with five years’ experience and a bachelors’ degree earns \$34,000 today compared to \$36,000 nine years ago, measured in 2015 dollars. Overall, Oklahoma teacher salaries are about 16% lower than in Texas and 28% lower than median salaries for similar workers in Oklahoma’s private sector.

As salaries fall behind, Oklahoma is seeing increased teacher attrition and declining teacher ex-



perience. As school districts struggle to recruit and retain teachers, teacher turnover is higher, more teachers are leaving the Oklahoma public school system, and the average experience of teachers is declining. For the period from 2006-14, about 35% of Oklahoma first-year teachers left their school and 17% left the public school system altogether; Oklahoma's 17% attrition rate for first-year teachers compares to just 11% in Texas.

Attrition rates for more experienced teachers are lower, but still nearly 10% of teachers with 10 years of experience left the public school system each year. Since 2006, Oklahoma's teacher turnover rate has increased for teachers at all levels of experience, with the exception of first-year teachers.

With increased attrition, the average experience of Oklahoma's teachers has fallen from 12.8 years in 2006 to 11.4 years in 2015. The Oklahoma Equity Plan found that 21.6% of all teachers in 2014 had three years of experience or less.

Low-income students are affected most by the teacher shortage. Schools that serve the most disadvantaged students also have the highest turnover rates and the least experienced teachers.

According to Hendricks, "On average, Oklahoma's most at-risk students are taught by teachers who are the least attached to their school." Over the years 2006-14, 24.7% of teachers in predominantly low-income schools [defined as schools with over 65% of students participating in the free and reduced-price lunch program] left their schools each year, compared to 20.3% of teachers in the most affluent schools

[less than 32% free- and reduced-price lunch participation]. In 2014, the average teacher in the schools serving the poorest students had 1.7 fewer years of experience than teachers in more affluent schools, while new hires in low-income schools typically also had substantially less experience. The Oklahoma Equity Report found that 27% of teachers in schools with the highest share of low-income students had three years of teaching experience or less, compared to 19% of inexperienced teachers in schools with higher-income students.

The decline in teacher experience and increase in teacher turnover that is affecting all schools, and low-income schools in particular, does real damage to student outcomes. The evidence shows that students perform better with more experienced teachers.

Hendricks writes, "Simply put, teacher experience is the only observable teacher characteristic that is consistently related to teacher productivity. Strong evidence suggests that teachers improve with experience, as measured by their contribution to student achievement on standardized tests."

In particular, teacher performance has been shown to improve dramatically in the first four or five years of teaching. "Teachers improve a great deal at the beginning of their careers," write John Papay and Mathew Kraft in a 2015 study in the *Journal of Public Economics*, a finding confirmed by earlier studies by Hendricks and by Douglas Harris and Tim Sass.

This makes the growing number of inexperienced teachers in our schools, especially those serving the most at-risk students, very troubling.

The research on teacher experience and student performance strongly suggests that Oklahoma students are hurting due to inexperienced and under-qualified teachers. Would raising teacher salaries help address the problem? Hendricks answers with an emphatic yes.

"If more funds are allocated to teacher salaries, average teacher productivity in the state is likely to improve substantially," he writes.

Hendricks suggests that a roughly 12% increase in teacher salaries – which equates to a raise of \$4,500 based on the current median annual salary of \$37,400 – would be enough to reduce teacher attrition rates in Oklahoma to the same rate as in Texas.

It should be noted that Hendrick's optimal solution for addressing the teacher shortage is not necessarily an across-the-board raise of an equal amount for all teachers, as would be provided under the current initiative petition effort that proposes a \$5,000 increase for all teachers.

His research suggests that to decrease turnover, Oklahoma should alter its salary schedule to provide larger salary increases each year to novice teachers, followed by smaller increases for veteran teachers who have already committed to the career.

However, an across-the-board raise would provide the largest percentage increase for newer teachers and thus could be especially effective in stopping the flow of young teachers leaving the profession.

Hendricks' study offers valuable insights into how Oklahoma's teacher salary structure could be redesigned to boost teacher retention. In particular, if we are to close the experience and turnover gap between teachers in low-income and higher-income schools, the state must be willing to consider paying teachers substantially more – perhaps up to 55% to 65% more – for serving the most at-risk populations.

Nonetheless, this research provides compelling evidence that the teacher shortage crisis is harming Oklahoma students, especially the most at-risk low-income students. It also shows that boosting teacher pay is likely to significantly reduce the problem.

Oklahoma lawmakers and anyone who cares about the education of our children should pay close attention to these findings.

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

Oklahoma's Per Pupil Spending Still Dropping

BY GENE PERRY

Oklahoma continues to lead the nation for the largest cuts to general school funding since the start of the recession, according to a new report from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

After inflation, Oklahoma's general PreK-12 education funding per student is down by 24.2% since 2008, far more than any other state. Oklahoma's total state appropriations for the support of schools is \$173 million below what it was in fiscal year 2008, even before accounting for inflation and enrollment growth of more than 45,000 students.

The report also examined states' total funding for education, including funds for transportation, teacher health benefits, and other funds for specific purposes. After inflation, Oklahoma's total state funding for education is down by 15.3% per student since 2008, more than all but five other states.

Local funding to schools has increased, but not by enough to make up for state cuts. Oklahoma's combined state and local funding for schools per student has dropped 10.1% after inflation since 2008, a bigger cut than all but eight other states.

Oklahoma is one of only 12 states that continued

to cut general support for schools this year, even as the national economy recovered. Between 2015 and 2016, Oklahoma's state aid funding fell by another 1.6% per student adjusted for inflation.

The report also discusses research showing that reducing investment in schools weakens the economy in the long term.

To prosper, businesses require a well-educated workforce. The budgetary savings from recent K-12 funding cuts may cost states much more in diminished economic growth.

"At a time when the nation is trying to produce workers with the skills to master new technologies and adapt to the complexities of a global economy, states should be investing more – not less – so our kids get a strong education," said Michael Leachman, director of state fiscal research at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and co-author of the report.

The report found that four out of five states with the deepest cuts to education have also cut personal or corporate income tax rates since 2008.

Another state that cut taxes deeply – Kansas – also has imposed large reductions in general school funding, but the precise size of those cuts cannot be de-

terminated because the state eliminated its funding formula earlier this year.

It's clear that choices by Oklahoma lawmakers have put us this position. Lawmakers enacted another tax cut costing tens of millions in 2016, even as we're expecting huge funding shortfalls for schools and all other services.

Most other states are finding ways to improve education funding, while Oklahoma is digging a deeper hole.

Instead of investing in Oklahoma children, Oklahoma lawmakers are giving them teacher shortages,

growing class sizes, and disintegrating textbooks. That will make it harder for the next generation of Oklahomans to compete for jobs, and it will deprive local businesses of a well-trained workforce and a strong customer base.

If we don't change the course we're on, it's a bad sign for our state economy.

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

Two Left Shoes ... And Oklahoma's Revenue Failure

BY DAVID PERRYMAN

Back in my college days, I had a class comparing economic systems from around the world. It was my first real exposure to the inefficiencies of Soviet industrial manufacturing and provided specific examples of factories that produced goods according to the demands of the government and not to the needs of its citizens.

Supply bore no relationship to demand and factories did ridiculous things like make left shoes only because the quota requirements focused on the number of shoes and not the number of pairs produced or customer satisfaction.

Another example was window glass manufactured too thick to be transparent when quotas were based on weight and too thin to avoid shipping damage when the quotas were based on the number of windows produced.

There was no place in the inefficient Soviet model to consider the needs of its citizens.

Oklahoma voters have installed their own model of inefficiency.

At 12:01 a.m. on Jan. 1, 2016, with declining revenues, underpaid teachers, deteriorating roads and bridges and thousands of untreated mentally ill citizens, Oklahoman voters, through their elected officials, cut personal income by nearly 5%, further crippling the state's ability to address the needs of its citizens and imposing hidden taxes on those least likely to afford them.

The tax cut will not put any money in the pockets of the 20% of Oklahoma households that are poorest. The next 20%, those averaging \$26,400 in household income, will receive a state income tax cut of \$8 for the year.

The middle 20% of Oklahoma households average \$45,700 in earnings and will receive a personal income tax cut of \$2.41 per month. The next 20% of households with average incomes of \$73,800 will re-

ceive a cut of 22 cents per day.

The 15% whose income averages \$126,800 will receive a decrease of \$168 per year.

If your household is fortunate enough to earn \$263,000 per year, your state income tax cut will be a whopping \$359 per year and of course that 1% of Oklahoma's households earning \$1,381,600 per year will see a healthy tax cut of \$2,009.

Hidden taxes occur when we incur costs that we would not have had if the state had properly funded its services and whether your tax cut is \$8 or \$168 or even \$359, it is likely not enough to cover them.

Examples are the cost of a new tire [or wheel] when it is destroyed by a pothole or higher medical co-pays and costs because the state has sat on its hands and not provided ways to help citizens gain medical coverage.

Mark Twain illustrated a hidden tax when he said, "Every time you stop a school, you will have to build a jail. What you gain at one end you lose at the other. It's like feeding a dog on his own tail. It won't fatten the dog."

Likewise, the cost of failing to treat the mentally ill leaves us at the very least with dysfunctional citizens and could contribute to increases in suicides or mass shootings.

Oklahoma voters have put themselves in a predicament where the state government has the same disconnect between goods and services and citizens needs as was evidenced in the old Soviet Union. It is the same disconnect that made factories in the Soviet Union produce pairs of shoes for left feet.

There is one difference: attentive and engaged Oklahoma voters have the power to make government responsive to the needs of its citizens in 2016. Have a Great New Year.

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

IF THIS GUY
REALLY WAS
ABOUT LAWLESS
THINGS DESTROYING
AMERICA and
NOT ABOUT
SPKING
WHITE
RAGE...



HE'D BE
STRADDLING
A WALL ST.
BANKER.

How Abusive Police Practices Target Women of Color – And What Women Are Doing About It

BY ALEXA VAN BRUNT AND SHEILA A. BEDI

On Dec. 11, 2015, a jury convicted former Oklahoma City police officer and serial rapist Daniel Holtzclaw.

On Dec. 15, 2015, the U.S. Department of Justice [DOJ] released – for the first time ever – guidance on “Identifying and Preventing Gender Bias in Law Enforcement.”

And on Dec. 22, 2015, a grand jury refused to indict anyone for the death of Sandra Bland in a Texas jail cell.

These events reveal a truth about law enforcement in the United States that has remained in the shadows for too long: Police departments across the

country have well-documented histories of devaluing and brutalizing women of color. But women [and particularly black women] are not just victims of police misconduct; they are also leading the movement to transform this entrenched system of injustice.

Until recently, Detroit had a backlog of 30 years' worth of rape kits, the contents of which had never been processed nor the underlying crimes investigated by the city's police department. Eighty-one percent of Wayne County victims whose kits were never tested were black.

As a result, women who were subject to often brutal attacks never had the opportunity to learn the iden-

tity of their attacker or receive a semblance of justice for the pain they suffered. What they did learn is that they were not valued by the system.

It was not until Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy galvanized female business leaders in the Detroit community to raise private funds that the testing of decades' worth of rape kits went forward. As a result of the private sector's involvement, victims in that city have begun receiving attention that is long overdue.

Such disregard for rape victims of color is not unique to Detroit. In 2010, the DOJ uncovered a pattern of misconduct in the New Orleans Police Department's sex crimes unit, which included the failure to test rape kits, "downgrading" of rape complaints and victim-blaming for sexual assaults.

Since then, the police department entered into a consent decree with the DOJ, aimed at fixing both the kit backlog and officers' treatment of victims. But as recently as August 2015, problems persist in the sex crimes unit.

Women With a Vision, a New Orleans nonprofit founded by a grassroots collective of African-American women, fills the void left in the wake of the DOJ consent decree. The organization advocates for the "human rights protection of street-based sex workers" who often endure sexual abuse on the streets and are then subject to "the threat of prosecution even when reporting violence done to them."

Chicago law enforcement has exhibited a similar lack of respect for female crime victims. Significant public attention has been paid over the years to Chicago's spate of wrongfully convicted men [mostly men of color] who were arrested by police for crimes they did not commit.

What has been less of a point of focus is the women who were victims of these crimes. Officers intentionally bungled these investigations. As a result, innocent men languished in prison and the lives of the women and girls who were victimized were devalued.

This is true for Nina Glover, a rape and murder victim in the Englewood neighborhood of Chicago in 1994. As alleged in a civil suit brought on behalf of our client, Terrill Swift, he and four other teenagers were coerced by detectives into confessing to the crime. Consequently, the true perpetrator, a serial rapist, was never caught.

The same is true for Sharon Haugabook, a woman killed execution-style in 1992, but whose murder went unanswered when Daniel Taylor, also a client, and other Chicago teens were forced to confess to her murder. They have since been exonerated and have also brought suit against the City of Chicago. Haugabook's murder was never solved.

Outside Chicago, nearby Lake County, IL, has been similarly plagued by wrongful convictions.

