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Self-Inflicted Wound

*Oklahoma Can't Solve
Long-Term Fiscal Crisis
Until It Modifies
Or Repeals SQ 640*

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

Julie Knutson and her Oklahoma Academy team traveled the state last year, staging 19 “listening sessions” devoted to helping solve state government’s fiscal crisis.

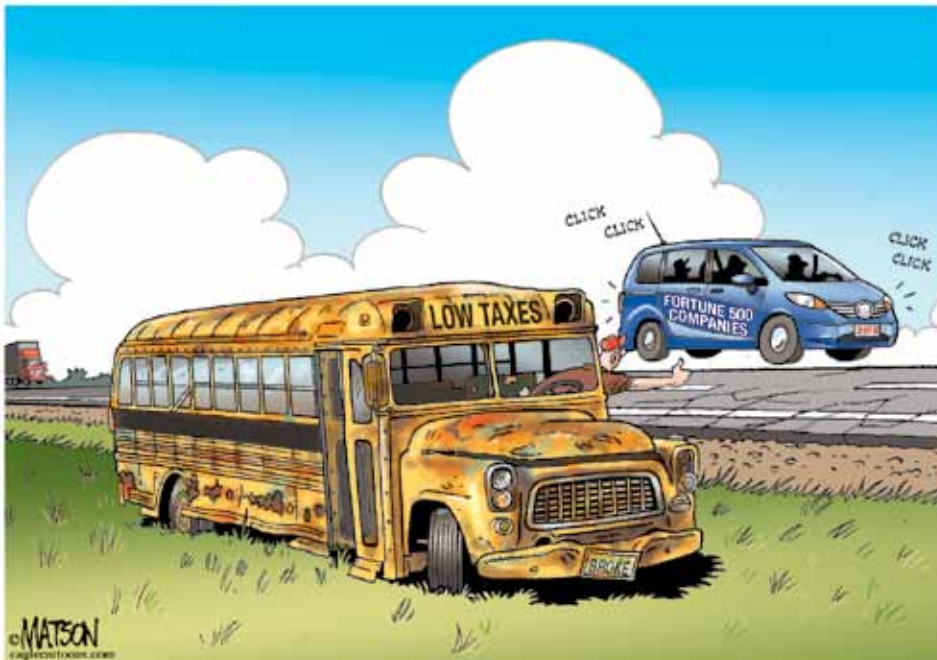
At each forum, attendees were asked how they would allocate declining revenues, given that 91% of the state budget is typically dedicated to 11 agencies.

The discussions also included mention of increased revenues – though Knutson always pointed out that SQ 640 made it highly unlikely that taxes could be raised.

“You could watch their faces,” said the Oklahoma Academy’s president and CEO. “Most of those people had no clue. They had not ever heard of SQ 640.”

Therein lies a significant problem if Oklahoma is to ever solve its fiscal crisis and lay the foundation for a brighter, sustainable economic future that benefits more than a wealthy few.

It’s only been 14 years since Oklahoma voters slipped the fiscal noose around their necks – 56.2% endorsing a constitutional provi-



CONTINUED ON PAGE 14



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So then to all their chance, to all their
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themselves, and to become whatever
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combine to make them. This seeker,
is the promise of America.

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

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Observations

Priorities

Kevin Durant is an extraordinary basketball player, but the collective angst over his departure reflects Oklahomans' seriously misplaced priorities.

Nearly every day, the state's real heroes – its finest public school teachers – leave for better-paying jobs in neighboring states, an exodus that rarely evokes anything more than a whimper.

Unlike the loss of Durant's 28 points per game, the teacher exodus has real-world implications: It puts at risk the education of thousands of students who will help shape the state's future.

Sadly, Oklahoma teachers flee to other states because they haven't received a raise in at least seven years and soon will be the lowest paid among the 50 states, despite lip service from GOP elected leaders that education is their top priority.

In this year's State of the State address, Gov. Mary Fallin urged a teacher pay raise. Several state lawmakers concurred, insisting it could be accomplished without higher taxes. In the end, nothing happened – and won't, unless a one-cent sales tax hike is approved by voters in November.

The elected leadership's double-talk is making it ever more difficult to attract and keep qualified instructors in K-12 classrooms.

Ultimately, rank-and-file Oklahomans must look themselves in the mirror.

They were transfixed by – and vocal about – Durant's free agency at a time when schools and other vital state services are being starved financially. But they were strangely silent when OU and OSU regents voted to hike 2016-17 tuition 7% and sweeten football coaches' salary packages.

The football salaries clearly reflect Oklahoma values and priorities. Many live in perpetual fear Bob Stoops, Mike Gundy or their top assistants will be hired away by bigger checkbooks.

Both gridiron programs are successful – often commanding the na-

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 43

THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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Mark your calendars for July 28: The Observer's Newsmakers Series features Rep. David Perryman and Mid-Del Superintendent/blogger extraordinaire Rick Cobb, 3-4 p.m. at OKC's Full Circle Books.

Laurel: To outgoing Tahlequah Rep. Mike Brown, capturing District 2 Cherokee County commissioner's seat. Great to know he remains in public service – but he will be missed in OKC.

Don't hold your breath waiting for a special session to prioritize spending of a \$100 million budget surplus. Lawmakers won't risk anymore negative attention in an election year.

Dart: To the Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust, creating a \$250,000-a-year CEO post amid lean economic times. The stench worsened when the job was offered to ex-Corporation Commissioner Patrice Douglas.

Former radio reporter-turned-State Chamber flack Peter Rudy is joining the Oregon Department of Education's communications team, focusing on social media.

Laurel: To the Oklahoma Health Care Authority, reversing plans to terminate contracts with Planned Parenthood. Finally, good health trumps politics!

Clarification: Last month's Observerscope should have noted that U.S. adults claiming no religious affiliation [22.8%] outnumbered Catholics [20.8%] and Mainline Protestants [14.7%].

Dart: To Blue & Gold Sausage Co., using its packaging to promote SQ 777, the so-called Right to Farm proposal on November's ballot. It's more aptly named Right to Harm.

The knuckle-draggers at the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs mounted yet another legal challenge to SQ 779. They clearly don't trust voters to decide the penny sales tax proposal aimed at bolstering public ed funding.

Laurel: To renowned Oklahoma history teacher Carolyn Leslie, a 2016 Mid-Del Public Schools Foundation Wall of Fame honoree. Among her students: Observer Editor Arnold Hamilton!

Primary night wasn't the same without OETA's election coverage, dropped because of funding cuts. Another gift from the tinkle-downers dominating the Legislature.

Dart: To Bigot-in-Chief Donald Trump, deriding Sen. Elizabeth Warren as "Pocahontas." Native Americans know a dog whistle when they hear it.

Oklahoma jumped from 39th to 37th in the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 2016 Kids Count Data Book that ranks states on child well-being. But Oklahoma remains below average despite improving 11 of 16 indicators.

Laurel: To Tulsa attorney and OKPolicy legislative liaison Damarío Solomon-Simmons, named one of the National Bar Association's "40 Under 40 Best Advocates" for 2016.

Oregon recently became third state to ban gay conversion therapy for minors, joining California and New Jersey. Somewhere, Rep. Sally Kern fumes.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 44

Letters



AS SOON AS NASA'S JUNO ENTERED JUPITER'S ORBIT THE JOVIANS CALLED FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN INTERPLANETARY WALL AND A BAN ON EARTHLINGS UNTIL THEY "GET THIS THING FIGURED OUT!"

Editor, The Observer:

I keep hearing about the need and cost to repair the Capitol building. They are trying to come up with a way to pay for the repairs. I don't see what the problem is.

There is a simple way to get it all fixed. Just do it the way other projects get done. Find sponsors. We could have the Haliburton Senate, the Devon House of Representatives, and other such buildings.

Why not do it this way? Just think of it as transparent government. They already own the inside why not the outside?

Tom Newman
Harrah

Editor, The Observer:

Evangelicals and other flat-Earth-minded voters think they've found a champion for their repeated attempts to install an American theocracy with GOP candidate Donald Trump as president.

It seems to me that radically far-right Christian leaders often blatantly lie to convince their followers that all gay citizens are immoral, that all Muslims are terrorists, that all politicians are disreputable until, that is, they find one who will claim to carry their

dogmatic water and enact an Old Testament-founded government.

They never got Roe v. Wade overturned with either Reagan or either of the Bushes. They never got their anti-gay marriage constitutional amendment. But they're willing to get in bed with a character like Trump in spite of the disreputable things he's said which should send shudders of disgust down their spines.

They're displeased with any kind of compromise on their issues in Congress which has resulted in eight years of stalemate but they're considering throwing out their principles to make a deal with Trump?

That doesn't sound like morally directed leadership to me.

James Nimmo
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

I voted for Bernie [Sanders]. I supported his campaign. I will vote for and support the candidate that the Democratic Party selects.

I find it interesting that the anti-Hillary people search the archives for video and articles to discredit her. Old history, old information. Recently saw a video of a much

younger Elizabeth Warren posted to support the argument that Hillary is a Wall Street shill. I doubt that I am the only person that watched Elizabeth on the Rachel Maddow Show [June 9]. Opinions change. Perceptions change.

There is an old adage: burning down the house to get rid of the rats is not the wisest decision.

Don Nelson
Lawton

Editor, The Observer:

Elizabeth Warren is running high in the race for vice president [at least as far as Democratic voters are concerned] and I expect that by the time Hillary must make her choice in Philadelphia – Elizabeth's total [poll-wise] will be higher than all other possible candidates combined.

The problem is, I don't believe Hillary will be allowed to choose Elizabeth! Why you say? Remember, Hillary has taken a lot of money from the big "Super PACs" – and is part of what I call the "Demlicans" – this includes her husband Bill, our current president Barack Obama, and many other top level Democrats.

Both Bill and Barack have made many decisions during their 15 years in office which show the powerful input of these ultra-rich "Super PAC" people.

These people will not want Elizabeth as vice-president because if something happens to Hillary [either extreme health issues or an assassination] Elizabeth would become president – and this would be a definite no-no as far as the "Super PAC" people are concerned. Elizabeth is just as liberal as Bernie Sanders and the super rich will not stand for that to happen.

J.A. Gowman
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Gun enthusiasts argue that the 33,000 gun deaths in America ev-

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 45

Once Again, GOP Is Eating Its Own



What is it with Oklahoma Republicans and their state school superintendents?

In 2012, the GOP knives already were out for then-second year Superintendent Janet Barresi – the most common complaint that she didn’t play well with others. Her first and only term quickly spiraled downward and she was knocked out in the 2014 primary by Joy Hofmeister.

Now, Hofmeister, in only her 18th month in office, also has become the target of her party’s powers that be – evidently because she refuses to parrot the state-house leadership’s spin about their [allegedly] heroic efforts to spare public education from even deeper budget cuts.

There is a huge difference, of course, between Barresi and Hofmeister: Barresi’s mercurial reign seemed doomed from the first, tumultuous State Board of Education meeting; Hofmeister, by contrast, is more popular now than when elected, a public school champion who speaks openly about the damage wrought by six-plus years of the nation’s deepest budget cuts to education.

The problem for legislative leaders and Gov. Mary Fallin is that as they lose trust with rank-and-file Oklahomans for failing to tackle the state’s acute fiscal woes, Hofmeister emerges as voice of clarity, reminding all that education is an investment, not a cost center.

Alas, Hofmeister’s view doesn’t hew to a GOP narrative that depicts public education as a bloated, underperforming government bureaucracy that would be better off as a private, for-profit enterprise.

Since Hofmeister refuses to recite Republican talking points, legislative leaders and state Finance Secretary Preston Doerflinger now work to discredit her – not-so-subtly hinting she’s unable to grasp the finer points of state government finances.

First, they all but called Hofmeister a liar when she exposed the shell game in which legislators moved \$33 million for textbook purchases into the overall education budget to disguise the real extent of cuts in K-12 funding.

Then Doerflinger claimed she submitted bogus figures on the fiscal impact of vouchers – the so-called

Education Savings Accounts that would siphon public funds to private schools.

Eventually, the Daily Disappointment sought to bolster the emerging GOP narrative, editorially portraying Hofmeister as apparently “ill-informed” on fiscal matters – a “trend line that gives Oklahomans reason for growing concern.”

Baloney. What these shots across Hofmeister’s brow reflect is not fact, but fear – fear that voters are awakening to the reality GOP leaders are architects of arguably the worst financial crisis in state history.

Apparently, Hofmeister and the State Board of Education were expected to suffer in silence over the textbook funding hijinks. When they didn’t, state-house leaders were furious.

Suddenly, Hofmeister and her agency are depicted as incompetent – the alleged smoking gun: an announced \$19 million shortfall in the 1017 Fund that apparently was \$43.8 million in the black.

The problem with blaming Hofmeister and Co. is that her agency does not administer the 1017 Fund – Doerflinger’s Office of Management and Enterprise Services [OMES] does. It was OMES that mistakenly claimed the account was in the red – only to later determine it wasn’t.

[FYI: An OMES official disputes this, insisting a) it is a state Department of Education-controlled account and b) OMES never believed a shortfall would occur. My sources for this information stand by their version.]

Politically, it makes scant sense for Republican leaders to lash out at Hofmeister.

Oh, sure, it might please their deep-pocketed, pro-voucher campaign donors, no doubt unsettled by the superintendent’s ability to win over nearly all who believe in and support public education.

But it also risks a political backlash among rank-and-file voters asked to answer a simple question: whom do you trust? The GOP-dominated Capitol gang that drove the state off the fiscal cliff? Or the Republican superintendent who speaks truth to power?

Statehouse leaders have no one to blame but themselves for this mess. They underscore their perfidy by attempting to blame Hofmeister.



Simmering Summer Of Discontent

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

Twenty-eight state legislators faced challenges in June's primaries. Twenty-five survived their intra-party skirmishes.

A deflating result for the throw-the-bums-out movement?

Hardly. The fact three incumbents were defeated – as many as in the last eight primaries and runoffs combined – speaks to a deep-seated rank-and-file displeasure with the state's elected status quo.

In democratic societies, revolutions rarely play out in one election. Most often, it takes a generation or more.

Remember, Republicans didn't seize lopsided majorities in both houses of the Oklahoma Legislature in one or two elections.

They chipped away at a century of Democratic dominance, moving from irrelevance in the early 1980s – when the GOP caucus was small enough to convene in a phone booth – to supermajorities in the second decade of the 21st Century.

The primary results suggest the philosophical pendulum is swinging slowly back away from the uber-conservative, anti-government zealotry that drove the state off the fiscal cliff.

For example, veteran Duncan Rep. Dennis John-

son lost his bid for a sixth term, knocked off by Marcus McEntire, a home décor business owner widely viewed as more moderate politically.

Significantly, McEntire received the endorsement of the non-partisan Oklahoma Parents and Educators for Public Education, a social media group that opposed 11 candidates that were defeated in the primary – including Johnson and Tulsa Rep. Ken Walker.

The primary was widely seen as the first test of the so-called Teacher Caucus – educators, administrators and public school supporters seeking public office on an agenda reverse seven-plus years of draconian funding.

The results: Half of the 40 primary candidates currently or formerly involved in public education survived, including five who face August runoffs for their party's nomination.

The status quo set, not surprisingly, uses the 50% failure rate to make the case anti-legislative discontent isn't as fervent as the Teacher Caucus contends.

It's not that clear, of course. Each legislative race turns on a number of unique factors, most of them quite local.

It can be as simple as who's shaking the most hands and knocking the most doors. As complicat-

ed as who's offering the best tax plan. Or as petty as whose family has the most enemies in town.

Actually, it's a stronger case to argue the Teacher Caucus exceeded normal electoral expectations. It's not uncommon for first-time candidates to lose – in fact, it's almost guaranteed when challenging an incumbent. It often takes the best candidates two or three tries to win.

The fact that half the Teachers Caucus candidates lived to campaign another day foreshadows an emerging wave of political engagement that could prove the difference in more than a few legislative races this fall.

Of course, the power of incumbency, coupled with the power of straight-party voting in presidential years, could limit the breadth of a November general election wave.

But it isn't necessary for all Teacher Caucus candi-

dates to win or for Democrats to somehow, miraculously regain control of one or both houses for the 2016 wave to succeed.

All it would take is to flip a few legislative seats – three? six? eight? – to persuade policymakers it is in their best political interest to embrace a more progressive, common sense agenda that serves rank-and-file Oklahomans, not just the state's most powerful special interests.

As GOP consultant Trebor Worthen, himself a former legislator, told the Associated Press: "So many of my colleagues in the Republican Party think because it's a presidential election that Republicans are just going to sail to victory in November like we have in recent years.

"The truth is, Oklahomans are not happy with the direction of the state right now, and that blame will be placed on Republicans."

Program Known As 'Welfare' Barely Exists In Oklahoma

BY DEVON DOUGLASS

From its creation in 1934, the Assistance to Families with Dependent Children [AFDC] program offered cash assistance to low-income families with children. AFDC was a big part of America's safety net until 1996, when President Bill Clinton and a Republican-controlled Congress approved reforms to "end welfare as we know it."

AFDC became Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF], with new work requirements, tighter restrictions on who can receive aid, and a strict time limit – adults can receive benefits for a maximum of five years over their lifetime.

The 1996 reforms also gave states much greater leeway to use federal funds for welfare as they see fit. Before these welfare reforms, AFDC was an entitlement like Social Security and Medicare. That means any qualifying family who applied could receive benefits, and spending on the program went up and down based on need.

Under the new TANF rules, funds are provided as block grants to states. Instead of going up and down based on need, the TANF block grant has remained at \$16.5 billion per year since 1996. Due to inflation, its real value has fallen by one-third since that year.

States also are no longer required to use most welfare funds on basic cash assistance. The block grant format allows states to decide which areas to fund or if they will fund them at all. Oklahoma is an example of how basic assistance through TANF has severely eroded over time.

In 2014, the state only spent \$18.1 million on basic

cash assistance compared to \$95.1 million in 1997. Over that time, Oklahoma's cash assistance to families plummeted 80.8%, even before inflation.

Oklahoma is one of just 10 states that spends less than 10% of TANF funding on basic cash assistance.

We spend so little on cash assistance for a couple reasons. First, Oklahoma's maximum cash benefit is \$292 per month for a single-parent family of three, or just 18% of the federal poverty line. Second, Oklahoma provides these already small payments to very few families. In fiscal year 2015, a monthly average of just 2,469 adults were enrolled in TANF in Oklahoma, a tiny fraction of the more than 370,000 Oklahomans age 18 to 64 living in poverty.

Since Oklahoma is not sending TANF funds to low-income families, where is the money going? We spend TANF funds on a wide variety of programs, including child care, domestic violence services, child welfare services, marriage promotion, and others. Perhaps due to the large variety of programs overseen by this grant, we actually are spending more TANF funds on administration [\$25.5 million] than on basic cash assistance.

