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Connecting The Dots

As Schools Suffer And Hospitals Close, Sooners Warm To Higher Taxes To Fund Vital State Services

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

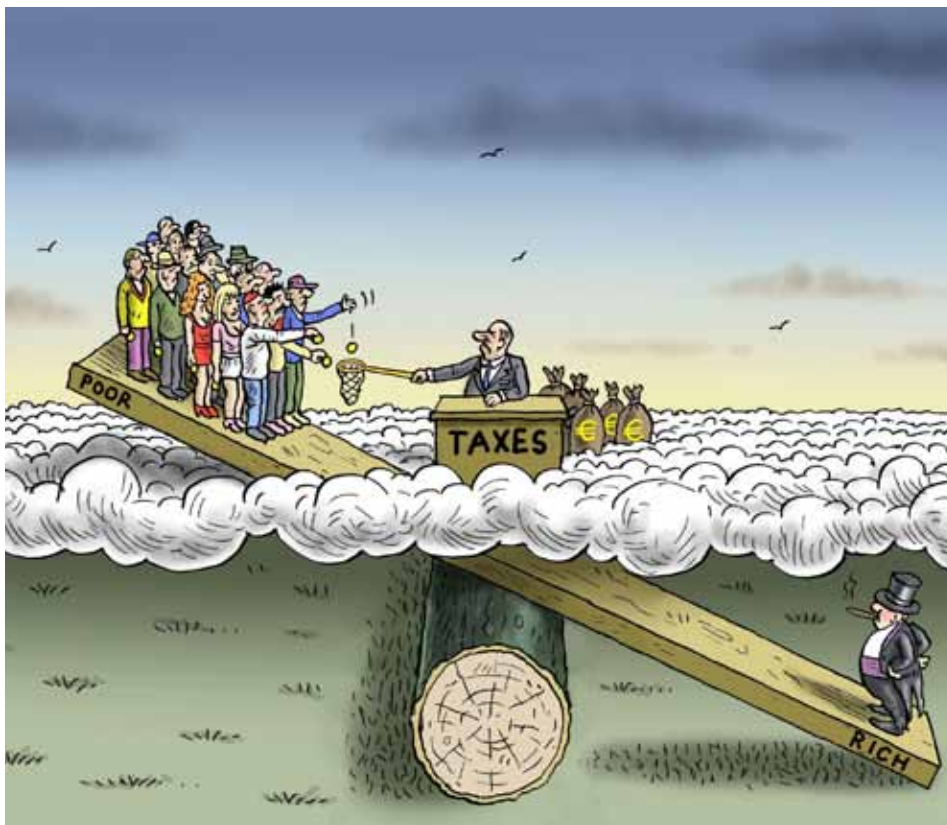
Last month, state Finance Director Preston Doerflinger gave a small, private lunch gathering a sneak-peak at Gov. Mary Fallin's latest fiscal plan – aka Executive Budget 2.0.

It was a glimpse into a rare, late-session gubernatorial gambit aimed at refocusing legislators and the public on her strategy for surviving the state's gut-wrenching \$1.3 billion budget crisis.

There was renewed talk of expanding sales taxes to such items as haircuts, car repairs, landscaping, veterinary services and residential utilities. There was another push to eliminate the income tax "double deduction" and make the state Earned Income Tax Credit non-refundable. And there was a new idea: borrowing \$503 million to improve roads and bridges.

But Doerflinger did not – *could not?* – utter the words "income

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OUR MOTTO

To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

OUR CREDO

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

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

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Observations

Stacking The Deck

Some Oklahoma lawmakers never learn the lessons of history.

It was only a half-century ago the state suffered a Supreme Court bribery scandal – one justice was impeached, another resigned, and a third served a federal prison sentence for income tax evasion.

The ignominy led to reforms that have served the state well ever since, including creation of an independent, Judicial Nominating Commission comprised of legal experts and lay people.

The panel recommends three candidates to fill vacancies on the state's appellate courts. The governor then appoints one of the three. The voters decide periodically whether the jurists are retained or removed.

Ever since Republicans took control of the Legislature in 2010, an unholy alliance of corporatists and religious fundamentalists has worked to return the state to the Bad Old Days when money overtly influenced court decisions.