Last May, Lake County resident Jason Strong was released by the state, cleared of murdering Mary Kate Sundelin, a disabled woman who was not even identified until six years after Strong was convicted. To say

Sundelin was denied a fair investigation is an understatement.

The list of men in this area of the country who were falsely imprisoned – and the female victims whose murders went unsolved – goes on.

There is also ample evidence that Chicago police officers regularly abuse women while on the job. Chicago paid out over \$500 million between 2004 and 2014 to compensate people alleging violations of their constitutional rights by police.

Contributing to this number are numerous settlements on behalf of women who endured physical brutality at the hands of law enforcement, as detailed in a complaint concerning police misconduct in Chicago that we submitted to the DOJ on Dec. 7, 2015.

Women allege in court filings that Chicago police slammed them into cars, choked them, punched them, beat them with blunt objects and taunted them based on their perceived sexuality.

The most well-publicized case is that of Rekia Boyd, who was shot to death by an off-duty police officer in 2012. He has since been acquitted of her murder.

There can be no doubt that women, and particularly women of color, are consistently targeted, abused and discriminated against by those in uniform. But as documented by the black women leading the Say Her Name movement, while the names of men of color who are murdered by police officers become rallying cries, the names of women who endure brutal maltreatment are too often relegated to obscurity.

Sparked by community outrage after the police shooting of 17-year-old Laquan McDonald, the DOJ, in December, launched an investigation into the Chicago Police Department's use of force. But the U.S. attorney general's announcement of the investigation contained no mention of the federal agency's intent to examine police handling of crimes against women or uses of force directed at women.

Nor have interventions by the DOJ in other jurisdictions included a gendered focus – though the subsequent federal investigations unsurprisingly revealed police cultures that tolerated violence against women.

Women may be sidelined by official systems of inquiry, but as the Detroit and New Orleans examples make clear, it is women who are leading the crusade nationwide to change policing practices that terrorize people of color.

It was three black women who began the Black Lives Matter movement that roused a countrywide following and sparked civil rights protests throughout the United States. The Black Youth Project and We Charge Genocide are two efforts largely led by black women that have focused the nation's attention on the abusive law enforcement culture in Chicago and elsewhere.

Both groups have called repeatedly for justice on behalf of women mistreated by police.

Largely because of the advocacy of black women

Remembering Mike Barlow

BY JOHN THOMPSON

Oklahoma City legend Mike Barlow died recently at the age of 71. His funeral at the Temple B'nai Israel was attended by a sanctuary full of friends and family; teachers and administrators from within and without Oklahoma City; leaders and the rank-in-file of both teachers unions; civil rights and social justice activists; and, of course, fellow worshipers committed to the Jewish faith, locally and in Israel.

Although Michael would go on to become a small business owner for 30 years serving Oklahoma school districts, an inductee into the Oklahoma Educators Hall of Fame, and a leader in the Oklahoma City Jewish community, his record of service and activism began when he first entered the teaching profession.

When Mike became an Oklahoma City Public School System teacher in 1968, he sure didn't look the part. All he had to wear to class were two old \$20 iridescent suits from college. [But he went overboard and shocked students by buying a black suit suited only for a pastor or undertaker.]

Mike ignored his principal's threats regarding his sideburns [a teacher had recently lost his job basically because he wore a mustache] and became probably the first OKCPS teacher to wear a beard.

Mike brought some unique assets to South OKC schools. He had attended a New York City high school that was two-thirds non-white, mostly black and Puerto Rican. His favorite teacher had spoken passionately during a strike about the improvements needed in education and how the union was the way to achieve results.

Mike landed at Grant High School, serving a community that embodied an external stoicism born of the Dust Bowl and the Depression.

Southsiders had served in disproportionate numbers in combat during World War II, the Korean War, and in Vietnam. They were close-mouthed about their ordeals. Even in the outwardly more comfortable neighborhoods of the Grant area, the demons from their trauma was just below the surface.

Grant patrons were just as friendly as anyone else in our famously neighborly state. But their ordeals perpetuated a mindset of "I got mine" that drove a wedge between whites and blacks.

Mike – a self-avowed ham, actor, and comedian – also drew heavily on humor in the classroom. He created a successful discussion style of teaching, as he learned the reasons why his [and others'] testing strategies were disastrous. This was the time be-

fore Special Education legislation had been passed; many students had reading difficulties and some couldn't read at all. Mike also saw the brutal effects of corporal punishment rendered at home as a cycle of abuse was often perpetuated.

During Mike's first years in the classroom, classes of 40-plus were the norm, but then he was given a ridiculously large class of 61. He pushed back and forced the administration to reduce his numbers to a "manageable" class size of 44.

Mike became a civil rights leader as Grant became the epicenter of violence during the desegregation battles that culminated in busing to achieve racial balance. In 1975, a student was murdered in their halls. The school often had a dozen or so police officers assigned to it, and it even had national television crews and National Guard helicopters circle around it.

Mike also led a panel discussion at Grant where one of his students asked the anti-busing activist, Yvonne York, whether she would ever consider living next to a black family. Mrs. York replied, "Of course, I would. I would not mind living next to them as long as they kept up their yard and didn't make trouble."

Mike later told Mrs. York that it was alright for her to have her views as a private citizen, but as a school board member, she should follow the court order and support whatever methods would be necessary to implement desegregation. Mike quietly and privately told her that in his opinion she was a bigot. She told him that she would have him fired for that remark.

Mike taught a Human Relations class that brought together Freaks, Jocks, Soshs, Straights, Gays, and straight-laced students of all races. Students sat on the floor to better learn about sharing and caring.

He brought two beanbags from home, and soon the room was covered with beanbags from students' homes and other assorted pieces of furniture. On the ceiling were stapled posters that they all brought in. Music posters from rock to country to soul helped reflect their commitment to brotherhood.

They also created the teaching tool known as "the Hot Seat" where students, Mike, other teachers, the principal and, even, the police shared their feelings.

Mike's class also brought their quest for justice and racial equality into the streets, asking citizens to express their frank opinions, and to the neighborhoods, documenting housing discrimination.

Before long, Mike applied his pedagogies to labor/management conflicts. After leading an effort to

talk through racial problems on a factory floor, he learned how much of its racial animosity was due to a communication problem throughout the organization.

Mike's quest for racial healing would have been enough to assure his reputation as a crusader for justice. Before long, he made his mark as a labor activist. That is an illustrative story for another article. *Dr. John Thompson, an education writer whose essays appear regularly in The Oklahoma Observer, has a doctorate from Rutgers University and is the author of Closing the Frontier: Radical Responses in Oklahoma Politics. His latest book, A Teacher's Tale, is available through Tate Publishing. This essay is the first of two parts; the second will be published online at www.okobserver.net.*

Pied Piper Of Fearful Rednecks

BY LOTTIE WILDS

Donald Trump is a tool – a tired joke – like every rich, entitled blowhard you ever met in a frat house. All he is missing is the ugly sweater. He is, just as televangelists often are, using people's fears – Stranger Danger – and the natural reluctance to try anything new to win followers.

I am in favor of immigrants coming legally to this country. My English and German ancestors did and so did yours, more than likely. We are a nation made stronger by our acceptance of legal immigrants who want to come to the U.S. to make their lives better.

Those people also make everyone else's lives better for being here. They work hard, believe in the greatness of the "American Possibility," and teach their children to give back to their new homeland.

Legal immigrants are vetted – some from war-torn, unfriendly places – for two years. Were you vetted? I wasn't. It was my great luck of birth to be born right here and get to stay right here. I make the U.S. better by my being here, too. Ask my co-workers and neighbors.

If we close our doors to immigrants, then we will break our promise to the world – to be that shining beacon in times of trouble. It is extremely important to keep our promises. We need to be the shining beacon, don't we?

We also need to be as sure as we can be that *anyone* living here is not plotting to kill people, blow buildings up, and commence "jihad" or "Yee-haw" to terrorize or terminate our own people.

We already have powerful tools to do that. I think we have gone too far to monitor our own private conversations, but I am not afraid to be monitored. I don't like it, but the scariest thing you'll get out of my life is my grocery list! What the heck is quinoa, anyway?

Threats against our country have always existed but we let the bad guys win when we give up our freedoms and privacy to catch a few of them. Benjamin Franklin, a giant of American history, who knew a thing or two about freedom, security, and advice, said emphatically: "They who can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety."

Does that sound like the ravings of a greedy, outlandish showman or power-hungry politician – or the studied observation of a statesman? Do we want our country run by P.T. Barnum wannabes who can depend on our childish fascination with "others"?

Or will we remember what H. L. Mencken, my favorite curmudgeon, said about politics?

The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed [and hence clamorous to be led to safety] by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary.

Trump and others, who only wish they could be as outlandish, are using "ISIS" and "TERROR" to gather their flocks. As long as our country is divided into "them" and "us," we are easy sport for any politician who makes us feel "special."

There is a powerful group of maniacs under the umbrella of ISIS. We could be paralyzed with fear if we listen to every knucklehead rehash the same 10-second news-clip or pushed to exterminate the next three people who move.

The questions remain: Who are we? What do we want? How do we get it?

Read to find out – read from liberal and conservative viewpoints. Somewhere in the middle is the real situation. Educate yourself to identify a threat, not any woman whose head is bound up, a pencil-toting child, or a dark man who is shouting words you don't like. Itchy trigger fingers kill innocent people – "we" not "they." We must remain "we."

If we band together to fix our own country – roads, bridges, schools, racism, corruption, lobbyists, scandal – and *not* unite under the splashy, bloody, idolatrous banner of hatred of *them*, we will be strengthened from the roots up, we will keep our wits about us, and we will have nothing to fear from any faceless horde.

Lottie Wilds lives in Sapulpa.



Of Climate Marches And Extinctions

BY NATHANIEL BATCHELDER

Global Climate Marches took place in Oklahoma City and around the world on the weekend before the Paris Climate Summit began in late November. According to the Global Climate March website, 780,000 people participated in 2,300 marches in 175 countries.

The message of the marches was, "We demand a climate treaty in line with the realities of science and the principles of justice." Marchers also sought agreement to leave most remaining fossil fuels in the ground, and to finance a fair and just global transition to 100% renewable energy by 2050.

Coal is the dirtiest fossil fuel, producing global warming carbon dioxide [CO₂], sulphur dioxide and other particulates that contribute to asthma, emphysema and lung cancer. While transported by rail, 1% of coal's mass is lost into the atmosphere as coal dust, further contributing to lung irritation and

disease. Strip mining for coal is an environmental disaster.

Production of electricity must be shifted to solar and wind power. These do not cause earthquakes, climate change, lung disease, or require thousands of years of safe storage of radioactive wastes.

People and industries can reduce their carbon footprint by conserving energy, insulating buildings, installing LED lighting, driving hybrid and electric vehicles, reducing meat consumption. Geothermal systems heat and cool buildings with less energy.

Emissions of CO₂ are warming the atmosphere and the oceans. Sea levels are rising as polar ice melts, but also because water expands as it warms. Oceans become acidified as they absorb CO₂, causing the bleaching of coral reefs and reducing the reproductive capacity of fish that serve humanity as food.

PUBLIC FORUM

Business schools teach that healthy economies depend upon economic growth. Growth is good, they say, in the production of energy, food, products and services, particularly as human numbers have risen, from three billion in 1960 to seven billion today – to perhaps nine billion within this century.

Economic equations, however, do not factor in the cost of degrading the quality of air, water, land or natural systems supporting life. Because we live on a finite planet, unlimited growth has serious consequences for all living things.

Zoologists tell us that we are, right now, living in the sixth great extinction of species on earth. The previous five had natural causes. The most recent was 65 million years ago when an enormous asteroid slammed into the Gulf of Mexico. Dense clouds of dust encircled the earth, blocking sunlight, killing vegetation and chilling the atmosphere. The majority of plants and animals living then disappeared.

Goodbye, dinosaurs.

The current era of extinctions is considered anthropogenic, or human caused.

Beginning some 10,000 years ago, human societies began displacing other species. Our impact has grown dramatically with industrialization, population expansion, increased consumption per capita, and disposal of wastes into the air, water and land. Estimates are that some 50,000 species of plants, animals, insects and microbial life are now going extinct every year as a result of human impact.

Virtually every religious tradition emphasizes humanity's responsibility to be stewards of nature and the environment – God's creation.

For all these reasons, humanity must fundamentally change our ways, or watch the continued destruction of natural systems supporting life.

Nathaniel Batchelder is director of The Peace House in Oklahoma City.

Homage To Un-Civil Servants

BY RANDY McLERRAN

A family went shopping at a large grocery store. Upon arriving at the checkout counter they encountered this:

The first cashier said, "I am Catholic and I cannot check you out because you have condoms in your basket and that is against my religion. Please go to the next counter."

The next counter had a person who was a Muslim and said, "I cannot touch or ring up pork. Go to the next aisle."

A Jewish cashier was in charge of the third counter and refused to process their purchases because they had food that was not kosher.

Very frustrated, they found hope at the next counter which was staffed by an old hippie. Just their luck, he would not ring up their vegetables because they were not organic.