The end result is that Oklahoma's use of TANF funds falls far short of providing a true safety net for the poorest Oklahoma families. What most Americans think of as "welfare" barely exists in Oklahoma. *DeVon Douglass is a policy analyst with Oklahoma Policy Institute [www.okpolicy.org] and coordinator of the Oklahoma Assets Network [www.oklahomaassets.org].*



How Do You Define ‘Truly Needy?’

BY MIKE W. RAY

In an editorial published last month, the Oklahoman newspaper heartily embraced a package of recommendations by the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs [OCPA], a right-wing, free-market “think tank.”

Instead of expanding Medicaid to “a new class of able-bodied adults,” the OCPA contended, legislators should refocus their efforts on improving the program for those it was meant to serve: “the truly needy.”

I, for one, would like to know just how the OCPA and the Oklahoman define “truly needy.”

Medicaid Covers More Than Three-Quarters Of A Million Oklahomans

The Oklahoma Health Care Authority, which administers this state’s Medicaid program for low-income citizens, reported that 785,348 state residents – approximately 21% of our entire state population – were enrolled in SoonerCare [Medicaid] in April. Two-thirds of them [517,426] were children and the other 34% [267,922] were adults. All of them were impoverished.

Federal poverty levels this year are:

- \$11,880 for a single person
- \$16,020 for a two-person household
- \$20,160 for a household of three
- \$24,300 for a family of four

I don’t know anybody who’s making 20 grand a year and driving a Lincoln Continental or a Cadillac Escalade and living in Got-Rocks Acres. Maybe the OCPA does, but I seriously doubt it.

Oklahoma’s poverty rate is 17th highest in the nation.

Statewide, 16.67% of the population was deemed impoverished in 2014. Among children living in poverty, the rate was one-in-four.

In 2014 [the most recent year for which complete data is available], 23% of the in-patients admitted to Oklahoma’s 158 hospitals had Medicaid as their primary payer.

Fully 90% of the babies delivered at the Eastern Oklahoma Medical Center [EOMC] in Poteau are born to mothers whose health benefits are provided by

Medicaid. Approximately 60% of all babies delivered at medical facilities throughout Oklahoma are born to females who are on Medicaid, records reflect.

Nurses, doctors and staff at the EOMC “often pay cab fare from our own pockets to enable these new mothers to get back home,” said CEO Mike Carter. More than one-third of the patients treated at Poteau’s EOMC are on the state’s Medicaid rolls, and 43% are on Medicare, he added.

More Than Half A Million Oklahomans Uninsured

The Oklahoma Health Care Authority reported that 578,336 Oklahomans were uninsured in 2014; of that total, 86% were adults and 14% were children. Oklahomans who had no health insurance whatsoever constituted 15% of the total state population at that time.

Uncompensated medical care that hospitals across this state provided in 2014 totaled \$560 million, Oklahoma Hospital Association ledgers reflect. That means the hospitals provided that medical care at their own expense, because the patients they treated couldn’t afford health insurance and thus had no cash with which to pay their medical bills.

The U.S. Census Bureau reported that more than one-fourth of all adults in Oklahoma aged 18-34 had no health insurance; one of every five adults 35-54 were uninsured; 13.7% of all Oklahomans aged 55-64 had no health insurance; and even some seniors 65 and older, who presumably qualify for federal Medicare, nevertheless had no insurance coverage.

Tens of Thousands of School Children Qualify for Free Meals

Over the last decade, Oklahoma has experienced a 37% increase in children who qualify for free or reduced-price school lunches because of modest family income.

The Feed the Children Oklahoma City Teacher Store announced recently it was “currently at capacity and not accepting applications for new school districts at this time.”

The announcement was followed by a list of 104 public school districts. They included Putnam City, in which 76% of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, and El Reno, where approximately 80% of the students qualify for free or reduced-cost lunches. Virtually every student in the Poteau public school district qualifies for a free or reduced-price lunch.

EITC, For Working Poor, Cut Back By GOP

The Republican-controlled Oklahoma Legislature voted May 20 to limit the Earned Income Tax Credit [EITC] in order to save \$28.9 million needed to help plug a \$1.3 billion hole in the state budget that the Republicans created by reducing the state income tax, slashing the gross production tax, and approving a host of tax credits and exemptions for wealthy corporations.

The EITC legislation, SB 1604, harms Oklahomans who are employed in low-paying jobs. The credit is de-

signed to encourage work by supplementing earned income from those low-wage jobs. Oklahoma’s EITC was enacted in 2000 during the administration of Republican Gov. Frank Keating.

Contrary to erroneous statements that more than one Republican uttered on the floor of the House of Representatives during debate on SB 1604, everyone who claims the EITC is employed. Only working parents and a few working singles can claim the credit. They pay income taxes, sales taxes, and property taxes.

The maximum state EITC for a family with two children is \$277; for a family of three children, it’s \$312.

The state EITC was claimed by more than 330,000 Oklahoma households in 2014, for a total benefit of \$39.1 million. Thus, with SB 1604, the Republicans gutted 74% of a benefit for one-third of a million households of working but indigent Oklahomans.

In comparison, the oil and gas industry reaps about \$470 million annually from tax concessions authorized by the Legislature.

WWJS

Scholars say that nearly 100 passages in the Holy Bible address our responsibility of service to the poor and homeless and providing for the hungry. So I wonder what Jesus would say about this year’s legislative session.

Mike W. Ray is media director for the state House Democratic Caucus.

Some More Equal Than Others

BY DAVID PERRYMAN

George Orwell’s 1945 novel *Animal Farm* was a political satire where animals had overthrown the farmer and established their own society based on equal rights and equal opportunity and the supreme rule that “All Animals are Equal.” Unfortunately, after a very short while, the barnyard animals developed human instincts to the extent that the allegorical theme became, “All Animals are Equal/But Some are More Equal than Others.”

A prime example of some being “more equal” than others is the disparity in the way that certain Oklahoma legislators have attempted to define student eligibility in a couple of scholarship programs.

One program is Oklahoma Higher Learning Access Program [OHLAP], often called Oklahoma’s Promise. The other is the establishment of Private School Scholarship Granting Organizations [SGO] created pursuant to the Oklahoma Equal Opportunity Education Scholarship program.

OHLAP was created in 1992 by the Legislature to

help more Oklahoma families send their children to college. OHLAP is administered by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education.

SGOs were created in 2011 by the Legislature to provide individuals and corporations the ability to receive tax credits of up to \$150,000 per year to offset taxes due the state and to reduce tax burdens by charitable contributions and channel donations to students who attend K-12 private schools.

To be eligible for an OHLAP scholarship, students must register during their eighth, ninth or tenth year of school, take certain college preparatory classes, stay out of trouble, maintain a 2.5 GPA and their parents meet certain income limits.

To be eligible for a SGO scholarship, students must attend a private K-12 school and their parents must meet certain income limits.

The OHLAP scholarship is for college tuition only and does not cover items such as fees, books, supplies, or room and board for a maximum of five years or achieving a bachelor's degree, whichever comes first.

The SGO scholarship is for payments of \$5,000 or 80% of the total private school educational expenses, whichever is greater for up to 13 years or until the student reaches age 21. However, if the student was on an Individualized Educational Plan in the public school before transferring to a private school, the student may receive up to \$25,000 per year.

OHLAP rules require that a student's parents not earn more than \$50,000 per year during the year that the student registers and that the parents may not earn more than \$100,000 during the year that the student begins college or any year thereafter.

SGO rules do not require that income parameters be reviewed until the student is ready for the private school tuition and then parents of private school students may earn \$134,589 with two children or up to \$226,941 depending upon the number of family members.

Incredibly, while OHLAP rules require that each and every child in the family must meet eligibility requirements, once a SGO recipient meets income guidelines, all of his or her siblings will automatically receive the scholarships until they all graduate or reach 21 years of age, regardless of how high the parent's income may go.

Despite already stringent eligibility requirement on OHLAP scholarships, the Legislature has repeatedly been trying since 2008 to make it more difficult for students to qualify for Oklahoma's Promise. The assault became so intense that in 2013, 56 anti-public education legislators, many of whom are still in the House of Representatives, voted in favor of HB 1721 to decrease by 40% the amount of money that an Oklahoma Promise student's parent may earn when the student is ready for college.

At the same time many of the same legislators passed HB 2643 in 2014 and HB 1693 in making private school scholarships more lucrative and more

beneficial to high-income taxpayers who channel their money to private schools.

Could it be that there is a connection between campaign donors and those who benefit from private school tuition scholarships, or maybe it's just that some people are more equal than others?

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

Budget Deficits Just Beginning – I Guarantee It!

BY CAL HOBSON

In March 1952, when asked by reporter Mitch Ohnstad why he robbed banks, Willie Sutton allegedly said, "Because that's where the money is." Later in life he denied ever saying it.

As the dust begins to settle on the now-adjourned 2016 legislative session, the identical answer could be given by those who spend much of their time evaluating and then manipulating the monetary mechanisms buried in Title 68 of the Oklahoma Statutes.

The *what* buried *where*?

Boring as it sounds, Title 68 – the third longest of the 85 titles that make up our state's voluminous statutes – is the repository of Oklahoma's always growing and ever more complex tax code. In it you will find billions of dollars worth of revenue shelters, credits, incentives, gimmicks and giveaways which, according to their critics, are the primary culprits that created the current and future cavernous canyons of structural deficits.

Obviously proponents of these programs have very different views and defend same in the name of progress, growth and success for their specific interests. And, if they think it would help justify them, also in the name of Motherhood, apple pie, and the Fourth of July!

Of financial stream that flow, trickle or drip toward the state Capitol for annual appropriations, these uncollected, or collected and remitted, mountains of money far exceed any other categories of cash paid by Oklahomans, including personal income and sales tax combined. Some estimates are that Title 68 authorizes about \$5 billion worth of such legal and highly coveted collaborations

In the revenue and taxation code there are scores, perhaps hundreds, of individually crafted special interest opportunities ranging in value from a few thousand dollars to hundreds of millions. While advocating their passage, sponsors usually promised the following: [1] over time each would create more rev-

enue than it initially costs the state treasury, and [2] permanent and excellent paying jobs would be generated, resulting in more high-income taxpayers. Some proposals included expiration dates to claim the special benefit, but most didn't and still don't.

In fairness, a few schemes have been noteworthy successes, such as the Quality Jobs Act, as well as narrowly drawn aerospace, manufacturing and engineering credits. Also, horizontal and deep drilling rebates on severance taxes paid at the wellhead initially produced exactly the outcome desires at a minimal cost to the general fund budget. Not any more.

Unfortunately, for the vast majority of prosperity promising proposals that are in Title 68, their continuing drag on state revenues has far exceeded benefits gained to anyone except the special interests who pushed their passage in the first place.

A word of warning: Please resist blaming lobbyists for this situation as they are only doing what they are paid to do. It is the Legislature's responsibility to determine the pluses and minuses of each proposal while always focusing first on the general well-being of all citizens.

And therein lies the problem. Apparently our lawmakers have decided it's better to give than receive and they do it to excess with your money. Unless corrective action is taken either in special session this year or immediately when solons convene in February 2017, overly generous oil, natural gas and wind credits, soon to exceed more than \$1 billion, will guarantee revenue shortfalls for years to come, even if other major sources of tax revenues such as income and sales increase dramatically.

Two words adequately describe the myriad laws on the books right now that determine who, how, when and why individuals, companies LLCs, partnerships and corporations pay or don't pay taxes on bountiful natural resources such as oil, coal, natural gas, wind and sun found and produced in Oklahoma. The two words are ... It's complicated.

For example, money from the 2% severance on oil – which as 7.086% until a year ago – is allocated to 11 different funds or programs before the remainder, if there is any, finally plops into the general revenue account for appropriations.

Just the opposite happens with the 2% tax on natural gas production – again formerly 7.085% – in that most of it goes first to the general fund and then smaller amounts to county roads and schools.

Hundreds of massive wind turbines that generate thousands of megawatts of electricity are eligible to claim extremely generous zero emission tax credits and thus provide little direct revenue to state coffers.

Finally, Oklahoma currently extracts minimal coal tonnage from mines located in Little Dixie so taxation of it has almost no impact.

Here's the bottom line: Our state is blessed with incredible natural resources, including renewables such as wind and solar, but also enormous accumulations of finite materials like oil and natural gas.

However, through recent legislative changes in Title 68, severance taxes paid on those hydrocarbons can no longer be relied on as the cash cow industry for the future.

To understand the gravity of the situation, you need only to be reminded of one fact: Effective July 1, 2015, the Legislature voted to reduce the tax paid on all oil and natural gas produced in our state from slightly above 7% to a flat 2%. According to the Oklahoman's business writer Paul Monies, that one change translated into a loss of \$426 million to the state's general fund in the just-concluded fiscal year. Had that money been available, it would have filled more than one-third of the catastrophic, record \$1.3 billion hole recently plaguing our state.

Simultaneously, zero emission wind incentives became fully effective, resulting in an additional loss of \$200 million. Worse, they continue unabated through 2020 when the credits are due to expire. But if past behavior is prologue for the future, their extinction will be harder to accomplish than eradicating the long-lived cockroach.

In summary, if bank robber Willie Sutton were still around today, he would be a tax accountant devising methodologies to further empty the near-depleted coffers of state government. Being a gentle, non-violent soul, Brooklyn native Sutton never carried a gun when working his profession because, he declared, "someone could get hurt."

Also not packing a piece are today's tour guides for tax policy as they troll the hallways, committee rooms and watering holes in search of our gullible guardians entrusted with your public wealth. What they do carry in their briefcases and suit pockets are much safer, entirely legal, and even more convincing than a snub-hose .38.

Accessible only to lawmakers, they are called campaign contributions and, similar to Wal-Mart, are known by their motto – always available, always working and always welcomed. Always.

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

The Cherokee Nation was recently awarded a \$1 million federal grant to help get more eligible children enrolled in Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program [CHIP]. The Connecting Kids to Coverage grant is designed to build on the historic progress already made increasing the number of children who have health coverage. According to the National Health Interview Survey, only 4.5% of children remained uninsured in 2015. The Cherokee Nation was among recipients from 38 states, school districts, and local community organizations to receive the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services grants for application assistance and other targeted outreach. For more information, visit <http://www.insurekid-snow.gov/professionals/funding/history.html>.



Oklahoma's Capital Gains Tax Break A Windfall For The Wealthiest With No Proven Benefit For Economy

BY GENE PERRY

One of Oklahoma's largest tax breaks got no attention from legislators last year, despite its questionable legality, its questionable benefit for the economy, and a \$1.3 billion budget shortfall that inspired legislators to go after many other tax breaks and programs.

The "Oklahoma Source Capital Gains Deduction" was enacted in 2004 as part of SQ 713, which also increased Oklahoma's tobacco tax. The deduction allows taxpayers to exempt from their taxable income any gains from the sale of property located in Oklahoma or stock of a company headquartered in Oklahoma. To qualify for this exemption, the seller must have owned the property for at least five years or the stock for at least two years before the sale.

The benefit of this tax break goes almost entirely to wealthy business executives and investors. The Tax Policy Center estimates that nearly three-quarters of the benefit from lower tax rates on capital gains goes to taxpayers making over \$1 million annually.

The only major asset that a middle-class household is likely to sell for a capital gain – their home – is al-

ready largely exempt from capital gains tax under federal rules that carry over to the Oklahoma tax code. So Oklahoma's extra capital gains tax break does nothing for these families.

This tax break for a few wealthy households comes at no small cost. In FY 2014, the capital gains deduction cost Oklahoma \$157 million. It cost more than four times as much as the Earned Income Tax Credit [EITC] for low-income working families, which was slashed in the latest budget deal. The capital gains tax break cost far more than the EITC even though it went to just over 18,000 households, compared to more than 330,000 households receiving the state EITC.

Former state Treasurer Scott Meacham was instrumental in securing passage of the capital gains tax break while serving as finance secretary for Gov. Brad Henry. Today, Meacham leads a firm specializing in Oklahoma startup business investment. But he no longer believes Oklahoma's capital gains tax break is worth the cost. He told Oklahoma Watch that since

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

Labor Department Seeks To Protect Union-Busting Rule From Red State Onslaught

The Obama Administration is asking a federal judge to throw out a challenge brought by 10 states – including Oklahoma – against a new labor regulation that will force union busters out of the shadows.

Finalized in April by the Department of Labor, the “Persuader Rule” is under assault in federal court, where several Republican-led states, are seeking an injunction against it.

According to a brief filed in mid-June, the department argued that the state interveners claims should be rejected, and the regulation preserved.

“The public interest would be undermined if the Court were to enjoin a rule that seeks to bring greater transparency to attempts to influence employees’ decisions about whether to organize and bargain collectively,” the filing reads.

The persuader rule clarified a portion of the 1959 Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act [LMRDA], which required businesses to inform the public whenever they sought the help of an outside firm to squash an organizing drive.

It specifically closed a loophole in the interpretation of the law that allowed indirect union-busting assistance—such as the supplying of talking points, video materials, and brochures—to go unreported.

According to the AFL-CIO, roughly 82% of employers will seek help of an outside firm to thwart an organizing effort.

Oklahoma and nine other states claim that the mandatory disclosures violate the Tenth Amendment by improperly overriding state laws affording protection to attorney-client communications.

“None of this information required to be reported falls within the traditional confines of the attorney-client privilege,” the government shot back in its filing.

DOL attorneys contended that disclosures required by the regulation—the identity of the firm providing assistance, the types of material provided in the campaign, the duration of the services – all exist outside the realm of protected communications.

The court has “repeatedly rejected attempts to extend the traditional protections afforded to privileged attorney-client communications to cover information not traditionally considered privileged, such as the basic fact of legal representation or the name of a client,” DOL stated.

Rather than “commandeer” state law,

the persuader rule “only requires covered private entities to disclose information under prescribed circumstances,” the briefing noted, countering the states’ Tenth Amendment arguments.

The lawsuit was initially filed in March by five business groups, including the National Federation of Independent Business [NFIB]. In May, the court allowed Texas, Alabama, Arkansas, Indiana, Michigan, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Utah, West Virginia, and Wisconsin to join the plaintiffs in seeking an injunction.

Republicans in Congress are working on a parallel track against the persuader rule. A GOP-led House labor subcommittee convened a hearing in April to discuss ways to undermine the regulations. Lawmakers have since put forward H.J. Res. 87 to use their authority under the Congressional Review Act to block implementation of the rule. The legislation was passed out of committee in May.



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sion that thwarts any tax increase without a three-fourths vote of the Legislature or a simple majority in a statewide referendum.