Think of tort reform. Think of the outcry over judicial rulings on the Ten Commandments monument, school vouchers and abortion rights.

This year's HB 3162, authored by House Speaker Jeff Hickman and Senate President Pro Tem Brian Bingman, is the latest attempt to tilt the scales of justice in favor of the Powers That Be. It would give a panel of partisan-elected lawmakers the power to accept or reject the governor's choice.

Holy separation of powers! Why would any clear-thinking Oklahoman want the Legislature meddling in – politicizing – decisions about who serves as the state's impartial referees?

Versions of HB 3162 cleared both houses, but the measure was mired in conference committee at press time. The Legislature may well approve it, but it would require a vote of the people to enact.

The Oklahoma Bar Association already has sounded the alarm, arguing it would benefit those with "power, money and influence." Rank-and-file citizens need to take note, too.

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THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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That stench wafting across the state is from the Corporation Commission's about-face on OG&E's \$500 million coal scrubber project. The Observer filed an Open Records request to get to the bottom of it. Stay tuned.

Laurel: To Gov. Mary Fallin, vetoing HB 3016 that could have dissuaded parents from immunizing children. The vaccinations are safe – and they work, helping contain mumps, measles, etc.

Oklahoma Department of Commerce's State of Success magazine is produced and published in ... Georgia. Really? No one in Oklahoma is capable?

Dart: To Rep. Todd Russ, R-Cordell, stereotyping African-Americans and Native Americans during an anti-alcohol rant on the House floor. He later apologized, but it's par-for-the-course for the religious zealot.

We mourning the passing of longtime Capitol reporter Paul English, a tough, but fair journalist who didn't cotton to political spin. His fearless work exposing ex-Gov. Frank Keating's payola will not be forgotten.

Laurel: To CAIR Executive Director Adam Soltani, honored with ACLU of Oklahoma's Angie Debo Civil Libertarian of Year Award. Well deserved!

Grand Theft Auto? Democrat Forrest Bennett's white Toyota Avalon was stolen as he door-knocked in south OKC's HD 92. Bennett hopes to succeed term-limited Rep. Richard Morrisette, who's seeking Corporation Commission seat.

Dart: To Legislature's NRA water-carriers, chipping away at sensible gun restrictions. Imagine allowing anyone to open-carry a firearm, without any training or a permit. Sheer madness.

Legislators eat well every day, thanks to special interest-financed buffet lines. Repelled by the too-cozy relationship, Rep. James Lockhart, D-Heavener, offers colleagues baloney sandwiches in his fifth floor office.

Laurel: To our good friends Ted Metscher and Bob Bearden, honored with Central Oklahoma Labor Federation's Legends of Labor Award. Bravo!

The Legislature's GOP majority has chosen its 2017 leadership: House Speaker-designate is Atoka banker Charles McCall, Senate President Pro Tem is Altus farmer Mike Schultz.

State journalism lost a champion with recent death of Ben Blackstock, longtime Oklahoma Press Association leader. He was staunch Observer supporter and advisor.

Letters



Editor, The Observer:

I have been following some of these so-called education blogs – you know, parents and teachers supporting education, trying to find candidates to run.

What they really don't understand is that Republicans, no matter what they say, will not support more funding for education. They all talk about finding waste and other B.S. like consolidation.

It would be completely ignorant to replace a Republican legislator with another Republican.

Dave Herbert
Midwest City

Editor's Note: Dave Herbert served District 42 in the state Senate from 1986-2002 and as mayor of Midwest City from 1982-86.

Editor, The Observer:

Recently, an article in The Oklahoman stated that David Boren's

campaign to increase our sales tax by one penny has collected twice the required 123,000 signatures to be put on the November ballot. The purpose, of course, is to raise \$615 million per year, with the majority of the money going to all state public education – K-12 and higher education.

Public education's need for this money is obvious; however, I have a very unsettling problem with his method. Boren thinks and acts more like an extreme right-wing Republican than he does as a Democrat, and this is a good example.