Hoping they would finally get checked out, they encountered a young clerk who was a stoner. She ate all their chips and Twinkies and then wandered off distracted by the lights and listening to her headset.

It seemed their ordeal was over when they found a counter staffed by an atheist, but to their chagrin no cash was accepted because it clearly stated "In God We Trust."

The next register was staffed by a man with a rebel flag tattoo. He did not believe in interracial marriages. Complicating matters was the fact that one of their children was Hispanic and the other Asian.

Without documentation proving that the children were in the country legally he could not sell them food. However, this could be overlooked providing they had a concealed carry gun permit. Unfortunately, they had neither document so they moved on.

The family went to the next counter and the clerk said, "I am Baptist and I cannot ring up your beer, but if you wait until my next break, I will go out back and help you drink it if no one is looking."

The last checkout stand was staffed by a retired county employee who had failed as a store greeter. After extensive questioning regarding their sexuality they were allowed to check out with the promise that they would attend church the following Sunday or go to jail if they violated her beliefs.

Absurd as this is, please consider the following:

In the United States, there are 3,143 counties. All civil servants must take an oath of office to obey the Constitution of the United States of America and the state in which they reside, and obey all state and federal laws.

This oath usually ends with the phrase, "So Help Me God."

It seems that only one person in the 3,143 counties in this great nation believes that it is exalted to betray her faith and her oath of office. If Walmart had employed her as a corporate trainer in sales, the company would be in receivership within six months.

Randy McLerran lives in Oklahoma City.

John Hope Franklin: A Giant Of U.S. History

BY DON McCORKELL

Legacies tend to fade away with time, but there are exceptions, individuals whose singular impact was so vivid and so vast that the passage of time only sharpens their image. This year is the 100th anniversary of the birth of John Hope Franklin, and he was one of those rare individuals who was able to light fires for justice far beyond his personal reach.

There are probably only two historians from Oklahoma who have had a profound impact beyond their own time. Angie Debo, who documented the vast and searing mistreatment of Native Americans in her majestic *Still the Waters Run*, was one. John Hope Franklin, whose monumental examination of the history of African Americans, was the other.

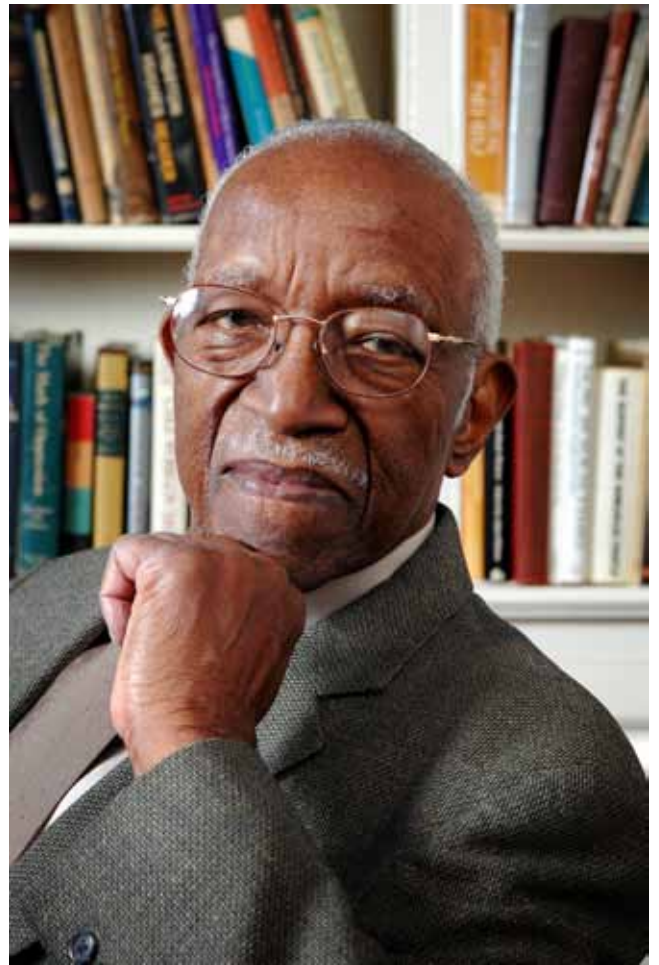
Franklin was born in Rentiesville in eastern Oklahoma and grew up there and in Tulsa where he graduated from Booker T. Washington High School. His father, Buck, grew up in Indian Territory, starting as a rancher and then turning to law, moving his law practice from Rentiesville to Tulsa in the early years of the 20th Century.

Franklin and his mother and sisters remained in Rentiesville waiting for the time they could move to Tulsa, which to them sounded like the Promised Land. They did get to make that move, but only after the horrendous Tulsa race riot in which the black community was devastated and Buck's law office burned to the ground.

The city doubled down on its racist acts by passing an ordinance to prevent blacks from rebuilding. Franklin's father was among those who challenged this act successfully in a lawsuit finally resolved in the Oklahoma Supreme Court.

Franklin edited his father's autobiography, *My Life and an Era*, which Buck wrote by typing it out one word at a time, using only his index finger after suffering a difficult stroke, which left him with one side severely weakened. Franklin and his son, John Whittington Franklin, edited it after Buck passed away. It was published in 1997.

Franklin always looked at Tulsa as his only home,



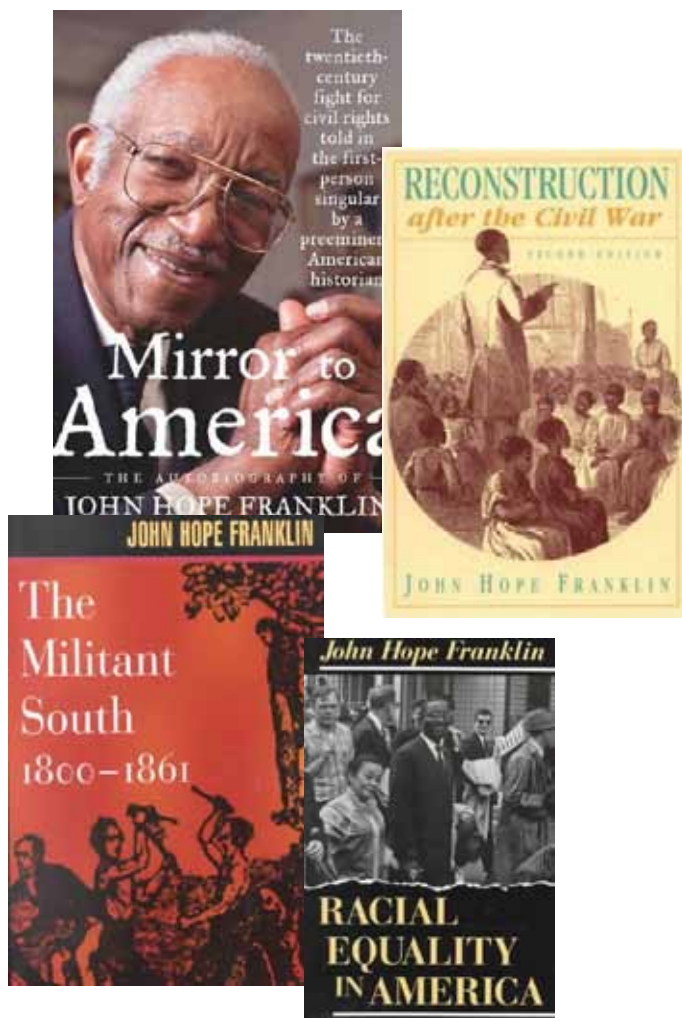
Editor's Note: This is the first in a series of essays commemorating the centennial of Franklin's birth to be published in The Oklahoma Eagle, a north Tulsa weekly that focuses its coverage on the African-American community. The essays on Franklin's life, work, and significance as an intellectual, social and political force in America also will appear at www.okobserver.net.

recognizing it as such in his autobiography, *Mirror to America*, in 2006. Franklin's parents were both focused opponents of segregation and bias in all parts of their lives.

When young John Hope wanted to go to the Tulsa Opera, his parents refused to join him. "Go if you want, but we will never honor a segregated practice with our presence." He went even though forced to sit in designated segregated seating. Later he said as much as he loved opera, he wished he had honored his parents by not going.

Franklin earned his doctorate in history from Harvard University and went on to teach at several universities, including Brooklyn College where he was the first African-American to head the history department.

That was followed with distinguished service elsewhere, including years as the head of the history department at Chicago University and at Duke.



His extensive research and writing earned him the respect of many and honorary degrees from over 100 colleges and universities. His history of African Americans, *From Slavery to Freedom*, is still the definitive work on African-American history and has sold over three million copies.

His biography of George Washington Williams was a brilliant reconstruction of the life of the first major African-American historian whose life had virtually been hidden in American history. Franklin's focused scholarship and relentless detective work over several decades of research resulted in a masterpiece described as a brilliant and superb work.

In *School Book Nation*, the author, Joseph Moreau, described the relentless attacks on Franklin's magnificent history textbook, *Land of the Free*. Franklin was singularly responsible for exposing and detailing the vast and brutal history of segregation and discrimination imbedded in the country's history after the Civil War.

Slavery met its end, but its end gave birth to a complex and relentlessly brutal and vicious world of endless and humiliating barriers and assaults on humanity itself.

It was a crime in many southern states to teach or educate African Americans. They were not allowed to vote in the "white primaries" which were the definitive elections in southern states at the time.

Franklin personally felt the painful blow of discrimination from his early childhood when he and his mother were forced off a segregated train; being rejected as a guide through busy downtown Tulsa traffic by a blind woman who, when discovering that the Boy Scout who had rushed to help her was black, rewarded him with a demand that he not touch her because he was black; being threatened with lynching as a young man; being denied mortgage financing as a middle-aged man because of his race; being ordered to serve as a porter in a hotel when he was 60 and a guest at the same hotel; and at age 80 being directed to hang up a guest's coat at a Washington club where he was not an employee, but a member.

He witnessed and honored the great gains made during his life, but to the end he witnessed and documented the insidious power of imbedded racism.

He dedicated his life to history and he followed the highest standards of professional scholarship in each of his works. He was very careful not to wrap any of it with emotional judgment, but to lay out the full truth, fact after fact after fact.

That and his extraordinary dignity was what added so much power to his words and led to his recognition by President Clinton as a recipient of our country's highest civilian honor, the medal of freedom.

The PBS film, *First Person Singular: John Hope Franklin*, describes him as a legendary figure among American historians.

His legacy is unmatched and is sharpened and focused with each passing year, for he is truly one person, who in remembering him, the named one, we cannot forget the many without remembered names who suffered and survived so much.

Don McCorkell is a Santa Barbara, CA-based documentary filmmaker who represented Tulsa in the state House from 1978-96. He earned both a bachelor's degree in political science and a law degree from the University of Tulsa.





AMERICAN FASCISM

Trump's Bigotry Relies On Legal And Historical Precedents

BY TED RALL

George Stephanopoulos, ABC News: "You're increasingly being compared to Hitler. Does that give you any pause at all?"

Donald Trump: "Because what I'm doing is no different than what FDR [did]. FDR's solution for Germans, Italians, Japanese many years ago. This is a president who was highly respected by all. He did the same thing – if you look at what he was doing it was far worse."

When it comes down to core values, you can never make an exception.

Here's why:

After Republican presidential frontrunner Donald Trump called for a ban against Muslims to enter the United States – all Muslims, including businesspeople, college students, athletes, performers, even U.S. citizens currently living abroad – corporate media and the experts in their contact lists called the idea outlandish.

Primarily, they said it was crazy because it is unprecedented.

For example, NYU law professor Nancy Morawetz

told The New York Times: “This is just so antithetical to the history of the United States. I cannot recall any historical precedent for denying immigration based on religion.”

True, there hasn’t been a religious test for admission to the U.S. But in a broader sense, Trump’s idea continues a long tradition of using immigration rules as expressions of American racism and intolerance.

There have been plenty of blanket bans motivated by bigotry. The Chinese Exclusion Act comes to mind. The Immigration Act of 1924 banned all immigration to the U.S. by Asians and Arabs. People with HIV-AIDS weren’t allowed to visit the U.S. from 1987 to 2009.

In each case, supporters of blanket exclusions argued that their extraordinary measures were “temporary” [that’s what Trump says] responses to unusual threats, such as the 19th Century “yellow peril.” [Asians with “special powers,” Americans were told, were going to crush white culture.] Now we understand that the threats were trivial or nonexistent, that these responses were outlandishly reactionary. At the time, however, idiots and opportunists exploited the masses’ fear and ignorance to whip up paranoia – which set some terrible precedents we’re living with today.

Trump’s no-Muslims-need-apply plan is being criticized harshly. Rightly so, though no one asks the obvious question: If this is about border security, wouldn’t a real Islamic terrorist lie when asked about his religious affiliation, or claim to have renounced Islam, while applying for a visa? After all, some of the 9/11 hijackers were clean-shaven, drank alcohol and hung out in topless bars.