Yet, the city managers, police chiefs, small business owners and non-profit operators, among others, attending the Oklahoma Academy meetings were almost universally ignorant of the provision and its implications.

Indeed, Knutson noted, she could count on one hand the number of people at 19 forums who knew what SQ 640 was.

"It's not only dumbfounding," she said, "it's also frightening."

The state's self-inflicted wound is made worse because voters embraced Republican candidates selling Supply Side or Trickle Down economics – the notion that cutting taxes actually produces more revenues.

Ronald Reagan learned a painful lesson about the specious theory when tax cuts blew a massive hole in the federal budget, forcing him to agree to raise taxes 11 times.

His vice president, George H.W. Bush, was so gunshy of the failed theory that he referred to it as "voodoo economics."

But the something-for-nothing scheme turned out to be an easy sell in a state victimized for years by a powerful mainstream media – hello, Edward L. Gaylord – that incessantly derided Democrats as wild-eyed, big-spending liberals and praised Republicans as prudent, God-fearing capitalists.

As GOP power grew at the state Capitol, lawmakers took a machete to state income tax rates, whacking the top rate from 6.65% in 2004 to 5% this year. It could drop another .15% in January 2018 if certain triggers are met.

Moreover, the Republican majority rammed through the nation's lowest oil and gas drilling taxes – 2% for all horizontal and vertical wells for the first three years of production.

Now that state revenues are declining each month – and a growing state's needs are, well, growing – policymakers have no way to make up the difference.

It is a Grover Norquist disciple's fondest dream – shrink government to the size where what's left can be drowned in a bathtub.

The problem is, of course, that most Oklahomans like the services that tax dollars provide – schools, roads and bridges, child welfare, mental health, law enforcement ...

Now that public education, for example, has endured the nation's deepest cuts the last seven years – and teachers are fleeing to poor states like New Mexico that offer higher salaries – Oklahomans are

beginning to once again see the link between taxes and services.

With SQ 640, however, it's nigh on impossible to raise taxes.

First, getting three-fourths of the Legislature to agree on almost anything of substance is rare. Second, lawmakers are reluctant to send a tax hike to the ballot because they fear a backlash from the anti-government, Don't-Tread-On-Me crowd that dominates the GOP primaries.

So what is Oklahoma to do?

The best hope is eventually to repeal SQ 640 – or at least modify it. The Legislature isn't likely to even take up such a notion, meaning the only path forward is via a costly initiative petition drive and general election campaign that educates voters on how the anti-tax provision dooms Oklahoma's future.

Even then, it's not clear a majority of Oklahoma voters would approve repeal or modification. More than the usual 20% would have to turn out to vote to give such change a fighting chance.

Who would help underwrite such an effort? There are some individual deep pockets that could make it happen – maybe even some of the tribes would be willing.

Of course, those who've enriched themselves during the Supply Side experiment won't accept change without a fight.

The Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs and its lobbying arm already are gearing up to oppose efforts to lock the 2018 tax trigger.

And they will have all the money they need – think: Koch Brothers – to dissemble and mislead the voters with pithy slogans about government bureaucrats getting their hands into working class pockets.

Any effort to dump SQ 640 needs to start soon. Think the 2016-17 budget was a nightmare? It will be worse next year – not least because the GOP-dominated Legislature already has cut services to the bone.

If the SQ 640 handcuffs aren't unlocked soon, it will take Oklahoma generations to recover from the Supply Siders' political science experiment.

Who will step up to lead the fight?

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Common Cause tells us our democracy is under attack. The wealthiest few have stacked the deck four ways:

- 1. An election price tag expected to exceed \$5 billion ...*
- 2. Gerrymandered districts shielding incumbent politicians from the consequences of their actions ...*
- 3. Voting laws that target our most vulnerable populations and deny their right to vote ...*
- 4. A Senate leadership refusing to allow a hearing or debate on a Supreme Court nominee.*

What do all these threats to our democracy have in common? The answer is money. The political deck has been stacked to favor the wealthiest few.

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Saving And Securing Passenger Rail

BY BOB D. ROUNSAVELL

Most people fail to realize that solving a societal issue often requires tenacity and collaboration. Why the difficulty in understanding this? They are not involved in the process. Because we don't visit the annual legislative sessions and talk with those in the legislative branch of government, whether our legislators or their staff, we have a limited knowledge of the dedication and labor for smooth government operations. And, yes, the executive branch as well for its larger role in governance.

The Eastern Flyer is a proposed medium-distance intercity train between Oklahoma City and Tulsa, or a commuter rail service, according to Wikipedia, as well as a private operation by the Iowa Pacific railroad, with services to include a dome car, coaches and full meal service. It would be the first regular passenger service to Tulsa since 1967. The initial commercial demonstration test trips were in February 2014 between Midwest City and Sapulpa with stops in Stroud and Bristow. There were also the Christmas Polar Express excursion trips.

Final note: In March 2015, the six-month pilot service was anticipated in May or "early summer," with rail service from Sapulpa to Midwest City connected by bus shuttles on each end. Earlier that month, however, Iowa Pacific announced the start date would be further delayed, as both Oklahoma City and Tulsa were considering arrangements to facilitate rail service connecting their downtowns, thus preparing the way for train stops. To date, little has been announced about the Eastern Flyer from Tulsa while Oklahoma City is seriously reconfiguring and expanding its metropolitan transportation operations.

After the last legislative session, there was some good news from Passenger Rail Oklahoma. The Oklahoma Department of Transportation [ODOT], long the apparent nemesis of passenger rail service, came to the rescue with its funding for the Heartland Flyer from its own budget.

The enemy now, it seems, is the Legislature whose only solution to budget deficits is tax cuts first, hence higher deficits for FY 2017. Next is decreased funding for core state services such as education, health services, transportation and economic development in general. One of its significant transportation moves were the raids on a \$5 million Tourism and Passenger Rail Revolving fund reserve and a clean sweep of the Oklahoma Railroad Rehabilitation Revolving Fund. Twenty-six million dollars was still in this from the \$75 million Sooner Sub sale to WATCO making a total of \$31 million in the two rail funds. Both were wiped out but barely made a dent in the \$1.3 billion budget deficit for FY 2017.

SOME HISTORY

Because private rail companies ceased to provide passenger train service for much of the country, Amtrak has at the very least kept some much-needed passenger rail service running, including the Heartland Flyer for Oklahoma. With the ever-declining federal appropriations, however, Amtrak has been unable to control costs, spinning out of control for some years now and its recourse, higher charges for its services.

When the Heartland Flyer began, Amtrak charged both Oklahoma and Texas a fee for providing the service: Oklahoma was charged more because it has more stops from Oklahoma City to Ardmore and more total miles traveled than Texas for its Gaines-

Capital Gains

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

Oklahoma's numerous income tax cuts have reduced the tax break's effectiveness as an investment lure, "it doesn't make a lot of sense to do both."

It's also important to remember that the burden of proof for this tax break is not just whether it benefits the economy, but whether the \$157 million tax break helps the economy more than would comparable investments in core public services.

With Oklahoma making dramatic cuts to higher education, on top of the largest cuts in the nation to our K-12 funding formula, it's hard to make the case that the need for this tax break is greater than the need for reinvesting in core services.

Meanwhile, there's some evidence that the tax

break could be violating the Commerce Clause of the U.S. Constitution by discriminating against out-of-state companies. Oklahoma avoided that issue being brought before the U.S. Supreme Court only by settling with a Florida company that challenged it in court.

For all of these reasons, Oklahoma should do away with the costly capital gains tax break. We should bring a skeptical eye to the idea that exempting a few very wealthy households from much of their state income taxes is the best way to create an economy that works for all Oklahoma families.

Gene Perry is policy director at Oklahoma Policy Institute; www.okpolicy.org.

ville and Fort Worth stops. As late as 2009 Amtrak was only charging Oklahoma \$1.9 million annually. Now the Amtrak fee for Oklahoma is \$3.7 million with the state appropriating only \$2.84 million. The two rail funds wiped clean this legislative session were the sources for making up the financial gap for Oklahoma these last few years.

Neither Oklahoma nor Texas had enough money to pay the full price of the annual fee for FY 2017. ODOT stepped in, taking the money out of its general budget to pay the difference for both states: for Oklahoma, a little more than \$580,000 and for Texas \$500,000.

THE NEAR FUTURE

Today there's urgent need for solutions for FY 2018 funding for continued passenger rail service in Oklahoma. With the two rail reserve funds gone, Passenger Rail Oklahoma's President Evan Stair characterized it a possible mortal wound. "Next year will be an even more difficult battle. Cities need to be on the point if the Legislature fails to provide for passenger service next year."

As a result of Amtrak's rapidly increasing costs and, hence, charges, ODOT has issued a Request for Qualifications [RFQ] to various passenger rail carriers, including a doubling of the current frequency of service at the current service cost. The carriers receiving ODOT's RFQ are Amtrak, Iowa Pacific Holdings, Corridor Capital, Herzog Transit, Keolis North America, and Veolia-Transdev Transit.

This RFQ process represents a preliminary process that just might lead to an unbundling of the sole-source Amtrak Heartland Flyer contract established in 1999 and opening it up to competition among private company providers. According to Stair, Iowa Pacific Holdings is already serving as a provider in Indiana with the unbundled Amtrak HoosierState service between Indianapolis and Chicago. [He believes in the strong possibility of a seamless Tulsa-Oklahoma City-Fort Worth service and the long anticipated Kansas connection.]

In the RFQ, ODOT and TxDOT have proposed a cafeteria plan that involves the following: train crews, rolling stock [equipment], train maintenance, on-board food and beverage, and ticketing. Also included are specific comments about liability coverage/insurance and labor relations and any details about a working relationship with host railroads, i.e. BNSF Railway and Amtrak.

This informal investigative process may lead to a Request for Proposal [RFP]. ODOT provided a timeline for the RFQ:

- Provider questions due by noon July 8
- Response to Provider's Questions due by 4 p.m. July 13
- Provider submissions due by noon July 22.

The Oklahoma and Texas transportation departments indicated in their OK/TXDOT release a goal of increasing train service to twice a day. However, capital cost requirements could make a second frequency prohibitive, according to Stair. There is always the

hope Amtrak will work more effectively to bring the capital costs requirements for a second frequency and Kansas expansion in line with reality.

OTHER GOOD NEWS

The new thruway bus service that connects the Heartland Flyer [OKC] and the Southwest Chief [Newton, KS] sold out for the Memorial Day weekend. This bus service run by Amtrak gets passengers from OKC to Newton where they can connect with Amtrak's Southwest Chief that runs between Chicago and Los Angeles.

More good news: a new stop has been approved by ODOT and the Chickasaw Nation for Thackerville, home to the tribe's WinStar Casino. The Chickasaws intend to build a new "period" train station. [Thackerville is just north of the Oklahoma-Texas line.]

If it's successful, perhaps they can also provide some operational funding. This could open the door for financial arrangements with other Oklahoma tribes along both the Heartland and Eastern Flyer routes, which could enhance their programs in economic development and environmental enhancement.

The hope is for the Cherokee Nation, which serves the Eastern Flyer corridor, the Osage, Creek, Pawnee, Sac and Fox, Kickapoo and Lenapah also to come aboard. For the Heartland Flyer route, the Chickasaws may also see some more advantages for their OKC investment and be joined by the Pottawatomie, the Shawnee, the Absentee Shawnee, Choctaw, Apache, and Comanche nations.

COLLABORATION FOR STATE PROSPERITY

The year 2017 will offer a significant opportunity for Oklahomans to restart a passenger rail system that can connect downtown Tulsa to downtown Oklahoma City – then to Ft. Worth and to Wichita/Newton. Newton train travelers can go north to Chicago or west to Los Angeles on Amtrak's Southwest Chief. The whole country can become accessible in a fairly short time if we make the right decisions this year – and in the coming elections.

Here's the agenda for the next 12 months: Communities along the Heartland Flyer and the proposed Eastern Flyer route shall unite and support passenger rail service making Oklahoma much more economically viable, if not prosperous and health-enhancing. That would mean more revenues in our



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treasury, similar to that being brought in by the daily round trip of the Heartland Flyer. [For the low investment of \$1.9 million, later \$2.84 million and now \$3.7 million, the state has received annual returns of at least \$14 million.]

More important are the decrease in road accidents and mortalities, in transportation costs for individual car owners and for state road/bridge maintenance, and significant productivity increase for businessmen and professionals less stressed preparing for their day's work. Most important of all is the lessened carbon footprint for all transportation modes.

Let's all get together and do everything necessary to incorporate passenger rail in our future. Let's urge Oklahoma's Indian tribes collaborate with us in the quest for passenger rail service. Let us push our state towards its full economic potential. Let's accomplish the goal of prosperity for all, especially our beleaguered working class.

Bob D. Rounsavell lives in Oologah and is president of the Carrie Dickerson Foundation. His wife, Maria S. Rounsavell, serves as his editor.

Our Days Of Guns

BY VERN TURNER

Allow me to begin with a poem written by my colleague and friend, Steven Love of Dallas ...

VOICES

*Voices, the high-pitched tones of childhood,
Laughing and enjoying moments of innocence
And the company of others with little and big
voices ...
And then came the bullets ... the bullets! ... the bullets!!
And then all the little voices went silent.
The little ones cradled in the loving embrace
of some with big voices
Also silent!*

*Voices in prayer, big voices
Voices tempered with decades of seeking justice
and peace
Seekers of healing from long memories of a
struggle for dignity
A sacred gathering of big voices ... in God's
house!
And then came the bullets ... the bullets! ... the bullets!!
And then all the voices went silent.*

Peace at last! At peace ... at last!

*Voices, barely heard over the beat of the drum
Bodies moving with the universal tempo of music*

*A celebration of our common humanity
And the unquenchable quest for love and acceptance.*

And then came the bullets ... the bullets! ... the bullets!!

And then in the midst of the screams of the injured

The voices of 49 souls went silent.

*What are we to make of so many voices
Silenced in the midst of life?*

*Silenced, but still present in our memory
Snatched from us in moments of unspeakable violence*

When came the bullets ... the bullets! ... the bullets!!

*Shall their voices remain silenced forever
In the solitary aloneness of their grave?
Or will we in one voice,
Rooted in the pain and grief of so many silenced voices*

*In defiance that so much silencing of voices
Would be the national legacy of our freedom
DEMAND ... an END ... to the
Coming of the bullets ... the bullets! ... the bullets!!???*

I can in no way emulate Steve's elegance. I am too full of sadness and disappointment. But my desire to communicate is strong and, as is my wont, mostly unfiltered so the reader can hear my heart beating and my voice trying to make sense of it all.

Right now, none of these elegant words do much good except to give people like us a place and means to grieve. We grieve for our lost citizens and our nation. We weep for the wasted promise of a civilized nation, wallowing in the slime of fear, hate, madness and money. Our elected representatives have failed us absolutely. Over 90% of us want the meagerest of gun controls, but the politicians give us nothing. They parse words and take no action. The people cry out for action. They've heard enough wasted words and endured enough "moments of silence."

We elect the whores of the gun/ammo industry. We elect the easy marks of The Lobby of Death, the NRA. A significant number of our males feel as if they are not masculine without a gun in their hands, a gun to solve all their problems of self-identity, inadequacy and ignorance. In Texas, for example, 26% percent of the gun licenses are held by women and only 7% are held by African-Americans [another urban myth dispelled]. That means that around two-thirds of the licensed gun owners are white males.

The deranged and unhinged people grab at guns as

a way to commit the murders that haunt their souls and a way to take so many innocents with them in their suicide pacts with Hell. How is it that this distinct minority gets more attention from the Republicans in Congress instead of the vast majority? Money. Bribery. Graft. Incompetence. That's how.

Are we not long past the day when the gun was our main tool of survival? I guess not ... at least in the minds of those who must have them. The current gun "show" now in theaters everywhere is a sure sign that we have lost our way as a people and as a nation with regard to understanding the meaning of the Second Amendment to the Constitution. We have allowed the tail to wag the dog of government, and the tail has a peculiar smell: cowardice.

Explaining the nuance of a " ... well regulated militia ..." is lost on those who fear government – and their neighbors. Is the gun pathology a symptom of our national psyche and its inherent, self-induced disease of paranoia, insecurity and inferiority by those who choose not to think and are not willing to work toward improving life in this country? Or is it just a temporary condition until rational people actually take over the conversation? How many have to die at the hands of lunatics with guns – lunatics who could legally buy them – before that conversation will actually generate action?

No new law is going to change anything unless the conversation is changed. Perhaps saying something definite will override the handwringing about "due process" conversations in Congress. Bribery will still persist as long as there is money to be made from the death of innocents. In Australia, when assault rifles were banned, the mass murders disappeared. Here, all that law would do would be to enable more mass shootings with the guns already in circulation; including the new guns that would be mass purchased before the sales ban deadline.

Oh, the horror of someone coming for your guns. How could anyone survive without one? The perfect irony and confirmation of my sarcasm is that nobody has tried to come after anyone's guns unless laws were broken. Add to that the fact that home defense events are extremely rare. But every time there is a need by the gun industry to boost profit, some mindless spokesperson shoots off his mouth and scares those weak souls enough that they go out and buy more weaponry they don't need. This is called a racket. Exploiting fear for profit, in the case of guns, is a most deadly undertaking. There is nothing good about this racket. Perhaps it takes a major stockholder in a gun manufacturer to lose a loved one to mindless gun violence before the message will get through.

Why are our rights to bear arms so badly misconstrued into a drooling anxiety about grabbing all of them we can before someone, anyone comes to take them away? Simple. Guns and killing in America is a profit opportunity for the gun-makers, the ammo-makers and the media. Our Congress, outside of a

few brave, rational souls, looks the other way and creates moments of silence. They are the gutless, the corrupt and the villains in this macabre drama of death we see every day in America. The 90 people we kill every day by gun is testimony to our fundamental incompetence at managing and governing ourselves.

We have lost our way. This is not a poem, but rather a venting of pain from an old man who has watched too much killing; killing by the enraged, the disconnected, the deeply disturbed, the criminals, the bullied, the bullies, the angry, the disenfranchised, the police and the very stupid who allow their children access to lethal weapons.

I keep waiting for the shroud of our shame to somehow be lifted by some inspired movement or leader capable and strong enough to also lift the primitiveness from our society along with it. If this election season is any indicator, I think my wait will be in vain. *Vern Turner lives in Marble Falls, TX and is a regular contributor to The Oklahoma Observer. His latest book, Racing to the Brink: The End Game for Race and Capitalism, is available through Amazon.com.*

R-e-s-p-e-c-t

BY DON NELSON

Tis a thin line I'm treading with this post. That said, I am tired, no, I am sick and tired of the "but you have to respect me and my opinion" crowd.