While for the last 20 years, the wealth of the poor and the lower fraction of the middle class has been transferred to the upper one-tenth of one percent, he comes up with a plan to make it worse in Oklahoma. Everyone knows a sales tax is a regressive tax; i.e., the poor pay a higher percent of

their income than the rich. In fact, many of the wealthy class pay sales tax mostly just on groceries – nearly everything else they buy is from Amazon or another Internet sales company – and they do not pay the state sales tax as supposedly required.

The best form of progressive taxation is, of course, the income tax. However, rightwingers defeat this in two ways: [1] by having a flat tax [every one pays the same percentage] and [2] by lowering the tax to absurdly insignificant levels [as has happened to Oklahoma's state income tax.] People seem to forget that during the Eisenhower Administration {the only "good" Republican administration during my life-time} income taxes were as high as 90% on the top dollars of the very rich!

I have figured out some changes

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It's Time For Lawmakers To Look In Mirror

It is hardly melodramatic to suggest the Legislature's fiscal malpractice could end up killing Oklahomans.

Misplaced taxing and spending priorities at NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd. precipitated the recent closure of hospitals in Sayre and Frederick. As many as 40 others – many in already medically underserved rural areas – teeter on the financial brink.

A cash-strapped state Health Department recent announced it had eliminated the state's Uncompensated Care Fund that helps offset losses sustained by community health centers serving the uninsured working poor.

And the Oklahoma Health Care Authority has taken steps to impose a 25% cut in reimbursement rates for treatment of those enrolled in SoonerCare, the state's Medicaid equivalent.

What are the working poor to do? Especially in rural Oklahoma. If you live in Frederick, for example, it's now at least a 40-minute trip to the nearest emergency room in Lawton.

Forty minutes often can be the difference between life and death.

The Oklahoma Health Care Authority's CEO, Nico Gomez, is pushing a \$1.50 per pack hike in cigarette taxes in a last-ditch effort to generate enough money to avoid the reimbursement cut and get more working poor insured.

Even though the health of 800,000 low-income Oklahomans is at stake, some lawmakers won't even entertain the idea of a tax increase – even a hike in what is commonly referred to as a “sin” tax on cigarettes.

It only takes a few legislators with heels dug in to squelch this common sense idea. After all, thanks to SQ 640, it now requires three-quarters of the members of both houses to increase taxes. Not likely.

The best hope might be punting the issue to voters – a referendum on the November general election ballot. Even then, the outcome would be far from certain

given a knee-jerk antipathy to taxes evident in Oklahoma in recent years.

The cigarette tax proposal currently commands the most attention in the public debate, but there is another way legislators could help protect the health of Oklahoma's working poor.

They could take steps necessary to replenish the Uncompensated Care Fund.

In the context of a \$7 billion annual state budget, the \$3 million or so necessary to help keep community health centers open is pocket change. What's more, the clinics have a long track record of improving health outcomes for the working poor.

Two years ago, for example, the community health centers – such as Oklahoma City-based VarietyCare, Tulsa-based Morton Comprehensive Health Systems and Stigler-based Health & Wellness Center – provided care to more than 176,000 uninsured Oklahomans, a third of them children.

The uncompensated care fund distributed \$3.84 million in 2009 to help community clinics absorb the costs of treating the uninsured. In 2015, thanks to state budget cuts, the fund had dwindled to \$2.55 million.

Only about \$700,000 was left this spring when two revenue emergencies in four months led to imposition of deep mid-year cuts to state agencies. One way for the state Health Department to balance its books was to eliminate the uncompensated care fund.

How could the Legislature come up with the money to keep this important health care resource afloat? Start by looking in the mirror.

Last year, amid cuts to most state agencies and services, the Legislature spared itself. The FY'16 budgets – Senate \$12.4 million, House \$16.6 million – were exactly the same as the previous year.

It is true both houses are spending less on operations than seven years ago. But it's a safe bet most Oklahomans would view health care for the working poor a higher priority than legislative operations.



A Lousy Legacy

*Under Fallin, 46th State Is 46th – Or Worse –
In Just About Every Quality Of Life Index*

BY CAL HOBSON

As some readers of The Observer know, I have rarely penned a positive paragraph about Republican Gov. Mary Fallin's policies or politics. With the foolish fiscal follies still playing to dismal reviews at the Capitol, don't expect any today.