If anything, criticism of Trump has been too muted. Not one single Republican presidential candidate or major GOP official has said he or she would not support Trump should he win the Republican nomination. Believe you me, they’ll all fall in line if The Donald becomes The Man running against Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders.

Such weaselry is the way these things usually go. First, there’s some sort of shock. Then a demagogue enters the scene who frames the shock as part of a crisis, followed by overreaction [we must give up some freedoms to stay safe] based on “exceptional times” because “everything has changed.” Ultimately sanity returns, thanks to the passage of time, the cooling of passions and moving on to other concerns. This is a pattern we’ve seen before and we will surely see again – mainly because previous overreactions, many of them never renounced, serve as a perfect justification for new crimes against humanity.

“Look at what FDR did many years ago,” Trump said by way of justification, “and he’s one of the most respected presidents.”

So, sadly, true.

During World War II, Franklin Roosevelt issued presidential proclamations that allowed officials to declare people of German, Italian and German an-

cestry to be “enemy aliens” who could be detained without trial. Even though there is no evidence that any Japanese-American ever committed a disloyal act during the war, FDR ordered the internal deportation of tens of thousands from the Pacific Coast to concentration camps. Many lost their homes and their businesses. [Trump hasn’t decided whether he’d create Muslim concentration camps beyond the existing facilities at Guantanamo and overseas.]

There are two problems with FDR’s assault on the basic legal principle that we are innocent until proven guilty: His actions themselves, and the failure of our political and legal culture to repudiate him and what he did.

Had they been reversed and retroactively annulled, the FDR actions cited so approvingly by Trump would nevertheless stand as historical precedent. When something Really Bad happens – a sneak attack on your naval base, planes crashing into buildings, a couple going berserk and shooting up their workplace – all bets are off, including the Constitution.

But they were never annulled, much less reviled. So they also stand as legal precedent.

As Trump says, FDR is considered one of our finest presidents. The New Deal and winning World War II are what we remember. The internment camps, which affected only people with yellow skin, are a minor footnote in history classes. The message is clear: No one cares. If we thought the camps were really so wrong, Roosevelt would stand with Nixon and George W. Bush among our worst leaders, the same way Woodrow Wilson’s accomplishments in World War I and with the League of Nations are now being eclipsed by his racism.

And he should. Send just one kid to a camp, as FDR did to thousands, and yeah, that really does erase the Social Security Act.

The United States has never fully renounced those concentration camps for Japanese-Americans. Forty-three years after the end of World War II, Congress finally issued an apology but only paid token \$20,000 payments to each surviving victim. [40,000 of the 120,000 prisoners had died.] No one was compensated for lost property. It’s still a fairly obscure chapter in history; I’d be surprised if 10% of Americans know it happened.

Disgustingly, the legal underpinnings of Roosevelt’s actions remain in full effect, namely the 1944 Supreme Court ruling in favor of the government in *Korematsu v. United States*. Fear of espionage and sabotage – though completely unsubstantiated – outweighed the right to due process of Japanese-Americans, said a 6-3 majority.

As a rule Americans prefer “to look forward as opposed to looking backwards,” as Obama said in 2009 about Bush-era torture. The trouble is, the future winds up looking a lot like the past.

Use waterboarding as an example: U.S. troops occupying the Philippines did this with impunity against Filipino independence fighters, and then it came

back after 9/11. [No Marines were ever prosecuted for using this form of torture, but the U.S. did execute Japanese soldiers who waterboarded American POWs during World War II. Since Obama refused to prosecute CIA waterboarders, we can be sure it will happen again.]

Allow the president to fight a war without a formal declaration of war, “exceptionally” violating the Constitution as Congress did in 1950 with Korea, and a future president will do the same in Vietnam. And Panama. And Iraq. And Bosnia. And Afghanistan. And Iraq again.

And now Syria.

Because America never drives a stake through the darkest heart of its history, like the Korematsu decision, “exceptions” become precedents.

Several of George W. Bush’s memos calling for the suspension of the ancient right of habeas corpus cited Korematsu in order to justify holding Muslim POWs

without charges or access to an attorney at Gitmo. In 2004, the Bush Administration used the precedent to fight a challenge by Gitmo detainees – prisoners who have been languishing under both Bush and Obama. [The Military Commissions Act of 2006 ended habeas corpus, the 800-year-old right to a court trial, for American citizens.]

As recently as 2014, Justice Antonin Scalia said the ruling remained in effect. It was, he said, “wrong, but it could happen again in wartime.”

Or, under a President Trump, in peacetime.

Just this once.

Because this time is different.

Ted Rall, syndicated writer and the cartoonist for ANewDomain.net and SkewedNews.net, is the author of Snowden, about the NSA whistleblower. His new book Bernie about Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, comes out Jan. 12.

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To The Trump-Led GOP: We Will Fight You And We Will Win

BY CHRIS CRASS

One of my closest high school friends was a white supremacist skinhead when we first met as teenagers.

He would have cheered at Donald Trump rallies with each call to deport Mexicans and ban Muslims from entering the country. He would have agreed with Trump that the Black Lives Matter activist in Alabama deserved getting roughed up. He would have heard and understood Trump for what he is, a right-wing leader mainstreaming racist hate, and he would have felt validated, rather than repulsed by it.

We weren’t friends at this point. I was scared of him and looked away when he looked at me.

My other close friend was a charismatic anti-racist social justice activist rooted in the working-class anarchist vision of a commonwealth of socialism and democracy.

Rather than avoid the racist skinhead when they ended up sitting next to each other in science class, my friend, the anarchist, engaged the skinhead with questions about his beliefs and eventually said, “Look, we’re both working-class, and racism is screwing you over, leading you to blame the wrong people for the problems you’ve named, and I want to argue with you, because our ideas are better.”

They argued for weeks, and in a few months, the former skinhead had traded in his white power music for Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States*. Two years later, we were all march-

ing, along with dozens of other white kids from our high school, against racist police brutality after the Rodney King verdict in 1992, in Los Angeles, where we grew up in the suburbs.

I am not surprised by the popularity of the Trump/Cruz/Ryan-led GOP. I grew up surrounded by racist, rightwing Republicans who blamed every problem on immigrants and “Black women on welfare,” all the while bemoaning me for talking about corporate power and the structural inequality that has screwed over white, working-class communities like my extended family for hundreds of years.

But I also grew up with my parents laying seeds about the courage of Cesar Chavez and Martin Luther King Jr., and I had friends who refused to let white supremacy claim other white people without a fight.

My friend the anarchist believed that racism goes after white working-class people, like our families, and tries to turn their economic insecurity and humiliation under capitalism into a raging inferno of racist, homophobic and sexist hate that fuels ruling-class ambitions of money and power.

He said our job – as revolutionaries who know another way is possible – is to fight for our families, to fight racism, to steer other white kids away from the trap of white supremacy and to join in liberation movements that unite people under the banners of equality and justice.

As teenagers in California, we stood on street cor-

ners in the 1990s protesting attacks on immigrants, LGBTQ people and abortion clinics. We were spit on and had bottles throw at us. Grown white men in suits drove by sieg-heiling us.

We were scared, but we were also defiant, and we stuck together. We imagined ourselves standing up against the nightmare of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy and saying, "You cannot have us, and we will fight with everything we have, to save as many people as possible from the hell you create in our lives."

With the rise of Donald Trump, coinciding as backlash to the growing Black Lives Matter movement on the move, as backlash to the continued march for gender equality, as backlash to the continued march for LGBTQ rights, I keep thinking of my friends from high school.

The former skinhead is today the father of two multiracial children, whom he is raising to be proud of their Mexican and Hawaiian ancestry, as well as of the white anti-racist tradition from the abolitionists to today.

I think of his family and know that they exist in part because a working-class anarchist kid had seen racism and the humiliation of capitalism devastate people in his own family and decided to do something about it. That anarchist kid picked a fight pitting white supremacy against collective liberation, and collective liberation won.

To be clear, there were other racists my anarchist friend tried to engage who weren't open to conver-

sation, and he moved on. He didn't waste his time arguing with trolls. He knew this was about building a multiracial liberation movement and shifting power, policy and culture.

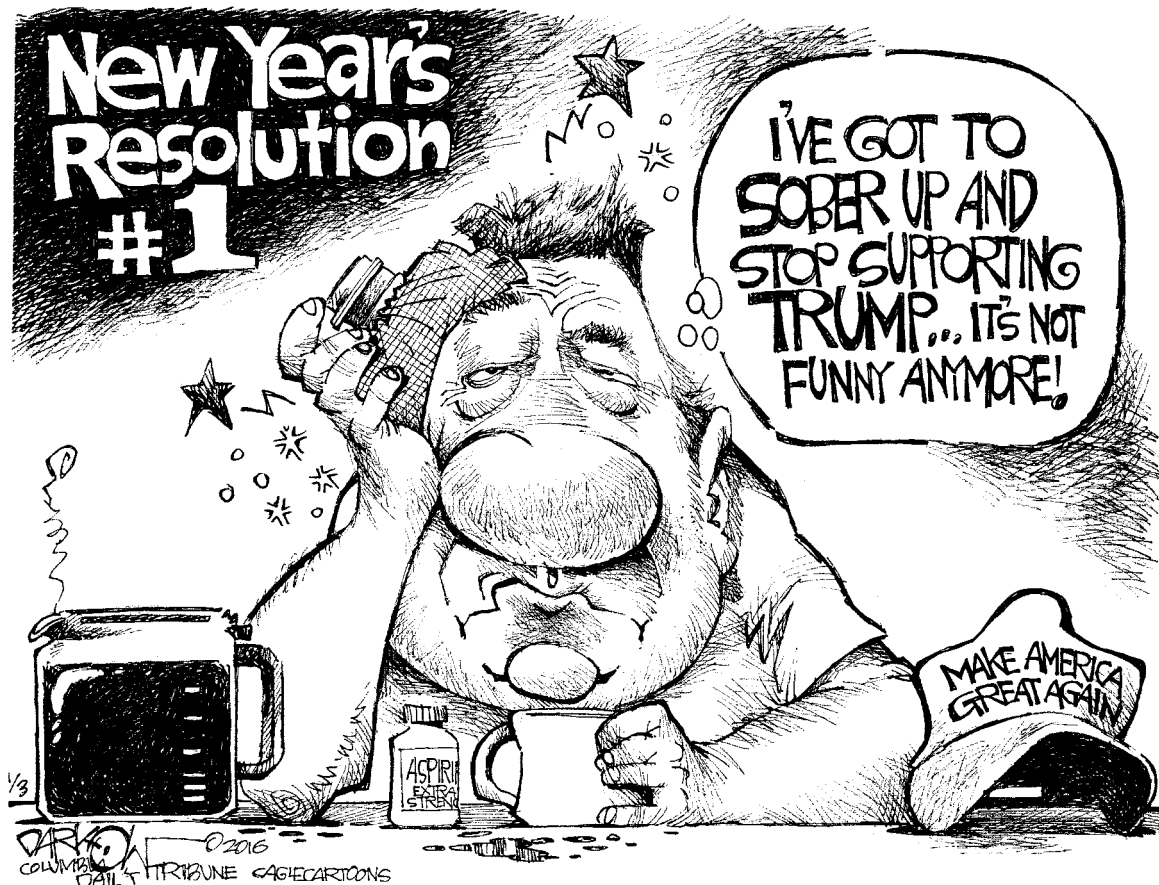
And he wanted to bring along as many other white working-class kids, moms, families and communities as possible, both to end the racist violence [structural and individual] that white communities support, and to eradicate the poison of racism that turns white people's capacity to love into an engine of hate.

We will fight the Trump-led GOP in every community, in every state, and we will win. We will build a majority for racial, economic and gender justice, and we will be courageous even when we are scared, because our values – when put into practice – open up the possibility for a healthy, democratic society that values the inherent worth and dignity of all people, the interconnection of life and the sacredness of the planet.