The word respect has many uses – to hold someone in esteem, to have admiration for, to have high regard for, to honor. In all cases the word points to a person having earned the recognition of respect.

Perhaps I am guilty of holding too narrow a view but, for me, there are certain attributes that must be evidenced before "respect" is awarded.

The ability to act in compassionate ways, to behave toward one's fellow human beings in ways that show humaneness rather than callousness.

Reaching out to the unloved and rejected that share the same hopes and aspirations that everyone has, not seeking to place them outside the walls of the comfort zones people work so hard to build.

Standing up to the dehumanizing lack of understanding of those who are different. Yeah they are different – get over it. We are not all the same, we do not all think the same, look the same or have the same preferences.

Standing up for those who either cannot or do not have the strength to stand up for themselves is a requisite.

Working to establish a just life experience for any who are denied. Striving to provide the basics of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for those who would be denied by those seeking self-justification, the calloused, the ludicrous self-righteousness of the

self-absorbed.

Complaining that the poor get all the breaks, single parents are enabled and dependent, homelessness is a character flaw, the unemployed are lazy, children born into poverty are just unlucky, the common worker deserves his or her station in life, whites need the jobs, people of color [pick a color] need to work harder to be accepted, unwed mothers or pregnant out-of-wedlock women are a burden on society – the list can go on.

Complaints serve but one purpose – they show the level of callousness, the hardness, the lack of humanity of the complainant.

If you expect to be respected, if you expect others to hold you in high regard, you have to earn that position.

Honestly, I have little, if any, respect for any humanoid that suffers the little children to remain in poverty, that sees as their purpose in life to support large corporations at the expense of education, health care and serving the neediest of our numbers.

Do not waste your breath trying to convince me that you are right to be a reprobate, a greedy self-absorbed purveyor of blatant self-serving greed while there are those you could be working to help.

Oh, yeah, I've heard it all, you know how it goes – I don't want kids suffering *but* or I'm not trying to hurt anyone *but*. In this case the Buts do not win the argument. You do not get respect when you have not earned it.

Don Nelson lives in Lawton.

History Won't Be Kind To GOP Leaders

BY BOB BEARDEN

In the Grand Old Party of Lincoln, there is a crisis of leadership.

It is totally inconceivable to me – and totally abysmal, in my opinion – for a national leader of one party to be so afraid of not having his party retain majority status that he would consciously put his nation in jeopardy by helping promote the election of such a person as is the presumptive nominee of the Grand Old Party of Lincoln.

I can understand how one party doesn't see eye to eye on a number of issues with another party's nominee. I could on the face of it understand their objec-

tion to having a choice between a true conservative and someone much more liberally bent like Hillary Clinton.

If those differences were truly the reasoning they were offering and if the differences between the two candidates didn't rest on one candidate's openly vile racism and bigotry, then they might actually have a valid argument for what they are attempting to stand on.

But their stance on the issues don't wash when, time after time, they have to cringe and walk back their party's nominee's pronouncements by saying they don't agree with what he is saying, nor his philosophy, and yet still support him despite his rabidly anti-almost everything they say they stand for as a party, simply because they want to win at no matter the cost to the nation and its citizens.

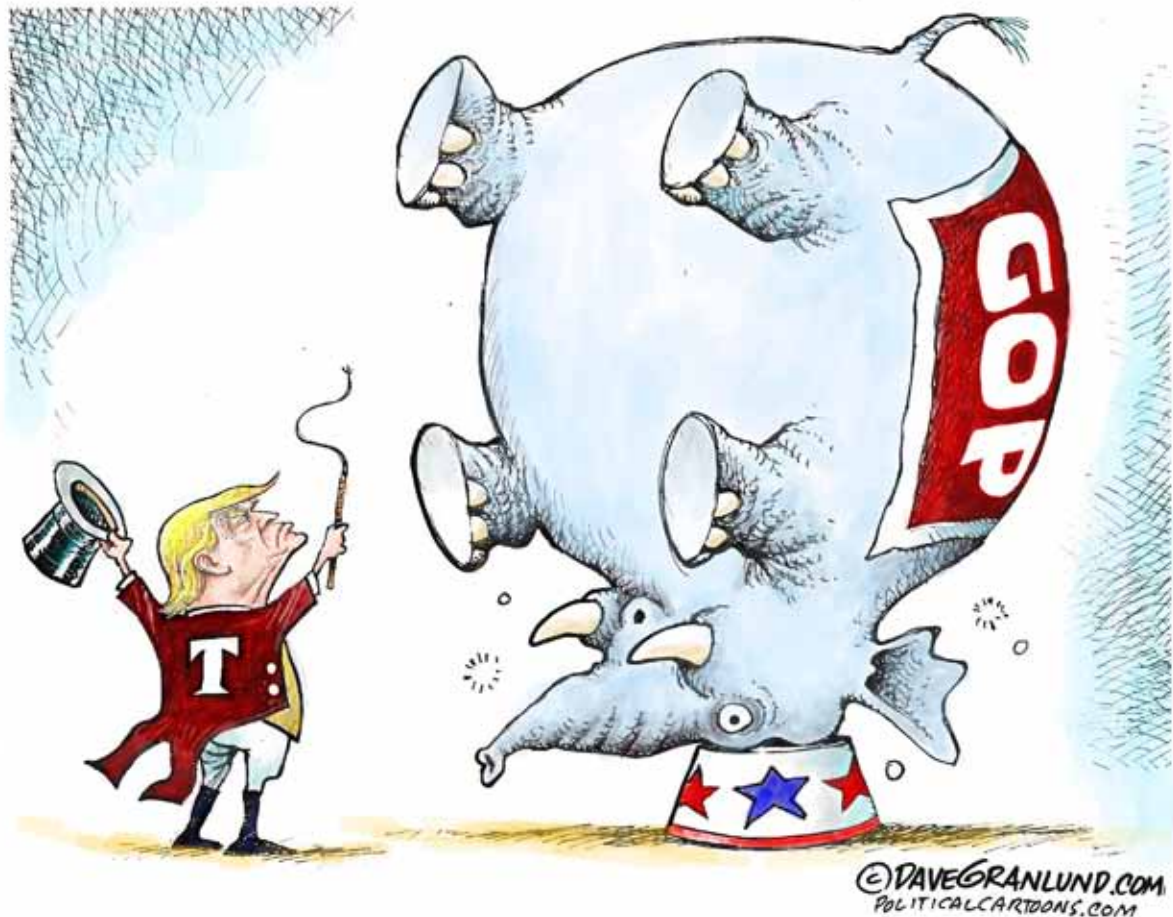
Over the many years of our republic, we have had other divisive candidates. Abraham Lincoln was so divisive as a candidate as to have been the primary cause for 11 states to secede from the Union and yet he wasn't racist nor bigoted. He stood on the principles upon which our nation was founded. That was righteous and honorable.

Teddy Roosevelt found himself often more at odds with his own party than he did with the electorate in general. So much so that after his handpicked successor replaced him in the White House he became so appalled at William Howard Taft's policies that he mounted a campaign four years later in opposition that led to Taft's defeat and the resurgence of the Democratic Party in the United States.

Those examples stand the test of time because the backlash proved false and out of step with the citizens of this nation. That is simply not the case now. There is widespread disaffection within the Grand Old Party of Lincoln to their party's nominee to the point where prominent members of that party are openly refusing to support their presumptive nominee due mostly because of his outrageous and vile pronouncements. And in poll after poll, the nation overwhelmingly agrees with them.

It is a party being split apart by its own presumptive nominee who beat out 15 other GOP wannabes. At the top the party's leadership are House Speaker Paul Ryan and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, both of whom in position to react positively, yet often reacting just the opposite. They are willing to hold their collective noses and stand by a person who is openly bigoted and racist simply because they want to keep their party in power at whatever the cost.

What would Lincoln do? What would Teddy do? Times are different and both parties are different in tenor and makeup as opposed to either party of those bygone days, but both Lincoln and Teddy were honorable and principled men, despite their acumen as consummate politicians.



I believe they would do the right thing and oppose their party's current nominee and refuse to support him as long as he continued down the path that he has chosen to follow. Shame on McConnell and Texas Sen. John Cornyn and more especially a much more principled Ryan for taking the low road and putting their party loyalty first ahead of their loyalty to their nation.

It is, I believe, a stance that will be to their everlasting regret, and history will not be kind to them for taking it.

Bob Bearden is a trustee of the Central Oklahoma Labor Federation and a member of Mayflower Congregational Church UCC.

One Issue Voters

BY SHARON MARTIN

Say you are pro-life. You want to stop abortions, but you don't want sex education. You don't want your taxes paying for birth control. You want to close the Planned Parenthood in your town, the only source of healthcare for some women and a fighter against the spread of

STDs. Think about that for a while.

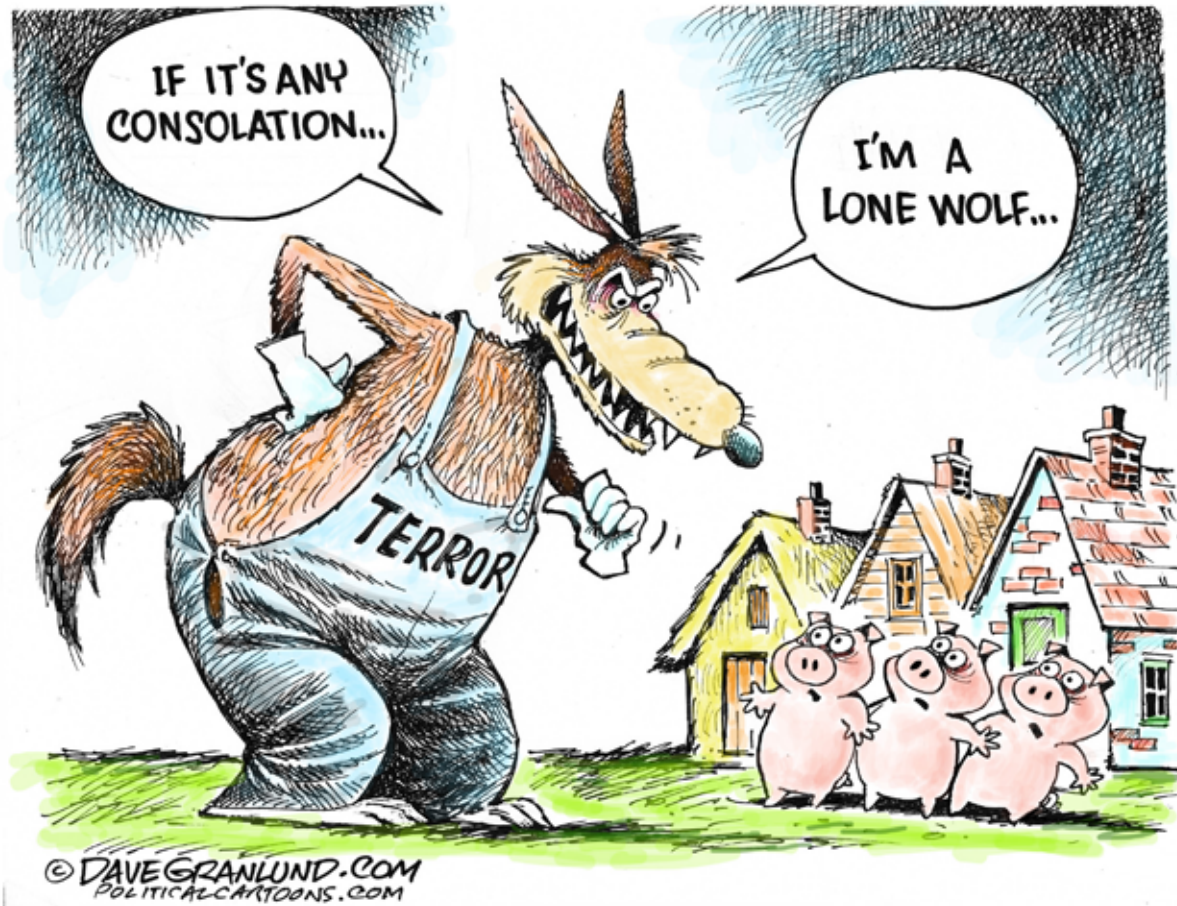
You're pro-unregulated Second Amendment, never mind what the Constitution says. You've never broken a law in your life, but you don't want to have to pass a background check because it infringes on your rights. How about the right to safe schools? The answer isn't more guns. If that were the case, the United States would be the safest country on earth.

You want to do something about the ravages of drugs and drug addiction on our culture. Good. That means you want to see drug courts and treatment programs expanded and affordable. And you want access to mental health care for everyone. Who pays for it?

You want cuts on income taxes? That benefits the wealthy. When revenues fail because of income tax loopholes, political favors, and other giveaways, they'll have to nickel and dime the rest of us with fees and sales tax increases.

What if I told you that an increase in income tax, especially on large incomes, would equate to a higher standard of living for the average person in the state? What if I told you that the states that spend the most money on education have the highest per capita income?

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23



ISIS Vs. The A Team

BY LARRY KINCHELOE

Here is an out of the box solution for dealing with the radical Islamic fundamentalist of the future.

But first, some background information. Starting in the 1990s, shows like *Will and Grace* and *Ellen* began to openly show the lives of gay characters in normal everyday activities. Therefore, we now have a generation of Millennials who have grown up watching TV shows and movies with gay characters being depicted with acceptance and without any type of condemnation.

I have two sons in this generation and for them the issues of gay marriage, gay rights, gender identity, etc., are, well, non-issues.

Partly because they grew up watching members of the gay community being portrayed in television and the movies, they really do not care who someone chooses to love or become intimate with.

For them and many of their generation, tolerance is the norm.

So back to ISIS.

Let's use this same sociological phenomena to change the culture that breeds violence.

I would like to propose that someone with the appropriate media-producing skills start producing a web series much along the lines of the *A-Team*.

Except in this rendition, the leader of the group could be a moderate Imam.

Other members might include a Sunni computer hacker, a Shi'ite mechanical MacGyver, an Israeli Mossad weapons expert and an American stunt car driver.

Together, this group would work to save innocents from life-threatening situations on a weekly basis. There would be lots of explosions, exciting car chases, and gun fights with almost miraculous escapes.

This show would also weave in background themes such as religious tolerance, racial tolerance and human rights. At some point a female character could be brought into the mix as an end of the season finale show.

Make the target audience preadolescent and adoles-

cent males and I would predict that within 10 years there would be a significant change in culture that would make it more difficult to find young men ready to be radicalized and converted into a culture of violence, torture and oppression.

The cost of producing such a show would be miniscule when compared to the billions of dollars that is spent in trying to contain and destroy radical Islamic fundamentalist.

Obviously, this is not a quick fix but it is only by changing the culture that real change will happen.

Thoughts from outside the box ...

Larry Kincheloe lives in Oklahoma City.

Oklahoma's Science Deniers

BY VIC HUTCHISON

Oklahoma legislators almost every year lead the nation in anti-evolution attempts. These ideological attempts waste time every year.

Fortunately, due to major efforts of Oklahomans for Excellence in Science Education, Oklahoma Science Teachers Association, Oklahoma Academy of Science, and many other state and national organizations – and especially numerous individuals – every effort of the ignorant legislative authors have failed!

But continued efforts will likely be needed next year and beyond until these particular legislators are voted out of office. See this release about research soon to be published in *Social Science Quarterly*:

New research from Rice University theorizes that “anti-evolution” education legislation continues to be introduced because lawmakers want to appease religious constituents, not because they expect the bills to be made into laws.

David Johnson, a postdoctoral research associate with Rice’s Religion and Public Life Program and the lead author of “Conservative Protestantism and Anti-Evolution Curricular Challenges Across States,” studied the relationship between religious characteristics of states and anti-evolution bills passing through state education committees across the country. A key goal of the study was to understand how creationist interest groups, science interest groups, public opinion about evolution and political climate influence the political-reform process related to how evolution is taught in schools.

Johnson and co-authors Christopher Scheitle and Elaine Howard Ecklund conducted a national analysis and found that between 2000 and 2012, anti-evo-

lution bills were introduced 110 times in 26 states. However, only 2% of this legislation made it through the respective state education committees for a vote by a state legislative chamber, and the only states where bills were enacted into law were Louisiana and Tennessee.

“The top three states where anti-evolution legislation was introduced were Oklahoma with 13 bills, Mississippi with 11 bills and Alabama with 10 bills,” Johnson said. “These three states also have the highest numbers of conservative Protestants [denominations diversely associated with fundamentalist, Pentecostal, charismatic, and evangelical religious movements] in the United States. In addition, more than two-thirds of the bills were introduced in states with more than 25% of the population identifying as conservative Protestants.”

Johnson added that while increased conservative Protestant adherence does lead to increased anti-evolution attitudes and activity among creation science interest groups, these outcomes are statistically unrelated to consideration of anti-evolution bills in state legislatures. This led him and his co-authors to theorize that the low rate of success in turning anti-evolution education bills into laws suggests that legislators may continue to push these reforms not because they expect success, but to mollify religious constituents.

Longtime OU professor Vic Hutchison lives in Norman.

Voters

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

How about religious freedom? Is that your issue? Do you believe that religious freedom extends to all religions or just yours? Which religion? If you want a Christian theocracy, will it be Protestant or Catholic? Baptist or Lutheran? Who gets to decide what you have to believe?

The issues overlap in ways we can see and in ways that we can’t. The thing is, we are all better off when there are no hunger zones, no pockets of hopelessness, no groups underemployed because of a lack of education.