For me, her partisan party persuasions are easily ignored. But the unforgiving policies toward our poorest, youngest, oldest and sickest ... not so much.

Fallin's failings for these citizens, most notably her heartless decisions rejecting billions of our own tax dollars to diagnose, alleviate and hopefully cure health maladies plaguing Oklahoma citizens, have – and continue to be – real killers ... economically, socially, morally and, of course, medically.

I know, I know. She seems sincere and concerned. Comforting comments flow from her like the mighty Mississippi during spring rains. But now, after six

years, the words increasingly ring hollow, even phony.

Why? Because the 46th state is about 46th or lower in almost every important quality of life category, such as educational achievement, public safety, health and mental health care, etc.

However, in my list above, I purposely did not include inadequate spending on infrastructure because indeed she and other Republican road warriors have made progress in the repair and construction of highways and bridges. Also, they pointedly denounce Democrats for not doing similarly when we were in charge.

Recent editorials authored by House Speaker Jeff Hickman and former Gov. Frank Keating laud these investments in asphalt, concrete and steel ... all done without a hated gasoline tax increase.

That sounds almost magical, so what's not to like? Here's what: To enhance funding for our still arthritic arterial system, the Legislature, motivated and financially rewarded by the powerful highway lobby, diverted to it over \$1 billion normally allocated for your schools, colleges, hospitals, nursing homes, child care services, and other core responsibilities.

For our small-government gurus, guided by goofy Grover Norquist, who surely doesn't know whether Oklahoma has more prisons [67] than colleges [27], the definition of infrastructure apparently also includes spending \$250 million to repair the state Capitol and beautify the surrounding grounds.

Important, yes. Critical, no.

Admittedly, the acrid smell of basement sewer gas does not often waft upstairs into the nostrils of our pontificating pols, but it is only seeking the empty vacuums located directly above their eyeballs.

Irritating, yes. Deadly, no.

Adding to the current and future fiscal meltdowns is math-challenged Mary's ill-conceived, unnecessarily and terribly-timed \$188 million personal income tax cut. Incredibly, it was allowed to take effect in January, even though the Senate Finance Committee voted 10-2 in support of Chairman Mike Mazzei's common-sense bill to delay implementation.

However, Senate President Pro Tem Brian Bingman, R-Sapulpa, mimicking U.S. Sen. Mitch McConnell's childish behavior concerning a certain vacancy on the U.S. Supreme Court, refused to allow the proposal to even be heard by his colleagues.

After exhausting his troops by not letting important work proceed, Boss Brian rewarded them by temporarily reducing their legislative week from four days to three.

At least while they were off fishing, golfing or playing farmer, the rest of us could focus on something more important – like remembering to pick up our kids due to canceled school days.

Apparently this increase in lawmaker lethargy gave the governor cause to contemplate her legacy which, like Oklahoma's future, isn't exactly bright. Therefore, in mid-April, she rolled out – again – another

series of suggestions, including a \$450 million bond issue, designed to chip away at the \$1.3 billion financial chasm threatening to remind many of our Dust Bowl days.

If you don't believe the outlook is as bleak as our Little Sahara dunes in the summer, just ask your doctor who increasingly refuses to take Medicare or Medicaid patients, teachers who must enforce more meaningless mandates from above on additional students below, any correctional officer who hopes his double-shift won't include injury or worse for him or his co-workers, the mentally ill neighbor hiding behind curtains down the street or in plain sight under a bridge [the span just south of Norman on I-35 is currently home to at least five men and two women], the child care worker who prays not to encounter a damaged or dead baby on her increasingly dangerous and discouraging rounds.

But – hey! – maybe the roads are better for some of us.

In a nutshell, ask almost anyone in Oklahoma except the legislative deniers of reality huddled together within their Capitol caucus cocoons. In those webs of worry the occupants are only fretting about two things: [1] the 30-plus pro-education opponents who filed to run against them, and [2] how to worm more campaign money from the ever-present lobbyists trolling the halls and camped out in the rotunda.

Of course, our lawmakers have added concerns this election cycle. Usually about one-third of incumbent senators are returned to their opulent offices unopposed. This year, all have opponents. And a similar scenario is playing out in the House.

Most surprisingly, many face party primaries next month, so ... how has it come to this for our rudderless rubes in the reddest of Red States?