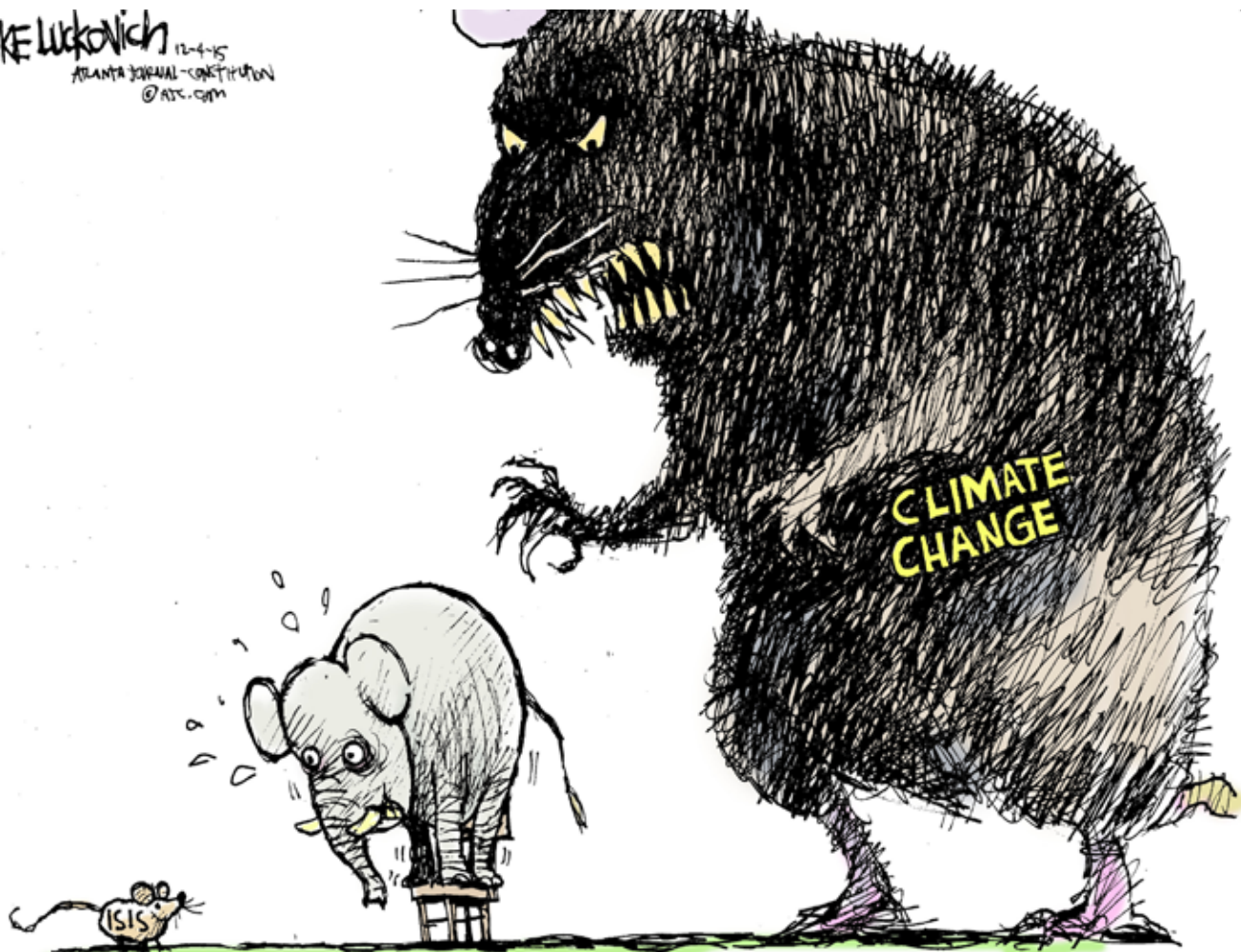
To white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy and its supporters, we say: You cannot have us; we will fight you, and we will win.

Chris Crass is the author of the new book Towards the 'Other America': Anti-Racist Resources for White People Taking Action for Black Lives Matter, intended to help equip white people to take courageous action for racial justice. It is available as a free ebook or for purchase paperback at www.chalicepress.net/OtherAmerica.

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ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION
@ALC.COM



ARNOLD'S WORLD

*'I Don't Give A **** If We Agree About Climate Change'*

BY ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER

I see your questions. Each and every time I post on my Facebook page or tweet about my crusade for a clean energy future, I see them.

There are always a few of you, asking why we should care about the temperature rising, or questioning the science of climate change.

I want you to know that I hear you. Even those of you who say renewable energy is a conspiracy. Even those who say climate change is a hoax. Even those of you who use four letter words.

I've heard all of your questions, and now I have three questions for you.

Let's put climate change aside for a minute. In fact, let's assume you're right.

First – do you believe it is acceptable that seven million people die every year from pollution? That's more than murders, suicides, and car accidents – combined.

Every day, 19,000 people die from pollution from fossil fuels. Do you accept those deaths? Do you accept that children all over the world have to grow up breathing with inhalers?

Now, my second question: do you believe coal and oil will be the fuels of the future?

Besides the fact that fossil fuels destroy our lungs,

everyone agrees that eventually they will run out. What's your plan then?

I, personally, want a plan. I don't want to be like the last horse and buggy salesman who was holding out as cars took over the roads. I don't want to be the last investor in Blockbuster as Netflix emerged. That's exactly what is going to happen to fossil fuels.

A clean energy future is a wise investment, and anyone who tells you otherwise is either wrong, or lying. Either way, I wouldn't take their investment advice.

Renewable energy is great for the economy, and

pletely sealed room, with a regular, gasoline-fueled car. Behind Door No. 2 is an identical, completely sealed room, with an electric car. Both engines are running full blast.

I want you to pick a door to open, and enter the room and shut the door behind you. You have to stay in the room you choose for one hour. You cannot turn off the engine. You do not get a gas mask.

I'm guessing you chose the Door No. 2, with the electric car, right? Door No. 1 is a fatal choice - who would ever want to breathe those fumes?

I want a plan. I don't want to be like the last horse and buggy salesman who was holding out as cars took over the roads. ... That's exactly what is going to happen to fossil fuels.

you don't have to take my word for it. California has some of the most revolutionary environmental laws in the United States, we get 40% of our power from renewables, and we are 40% more energy efficient than the rest of the country. We were an early-adopter of a clean energy future.

Our economy has not suffered. In fact, our economy in California is growing faster than the U.S. economy. We lead the nation in manufacturing, agriculture, tourism, entertainment, high tech, biotech, and, of course, green tech.

I have a final question, and it will take some imagination.

There are two doors. Behind Door No. 1 is a com-

This is the choice the world is making right now.

To use one of the four-letter words all of you commenters love, I don't give a damn if you believe in climate change. I couldn't care less if you're concerned about temperatures rising or melting glaciers. It doesn't matter to me which of us is right about the science.

I just hope that you'll join me in opening Door No. 2, to a smarter, cleaner, healthier, more profitable energy future.

Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger is former governor of California who resumed his acting career after leaving office. This first appeared on Schwarzenegger's Facebook page.

Figuratively Speaking

Araprosdokians – is there *really* such a word? – are figures of speech in which the latter part of a sentence is unexpected. Winston Churchill supposedly loved them. Some examples:

1. Where there's a will, I want to be in it.
2. Since light travels faster than sound, some people appear bright until you hear them speak.
3. If I agreed with you, we'd both be wrong.
4. War does not determine who is right – only who is left.
5. Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad.
6. They begin the evening news with "Good Evening," then proceed to tell you why it isn't.
7. To steal ideas from someone is plagiarism. To steal from many is called research.
8. In filling in an application, where it says, "in case of emergency notify," I put "doctor."
9. I didn't say it was your fault, I said I was blaming you.

10. Women will never be equal to men until they can walk down the street with a bald head and a beer gut, and still think they look sexy.

11. Behind every successful man is his woman. Behind the fall of a successful man is usually another woman.

12. A clear conscience is the sign of a bad memory.

13. I used to be indecisive. Now I'm not so sure.

14. Nostalgia isn't what it used to be. Nor is there any future in it.

15. Change is inevitable, except from a vending machine.

16. Going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than standing in your garage makes you a car.

17. I'm supposed to respect my elders, but it's getting harder and harder for me to find one now.

18. I am not arguing with you, I am explaining why you are wrong.



Should Big Corporations Pay The Taxes They Owe?

Carl Icahn, noted corporate predator and takeover specialist who made billions of dollars in corporate deals, has recently begun pushing a charitable cause involving a group of people who, through no fault of their own, are being forced out of America.

Syrian migrants who've lost everything, you ask? Or maybe Central American children fleeing the horrors of drug wars?

Nope, none of those foreign sob stories for Icahn. Rather, he weeps for the incomprehensible suffering of a small tribe of Americans, namely: the CEOs of several U.S.-based multinational corporations.

You see, Carl is fronting for CEOs of a small group of huge multinational conglomerates who are demanding that Congress drastically slash the taxes they owe on foreign sales of their products.

This "reform" would let them escape paying most of the \$600 billion in taxes that U.S. law assesses on some \$2.6 trillion in profits they've been hiding in foreign bank accounts and offshore tax havens. Three-fourths of these hidden profits belong to only 50 enormously profitable corporations.

In a recent heart-wrenching op-ed, he wails that poor superrich chieftains of such profiteering giants as Pfizer pharmaceuticals are having to move their corporate domains abroad, having been driven out of the USA by "our uncompetitive tax code."

These American-raised corporations have been raking in enormous profits on foreign sales, but the CEOs have whined that those profits should be exempt from U.S. taxation, since they're taxed by the countries where their products are sold.

In fact, their "double taxation" claim is a fraud, for most of that \$2.6 trillion in profits is subject to zero in taxes.

These rank corporate tax dodgers are starving America's essential public services of \$600 billion they owe us taxpayers, yet Icahn sobs in print that they are the victims.

If these trillions are brought back home, he ex-

plains, they'll be taxed – so, don't you see, this "forces" CEOs to desert the U.S., moving their corporate citizenship to a place that doesn't make them pay for public services.

Putting the \$600 billion they owe into America's public treasury would fund a lot of education, infrastructure repair, green energy, social services, etc. that our people desperately need. But Icahn & Co. claim that forgiving this corporate tax debt "would allow companies to reinvest ... in the United States, creating thousands of jobs."

Notice that verb, "allow." They *could* put this tax windfall into job-creating and U.S. investments – but Icahn does not want Congress to *require* any sort of patriotic use of the money.

Stop the cruelty, Carl says. America must let the CEOs "repatriate" their foreign bounty by essentially forgiving the taxes they owe on it. That way, the corporations get to keep the money, and America gets to keep the corporations.

Carl even asserts that the corporate elites are "completely justified" in leaving America if they aren't given this tax boondoggle. After all, he says, CEOs "have a fiduciary duty to enhance value for their shareholders."

Haven't we seen this movie before? Ah, yes: It was in the 2008 tragi-comic, multitrillion-dollar bailout of Wall Street banks and big corporations. They said that if Washington rescued them, they would then invest in Main Street and in middle-class jobs.

We did; and they didn't. They lied then, and the Icahn hucksters are lying to us now.

I would trust a pack of coyotes to guard my little herd of lambs before I'd trust a pack of corporate hucksters to "reform" America's tax code.

Congress has a moral imperative to serve not the few who are big corporate shareholders but to enhance value for all people – for the common good.

For information and action, go to www.AmericansForTaxFairness.org.

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Exxon's Weapons Of Mass Confusion On Climate Change

There is a constant flow of headlines these days confirming the mess we've made: "Looks Like Rain Again. And Again"; "Alaska Will Keep Melting"; "Climate Change a Worry to Central Bankers, Too"; "Warning on Climate Risk: Worst to Come."

This is far from a natural phenomenon. A handful of corporate interests are causing these catastrophes. Oil, coal, auto and a few other industrial powers have profited for decades by spewing fossil fuel contaminants into the world's atmosphere.

Some experts were speaking out about this mess nearly 40 years ago:

"There is general scientific agreement that the most likely manner in which mankind is influencing the global climate is through carbon dioxide release from the burning of fossil fuels," wrote James Black in 1978.

"Over the past several years, a clear scientific consensus has emerged," said Roger Cohen in September 1982. "There is unanimous agreement in the scientific community that a temperature increase of this magnitude would bring about significant changes in the Earth's climate, including rainfall distribution and alterations in the biosphere."

The significance of these early calls to action is that they came from Exxon!

Inside Climate News revealed in an investigative series released this fall that the oil superpower [now infamous for its relentless campaign of lies to discredit climate science] was briefly a paragon of scientific integrity. From 1978 through the '80s the corporation's research headquarters were a buzzing hive of farsighted inquiry into the "greenhouse effect," as the process of climate change was then called.

But in 1988, the elegant space inhabited by principle was suddenly invaded by the indelicate demands of profit. Dr. James Hansen, NASA's renowned climate expert, testified to Congress that fossil pollution of Earth's atmosphere had already surpassed the crisis point. "Global warming has begun," Hanson concluded.

Then the United Nations' intergovernmental panel on climate change issued an authoritative study in 1990 concluding that the warming was happening

and the cause was emissions from fossil fuels.

With that, Exxon dismantled and defunded its research team. Ever since, it's been the shameful, self-serving leader of a voodoo "science" campaign to keep the world hooked on the fossil fuels that provide its profits.

Their strategy was to create an incessant noise machine, fueled with hundreds of millions of industry dollars, to spread the false narrative that scientists are "uncertain" about climate change. In a confidential 1998 memo, ExxonMobil's senior environmental lobbyist stated the Orwellian goal of this corporate campaign: "Victory will be achieved when ... average citizens 'understand' uncertainties in climate science," and when "recognition of uncertainty becomes part of the 'conventional wisdom.'"

Their many tactics included: forming a lobbying combine in 1989 to sow doubt among public officials about the need for government action; placing a very costly, decade-long series of essays in newspapers denigrating the very scientists it previously nurtured and the science reports that it published; and trying to get the government's chief global warming official to decry the uncertainty of climate research [then, when he refused, got the incoming Bush-Cheney regime to fire him].