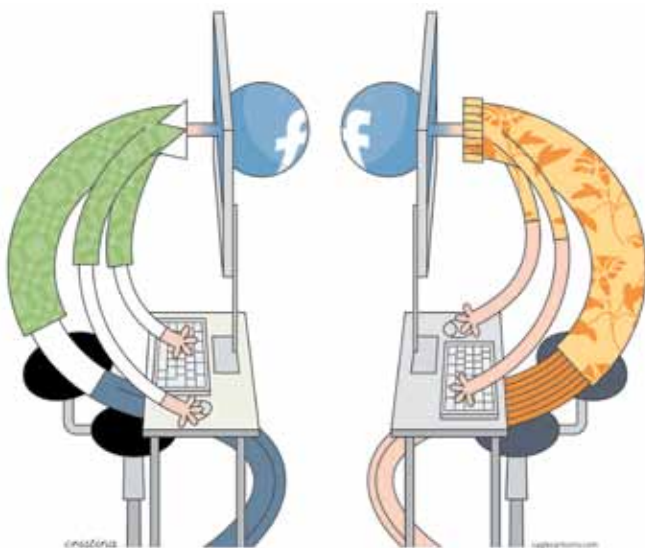
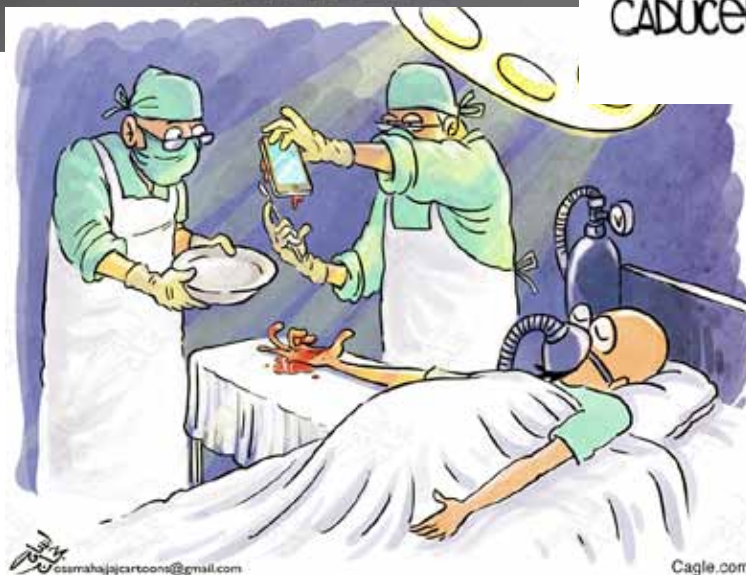
Ask any candidate one question: do you think the promises of the Constitution and the opportunities of a Democratic Republic should be accessible to every citizen? If they can’t properly answer that, start asking about single issues. Chances are, they won’t have good answers about those either.

Finally, ask them who is funding their run for office. That’s where you’ll find their priorities.

Funding! That may be the single issue we should all be voting on.

Sharon Martin lives in Oilton.

Addictions R Us – What Do We Do?



BY ANN DAPICE

Addiction is not limited to alcohol, tobacco, narcotics, tranquilizers, and illegal drugs. The media continually remind us now about opioid misuse and the possibility of overdose. But addiction affects many more people with many more behaviors that affect us all daily. Addiction is related to behaviors that were once adaptive for survival now gone badly wrong.

Science demonstrates that addiction is the excess intake of external chemicals and the excess engagement in behaviors that stimulate chemicals in the brain's dopamine reward pathway. It is any behavior that people do not, or feel they cannot, stop – even when potentially destructive to themselves and others.

According to Nora Volkow, director of National Institute of Drug Addiction, it is a physiological disease that requires treatment just as any other disease. Addiction is not just lack of will power.

To survive and continue the species, humans have always required food, work, exercise, sexual intercourse, necessary risk taking, pain relief, effective communication, and knowledge of potential danger [e.g., weather, violence, war]. It was also important that these behaviors feel good or relieve discomfort in some way so that people will engage in them – thus the involvement of the reward pathway in the brain. From these survival needs addiction arises.

In his book, *Drunken Monkey: Why We Drink and Abuse Alcohol*, Robert Dudley documents that all species, from fruit flies on, have always taken in fermented foods when they over-ripened – and in fact, across species, non-excessive intake of fermented foods actually extends lifespan. Too little or too much shortens life.

However, excessive behaviors are actually needed in certain situations. For example, our bodies became very effective in storing extra food for non-growing seasons and for times of famine. With increased easy access to fast food this now results in high rates of obesity and Type 2 Diabetes with related illness and death worldwide.

When population increases were needed after massive deaths, or at the beginning of agriculture when more children were needed, more sexual activity and partners became norms in some societies.

So, our old brains are at work not only in drugs, alcohol and tobacco use, but also in eating, computer games, working, texting, exercise, Facebook, sex, shopping, religion, tweeting, pornography, child molestation, stalking, risk taking, and more. Some addictive behaviors can be, and are, engaged in normally by many and, as noted before, are necessary for species survival, [e.g., eating, working, exercising, shopping/trade, and sexual intercourse].

There are differences in addictions. Many people can drink alcohol safely, while tobacco is almost always addictive. Risk-taking has often been necessary, for example, when populations had to migrate to unknown areas, in geographical exploration and the invention of new ideas and products. But our recent major economic recession resulted from market risk by individuals at high levels that have negatively affected us worldwide. Thus addiction to risk can readily become dangerous.

Religion is a part of most societies yet there are some who constantly engage in religious activities to the extent that they become negligent to family and dangerous to themselves. Because computer electronics are now part of most communications in the developed world, normally cautious people are able to text, check Facebook, and make calls while driving. The victim of distracted driving does not care whether the cause is alcohol or texting.

There are some addictive behaviors that are never

considered positive but are deviant variants of sexual behavior [e.g., child pornography/molestation and stalking]. Genetics, domestic violence and PTSD may lead to addiction when people attempt to self-medicate the resulting irritable brain waves. There is even a designated dopamine deficiency syndrome that demonstrates a specific problem in the brain.

Some activities combine multiple potential addictions. For example, at casinos it isn't unusual to find not only gambling but also the ability to eat good food, drink alcohol while gambling, smoke, and even enjoy pleasantly sexual entertainment.

Similarly, when driving, smart phones allow use of GPS map directions, the 24/7 global news cycle, weather checks, and communications via email, text messages, Facebook, and tweets. Normally careful people are seen texting obliviously while crossing a busy street.

Weather, child abduction and other messages alert us to danger at all times. When the phone rings while driving, the old brain tells us that it may be a child or friend in distress and, by the way, there may also be an emergency text or email to check.

The normally responsible person rationalizes checking for emergency messages as necessary – even in heavy traffic.

In the past, behavioral addictions were not seen the same as “substance” abuse. This changed when administration of medications to Parkinson's patients and patients with restless leg syndrome led to never before experienced behaviors of destructive gambling and hyper-sexuality.

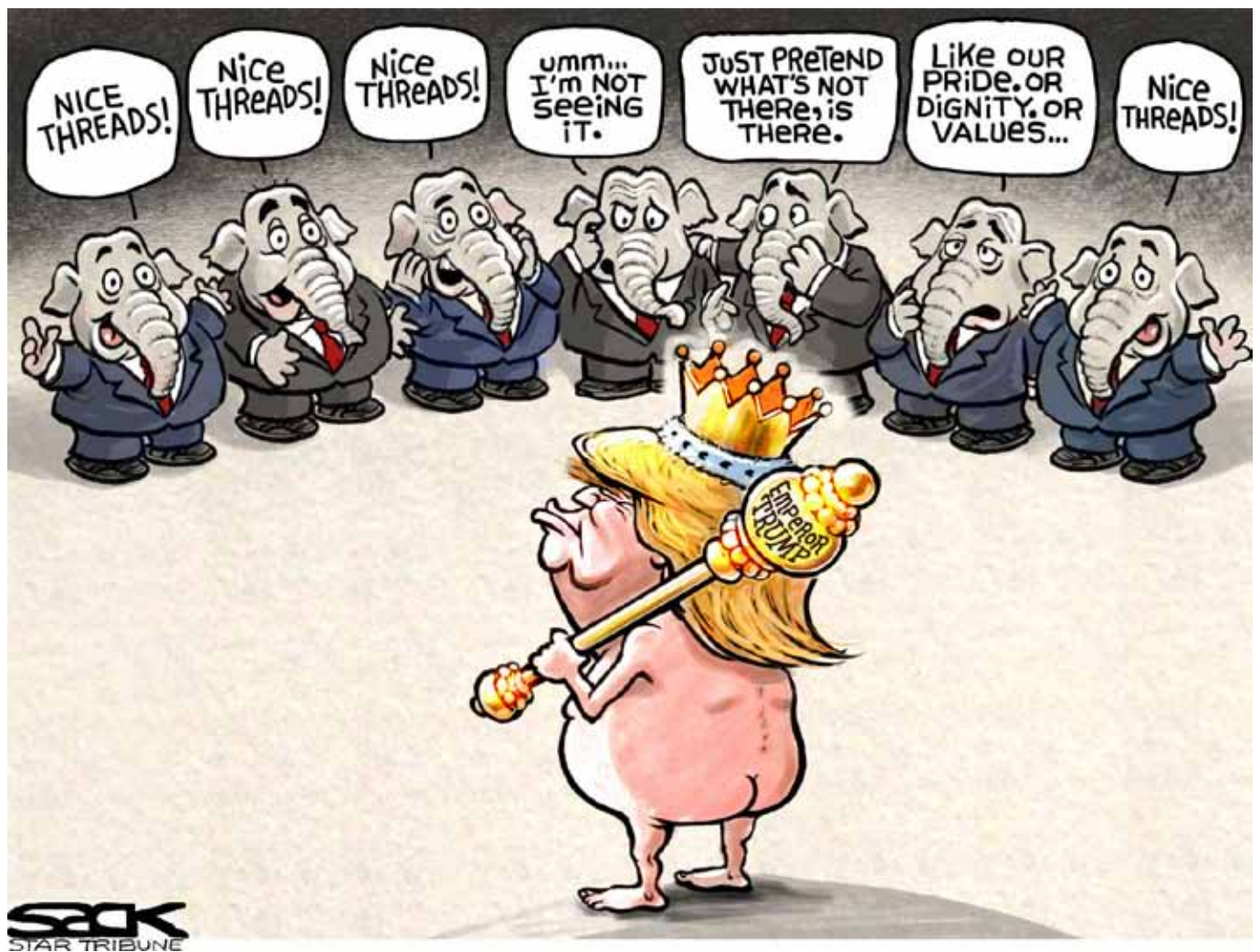
Most people have heard of, and many have experienced, the body's endorphins that provide an addictive high while running. Less known is the recent research showing the stimulation of endocannabinoids in the brain that occurs from eating trans-fats – the source of many successful church recipe books!

What do we know about addiction policies that are effective, responsible and ethical? Research demonstrates that most traditional addiction treatment has poor success rates. Studies have long shown rates of 4% to 7% success after four years for most 12-step groups and treatment facilities.

We don't limit treatment of other physiological disease to support groups. For example, cancer patients may be encouraged to go to support groups for encouragement, but that is not the only treatment they receive. One addiction specialist has said that to limit addiction treatment to “church basements would be considered malpractice” in any other disease. If societal shame and imprisonment worked there would be no addictions. There is always plenty of that.

We also blame some addicts more than others. Few people can say they don't suffer from one of the addictions above. Keeping addiction anonymous is curious when we don't do the same for other diseases.

Plenty of people suffer diseases from cardiovascular disease, Type 2 Diabetes and cancer related to un-



A CULT OF CRANKS

Mainstream Media Fail To Tell The Truth About Today's GOP

BY NEAL GABLER

As incendiary and dangerous as he is – and he is very dangerous – and as much of a main event as he has been in this election season, Donald Trump is largely a distraction from what really ails our political discourse.

Long after he is gone from the scene, the Republican Party that engendered him, facilitated him, and now supports him – despite a severe case of buyer's remorse – will no doubt still thrive, booting up for a future candidacy of Ted Cruz or Marco Rubio or Paul Ryan. And the media will still act as if Trump were an aberration, a departure from so-called “sensible” conservatism.

If so, it will be yet another act of media dereliction. In fact, worse than dereliction, because the Republican Party, with its history of dog-whistle racism, sexism, homophobia, nativism, and gun addiction, salted now by incipient fascism, has been legitimized by the mainstream media [MSM] for years.

One could say that the GOP and MSM have operated in collusion to the great detriment of this country. One could say that and not even be a liberal, just a commonsensical American.

Today's GOP is closer to a religious cult than a political institution.

The MSM continue to treat the Republican Party as

if it were just another constellation of ideology and policy – another way of governing the country, even though this campaign season, if not the last 30 years, should have disabused journalists of that notion.

Today's GOP is closer to a religious cult than a political institution. It operates on dogma, sees compromise as a moral failing, views enemies as pagans who must be vanquished, and considers every policy skirmish another Götterdämmerung.

That isn't politics; it's a modern version of the medieval Crusades, and as the ancient Crusades did to Europe, it has inflicted untold damage on our country. Because it is deep in the bones of the Republicans, it won't end with Trump, who is a non-believer himself when it comes to conservative orthodoxy. It can only end with the extinction of the party itself as presently constituted – Cruz, Ryan, Rubio, McConnell, et al – and the rise of a new conservative party, not a cult.

You won't hear that in the MSM, in large part because, partisan organs like Fox News and MSNBC aside, it tries to maintain that deadly and deadening balance so often discussed and decried by media critics like me. This is a practice that requires a tit for every tat, so that blame can never be leveled against one party unless the media immediately level it against the other as well. Political equipoise, as it were.

Part of this is laziness. Part is fear. The press knows that if it were to come right out and criticize the GOP for its denial of climate change, its campaign to deny the LGBT community its civil rights, its efforts to strip food stamps from children and health insurance from the poor, its systematic attempts to suppress minority voters, its recent howl to protect the Second Amendment rights of suspected terrorists while at the same time calling for greater surveillance of us all, there would be hell to pay from the right wing, which would invoke the mythical and dreaded "liberal media."

The historian and columnist Eric Alterman calls this "working the refs," and the MSM fall for it every time.

But there is another reason why the MSM haven't called out the Republican Party, despite its egregious behavior, and this one is especially relevant in this election: The media simply won't discuss the Republican Party's values, as values are the third rail of political journalism. You just don't talk about values, because when you do so, you can't fake balance.

We all know that there is a big difference between Republicans and Democrats, and it isn't just a matter of philosophy-cum-policy. It is a matter of what values underlie the parties' philosophies. And if I may be blunt, Republican values just aren't very consistent with what most of us think when we think of good values.

So the GOP's blatant contradictions, its hate disguised as individual rights and its disdain for the weakest among us, largely go unexamined. Indeed,

our media state of affairs is so sad that it largely has fallen to comedians to be our primary truth tellers about what one of our two major parties really stands for – among them, Jon Stewart in his day, Stephen Colbert, John Oliver, and Samantha Bee, whose recent broadcasts on Orlando and guns and on Republican racism have torn the so-called "principled ideological" veil off the GOP and exposed it for what it is: a cult of cranks.

By rousing the hatefulness within the GOP rank and file, Donald Trump has emboldened a few intrepid MSM journalists to rip off the veil, too – even journalists who treat Paul Ryan as if he were a first-rate intellect.

Andrew Rosenthal, the departing editorial page editor at The New York Times, wrote a blistering takedown of the GOP's refusal to denounce Trump, and Times columnist and Iraq War apologist Thomas Friedman, the very definition of a cautious Big-Foot pundit who slavishly creates and follows the conventional wisdom, called for a reconstituted Republican Party on the basis of "moral bankruptcy." It is a terrific column.

Of course, two larks don't an exaltation make, and in any case, both Rosenthal and Friedman are primarily print journalists. Television news still has the longest national reach, and it will never call out the Republican Party no matter what it does, much less examine its values.

Instead, we get endless horse-race coverage that turns the election into a long sporting event in which nothing seems to matter except who's winning. We all know that now, and despite the yowls of protest, we also know that it is not likely to change. Political journalists are like sports writers, tracking a team's game plans and checking the score – or, as we call it in politics, the polls.

But what we may fail to notice is that, with all its blather about what states are in play or whose field operation is better or which internecine battles presently engage the candidates' staffs, this kind of coverage is not only a way to juice the political narrative; it's also a way to avoid touching that third rail. So long as we are talking about strategy or who is winning, we don't have to talk about policy [borrrrrrrring!!!] or about values.

Avoiding talking about values is one of the reasons we find ourselves in our current political situation. Doing so might have stopped the threat of Donald Trump. Thirty years ago, it might even have stopped the march of the current Republican Party; its values could have been exposed as indefensible, which could have shamed them [and us] into changing.

There is a reason the Republicans contrived the slogan "compassionate conservatism." It was because even they knew their compassion was dubious. It would have been nice to have the MSM examine that, though, of course, it would have required both the courage to buck the right-wing, who would howl, and the seriousness to discuss just how important

values are in our politics. In some measure, because we never got that discussion, for three decades the GOP has gotten off scot-free.

Now the MSM routinely rebuke Trump, but that easy critique allows them not to have to rebuke the Republican Party itself, whose values, if not his often-changing policy pronouncements, are virtually identical with Trump's, minus his oft-changing policy pronouncements.

It is the politesse of a Paul Ryan that Trump lacks in expressing his hostility, and it is that politesse that has conned a gullible, frightened media.

When Trump's candidacy first began taking hold, we were told in the media that Republicans had a Trump problem. As he rose to the top of the GOP presidential heap and rank-and-file Republicans supported him – because of his hateful rhetoric, and not in spite of it – we realized the Republicans had a Republican problem, though, again, the media dare not say it.

Now that Trump is the party's presumptive nominee and Republicans are falling into line just as conservatives did in Germany in 1933, we have come to a much graver realization: America has a Republican problem.

This isn't about whom we elect as president. It goes much deeper. This is about who we want to be as a people.

For three decades, the MSM have been collaborators with the GOP, pretending the cult is a normal party with values just to the right of center. The result is the proto-fascist Donald Trump and an institution that continues to legitimize what is worst in us. *Neal Gabler is an author of five books and the recipient of two Los Angeles Times' Book Prizes, Time magazine's non-fiction book of the year, USA Today's biography of the year and other awards. He is also a senior fellow at the Lear Center for the Study of Entertainment and Society and is currently writing a biography of Sen. Edward Kennedy.*

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What It Takes To Be An Effective Citizen

BY LEE HAMILTON

It's so easy in a presidential election year to forget that our system is not about a single person. This year especially, when the dynamics of the presidential contest have dominated news coverage so thoroughly that even the Senate and House races have largely disappeared from view, the crucial role that citizens play – apart from serving as voters in the presidential drama – isn't even an afterthought.

Yet, effective citizenship is the base on which our representative democracy rests. Our vitality as a country depends on the involvement of millions of

people in their neighborhoods and communities, in interest groups and civic organizations, in groups agitating for change and groups defending the status quo.

So just what constitutes effective citizenship? I believe it's made up of several elements.

First, a confident belief that change is possible – that the country can indeed make progress over time thanks to the efforts both of ordinary people and of political leaders.

In his recent speech at Howard University, President Obama noted that by almost every measure, the country has moved forward over the last three decades. The poverty rate is down, as are the rates for crime and for teenage pregnancy. More Americans are getting college degrees, more women are working and earning more money, many cities are far healthier than they were in the 1980s.

Yes, we've got miles to go on many fronts, but on the whole, I'll take where we stand today over where we stood in the 1980s. Our system is working better for more people than it did then.

The people who helped make this happen understood two things: that progress was possible, and that it required their efforts. This might seem too obvious even to say, but those who were most effective had an impact because they had the skills to make a difference.