They also made their CEOs into hucksters of bunkum, with such lines as "the earth is cooler today than it was 20 years ago" and "it is highly unlikely that the temperature in the middle of next century will be significantly affected whether policies are enacted now or 20 years from now" and "what if everything we do, it turns out that our [climate] models are lousy, and we don't get the [rising temperatures] we predict?"

If these denials of reality sound familiar, that's because they're exactly the same ones we're now hearing from such Einsteins as The Donald [who recently tweeted, "I'm in Los Angeles and it's freezing. Global warming is a total, and very expensive, hoax"], The Cruzier [who claimed that climate change is a liberal plot for "massive government control of the economy ... and every aspect of our lives"] and Jeb [who said, "It's convoluted. And for the people to say the science is decided on this is just really arrogant"].

The deniers are not only on the wrong side of science and history, but also on the wrong side of most voters. A New York Times poll taken last January found that only 13% of our people [and only 24% of Repubs] said they would be more likely to vote for 2016 presidential candidates who contend that climate change is a hoax and America should keep burning oil and coal. A September poll by three GOP firms found that 56% of Republicans agree that the climate is changing and 72% support accelerating the use of renewable fuels.

The real power, and our great hope, is in the People's rebellion: marches, civil disobedience, trainings, teach-ins and other actions to pressure leaders to put people and the planet over corporate profiteering,

while also raising global public awareness about the crucial need to get off of fossil fuels and into renewable energy. As 350.org puts it, "Politicians aren't the only ones with power." So the coalition will be in the global streets, on the Internet, in schools, churches and all other available forums, to rally you and me to save ourselves. – *Jim Hightower*

The Sleaze, Guilt And Punishment Of A West VA Coal Baron

Don Blankenship didn't get what he deserves in his federal trial, but he definitely deserves what he got.

"Guilty," declared all 12 West Virginia jurors who pondered the charge that this arrogant and avaricious CEO of Massey Energy Company willfully conspired to violate America's mine safety laws. As a result of that conspiracy, 29 miners were essentially murdered by the corporation on April 5, 2010, in a horrific explosion deep inside Massey's Upper Big Branch coal mine.

Blankenship, a multimillionaire right-wing ideologue, union-buster, and political heavyweight, ran the Upper Big Branch mine like a lawless Third World operator. It was one of the most dangerous workplaces in the country, because this kingpin of King Coal relentlessly put profit over people, recklessly endangering miners. But coal is, indeed, king in West Virginia, so the laws are written to coddle the royals of the industry. Thus, Blankenship's guilt is to be punished by a maximum of *one year* in prison – and his diamond-studded legal team intends to have the jury's unanimous verdict of guilt tossed down the dark shaft of judicial favoritism for the rich.

What the mining baron deserved was to be put in stocks on the state's Capitol grounds, where he would be subjected to a steady stream of derision from the families of mineworkers who were degraded, made ill and even killed to haul up coal so Don could live in luxury. He escaped that justice, but he'll never shake off the guilty judgment of the jurors – or of the American people who followed the long, widely covered trial that fully documented the rank immorality of this man and his ill-gotten fortune.

He undoubtedly thinks he got away with murder, but in the Court of Public Opinion, his legacy is that he has turned the name Blankenship into a four-let-

ter word.

In fact, unlike the CEOs of most giant corporations, Blankenship's outward appearance actually reveals what's inside: an arrogant, conniving, cutthroat industrial thug.

Not for nothing was this thickset, mean-eyed West Virginian known as "the dark lord of coal country." He generated profits by working miners to exhaustion [and even to death], viciously busting unions, brow-beating subordinates, running disgracefully unsafe mines, callously decapitating mountains as a cheap way to get at coal, willfully poisoning the region's waterways and people with toxic mining waste and outright purchasing politicians to run errands for him.

To him, the value of everything and everyone was measured by one thing: the dollar.

By that measure, Blankenship has always put the dearest value on himself, taking \$18 million in personal pay in 2010 alone – the same year his disregard for safety ripped apart the 29 miners. He gets chauffeured around in a Bentley and a helicopter; he vacations on the French Riviera; and his "primary mansion" is a vast estate secluded behind tall iron gates. But he also enjoys his nearby "entertainment home," a four-story castle pretentiously perched on a mountain peak so all the serfs can see that he is lord of the realm.

Few townspeople are impressed. As Carmelita Brown said: "I can see his house from my window. To me it's like he made a statement, you know? He's God. God on the mountain. But he's as close to God as he's going to get, up on that mountain."

But Lord Don has taken a great fall, as he was ousted as CEO in 2010, and then finally, last week, was convicted for the conspiracy that led to the needless deaths of those 29 miners. He's also widely despised because, as one local put it, "he betrayed his own people."

Of course, he's so narcissistic and materialistic that he says, "I don't care what people think. At the end of the day, Don Blankenship is going to die with more money than he needs."

Or deserves. But if anyone ever deserved to die with nothing but a sack of cold cash to comfort him, this greedy industrialist is that person. – *Jim Hightower*

This Is Fishy

Little Tim was in the garden filling in a hole when his neighbor peered over the fence. Interested in what the rosy-cheeked youngster was doing, he politely asked, "What are you up to there, Tim?"

"My goldfish died," replied Tim tearfully, without looking up, "and I've just buried him."

The neighbor was concerned, "That's an awfully big hole for a goldfish, isn't it?"

Tim patted down the last heap of earth then replied, "That's because he's inside your cat!"

High Taxes, Regulations And A Swell Economy

BY FROMA HARROP

In the mythology of the right, California must fail. Its high taxes, strict environmental rules and thick book of regulations are all ingredients in the conservative recipe for economic meltdown. That California is prospering nicely throws a pie in the face of its harshest critics.

To get around this clash of ideas and reality, an alternative version of California-going-down has been created. It is built on cherry-picked facts, numbers out of context and anecdotes. And the right continues churning out stories of companies “fleeing” California.

The conservative City Journal has devoted its winter issue to what’s wrong with California. One piece accuses “coastal elites” of destroying drought-plagued almond farmers by “privileging the needs of fish over the needs of people.” [What the fish need is a minimum water flow to their habitats to save them from extinction.]

Not to mess up a sweet fairy tale, but the “coastal elites” and the farmers are often one and the same people. The largest producer of nuts in the state is a company owned by Beverly Hills billionaires Lynda and Stewart Resnick. Hedge funds and banks have also gotten into the almond game, now that a lucrative Asian market has sent nut prices soaring. Thus, in the jaws of a multiyear drought, California “farmers” continue to plant water-gulping almond trees.

What else is wrong with California? A state minimum wage raised to \$10 an hour from \$9. That Wal-Mart is raising wages to \$10 nationwide should offer a hint that \$10 an hour is not extraordinarily high.

Zoning and environmental regulations have made California real estate quite expensive, especially along the coast. This is true, although having the Pacific Ocean on a long border hampers development, as well.

One reason zoning and environmental regulations make real estate more expensive is they also make it more desirable. One shouldn’t have to explain this to The Wall Street Journal, but one does after reading its commentary about “the mismatch between supply and demand” in California housing prices.

Actually, supply and demand don’t match or mismatch. Supply is supply, and demand is demand. When demand rises faster than supply, prices rise. That’s the law of supply and demand working as it’s supposed to.

The writer is obviously trying to say that imposing high standards for preserving the quality of life

causes housing costs to rise. OK. Those who can’t pay the price – or who want bigger spaces – can and often do consider other parts of the country.

Though the decisions by Toyota and Occidental Petroleum to transfer their headquarters to Texas may energize California’s critics, they represent narrow slices of a bigger picture. A new study from Beacon Economics and Next 10 shows that California remains a powerhouse in attracting companies and well-to-do people.

In 2013, California ranked fourth in job creation by new businesses and fifth in creation of new businesses [a growth rate of 5.5%]. From 2007 to 2014, 49,000 more people with a bachelor’s degree moved into the state from other states than moved out.

So is California an easy place in which to do business? It’s not. Is it a paradise for less skilled workers? Sadly, no. Few places are these days.

What the strong numbers do mean, Beacon partner Chris Thornberg told the Los Angeles Times, is “that being ‘business friendly’ is not the be-all and end-all of economic development.” He went on: “When you actually look at the data, you’ll find that as kooky as California is, it’s not a state that’s underperforming.”

Let the critics carp. But do correct them.

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Robot For Sale

A father buys a robot lie detector that slaps people when they lie. He decides to test it out at dinner one night.

The father asks his son what he did that afternoon. The son says, “I did some schoolwork.”

The robot slaps the son.

The son says, “OK, OK. I was at a friend’s house watching movies.”

Dad asks, “What movie did you watch?”

Son says, “Toy Story.”

The robot slaps the son.

Son says, “OK, OK, we were watching porn.”

Dad says, “What? At your age, I didn’t even know what porn was.”

The robot slaps the father.

Mom laughs and says, “Well, he certainly is your son!”

The robot slaps the mother.

The robot is now for sale.

– Thanks to A.J. Henshaw for sharing



As Public Funding Dwindles, Higher Ed Faculty Are Unionizing

BY ELEANOR J. BADER

When newly installed University of Washington [UW] President Ana Mari Cauce and Interim Provost Jerry Baldasty got wind that the UW faculty was collecting signatures on union cards, they quickly sent a series of memos and emails to the 6,000 people eligible to vote. Their missives trumpeted their opposition to collective bargaining and denounced the Service Employees International Union's [SEIU] effort to organize on campus.

"Having a union bargain for all of the faculty on matters including evaluation, salary policy, promotion and tenure would sideline the Faculty Senate,

diminish the faculty voice, and eclipse the collaborative approach we have worked on for generations," they wrote on Oct. 22. "Union representation would fundamentally alter the relationship between the UW administration and faculty, creating a dynamic not unlike that of a manufacturing company."

An administration-created, anti-union website, UW-excellence.org, further slams the idea of collective bargaining and smears the union as little more than a money-grubbing dues collector.

Moon-Ho Jung, an associate professor of history on UW's Seattle campus, notes that the arguments about shared governance – which are framed as if faculty

and administration collaborate on all university policies – are deeply flawed.

“The Faculty Senate is purely advisory,” he said, with little clout on hiring or the academic direction of the institution. In fact, Jung believes that a union is needed for just this reason. “When I started teaching at UW in 2001, about half of the faculty was tenure track. Now, 14 years later, it is down to 30%,” he added.

Howard Bunsis, chair of the American Association of University Professors’ Bargaining Congress, says that the reduction in tenure-track hiring is the

lic-sector credentials, get appointed to these boards. They see every department as a profit center. Of course, this goes against the concept of public higher education as a public benefit, but these appointees think the goal of the board is to reduce or eliminate any programs that are not self-supporting. Many times there is no academic voice in the room at all. As a result, decisions that would favor the academic mission are not being made,” Bunsis said.

Instead, he added, governing boards increasingly support the construction of new athletic facilities and prioritize funding for profit-making athletic ven-

Oklahoma’s colleges and universities began the 2015-16 academic year with \$76 million less in state appropriations than in fiscal year 2009. Last month, state leaders ordered a 3% mid-year budget – another \$27.4 million yanked from higher education.

No. 1 driver of unionization campaigns among part-time adjuncts and non-tenure-track full-timers, campaigns that have led to successful unionization on 42 campuses since January 2013.

Among the newly organized, thanks to support from the American Association of University Professors [AAUP] and the SEIU Faculty Forward campaign, are Dominican University of California, Georgetown University, Howard University, Ithaca College, Mills College, Northeastern University, Otis College of Art and Design, the San Francisco Art Institute, the University of Chicago, the University of Illinois-Chicago, Whittier College and Wright State University.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, since 1993, the number of part-time faculty on college campuses has grown 104%, from 369,800 to 752,700. Nationwide, three-quarters of college courses are now taught by part-time teachers who typically earn \$3,000 per class, at least 60% less than their full-time, tenured peers. Most receive no benefits and typically have to juggle numerous jobs to make ends meet.

As has been well documented, this is a travesty for students since harried adjunct professors are often unavailable for out-of-classroom conversations or informal advising sessions. Worse, part-timers usually have no idea about graduation requirements or what is necessary to complete a particular major.

But as bad as this is, the AAUP’s Bunsis told Truthout that hiring shifts are not the only reason faculty are seeking union protections. College and university governing boards, he said, are increasingly made up of people from the private sector who have no clue about what it means to teach. This is especially problematic in public institutions, he added.

“We’ve seen many people from corporate America, with no background in education and with no pub-

tures over maintenance of classrooms and libraries, or providing the kinds of academic supports that students need.

At the University of Minnesota [UMN], for example, the administration shelled out \$24,298 to enable the women’s basketball coach and her staff to attend a conference in Tampa, FL, and gave a six-figure golden parachute to the retiring athletic director.

Meanwhile, tuition at UMN and elsewhere has gone up – nationwide, The New York Times reports, the average tuition in 2014 was \$9,139 per year at public, four-year colleges and \$31,231 at private universities – while the wages of instructional staff have stagnated.

Small wonder that a unionization campaign is presently underway at UMN to challenge administrative priorities and bring its 2,900 faculty members into the SEIU.