I'm talking here about the fundamental ability we should all have as citizens to solve problems in a representative democracy that's filled with people who have different beliefs, perspectives, and experiences. This means knowing how to work together with all kinds of people, being able to find common ground, being forthright about aims and methods, forging connections to key officials and other players who can help advance a cause, building consensus, and communicating ideas effectively.

I use the word "skills," but in the end, good citizenship is as much about temperament as it is about ability. Mutual respect, tolerance, empathy, civility, humility, honesty, resolve – these are the simple virtues that our nation depends on in its citizens, not because they're nice to see, but because in a vibrant and diverse democracy they're crucial for making progress.

So is a willingness to step up to challenges. The people who make a difference in our system are the ones who not only identify a problem, but then plunge into fixing it.

I frequently hear from people who are exasperated by the obstacles they have to overcome in order to make a difference: fellow citizens who are ignorant of the system, politicians who are too obtuse or self-interested to see the light, incompetence in the bureaucracy, officials protecting turf.

But here's the thing: those obstacles will always be there. You just have to keep plugging away at overcoming them, whether by casting an informed ballot, sitting down with – or protesting against – political

leaders, or finding the myriad ways you can improve the quality of life for your neighbors and fellow Americans.

You may already have picked up on the final quality that makes for effective citizenship, and it's a tough one. For the most part, we're not going to solve our challenges in a single generation. So we have to educate our children and those who come after us in the same skill sets I've been talking about.

That's because, as I said at the start, our representative democracy is not all about the presidency.

We – you, me, and our fellow citizens – are responsible for the future of our neighborhoods and our nation. Unless we all shoulder the obligation to learn the skills we need to shepherd it into the future, and then teach those skills to others, our country and our system will struggle.

Lee Hamilton is a senior advisor for the Indiana University Center on Representative Government and a professor of practice, IU School of Public and Environmental Affairs. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for 34 years.

No Trump, No Way

"I've always distrusted people who never question their assumptions or test their opinions against their critics' arguments. I believe empathy is the starting point of wisdom, and imagining things from an opponent's point of view is essential to solving problems in a closely divided polity.

"Yet on the subject of Donald Trump, my mind is closed. Slammed shut. Triple-bolted. Sealed like a tomb.

"Nothing anyone could reveal about Trump could get me to change my opinion that he's an asshole. And not a "yeah, but he's our asshole" kind but rather a cartoon villain, a fake, a cheat, a liar, a creep, a bullying, bragging, bullshitting, blowhard kind of asshole." – *Mark Salter, a former longtime aide to Sen. John McCain and a veteran of two presidential campaigns, writing in Esquire magazine*

Trump's Last Stand

BY RUTH HOPKINS

In late May, Donald Trump, flanked by enthusiastic brown-noser Rep. Kevin Cramer, R-ND, who pushed for legislation that makes it more difficult for Natives to vote and threatened to "wring Tribal council's necks" while making Native women cry at a state gathering on domestic violence a few years ago, appeared in Bismarck, ND.

During a press conference, Trump couldn't resist tearing into Sen. Elizabeth Warren, once again referring to her as "Pocahontas."

For those of you who aren't Twitter savvy, The Donald Sen. Warren have been engaged in a Twitter War in recent months.

Few of her position and stature have had the courage to stand up to Trump. For this reason, Sen. Warren is being singled out for ridicule.

Donald questions Sen. Warren's bloodlines, but whether or not she is actually Native is besides the point. The fact that the mere possibility that she may possess Native ancestry makes her a target for racial attack by Trump says everything we need to know about him.

Let's be clear: Donald Trump isn't calling Sen. Warren "Pocahontas" to honor her. He is using it in a derogatory manner, to belittle and insult her. This is what he thinks of Native people and women in general. Such statements are not only arrogant, they're misogynistic and racially charged.

Contrary to Hollywood lore and textbook mythology, Pocahontas wasn't a buxom NDN Princess built for sex who couldn't wait to help the white man defeat her brutish Tribesman. Pocahontas was a little

girl who first met John Smith around age 11. She was kidnapped, held hostage, imprisoned, and raped by European invaders who only released her when she agreed to marry one of her English captors. She was then promptly carted off to Europe as an example of what successful colonization could look like. She fell ill soon after and died far from her traditional homelands at the age of 21.

Pocahontas is not a stripper name or a Halloween costume. She is Exhibit A in the case that would hold the United States and its founders guilty of Indigenous genocide.

Trump shows us time and again that he has no respect for women, and by continuing to use the term "Pocahontas" as a racial slur, he is showing us his particular disdain for Native people and women, especially. Because of stereotypes like the Pocahottie that fetishize and hypersexualize Native women, we continue to be preyed upon by non-Natives who see us as exotic objects meant purely for sexual gratification.

There is a one in three likelihood that a Native woman will be sexually assaulted in her lifetime. Through Native provisions in the Violence Against Women Act, tribes are working to close loopholes that allow non-Native men to escape legal prosecution for beating and raping Native women on tribal lands.

Canada's First Nations are in the midst of an epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, a systemic problem that is finally getting the long overdue attention it deserves.

In spite of all of this, Donald Trump came to North Dakota, the homelands of Sitting Bull, where Native

people are the largest minority in the state, and spat in our faces. He owes us all a sincere apology, but I'm not holding my breath. Trump has spent his campaign insulting everybody, including veterans and the disabled.

As far as Elizabeth Warren is concerned, I couldn't care less whether she possesses the blood quantum necessary for tribal enrollment. She is counting coup on Donald Trump and calling him out like only a strong Native woman can. Hell, if she's not Native, I might hunka [adopt] her.

While in North Dakota, Trump secured 1,237 delegates, enough to garner the Republican nomination for President of the United States. Let that sink in. Donald Trump is so racist, that like flies to buffalo dung, white supremacists and the KKK flock to endorse him. This man, who doesn't have enough self-control to hold his tongue for two seconds, could be in charge of nuclear weapons. Donald Trump, who never explains how or why on anything, has promised

to use eminent domain to force pipelines like Keystone XL through tribal lands. He has said he would eliminate minimum wage. Native communities are already impoverished. You can bet that tribal funding will be cut under a Trump administration and trust responsibility will fall by the wayside as well. Not to mention, he talks out of both sides of his mouth and flips on a dime. The litany of disastrous policies he would put forth goes on and on. Do we really want the country to be another bullet on Donald's list of failures? I'm Rez born and raised and I know a con when I see one. We've seen his kind before. Those who come to kill and destroy. Weaklings and cowards who fight with women. Trump is just another incarnation of George Armstrong Custer, and we got your Crazy Horse.

Ruth Hopkins, a Sisseton Wahpeton & Mdewakan-ton Dakota, Hunkpapa Lakota, is a writer, blogger, biologist, activist and judge.

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Trump's Bullying Reminds Why Good Journalism Matters

BY DAN RATHER

I felt a shudder down my spine watching Donald Trump's May 31 fusillade against the press. This is not a moment to be trifled with. It wasn't his first tirade and it won't be his last.

I was reminded of my college journalism professor, the late Hugh Cunningham, who would exhort his young charges in a thundering voice to "never let them scare you." It was his most important lesson. One of Edward R. Murrow's favorite words was "steady." That also bears repeating today.

This is a dirty, nasty election. And it is only going to get worse. The reporters in the trenches need no lecture from me. They are walking through daily minefields, bracing themselves against winds of discontent whose effects no one can predict.

I know what it is like to sit in those seats and feel the scorn and even wrath of politicians of all political persuasions. Attacking the press for unfair coverage has long been a bipartisan pursuit. Sometimes it works. I am happy to say that more often it doesn't. But Trump's brand of vituperation is particularly personal and vicious. It carries with it the drumbeats of threatening violence. It cannot be left unanswered.

This is not about politics or policy. It's about protecting our most cherished principles. The relationship between the press and the powerful they cover is by its very definition confrontational. That is how the Founding Fathers envisioned it, with noble clauses of protection enshrined in our Constitution.

Good journalism – the kind that matters – requires reporters who won't back up, back down, back away or turn around when faced with efforts to intimidate them. It also requires owners and other bosses with guts, who stand by and for their reporters when the heat is on.

I still believe the pen is mightier than the sword. And in these conflicted and troubled times, we should reward the bravery of the men and women not afraid to ask the hard questions of everyone in power. Our nation's future depends on it.



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Republicans' Benghazi Report Seeks Repetition, Not Truth

BY FROMA HARROP

When Hillary Clinton was secretary of state, her approval ratings hit an all-time high. Republican luminaries Jeb Bush, Lindsey Graham, Marco Rubio, Rick Perry, John McCain – the list goes on – all sang her praises. Then she ran for president.

The applause stopped, and the Republican opposition searched for a scandal, real or made-up, to pin on her. They landed on the terrorist attacks that cost the lives of an ambassador and three other Americans in Benghazi, Libya. Clinton was to be blamed for the tragedy of Sept. 11, 2012.

As Democrats have noted, the Republican-run probes into the Benghazi fiasco have gone on longer than did the inquiries into the Sept. 11, 2001,

assault, the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the assassination of John F. Kennedy. But they're meant to go on. That's the whole point of them.

The House Republicans' "final" report on Benghazi contains no new dope on Clinton, but the authors don't need "new." They're looking for repetition. Spread the innuendo often and thick enough and a good chunk of the public will believe it.

Thanks to their efforts, the word "Benghazi" has become an incantation no longer attached to details. Even some Bernie Sanders liberals picked up on it, using "What about Benghazi?" as a talking point against Clinton. [Sanders himself did not.]

The latest report has about 800 pages of almost

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 42

Souring Chicago's Sweet Treat



For generations, kids from age three to 100 have loved munching on chocolaty Oreo cookies dipped in a glass of milk. But just over a year, ago, the tasty treat suddenly went sour.

In May 2015, bakery workers in Nabisco's monumental 10-story plant in Chicago's Marquette Park neighborhood had been expecting some sweet news from their corporate headquarters. Rumor had it that their renown facility – after more than half a century and millions of Oreos – was about to receive a \$130-million modernization investment to upgrade equipment and to add new production lines.

So, the future looked bright and spirits were high on May 15 of last year when management convened members of Local 300 of the Bakery Workers Union to announce that the investment was indeed going to be made.

In Salinas, Mexico.

For decades, the Marquette Park community has been proud that the delectable smell of “milk's favorite cookie” wafts through their neighborhood. But the noses of Nabisco's corporate brass are clogged with greed, incapable of sniffing out anything but ever-fatter profits for themselves and other rich shareholders. Taking the NAFTA low road, they intend to move the iconic Oreo brand – and the jobs of 600 top-quality bakery workers – from Chicago to Mexico, where the minimum wage is a bit more than \$4. Not per hour, but per day.

This is the tyranny of corporate globalization in action. In 2012 Kraft Foods split off its grocery business, which retained the Kraft name, and rebranded its remaining snack-food empire as Mondelez International, which includes Nabisco and its many brands including Triscuit, Planters nuts, Ritz crackers, Chips Ahoy and Oreos.

Such corporate empires now reign over millions of working families, arrogantly and even lawlessly making self-serving decisions from within the shrouded confines of faraway executive suites – wreaking havoc on workers, local economies, democratic values, and our sense of community. People affected are giv-

en no input or warning [much less any real say-so] in the profiteering that now routinely strikes us, like a lightning bolt from hell.

Worse, the so-called humans who've enthroned themselves with this autocratic power find it amusing to toy with those they rule over. Mondelez executives did exactly that after their sneak attack on Chicago's bakery workers. In a crude ploy to shift blame for the loss of jobs to the union, the plutocratic powerhouse claimed it had made an offer to Local 300 to keep producing Oreos in Chicago, but that recalcitrant union officials refused.

Of course they did, for Mondelez essentially proposed that the workers commit mass financial suicide. Here's the *offer*: Since the move to Mexico is expected to save \$46 million a year, the conglomerate would graciously let the 600 ransom their jobs by paying that \$46 million themselves. Just slash your annual pay and benefits [as well as your throats] by that amount, the executives told the union, and you can keep making Oreos for us.

This act was an astonishing, unprecedented insulting slap in the face of every middle-class worker in the U.S. Mondelez sapsuckers were effectively demanding that longtime, dedicated, productive employees subsidize the conglomerate and ransom their livelihoods by reducing their income to poverty. Note that Mondelez banked \$7 billion in profit last year.

If its executives are so inept that they can't find an honest way to fill a \$46-million hole, they should dock the pay of their top three executives by that amount. They can damn sure afford it, for they totaled \$37 million in compensation last year. CEO Irene Rosenfeld alone took a \$20 million paycheck in 2015, bringing her eight-year total pay and benefits to almost \$200 million.

I'd say her gluttony is hoggish, but I don't want to offend swine. Swine have better manners and a more delicate appetite than that.

To learn more, visit www.fightforamericanjobs.org/check-the-label.

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Bringing Back Bill

What's past, as Shakespeare has told us, is prologue.

2016 has been a wild political season. This year, despite the unnerving presidential freak show the Republicans are putting on, Hillary Clinton is the one who recently stunned me. Attempting to convince very wary working class families that she will stand against the abuses of her Wall Street financial backers, while also lifting up the poor and shoring up the middle class, Clinton made this horrifying, spine-tingling declaration: She'll Bring Back Bill! Specifically, Hillary promises that her former-president husband will be put "in charge of revitalizing the economy."

Good grief! Isn't Bill the big galoot who turned his economic policy over to Wall Street's Machiavellian, Robert Rubin? Yes. And didn't Bill break his 1992 campaign promise to raise the minimum wage in his first year, putting it off until his fourth year, and even then providing only a token increase that still left the working poor mired in poverty? Yes, again. And didn't he push into law a "welfare reform" bill that has shredded the safety net for America's poorest, most-vulnerable people? Afraid so.

So let's flash back only two decades ago to that defining achievement of President Bill Clinton's presidency: "[The] end of welfare as we know it." What sounded good in theory was detrimental to millions of Americans. Bill was awfully proud of teaming up with Republican ideologues to reverse FDR's historic commitment of providing "Aid to Families With Dependent Children." While there were some problems and some abuses with this poverty-alleviation program, Clinton signed-on to the right wing's fantasy that simply gutting it would magically make welfare recipients self-sufficient through "the dignity, the power, and the ethic of work."

But his faith in the work ethic lacked any actual ethics. Where were the jobs – much less decent-paying jobs – that were supposed to empower poor people? Bill had no plans for that, except a feeble request that major corporations commit to hiring a number of former-welfare recipients. Surprise – they didn't!

Now, fast-forward 20 years, with millions of poor people – especially single mothers – having no jobs, no cash earnings, and no social safety net to protect them. Clinton's empty promise of jobs for the poor totally disappeared in the smoke of Wall Street's 2008 crash of our economy. Plus, he had handed the remains of our national poverty program over to states that are now run by right-wing politicians who've shriveled the benefits to Dickensian levels.

Thus, the United States of America – the wealthiest country in the history of the world – now has a "poverty program" that largely consists of the poor being homeless, selling their blood plasma for income, and scrounging our alleys and highway medians for aluminum cans.

Moreover, wasn't it Bill who literally rammed NAFTA down our throats, creating that job-sucking sound that continues to devastate today's middle-class? Yep, he's the one. And didn't he also collude with laissez-faire ideologues and plutocratic Republicans to deregulate Wall Street so global speculators could wreck our economy by playing casino games with our bank deposits and home mortgages? Yes, him again.

By the way, since leaving office, Bill has amassed a personal fortune through smarmy, often-secret deals with Wall Street banks and global corporations. Why would Hillary threaten workaday Americans with another poke in the eye from this Big Money con man? Instead, she should use Bill's gift of gab by making him her official "Walmart Greeter" for White House visitors.

Bill fixed our economy the same way a veterinarian fixes your dog. – *Jim Hightower*

Is There Iota Of Courage In GOP Hierarchy?

This year's freakish presidential election has now devolved into an ethnic brouhaha between two foreigners: A Mexican and a German.

The "Mexican" is Gonzalo Curiel. He's a federal judge who was actually born in Indiana, raised and educated as a Hoosier, and is presently presiding over a U.S. district court in San Diego.

The German is Donald Drumpf, soon to be the Republican nominee for America's highest office. Drumpf has had fraud cases against him by former students of his Trump U [U as in "university"]. These students who paid tens of thousands of dollars say they were conned out of their hard-earned money by Trump U.

The judge presiding over this case is Gonzalo Curiel, and Trump the candidate recently became unhinged over the idea that "a foreigner" would be allowed to pass judgment on an upstanding American citizen like himself.

But, wait – Curiel is a full-blooded American citizen! No he's not, cried The Donald, he's "a Mexican," pointing to the jurist's family heritage. But, wait

again – Donnie himself is not pure-blood Americano (only Native Americans can claim that). In fact, The Donald's forbearers have been in our country for only about 120 years. His grandfather, Friedrich Drumpf, immigrated to the U.S. from Kallstadt, Germany, about 120 years ago and Anglicized his name from Drumpf to Trump.

Still, the GOP's nativist and racist 2016 flag bearer insists that even though we Americans are proud to be a nation of immigrants, an American with Mexican genes should be disqualified from overseeing the fraud trials, for he'd inherently be biased against the candidate who has promised to "build a wall" between the U.S. and Mexico.

So, does his screwy, self-serving claim that one's background trumps one's commitment to fairness also mean that a *Muslim-American* judge should also be disqualified from any trial of his wrongdoings, since the GOP presidential wannabe says he intends to ban all Muslim immigrants from entering the U.S.? "Absolutely," he said flatly.

Donald is not just plainspoken, nor is he merely trying to get media coverage. He is deranged, a manic threat to anyone he dislikes, which is everyone not named Trump ... or Drumpf. It's a good thing that the Republican Powers That Be are standing up for the American people and doing all they can to keep this psycho from running our country, right?

The opposite of courage is not cowardice, it's conformity. And, boy, America's Republican leadership is conforming like a pack of lemmings, dutifully march-

ing in lockstep behind their maniacal new leader. Even the nastiest of Trump's unhinged outbursts don't jar them enough to say: "Wait a minute, why are we following this wacko?" His incendiary rants insult, demean and mock women, Mexican immigrants, Muslims, refugees, disabled people, African-Americans, Latinos, and many more – but his destructive bigotry hasn't repelled the GOP hierarchy.

The final straw should have been this recent, blatantly-racist insistence that Judge Gonzalo Curiel should not be allowed to preside over the current fraud cases that Donnie has against him. However, shamefully, top Republicans have tried to protect their own political butts by distancing themselves from the bigoted remarks, but continuing to hug the bigot.

House speaker Paul Ryan was typical of the GOP's pusillanimous posturing, saying: "I regret those comments he made." Regret? How about "I'm repulsed, appalled, nauseated"? Ryan lamely added that Trump's scurrilous assault on the judge was "sort of like ... a racist comment." Then he rushed to say that, of course, he still backed the bigot to be America's president.

Likewise, the GOP's Senate Leader, Mitch McConnell, mumbled that "I couldn't disagree more with what he had to say," before declaring that, nonetheless, "we're all behind him now."

With morally rotten, gutless politicians like these, no wonder our Home of the Brave is sliding into mediocrity. – *Jim Hightower*

Rules Won't Stop Predatory Lenders

BY DAVID DAYEN

A borrower taking out a \$500 loan could still pay over 300% in annual interest, despite new Consumer Financial Protection Bureau [CFPB] rules designed to crack down on predatory small-dollar lending.

The proposed consumer protections for payday loans, auto title loans, and high-cost installment loans focus on making the lenders document borrowers' incomes and expenses to confirm that they have the ability to make their payments and still maintain basic living expenses. Payday lenders currently do minimal financial checks before issuing loans.

That could prevent deceptive practices. But actually enforcing underwriting standards is more difficult than enforcing specific product safety rules.

One more enforceable provision, limiting monthly payments on some loans to no more than 5% of a borrower's paycheck, was considered by the CFPB but rejected.

Small-dollar loans have become massively popular in America, perhaps because an estimated 47% of Americans are in such precarious financial shape that they would have trouble coming up with \$400 in

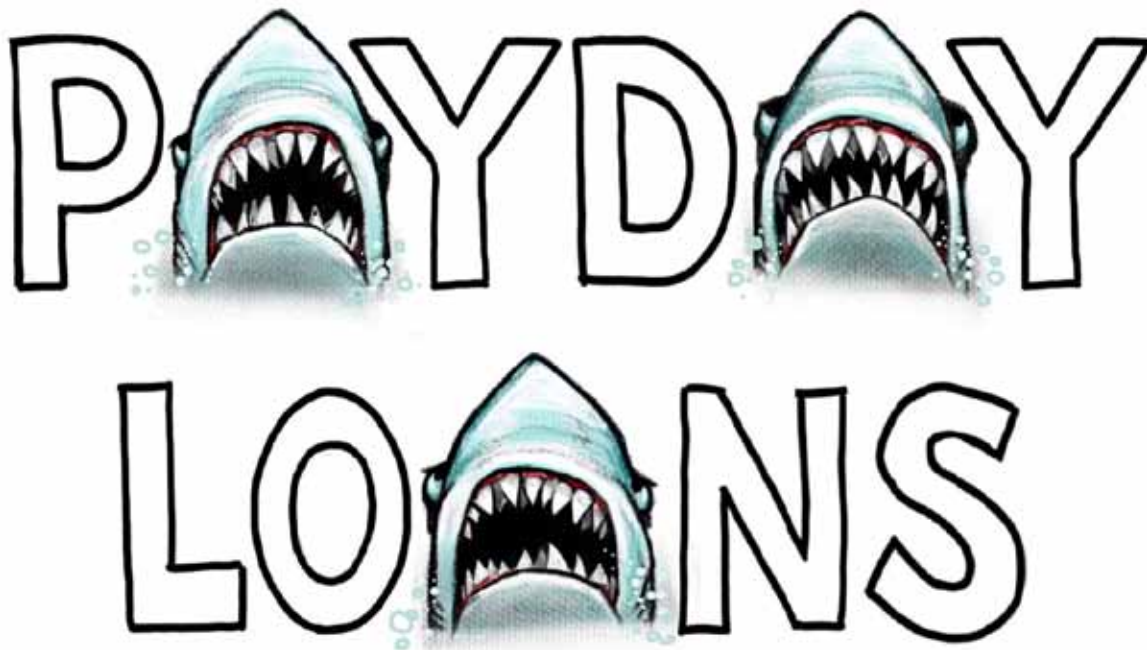
an emergency, according to Federal Reserve data.

Payday lenders take advantage of this desperation to trap consumers in a cycle of debt, with products designed to roll over endlessly, ringing up additional interest and fees. Auto title loans use a borrower's car as collateral, subjecting them to repossession if they default. Over 12 million Americans use payday loans and similar products each year.

"Too many borrowers seeking a short-term cash fix are saddled with loans they cannot afford," CFPB Director Richard Cordray said in a statement. "Our proposal would prevent lenders from succeeding by setting up borrowers to fail."

Under the Dodd-Frank financial reform law, CFPB is prohibited from simply capping interest rates. So officials chose a strong ability-to-repay requirement as an alternative, which some experts believe neglects other issues with high-cost payday loans.

"The problem with payday loans is they're dangerous simply because the lender gets direct access to a borrower's checking account, and that's going to continue," said Nick Bourke, director of the small-dollar loans project at the Pew Charitable Trusts.



Bourke does not believe the underwriting process will turn out to be burdensome. "People will still be able to apply and get payday loans on the same day," Bourke said. "The application process will take 15 to 20 minutes instead of five to 10."

The market would also likely shift to longer-term installment loans, said Bourke, where the borrower pays a set amount of pre-determined payments. This shift has already begun in the industry. While installment loans are safer because of the set terms, they are also incredibly expensive.

Installment loans on the market in 26 states appear to comply with the new proposed rules, even on the underwriting. And yet, if you took out a \$500 loan under those terms, you would pay \$600 just in interest and fees, and potentially as much as \$2,700, according to Bourke. "As long as the lender did the required documentation, that loan would continue."

Almost all these non-bank installment loans have payments that exceed 5% of the average borrower's paycheck. Pew's Bourke wanted to see an alternative that included safety standards like the 5% rule, or a loan duration of no more than six months. Then, alternatives to payday lenders like credit unions might try to compete, with lower-cost products.

The rule does include options with more streamlined underwriting, with lower interest rates and prohibitions on cycles of debt. But Bourke contended competitors won't jump into the market under those

terms. "Payday lenders are willing to do endless paperwork for a \$300 loan. Banks are not."

In an email, CFPB spokesman Samuel Gifford said that the bureau considered a limit on monthly payments and loan duration, but determined they were too low to allow lenders to make enough viable loans. The bureau is soliciting comment on this approach in the proposed rule, so they could still revive this approach later.

CFPB has studied the small-dollar loan market for over three years, and released a framework for consideration last year.

Other protections are included in the proposed rules: Borrowers can receive no more than three successive loans before a mandatory 30-day cooling-off period, theoretically stopping the debt trap.

Some consumer protection experts welcomed the CFPB action. Mike Calhoun of the Center for Responsible Lending told Politico the rule "could dramatically reduce unaffordable, debt-trap loans and encourage the availability of more responsible credit."

But Bourke believes that high-cost installment loans do little more for the borrower, regardless of the underwriting. "This proposal focuses on the process of originating loans rather than making sure those loans are safe and cost less," he said.

The public comment period for the rule will last until Sept. 14.

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Inconvenience As Opportunity

Meet The Crew Trying To Privatize Airport Security

BY MICHAEL ARRIA

The Transportation Security Administration currently employs about 42,000 officers, down by 5,000 since 2013. However, the number of air passengers has risen 15% in that time, from 643 million to 740 million, and that number is projected to crack 800 million in 2016.

It seems clear that there's a natural connection between these statistics and the recent plethora of horror stories regarding massive security checkpoint lines. Many Americans are now beginning to view the TSA as a bloated symbol of government waste and any confidence in it has seemingly eroded. The orga-

nization seems to realize as much; in a recent interview, TSA administrator Peter V. Neffenger referred to it as an "organization in crisis."

Now, with the TSA in economic disarray and pleading for congressional funding, many are calling for the privatization of airport security. But the intellectual framework for allowing private companies to run the organization has already been laid, as certain individuals have been promoting the policy for years.

Noam Chomsky once described what he considered to be the standard technique of privatization: "defund, make sure things don't work, people get angry,

you hand it over to private capital.” Writing about the fight against TSA unionization in 2011, Mark Ames and Yasha Levine cited Scott Walker’s battle against Wisconsin workers as a valuable insight into how airline fights would go down:

1. Manufacture a fake budget crisis in order to frighten the state’s residents;
2. PR the false-crisis hard enough until it breaks out of the right-wing/libertarian pipeline and into the mainstream media;
3. Blame the fake crisis on a fake villain – “greedy” state employee unions – thereby pitting the public against state workers. That way, when Republicans pass new laws destroying teachers and firefighters unions, they’ll come off as heroes defending the public from greedy unions, rather than as sleazy mercenaries carrying out their corporate sponsors’ dirty work.

To many, it seems that’s the blueprint currently at work. On May 26, CNN ran an op-ed California Representative Darrell Issa calling for the privatization of the TSA. Issa wrote that:

“Ultimately, allowing private companies to take over administration of our airports’ security, under the TSA’s guidelines, would unleash the markets’ power of innovation to improve customer service and undo years of bureaucracy that has squandered billions of dollars dedicated to airport security and done much to make traveling more miserable.”

Issa’s op-ed was praised by Chris Edwards, author of a Cato report on TSA privatization. Edwards referred to Issa’s proposals as “excellent” and identified them as “Cato-style aviation reforms.”

Edwards is certainly correct. His report calls for abolition of the TSA and open competitive bidding from private firms for control of the organization. As for the TSA charge that such an arrangement would actually cost more money, Edwards cites a House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure report which found that privatizing the TSA would save money.

The report was released while the chairman of that committee was John Mica, a Republican representative from Florida, who has long been a fierce advocate of transportation privatization. In 2011, Mica fought to privatize Amtrak’s rail service in the Northeast, which he referred to as a Soviet-style train system. The ranking Democrat on the committee at the time, U.S. Rep. Corrine Brown, insisted that Mica’s quest for privatization was predicated on the destruction of the transportation service.

“While Congressman Mica refuses to focus on critical infrastructure issues,” said Brown, “he is bent on destroying Amtrak.”

This year, Mica took aim at Washington, DC’s Metrorail system. When Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority chairman Jack Evans asked for federal funding at a congressional hearing, Mica began shouting at Evans: “I am not going to support bailing out the District of Columbia. Virginia needs to step up to the

plate, Maryland needs to step up to the plate, and DC with that huge surplus needs to step up to the plate!”

Evans explained that DC city government budget was separate from the Metro’s, but it didn’t seem to phase Mica’s disdain for the proposal.

In June 2011, while Congress was considering the Department of Homeland Security’s FY 2012 Appropriations bill, Mica introduced a “Pro-Private Screener Amendment” that cut the TSA budget by \$270 million with the savings going toward the Screening Partnership Program. SPP is a program that allows airports to opt out of using TSA personnel if they’re able to prove that they get the same results from private workers at a cheaper rate.

The FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012 was another victory for pro-privatization forces, as it required the TSA to approve private applications, provided it didn’t raise associated costs. Less than six months after that legislation, Robert Poole, co-founder of the libertarian Reason Foundation, testified about the benefits of TSA privatization in Congress, citing the same Transportation & Infrastructure Committee report Chris Edwards did.

Poole was the author of his own report, in 2006, for the Heritage Foundation. “Four years of experience have taught that the U.S. government cannot do the job any better than the private sector,” it reads. “This should come as no surprise.”

Poole, and Reason, have actually claimed that Poole coined the term “privatization.” This is disputed, but no one doubts the fact that Poole’s thinking has had a major impact on policy, not just in the United States, but throughout the world. A former adviser to Margaret Thatcher explained how Poole’s writings from the 1970s supplied a blueprint for wresting control from the government:

“The intellectual case for ‘contracting out’ came from an American MIT-trained engineer turned policy wonk, Bob Poole, head of the Reason Foundation in Santa Barbara and author of a little book called *Cutting Back City Hall*. In this book he explained how all you needed to run a city was a CEO, a lawyer to review contracts and a secretary. Everything – literally everything – could be outsourced and he littered his book with examples and figures ... [Thatcher adviser Michael Forsyth] translated Poole’s work into an English context and, led by the Westminster City Council, ‘contracting out’ spread like a contagious disease throughout the country.”

Poole’s connection to the U.S. government is well-documented. His own bio identifies him as an adviser to Reagan, H.W. Bush, Clinton, and W. Bush administrations. He’s advised the Federal Highway Administration, the Federal Transit Administration, the White House Office of Policy Development, National Economic Council, and Government Accountability Office. His 1988 policy paper proposing privately financed toll lanes inspired California’s landmark private tollway law, and for his efforts, he was appointed

to the California's Commission on Transportation Investment by Gov. Pete Wilson.

As for the airline industry, Poole has advised the Federal Aviation Administration and is a member of the Government Accountability Office's National Aviation Studies Advisory Panel. He's testified in Congress on the airlines numerous times, and in 1996, Canada implemented a version of the commercialized airline concept he has been pushing for years.

The idea that federal TSA jobs should be handed over to corporations has worked itself into the Republican Party's actual platform.

In March 2015, Rep. Mica presented a bill to the House aviation subcommittee that would create a private corporation to control U.S. air travel. "The time to stop talking is now," Mica declared.

Poole was there, to advocate for the plan and supply further information to the subcommittee. The Washington Post points out that he also provided recommendations: "separate the air traffic control system, shift some user fees from the federal government to the new entity and make airlines and other stakeholders – including airports and passengers – the overseers of the system."

Another lawmaker who spoke in support of the shift was Republican Pennsylvania Rep. Bill Shuster. Shuster became chairman of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure when Mica's reign ended in 2013. Shuster explained how TSA spending had led to little benefit and listened to the testimony of Douglas Parker, chief executive of American Airlines, who testified on behalf of the trade group Air-

lines for America. Parker cited many others that have separated regulatory and air traffic control functions, while privatizing the jobs of their controllers. "Transformation, not renovation, is required," said Parker.

Less than a month later, Shuster admitted to having a romantic relationship with Shelley Rubino, vice president for global government affairs at Airlines for America. Shuster drafted a document, in 2014, stating that Rubino could not lobby him or his staff, but as Politico notes, "This does not prevent Rubino from lobbying the other 50 members of the committee, and their aides."

In February of this year, Shuster proposed a bill called the Aviation Innovation, Reform and Reauthorization Act, which would break up the FAA and potentially put air traffic control jobs under corporations. Shuster fast-tracked the 270-page bill, which actually received support from the air traffic controllers' union, which identified the lack of funding and dated equipment as the reason behind its backing.

At the end of March, Shuster expressed hope for the bill and alluded to a possible bipartisan alliance. "There's certainly Democratic opposition," Shuster said, "but I've talked to a handful of Democratic senators that are very, very interested in what we are trying to do, and I think may be supportive of it."

It seems clear that the TSA is without funds, things aren't working and people are angry. There's only one part of the process left.

Michael Arria is an associate editor at AlterNet and the author of Medium Blue: The Politics of MSNBC.

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Addiction

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

healthy lifestyles yet we don't blame them for their diseases as much as we do alcoholics and drug addicts. We also provide treatment for them covered by health insurance.

We know that taking away pain medication from people with serious pain telling them to take ineffective over the counter pills is barbaric. Many people take opiates and tranquilizers when needed and do not become addicted. The problem is for the ones who do. And we do not know why some substances and behaviors are addictive to some and not others.

The reality is that we have much more than anonymous support groups and imprisonment to offer the addicted. We have therapies that respond to the physiological disease. These include:

1. Prescription medications that reduce "highs" and thus the cravings for drugs.

2. Well established and researched "addiction nutrition" for a number of addictions that provide nutrients to make neurotransmitters in the brain and reduce cravings for carbohydrates.

3. Long researched, externally applied, micro-current cranial electrical stimulation that normalizes ir-

ritable brain waves related to addiction and relapse.

4. Numerous treatments for related depression, anxiety and PTSD.

5. Cognitive therapies to help clients assess the implications of their addictions on themselves and others.

Addiction is a disease related to once necessary behaviors for survival that have now gone awry. Addiction affects all of us in countless ways – physically, emotionally, socially and economically. Many additives are aggressively marketed continuously throughout society. We overtly shame some addictions while defending others making them socially acceptable.

It is time to treat addiction as the physiological disease that it is.

Tulsa resident Ann Dapice, PhD, serves as Director of Research and Education for T.K. Wolf Inc., a 501(c)(3) American Indian organization where she and staff have treated addicted clients and researched addiction, publishing the results in book chapters and academic presentations regionally, nationally and internationally.

Healthcare For My Neighbors?

BY RON duBOIS

Our medical and medical insurance ethos sadly is that sick people are good for business. That health care should be a money-making machine is the mentality of a nation tricked into believing for-profit health care and medical insurance are superior to national health care as practiced in every other industrialized nation.

In contrast the ethos of national healthcare is to keep people healthy in order to save buckets of money. It works. Every nation with national health care delivers health care for all at a fraction of the cost Americans pay.

The incentives of public health care are opposite to those of a for-profit system.

I am a World War II veteran. My response to conservatives who are certain government can't do anything right is that I am grateful for VA health care and for Medicare, both run by "the government" and paid for in the same way we pay for public education and the fire department – i.e., through public taxation.

"In the box" thinking places profit over the health of the nation. It prevents Americans from having full medical insurance from day one. Unlike citizens of every other industrialized nation, Americans must wait until old age to get 80% rather than total coverage as in other nations.

We won't pay 100% as in other industrialized nations because it rubs against our frontier cultural values.

We are the only industrialized nation in the world in which parents are forced to advertise in the local newspaper that an account has been set up at a local bank to accept donations to pay for treatment of a child with life-threatening cancer. No Canadian, French, or English parent would need to "pass the hat" or to ask for charity in order to save the life of a child. In other nations it is never "charity," but "healthcare with dignity."

We are the only nation where private insurance companies can restrict services to a particular state forcing clients to travel thousands of miles for treatment, or dictate where a client can get a blood transfusion, or deny payment for a bone marrow donor search.

"Why should I pay for the health care of my neighbors?" is the outraged cry of conservatives. With national healthcare the answers are: [1] My neighbors pay for mine. [2] It is the ethical thing to do. [3] It costs half or less than half of what we pay now and would cover everyone.

Every other advanced nation pays a fraction of what the U.S. does. Canadians pay \$3,000 per capita to cover everyone while the U.S. pays \$7,000 per capita and

leaves out 47 million plus an equal number of at risk underinsured souls. European nations pay a third of what we do with better outcomes.

A national health care system would make us feel good about ourselves. At last we could say with pride to the world, "We are willing to pay for the healthcare of our neighbors just like everyone else."

Oklahoma's only universal healthcare website is <http://oklahomansforuniversalhealth.org>.

Please check it out.

The myth promoted by the private for-profit medical insurance industry is that there are long waits under Canada's public healthcare system [paid for through public taxation]. The truth is that no one dies for lack of medical insurance as is often the case in the U.S. under the shameful sway of a "pay or die" mentality. Life-threatening medical conditions are treated promptly. Non-life-threatening medical conditions are treated according to the degree of urgency.