That said, the reality is that most U.S. colleges – but especially those that are public – are scrambling for funds, but public programs have been hit the hardest. This is because each year since the early 1980s, state contributions to public higher education have been reduced – a fact of life in every state except North Dakota and Wyoming. More incredible – and outrageous – the American Council on Education predicts that if current trends hold, by 2059 state funding for colleges and universities will be reduced to zero.

The upshot is that South Carolina’s expenditures for higher education have shrunk 66.8% since 1980. In Rhode Island, spending has been slashed 62.1%; Virginia cut funds by 53.6% and Vermont, by 51.3% during the same 35-year period.

Oklahoma is taking a meat ax to higher education as well. The state’s colleges and universities began the 2015-16 academic year with \$76 million less in

state appropriations than in fiscal year 2009. Last month, state leaders declared a “revenue failure” and ordered a mid-year budget cut of 3% – which translates into another \$27.4 million yanked out of higher education.

Everywhere you look, says Barbara Bowen, president of the 25,000-member Professional Staff Congress of the City University of New York [CUNY] – a union I belong to – “public universities that used to be state supported are today just state located.”

She points out that CUNY presently receives 53% of its operating revenue from the state and city – reflecting a cut of \$1.5 billion to both CUNY and SUNY, the State University of New York system, since 2008 – with approximately 46% of the operating budget coming from the tuition paid by CUNY’s 539,000 students.

“There has been a hollowing out of the work force,” Bowen added, “with administration opting for a cheaper faculty. There has also been an increasing centralization of power. This has led to the removal of decision-making that for a century-and-a-half was driven by faculty but is now driven by administrators.”

Bowen further connects the dots and emphasizes that the use of part-time over full-time teachers has made it easier for administrators to control decision-making since underpaid adjuncts rarely have time to attend meetings or join committees.

On top of this, financial pressures have pushed universities and individual scholars to solicit outside funding. “There is now a greater reliance on outside grants,” Bowen said, “but grants always have strings. When outside commercial forces enter the academy, something that is most common in the sciences, you have to ask how it impacts the curriculum and whether it affects who is admitted.”

Indeed.

The AAUP reports that in 2011 alone, the Charles Koch Foundation donated money to 187 colleges and universities across the United States.

Florida State University [FSU] was one of the foundation’s earliest grantees.

A \$6.6 million award, to be paid over five years, from 2008 to 2013, began with \$1.5 million, which was paid after an agreement between the foundation and the FSU economics department was hammered out. The contract stipulated that five faculty would be hired to teach “The Value of Free Enterprise,” with oversight by an advisory board chosen by the Kochs.

The AAUP notes that the board not only gave the foundation authority on hiring, but also allowed it to “review the work of the professors to make sure it complied with the objectives and purposes of the foundation.” Although many on campus argued that this was a gross infringement of academic freedom, the administration seemingly had no qualms about accepting the donation.

And FSU was not the only college to accept Koch dollars. During the 2014-15 year, the notoriously

conservative libertarians funded sports programs on 15 campuses – and subjected fans to commercials touting Koch Industries’ many endeavors – among them Oklahoma State, the University of Arkansas, Southern Methodist University and the University of Houston.

In addition, the Kochs have worked in tandem with other like-minded companies to influence what is taught. Branch Banking & Trust, for one, has donated \$3.5 million to West Virginia University; \$3 million to the University of North Carolina; \$2.75 million to Duke; and \$1 million to Virginia Tech with an explicit goal: to fund classes that teach “the moral foundation of capitalism” and create a “national model for rigorous and imaginative analysis of the intersection between capitalism-based business organizing and the public good.”

Although faculty at UW have been encouraged to apply for grants and other outside funding, it was the loss of state money, says Amy Hagopian, associate professor in health services at the University of Washington, which led to the current unionization bid on campus.

“Although the state is just one source of money for the university, the contribution has gone down to 5% and while we survived drastic cuts during the recession, we’re not in good shape. Tuition has gone up dramatically, especially for grad students, and a master’s in public health now costs \$50,000. My students will be saddled with thousands of dollars of debt for years and I have to look them in the eye at graduation and know that UW has deprived them of buying a home or, perhaps, having children.”

Part of the problem, she added, rests with the state’s failure to tax the wealthy. “Some of the richest people on the planet live in Washington, and while some of them do write checks, they do this to keep the state from creating an equitable taxation system.”

“I really believe this is our last chance to save the university.”

Hagopian says that changing this, while simultaneously organizing a union at UW, will undoubtedly be “a long, hard slog.” At the same time, she says that the work is imperative, not only because success will lead to improved working conditions for faculty and better learning outcomes for students, but also because it is the only way to save public higher education.

She is heartened, she says, that even before enough union cards have been collected to call for an election, SEIU Faculty Forward called a meeting with the governor to ask that new appointments to the State Board of Regents come from faculty, rather than corporate ranks.

“I really believe this is our last chance to save the university,” she said. “If we succeed in bringing the union in, it will take all conversations about employment matters from the Faculty Senate so that they’ll be able to concentrate on other things, including racism on campus and the curriculum.”



Hagopian is no stranger to organizing and she and her colleagues understand that they're up against some mighty foes – including a highly paid law firm that is advising the administration on anti-union messaging. Still, they are optimistic. Similar tactics – including a slick anti-union website that is virtually identical to the one Cauce and Baldasty at UW had created – failed to derail the campaign to bring a union to Ithaca College and faculty there are presently in the throes of negotiating their first contract.

But they are aware that setbacks are possible. One of the most egregious occurred at Rider University, a small, private school in New Jersey. Despite settling a three-year contract in 2014, the faculty consented to givebacks just one year later.

Jeffrey Halpern, associate professor of anthropology, says that when the university hired a new president in August 2015, one of his first acts was to beat the drum of fiscal austerity. Enrollment was down and the reserve fund had shrunk because monies had been used to pay for the renovation of several buildings and construct new dorms, a theater and additional classrooms.

Earlier this fall, the administration announced plans to cut 14 departments and lay off staff. In response, the union agreed to forego wage increases for two years.

"We decided, as a union, to be the adults in the room," Halpern said. "We acted to protect the majors and stop the layoffs. But we gave up things that are

even more problematic. Under our existing agreement, we had a formula to determine how the university would fill positions when full-timers retired or left. Given the growing use of contingent labor, we instituted a trigger that no more than 30% of a department could be filled with part-timers and we gave that up. At the moment, there are a lot of retirements and we're seeing very few full-time hires."

Nonetheless, it is at public universities that the battle lines are drawn most starkly.

"Throughout the country things are reaching a boiling point," Professional Staff Congress President Barbara Bowen said. "All over the U.S., faculty are organizing against the attacks on our profession. The intensity of the effort comes from the connection faculty and staff have for the students we teach."

"If states do not invest in public, two- and four-year colleges and universities, they are cutting off the chance that working-class and poor residents of their state will live more prosperous lives. We simply cannot allow that to happen."

Eleanor J. Bader teaches English at Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn, NY. She is a 2015 winner of a Project Censored award for "outstanding investigative journalism" and a 2006 Independent Press Association award winner. The coauthor of Targets of Hatred: Anti-Abortion Terrorism, she contributes to Lilith, RHRealityCheck.org, Theasy.com and other progressive feminist blogs.

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America's Wake-Up Call

SAVING CAPITALISM

For the Many, Not the Few

By Robert B. Reich

Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group

304 pages, \$26.95

BY JOHN WOOD

Robert Reich doesn't want to ignore capitalism any more than he wants to destroy it. By actually "saving" capitalism as the title says, he's trying to save it from itself.

Reich points out that we need to look for new models, framing capitalism in another way. He provides one such model – Nordic capitalism. There is still protection of private property there and plenty of room for the free market, but it has to be balanced with a comprehensive welfare state as well as collective bargaining nationally. There, the system arguably works for most people.

So, the question: is America's system working for most people or just a few at the tippy top of the income scale? Is that fair or just? And why do we care?

Because it's not a just harmless accumulation in that the wealthy contribute to politics at the highest rates, in turn, transforming that cold cash in to pure political power. Only .2% of the people even contribute more than \$50 to a campaign. Politicians hear from mainly the elite.

Therefore, the system doesn't work for most people, only for the few. Since it doesn't work for most people, it's not sustainable.

To illustrate, the richest 1% have 42% of the nation's wealth and yet the bottom 90% only have 23%. This is the greatest concentration of wealth since before the stock market crash of 1929.

In 2014, six of the 10 wealthiest Americans were heirs to prominent fortunes. For example, six Walmart heirs combined now own 42% of America's wealth, which is 12% more than seven years ago.

Our founding fathers didn't want a ruling oligarchy, but that's the direction we are going in, according to Reich.

He finds that in the "populist" anger for Trump on the right and Sanders on the left, there might hope of real reform. A hunger for change even as these two visions brings us down two very different paths. Reich picks the latter.

Reich, in this very well-written book, calls out the free market itself as merely a myth. He points out that the fight between the right's prioritizing the market and demonizing government as well as the left's focus on government solutions and their own demonizing of CEOs and capitalism is rather silly.

I wholeheartedly agree with this sentiment. The intersection of the two – where the government creates the rules for corporations – is important to understand on both sides. And yet these rules often shrouded in legalese are created, implemented, and maintained for narrow interests – the wealthy.

For example, why are prescription medical drugs so expensive in the U.S.? While this is problematic enough, did you know that we pay more for our prescriptions than any other country worldwide? On top of this is the fact that Americans are actually not any healthier than citizens of other advanced nations.

One reason is that the U.S. government allows big pharmaceutical companies to do direct advertising of prescription drugs, which is not the norm worldwide. In fact, I remember Big Pharma coming up with these ads, a lot of floating butterflies, smiles, family, etc. These companies, I remember, would say research is why a drug can cost so much in American.

Yet they keep people from just crossing the border south to Mexico or north to Canada where they could pay a fraction of the cost for often lifesaving drugs.

Today, Big Pharma pays more for advertising than anything else by far. Why? To convince us their brand is better than the generic? Big Pharma can also pay off generic brand companies to delay inexpensive brands, allowing the name-brand advertising to dominate the airwaves. It's called the "Rule of 7" – hear a brand seven times and you are more than likely to buy it. For Big Pharma, it means bigger profits. Example: Pfizer, the largest pharmaceutical company, made a whopping 42% profit margin in 2014, according to the BBC.

Profits rule, of course. But at the expense of those

who can't afford it?

This reminds me of the recent Martin Shkreli scandal. He's the weasel who jacked up the price of a cancer drug called Daraprim from a mere \$13.50 a pill, which seems pricey to me, to a whopping \$750 a pill overnight. Luckily, he's in hot water over it – but only because a reporter told us about it. [Shkreli faces securities fraud charges, as well].

The Daraprim outrage was too recent for Saving Capitalism, but it really shows you the unrestrained mindset the market can create.

Another factor: while unions are at their lowest ebb, this wasn't always the case. A mere 50 years ago, General Motors [GM] was America's largest employer. In today's dollars, these workers made \$35 an hour. This is a sign of a healthy middle class. However, today, Walmart is our largest employer and – sans a union – their employees make an average of \$9 an hour. That's not even stagflation, it's going backward.

In addition, America has the weakest insider trading laws in the world.

No wonder Wall Street is doing so well and the middle class has stagnated.

Why do we let the banks and the wealthy perpetuate such a system? Shouldn't there be a moral core, Reich says – agreed upon rules laying down standards of decency in order to gain trust and sustainability in our system?

What to do?

1. Raise the estate tax for the very rich. Only the .2% benefit from this as it only affects those couples who leave more than \$10 million in assets in their estate; otherwise it's tax free. Any dollar above this is taxed at 40%. Yet some think this is too much still, so they want to abolish estate taxes all the way. The top 318 estates get an average of \$20 million in tax breaks under no estate tax at all.

Additionally, this reduces tax revenues by \$269 billion in the next decade, meaning less money for schools, reducing the deficit, military, police, etc. Restored to

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1998 levels, the estate tax would produce more than \$448 billion in tax revenue over the next 10 years – enough to give two years of community college for all.

2. Increase the top tax rate for the 1%. We need this, especially since after World War II to the 1950s, in

times of tremendous growth, the rich were taxed at 70%. It seemed to work then, why not now?

3. A more controversial way to help the middle class is to provide all Americans on their 18th birthday – a guaranteed income to create independence and self-suffien-

cy.

4. Likewise, reinvigorate unions and make college more accessible.

Reich's book makes you feel like Bernie Sanders would be the candidate who is on his wavelength. I doubt Trump supporters will respond to this book, though.

It goes to show you that populism is certainly not interpreted the same on both sides of the aisle.

I recommend this book to really get an overview of what the economic landscape of America is like and what we should do about it. While Reich's book has some constructive ways to work on into the future, much of it is more of a "wakeup call."

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

A Renaissance Woman On The High Court

NOTORIOUS RBG

The Life And Times Of Ruth Bader Ginsburg

By Irin Carmon and Shana Knizhnik

HarperCollins Publishers

240 pages, \$19.99

BY WANDA JO STAPLETON

Ruth Bader Ginsburg, an associate justice on the U.S. Supreme Court, is still going strong at age 82. In 1993, President Bill Clinton nominated RBG [which she was called] to the court, an act which might be seen as one of his greatest accomplishments.