The American mentality of "Why should I pay for the healthcare of my neighbor?" doesn't exist in other industrialized nations. One Canadian expressed it this way, "I'm willing to pay for my neighbor's healthcare because I think it makes for a stronger nation."

A Canadian citizen may wait six months for a non-life threatening knee replacement, yet will never see a \$35,000 bill. Impossible for most U.S. ears to hear or understand is that no Canadian ever receives a medical bill ... saving considerable paper clutter and clerical expense.

With regards to a list of disorders such as drug use, alcoholism, withdrawal agonies from highly addictive drugs, anxiety disorders, etc., a U.S. citizen must pay an average \$13,000 for a 30-day rehab program. Inability to pay up front tragically results in no treatment. It doesn't take much chronic pain to want to end it.

The American mentality of "pay or die" is foreign to that of every other industrialized nation.

No Canadian citizen faces suicide as the result of inability to pay for medical care. To illustrate: programs for addictive disorders exist in every province. The Manitoba Addictions Foundation, based in Winnipeg, like all programs in every province, is supported through public taxation. Addicts may wait for treatment to be admitted, but isn't that far better than no treatment at all as is the case in the U.S.? Private for-profit treatment programs exist in Canada but the cost is half those in the U.S. Let the reader be the judge of which nation is the more "civilized" or "Christian"?

An elephant stands on U.S. turf. Cultural blindness

CONTINUED ON PAGE 42

What's The Matter With Today's Democratic Party?

LISTEN, LIBERAL

Or, What Ever Happened To The Party Of The People

By Thomas Frank

Holt, Henry & Co. Inc.

320 pages, \$27

BY JOHN WOOD

Famous for his New York Times Bestseller *What's the Matter With Kansas?*, Thomas Frank is back.

And he shifts from his laser-like focus on the GOP divisions to the Democrats' split between the pragmatic Hillary Clinton and the idealistic Bernie Sanders. Frank's thematic shift seems apropos as the GOP slowly, even begrudgingly rallies around their presumptive GOP nominee "The Donald." A man Florida Sen. Marco Rubio once stridently called a "con-man," and yet now wants to be "helpful" to during the convention.

Democrats themselves are full of paradox and irony. So, Frank points the microscope at his own side. Frank's *Listen Liberal* is a highly readable, albeit dense at times, political tome that helps explain why there was such an eruption between the knighted Clinton and the insurgent Sanders, the man who just wouldn't go away. The divisions may yet deepen as some of his supporters think the Democratic race was largely rigged against him.

Frank said he would most probably vote for the corporate Clinton over Trump. Frank will assuredly be holding his nose, though, like many other Americans. He is rather unimpressed with Clinton's less-than-stellar record following the rightwing shift of the Democrat Party's platform over the last 40 years. And, yes, Democrats are certainly better than Republicans, but not by much in terms of economic policy. I get the sentiment that Frank is not surprised that some Sanders' diehards can't stomach enough to

vote for Clinton because of this dramatic shift to economic conservatism.

The author forcefully contends that the Democratic Party was the party of the people – unions, Social Security, Medicare, and working and middle classes –but then something happened: There was a seismic shift from the 1970s to today.

Frank is an unabashed Sanders' fan and of the FDR flank of the party, which certainly seems Leftist today, but was rather mainstream only 60 years ago.

Yes, Frank says, Democrats seemed to maintain their social status as "liberal," and yet, simultaneously, settled for economic policies that increasingly resembled the policies of stock traders on Wall Street and multinational corporate CEO foreign policy. More specifically, Frank cites school reforms, the destruction of welfare, the near extinction of unions, the bank bailouts, etc. that marked the right-wing shift of the Democratic elite.

What happened? How did it shift from the ideals of FDR to the business-minded "New Democrats" of the first Clinton Era?

Frank contends the Democrat Party has drifted away from its original working class constituency and asks why the Left failed so miserably even with all the support at the beginning of Obama's history-changing election in 2008? We, the people, knew what needed to be done, he challenges. But instead, Obama continued to solely focus on banks and continued George W. Bush's policies, ignoring the upside-down homeowner, her interest rate doubling, losing

her house, and the thousands of Americans whose income insecurity increased dramatically.

America did receive slightly better healthcare and the bailout [that ignored the poor], but other than that, what happened beyond the GOP obstructionism against Obama? Frank laments that the president did what he did because of what he wanted, not what we thought he wanted in 2008. The Democrats are no longer the party of the workers or the middle class; instead, the elite, the professionals, the experts, the creatives have become the most prized. These professionals used to be mostly Republican in the 1950s, but now are mostly Democratic. These professionals, unlike the working class, kept their houses and many work on Wall Street.

Meritocracy is the first commandment of this New Democratic Class – those on top belong there, they are the best. They do everything right and have the grades to boot, even the stellar resume like many prominent Democrats, including Bill Clinton. Clinton embodies this “pull your boots by your bootstrap” mentality that Frank opposes – the narrative of a man who emerges from the obscurity of Hope, AR and emerges a Rhoads Scholar and later becomes president. Obama followed a similar route.

Here, Frank points out, is what the Democratic establishment most prizes today: the hierarchy of the credentials, a member of the pedigreed class. They often are found in those with silver spoons hanging from their mouths. But when we celebrate those who made it, Frank says, we tend to denigrate the working class that is still working hard, but just barely getting by.

There was an era – the FDR years – when expertise worked for us. Not anymore. For example, FDR’s vice president was Harry Truman, who never went to college. Mariner Echols, who chaired the Federal Reserve, was just a small town Utah banker. Jessie Jones, merely a populist from Texas, was secre-

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tary of commerce. None were orthodox choices. Nor was the iconic John Kenneth Galbraith, head of the Office of Price Administration. Indeed, FDR’s administration hailed from all walks of life. They understood the working class.

They got it.

Today’s cabinet, Frank notes, is full of corporate shills. Take Timothy Geithner, former treasury secretary who left his job for greener pastures at Warbur Pincus, a private equity firm. Or Ken Salazar,

former interior secretary who now works for Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr, a law firm that recently represented Swiss banks accused of profiting from Holocaust victims. Salazar's firm also defended Siemens and other German companies accused of exploiting Nazi-era forced laborers.

Frank's book changed how I looked at Bill Clinton's legacy, one I had taken for granted, neatly wrapped in

Benghazi

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

nothing not already reported. That did not preclude two Republican reps, Jim Jordan of Ohio and Mike Pompeo of Kansas, from writing a 48-page addendum taking extra swipes at the Obama Administration.

The report failed to counter the most salient fact in Clinton's defense. The U.S. military in Europe could not have reached Benghazi in time to save the Americans.

Was there adequate security at the American compound in Benghazi? Obviously not. That was the conclusion of an independent report led by retired diplomat Thomas Pickering and Adm. Michael Mulen. Though highly critical of the State Department's security arrangements, they laid blame on lower-level officials rather than on Clinton. That wasn't what the partisans wanted. Not at all.

They were peddling the ludicrous notion that the secretary of state personally manages the security of every U.S. embassy and consulate in the world. That's like saying the CEO of Wal-Mart was to blame for two deaths when a tornado hit a store in Joplin, MO. [Wal-Mart was sued over that, by the way.]

American diplomats operate in the more unstable corners of the earth. That's their job. The brave men and women who take on these dangerous assign-

one of the most charismatic politicians in my lifetime. Maybe, like Frank, it's why I hoped Sanders would be on this year's general election ballot. Instead, I have to choose between the lesser of two evils.

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

ments accept the risks. They are a lot like soldiers, except they generally don't get to sleep in defended military bases.

Such harsh realities were swept aside, for there were politics to be played. House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy spilled the beans in a regrettable interview last September. "Everybody thought Hillary Clinton was unbeatable, right?" the California Republican said. "But we put together a Benghazi special committee, a select committee. What are her numbers today?"

Hillary Clinton is not a Teflon politician. Things stick to her. But what Clinton lacks in Teflon, she has in cast iron.

Last October, her Benghazi tormentors subjected her to eight hours of televised hearings. This followed seven previous investigations. Point is, Clinton never cracked. The latest report may have taken a bite out of the U.S. paper supply, but one doubts it will put another dent in Clinton.

Will House Republicans ever stop flogging their conspiracy theories about Clinton and Benghazi? They most definitely will, and we know the date. It will be Nov. 9, the day after the election.

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Healthcare

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 39

prevents the majority of Americans from seeing it.

Rarely is satisfaction with the Canadian healthcare

system discussed. Instead Canadian universal healthcare covering everyone from birth to death is viewed

as flawed, "un-American," and "socialist" ... nothing that Americans would ever want. Cultural blindness again prevents Americans from processing the truth that 96% of Canadians [or citizens of other nations] wouldn't have it any other way.

Is there any doubt that Americans are proud to be "uncivilized" in comparison to other industrialized nations?

Ron duBois is professor emeritus at Oklahoma State University.

Oklahoma Friends Meetings (Quakers)

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

- Author unknown

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Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

tional spotlight. Both coaches earn what could be described as the going market rate.

OSU regents awarded Gundy a two-year extension that ultimately bumps his annual salary from \$3.56 million to \$4.15 million. OU regents extended Stoops' contract, too, stair-stepping his from \$5.55 million to \$6.5 million and nearly doubling offensive coordinator Lincoln Riley's salary [to \$900,000].

In fairness, coaches' financial packages are only partially funded with tax dollars. But it's also fair to point out that retaining the state's best teachers will have a far greater impact on Oklahoma's future economic health than football championships.

Sadly, the elevation of athletics over academics is a time-honored Sooner tradition. It was revered University of Oklahoma President George Lynn Cross who famously hoped to build a university of which the football team could be proud.

Oklahomans ignore the serious message behind Cross's punch line at their peril.

Tone Deaf

What were they thinking?

The forehead-slapping question was spot-on twice recently when government leaders proved themselves alarmingly tone deaf in matters of public opinion.

First, amid troubled economic times, Oklahoma's Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust decided to add a chief executive officer at a salary of \$250,000 yearly, \$100,000-plus more than the governor is paid.

Then, in the wake of significant budget cuts and layoffs, Tulsa Public Schools awarded \$243,000 in raises to 30 administrators, including 11 receiving hikes of \$10,000 or more.

How could TSET and TPS officials fail to anticipate the fury that such generosity with public dollars would ignite, especially since both decisions came less than a month after a contentious legislative session riven by a \$1.3 billion budget crisis?

TSET's action, especially, did not pass the smell test. The trust appeared to operate just fine for 15 years with an executive director in charge. Then in June, the board suddenly decides it needs a higher-paid CEO, as well? And it just so happens that at least four political insiders – including House Speaker Jeff Hickman – are the leading candidates?

The trust ended up offering the job to Patrice Douglas, the former Corporation Commissioner and Edmond Mayor, a Republican whose electoral future needs a jump-start. But Douglas ended up withdrawing after intense public outrage, including criticism from Gov. Mary Fallin.

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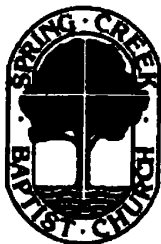
The salary boosts for Tulsa Public Schools administrators also are outrageous, given that budget cuts this year likely will result in 100 fewer teachers district-wide.

It may be that TSET's leader and TPS' administrators are underpaid. But it's inappropriate and unfair to reward those at the top of government's organizational charts when rank-and-file workers' wages are stagnant, jobs are being cut, and services trimmed.

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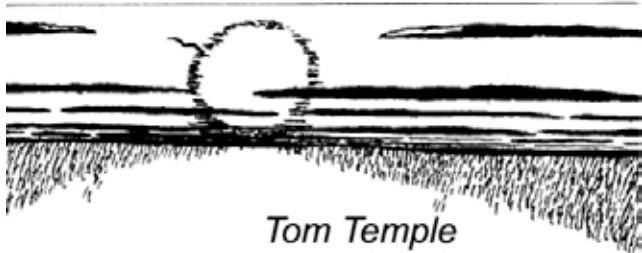
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**HAPPY BIRTHDAY,
USA!**

Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Former Senate President Pro Tem Mike Morgan is headed to federal prison, after all – sentenced to 18 months for a bribery conviction. An appeals court threw out Morgan's original punishment: probation.

Watchdog, muzzled: The cash-strapped Oklahoma Ethics Commission can't afford to enforce financial reporting rules for candidates seeking county offices. This, courtesy of a Legislature that claims transparency is a top priority.

New Rule: Republicans may no longer claim they're the party of local control. Texas recently joined Oklahoma in blocking municipalities from banning hydraulic fracturing.

Best news of summer? Two "smart on crime" initiatives – SQs 780 and 781 – collected more than enough signatures to appear on the November ballot. Yet again it's up to voters to fix what Legislature won't.

Slightly more than one in five students, ages 12-18, reported being bullied in 2013, the lowest percentage since 2005. The most likely targets are female and white. – National Center for Education Statistics

Yikes! Insurance premiums for some Oklahoma homeowners have skyrocketed 260% in the wake earthquakes linked to oil and gas drilling.

McAlester Rep. Donnie Condit survived a celebrity challenge in last month's Democratic primary – from *Amazing Race* icon Cord McCoy. Cord's brother/race partner, Jet, earned a spot in the SD 13 GOP runoff.

Hawaii is the first state to put firearms applicants and gun owners into the FBI's Rap Back database. The law allows police to be alerted when a Hawaii firearm owner is arrested anywhere in the U.S.

The equivalent of three Yellowstone National Parks – 7.5 million acres – were stripped of vegetation in the U.S. between 2000-12 as a result of oil and gas development. – High Country News

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Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

ery year – 68% of murders – are not caused by gun ownership. And the 49 murders with a military assault rifle in Orlando had nothing to do with sales of military assault rifles.

When the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta published their finding that, in a home where a handgun is owned, a family member is 43 times more likely to be shot than an intruder, Congress took action. They voted to prohibit the CDC from studying gun death statistics.

The World Bank Small Arms Survey showed that if the populations of all developed countries were expanded to equal the U.S. population, gun murder rates for all countries could be compared. Greece and Canada had the highest rate, with five gun murders per day, compared to 27 gun murders per day in the U.S.

I worked in Vietnam as a surgical technician, 12 hours a day, for a year, primarily on gunshot wounds. These had nothing to do with guns, either.

Nathaniel Batchelder
Oklahoma City

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

Editor, The Observer:

On Nov. 8 when Oklahoma voters go to the polls to elect the next president, they will also have the opportunity to vote on State Question 777 known as the Right to Farm. This innocuous-sounding piece of legislation could have profound negative effects on the entire state for decades to come.

As written SQ 777 sounds like if it passes anyone will be able to grow ochre, tomatoes or turnip greens or whatever, on their property. Maybe even have a horse or a few chickens in their backyard in Tulsa.

Regrettably, nothing could be further from the truth.

Most Tulsans' can easily remember one day a few years ago when they turned on their water faucet and what came out smelled awful and tasted much worse. The city's once excellent drinking water had become polluted by large corporate poultry farms. Waste from these farms released large amounts of phosphorus into the Lake Eucha and Lake Spavinaw headwaters. This is where the City of Tulsa gets its water.

A large confined animal feeding operation [CAFO] moved to Guymon, OK. While the CAFO promised

good jobs to the community only low wage, non-skilled, labor jobs that no one wanted were created. Once this CAFO started functioning, Guymon experienced a rapid shift of migrant workers who often didn't stay long and generated a host of social problems Guymon never had to deal with before. Worse was the horrible stench made by this hog CAFO which was very easy to smell for miles around.

As written, SQ 777 would basically:



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1. Remove the EPA from regulating these operations at all. Leaving the underfunded, almost nonexistent, Oklahoma Environmental agencies to ensure compliance with any regulatory issue.

2. If this State Question is approved it will be almost completely impossible to change or remove as it will become a permanent part of the Constitution of the State of Oklahoma. More frightening, to correct any issues with new large-scale farming operations in the state, it will take the state of Oklahoma to show a compelling interest litigation, to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, which usually sides with business interests.

3. Could easily allow the return of now illegal cock-fighting and puppy mills around the state. Might even force the state of Oklahoma to have to define what farming is. Dog fighting perhaps?

4. Set the stage for many other large farming operations to move into the state because there would be almost no checks and balances for what their operations do either to the environment or to the local Oklahoma communities they settled in.

This national election will be one of the most tumultuous ever. Many people from both political parties are still not certain whom they will support. Meanwhile, this vague piece of legislation could easily pass causing irreparable harm for a long, long time.

Merritt Ford
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Having now seen the VAXXED documentary movie I would like to clear up several misconceptions that individuals seem to have about it.

First of all, it is not an anti- or pro-vaccination movie. It is about vaccine safety. The Centers for Disease Control's [CDC] own internal study did find that there is definitely a direct causative relationship between the MMR vaccine and the onset of autism. The CDC, instead of going public, much to the delight of the pharmaceutical companies, did suppress and cover up this most telling study. I want to repeat, it was the CDC's own study that they themselves suppressed.

Fortunately for all the children on the planet one of their own very high ranking doctors put himself in an extremely vulnerable position and found a way to legally leak this study, and the director and producer of this VAXXED documentary have now publicly exposed this cover-up.

This movie does explain how this vaccine combination could be modified and administered in such a way to allow for safety. If you have a family member with an autistic child this movie will explain to you how it happened. If you don't have any family members with autism this movie will tell you how to not create autism.

I encourage you to go see this movie in its entirety and not just have me give you the punch line here. For the sake of all children I pray that you will set aside any preconceived opinions about VAXXED as

many of us had to do and go see this most important movie.

Jim Maxey, DDS
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

What ever happened to party loyalty and "you dance with them that brung ya?"

These political commandments were buried by former Tulsa Democratic Mayors Terry, Susan Savage and Kathy Taylor.

The three traitors endorsed Republican mayoral candidate G.T. Bynum in the non-partisan primary election. The other living Democratic mayor, Rodger Randle, remained true to his roots.

Bynum believes nothing that we, Bernie Sanders' Democrats, believe in – increasing the minimum wage and Social Security, plus free college.

These double-crossers are evidence as to why our Oklahoma Democratic Party has one foot in the grave and the other foot on a banana peel.

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner
Wagoner

Editor, The Observer:

A few years ago while shopping in Barnes and Noble bookstore with a friend, he called to me, "Homer, you must have written the forward in this book."

The title of the book was In 50 Years We'll All Be Chicks. The forward spoke to the woosification of American men. Look no further than the daily news. And nationally, at what for some, not me, passes for leadership.

The elite or establishment of either the Democrats or the Republicans, whatever they are, are as a whole a pathetic lot. On top of all that, take a good look at and listen to the pasty-faced Casper milquetoasts on national television news channels.

Homer H. Hulme
Chickasha



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