RBG is also described by the acronym TAN – meaning “tough as nails” – because she survived cancer twice. She didn't give up waterskiing until her late 70s.

And once, a cracked rib didn't stop her from keeping her twice-weekly personal training sessions in the gym; she works as hard in the gym as she does on the bench.

Sometimes, she pulls “all nighters,” leaving her clerks voice mails with instructions – all done at two or three in the early morning.

Even though she is “tough as nails” in some situations, she is fully human. For example, she and her husband, Marty Ginsburg, had a passionate love affair. She called Marty her “life partner” and “best friend.” Their marriage lasted 56 years and ended in 2010 when Marty died of cancer.

Her dissents on the Supreme Court are well known. For example, the case of *Shelby County v. Holder* was a challenge to the constitutionality of a major portion of the Voting Rights Act. The idea was that with the election of a black president [Obama], racism was pretty much over, so there was no need for the Voting Rights Act.

RBG disagreed and wrote the dissenting opinion.

She was joined by Justices Stephen G. Breyer, Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan.

They lost in this 5-4 decision because five justices voted to eliminate most of the Voting Right Act. These five were: Chief Justice John G. Roberts, Antonin Scalia, Anthony Kennedy, Clarence Thomas, and Samuel Alito.

Even though she lost, RBG said, “The noble purpose of the Voting Rights Act was to fight voter suppression that lingered, if more subtly. Killing the Voting Rights Act was like throwing away your umbrella in a rainstorm because you're not getting wet.”

In conclusion, RBG was a wife, mother of one daughter named Jane, and an associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. I'd call her a Renaissance Woman. *Wanda Jo Stapleton represented south Oklahoma City in the state House from 1986-96.*



Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

The unholy alliance of theocratic Baptists and far right Republicans forged in the 1980s unleashed a cancer destroying a brand built on commitments to the separation of church and state and to the so-called “priesthood of the believer” – the conviction that God through the Holy Spirit speaks to each of us, individually.

Southern Baptist leaders today demand members embrace theological – and political – absolutes, turning off not only longtime members but also Millennials. It's gotten so bad the Southern Baptist Convention actually toyed with the idea of rebranding itself, sans the words *Southern* and *Baptist*.

Some Southern Baptist churches already have taken that step. But it's like putting lipstick and earrings on a pig and calling it Miss America. No one is fooled. The Southern Baptist Convention remains a wholly owned subsidiary of the GOP.

What's particularly distressing is how so many Southern Baptist leaders and other religious zealots dream of an American theocracy – built on the notion that the Founders sought to create a Christian nation.

Unable to abide an increasingly pluralistic society, they not only seek to rewrite history [check some textbooks, particularly those used by homeschoolers], but also to win elective office to help craft laws that will protect their religious bigotry.

It's part of a movement known as “dominionism” – churches and religious leaders seeking dominion over politics, business and culture in preparation for the End Times. It's hard to know precisely how many dominionists hold seats in the Oklahoma Legislature, but it's at least a dozen and growing – including some ordained ministers.

The Southern Baptist Convention's president, Ronnie Floyd, recently led prayer at dominionist gathering in Kansas City that attracted 15,000 young adults. Floyd insisted his appearance was not an endorsement of dominionist theology, but rather a recognition that America needs God's “mercy.”

“We're living in a time in American history where the ship feels like it might be sinking, and it's a time where prayer is needed more than ever, ever before,” Floyd said. “When the ship feels like it might be sinking, everyone needs to grab a bucket.”

Interestingly, even though Floyd leads the 15.5 million-member Southern Baptist Convention, his Springdale, AR church no longer includes Southern Baptist in its name – it once was First Baptist Church, now it's Cross Church. He's also launched a campaign in which he is urging members to set aside 21 days for fasting and prayer about their “personal life, our church, and our nation.”

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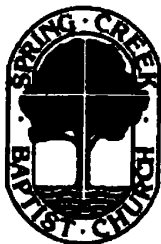
Those are code words for electing the right kind of people to public office. Words that all too often these days precede a direct pulpit endorsement, despite the obvious constitutional violation.

The unholy Baptist-GOP alliance still pays political dividends, particularly in rural Oklahoma. But if the First Baptist Church of Springdale, AR feels the need to conceal its Southern Baptist roots, you know a sea change is coming.

Spring Creek Baptist Church

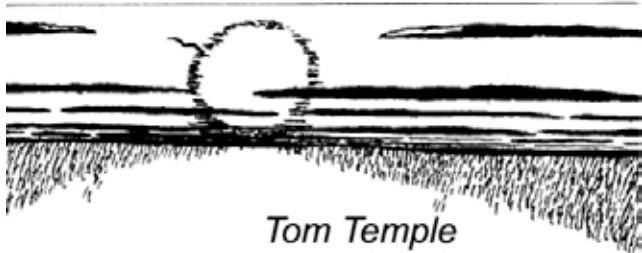
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Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Democrat Stephen Highers hopes to succeed term-limited state Sen. Earl Garrison, D-Muskogee, in eastern Oklahoma's Senate District 9. Highers is a Tahlequah city councilor who previously served on U.S. Rep. Dan Boren's staff.

Yes, the state Capitol must be repaired and maintained. How we treat it speaks volumes about us as Oklahomans. But now – in the midst of a budget emergency – is not the time to propose a new \$65 million park replete with four-column arch and reflecting pool.

Talk show host Diane Rehm has decided to retire after the November general election, ending a 30-plus-year run on public radio, including Norman's KGOU. She will be sorely missed.

You've come a long way, baby? Not in Oklahoma. Sooner women earned only 78.3% of the median pay for men in 2014, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics – down from 87.2% in 2009.

Attention, state Rep. Mike Ritze: A British Medical Journal study debunks your stereotyping that Brits have bad teeth. The research, in fact, suggests Americans are missing more teeth – in part because of high cost of dental insurance.

Great news! Executions in the U.S. last year dropped to a nearly quarter-century low – at least in part because of a shortage of lethal injection drugs. Moreover, the number of death sentences declined by one-third. – Death Penalty Information Center

Obsessive/Compulsive: Americans collectively check their phones eight billion times each day – an average of 46 for each person, according to new research. – Time

Political opportunism? Fletcher's Toni Hasenbeck ran as a Democrat for state House in 2014. This year she's seeking southwestern OK's Senate District 31 seat as a Republican.

The average yearly cost of brand-name prescriptions in the U.S. is \$2,960. One in five Americans use three or more Rx drugs each month. – AARP

Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

our solar or wind systems back to OG&E at either retail or wholesale rates – although that would be a great way to encourage renewable energy investment. Instead, net metering only lets us offset energy consumed with energy produced at our homes. Any extra energy is exported for free to the grid, essentially a donation from solar or wind homeowners to OG&E and the company's full service ratepayers.

Mr. Brown, who is executive director for the Harvard Electricity Policy Group, is misinformed about net metering laws in Oklahoma. Apparently, he frequently testifies against solar and wind development for electricity utility executives who belong to his organization.

I wonder what else he got wrong in his expert testimony intended to convince Oklahoma Corporation Commissioners to let OG&E unfairly raise rates on customers who have invested in wind or solar energy?

Jackie Gaston
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

Something has happened to the media in this country. The big corporate media practices what we called, when I was in a journalism class at OU, "advocacy journalism." It has devolved to become advocacy journalism on steroids.

The favored political candidate or cause is featured not only on the editorial page, but in "news" stories. The favored candidate or cause is covered fawningly on the front page or other pages above the fold. Mistakes by the anointed darlings are glossed over or left out of their coverage. Disfavored candidates, who are not malleable members of the ruling class and the pick of wealthy donors, are not covered. Their important announcements or policy positions are hidden [maybe on the next to last page of the classified ads] or ignored.

You can figure out who to consider voting for by paying attention to who the corporate media *does not* feature or fairly cover. This is a major reason that many large daily newspapers are found today only in the dustbins of history. The more big corporate media outlets skew and bias their coverage, the more people cancel their subscriptions and advertising. It hastens the day that we will study these publications in history books, instead of reading them after we



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Tom Guild
Edmond

Editor's Note: Democrat Tom Guild is a candidate for the 5th Congressional District seat currently held by Republican Rep. Steve Russell.

Editor, The Observer:

Our state finances are like a runaway freight train – out of control heading for total disaster. We are over \$1 billion in debt and pandering an additional \$200 million to the wealthy for tax reductions.

We blew the estimate for rebuilding our state Capitol which is now one-third of a billion. After the forensic report on the dome masonry failures [10%], it may approach one-half billion. With five million pounds of excess baggage, the only practical solution for the Capitol may be complete demolition.

The added proposal for a large masonry entrance archway is pure folly. Zero Mostel said it best: "We are surrounded by idiots."

Tom Birbilis
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

I am offended by Sens. Patrick Anderson and John Sparks who propose the placement of a monument to the Bill of Rights on the state Capitol grounds.

It would be a farce if it includes the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution banning "cruel and unusual punishments."

Neither Gov. Mary Fallin nor Attorney General Scott Pruitt nor the Legislature believe in it.

Fallin has ordered 18 executions which she claims can be done "efficiently, professionally and without cruelty."


Pish posh. Horsefeathers. Hogwash.

Executions are brutal, ruthless, barbaric and inhumane.

As a God-fearing Methodist, I consider life so sacred I cannot condone the execution even of creeps and thugs.

No one – not even popular elected officials – has a right to mess with it.

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Haunting Questions

How important does a person have to be before they are considered assassinated instead of just murdered?

Why does a round pizza come in a square box?

What disease did cured ham actually have?

How is it that we put man on the moon before we figured out it would be a good idea to put wheels on luggage?

Why is it that people say they "slept like a baby" when babies wake up every two hours?

Why are you *in* a movie, but you're *on* TV?

Why do doctors leave the room while you change? They're going to see you naked anyway.

Why do toasters always have a setting that burns the toast to a horrible crisp, which no decent human being would eat?

Why does Goofy stand erect while Pluto remains on all fours? They're both dogs!

If corn oil is made from corn, and vegetable oil is made from vegetables, what is baby oil made from?

Did you ever notice that when you blow in a dog's face, he gets mad at you, but when you take him for a car ride, he sticks his head out the window?

Why, why, why do we press harder on a remote control when we know the batteries are going dead?

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

cious fight they waged against Mike and his ideas of warning consumers of the health risks involved in smoking. In particular, the warning labels on smokeless tobacco.

The proliferation of vapor smokes would surprise Synar. As an alternative to traditional cigarette smoking, he would surely wonder if that's an improvement. The money that Oklahoma received in the multi-million-dollar lawsuit settlement against the big tobacco companies would have brought a smile to Mike's face. Programs sponsored with these funds go mainly to tobacco cessation programs. Another smile.

NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION

Mike's defeat probably marked the end of an era that congressmen such as Synar stood up to the NRA. Being targeted by the NRA, then as now, usually involves enormous amounts of cash being poured into the opponent's campaign, massive amounts of money going into opposition advertising and a general all-out war being declared in certain races with candidates who had dared to call for stricter gun control laws.

Any utterance by Mike of defending Second Amend-

ment rights was laughed at. Representing a largely rural district, Mike had a large population of gun owners who kept on his case.

Twenty years haven't changed the NRA's tactics, nor the fervor of gun owners. If anything, the tenor has turned nastier. Synar would be dismayed by today's world of shootings and the overwhelming support that the Congress gives the NRA.

And just in case these thoughts wend their way to Mike: I hate to tell you this, Michael, but Jim Inhofe is still in public office!

And don't get me started on the presidential run by Donald Trump. You heard me, Donald Trump.

Recalling one of the last things I ever heard you say, from your wheelchair in the living room when we were all in the kitchen, "Hey! I'm still here!"

Why, yes you are – not forgotten by many unabashed liberals everywhere.

Margaret French is a retired educator who lives in Tulsa. She dreams of the day she'll write further on Mike Synar, based on the more than 200 letters that he wrote her.

Police

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

throughout the country, the nation is paying unprecedented attention to the violence and misconduct perpetuated by police officers in communities of color. But the narratives shaping the nation's focus belong almost entirely to men.

This must change. The epidemic of police brutality, misconduct and discrimination undeniably affects women and especially black women, who are targets of abusive police interactions – whether that abuse takes the form of police violence or a refusal to take crimes against black women seriously.

The transformation of police practices in this country cannot happen without a national reckoning regarding the ways both white supremacy and misogyny have shaped and continue to influence law enforcement practices in the United States.

Sheila A. Bedi is a clinical associate law professor at Northwestern University law school and an attorney at the Roderick and Solange MacArthur Justice Center. She was a fellow with The OpEd

Project's Public Voices Fellowship at Northwestern. Alexa Van Brunt is an attorney and clinical assistant professor with the Roderick and Solange MacArthur Justice Center at Northwestern University Law School and a Public Voices Fellow with The OpEd Project.

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*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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