Since admittedly I do not understand what makes Republicans do what they do, let me turn to their greatest leader – and perhaps America's finest president ever – for a possible answer.

Abraham Lincoln said: "You can fool all the people some of the time and you can fool some of the people all the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time." No fooling?

Or for further insight, let me paraphrase the Conservative Party leader of wartime Great Britain, Winston Churchill, who opined something like, "Never have so few misled so many for so long."

Therefore, elected elephants, don't blame me if you are in the market for a less challenging job after November. Like your role models at Fox News, I just report, the voters decide, and unless you can fool most of them again ... better get a new resume ready.

As you draft it, I suggest leaving out the part about your "public service" in the Legislature.

Public, yes. Service, no.

Everyone knows that ... except you.

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

It's Not An Oil And Gas Crisis

BY DAVID WALTERS

Our elected officials have made it official! Oklahoma is looking at a \$1.3 billion shortfall in public funding. Republican officials blame the shortfall on the cyclical nature of the oil industry, but a review of the numbers says that simply is not true. Responsibility for this disaster rests solidly at the feet of conservative lawmakers. Their constant attacks on state funding mechanisms and state services have led us to this point.

Two revenue failures this year have resulted in a 7% cut from the current budget. State government has certified a \$1.3 billion shortfall for the next budget year and will require another 18% cut. The Oklahoma Policy Institute forecasts another billion-dollar shortfall the following year that will require another 20% cut. That adds up to a total reduction of 45% from the state budget over three years.

The budget shortfall has four components: \$500 million in one-time funds, \$325 million less in individual income tax collections, \$229 million reduction in sales tax collections, and a \$224 million reduction in gross production taxes. Oil revenue can only account for about 30% of the \$1.3 billion shortfall. Responsible budget action could have prevented even that.

One-time funds totaling \$500 million are, true to their name, no longer available. This accounts for 40% of the shortage. The Legislature could have budgeted for these expenses when oil prices were high but did not. This portion of the budget shortfall has nothing to do with oil price declines and everything to do with bad budgeting.

\$325 million of the deficit comes from a decline in individual income tax collections. \$147 million of this loss is due to the implementation this year of yet another tax cut.

Of the other \$177 million no more than 40% of this decline can be attributed to a fractional decline in the 5% of Oklahoma jobs that are oil and gas based.

The greater negative impact on income tax collections is the relentless attacks waged by state officials against jobs in healthcare, education, and government services, which contributes twice that of oil and gas to the Oklahoma economy.

The same logic leads one to conclude that only 40% of the sales tax decline can be attributed to an oil bust.

The only pure oil- and gas-related shortfall in the budget involves the \$224 million decline in gross production taxes. To be fair, however, in 2010, the Legislature cut the gross production tax rate from 7% to

2%. They did this during the \$100 per barrel oil period when they could have used the revenue to shore up funds in preparation for the next cyclical downturn.

Bottom Line: 70% of the \$1.3 billion shortfall has nothing to do with oil and gas price declines.

Tea Party Republicans own this deficit. They cannot blame the current cuts in healthcare and education services on oil prices. That clucking sound stems from the many efforts of our rabidly conservative leaders to reduce the state's revenue base coming home to roost.

This is such a catastrophe ... closing of schools, hospitals and throwing 100,000 individuals off of Medicaid insurance.

Pray that Oklahomans realize elections have consequences.

David Walters was the 24th governor of Oklahoma and is president of OKC-based Walters Power International. This essay was edited by Larry Stone, a high tech entrepreneur and self-styled recovering former Republican.

An Open Letter To Lawmakers

BY LOYD BENSON

In the 14 years since I left the Oklahoma Legislature, I have not written a letter to the legislative delegation from southwest Oklahoma concerning issues that I think are important. However, I'm extremely concerned about where the Legislature is taking us these last six weeks of the session. I have listed my five major concerns:

1. I just learned that DHS is proposing to close every county DHS office that has less than 20 employees. In their place, they want a computerized kiosk. First of all, the people of rural Oklahoma deserve the same treatment as the people of the urban areas. They need to have the same access to the services provided by DHS. The elderly, the disabled, sick, and the children in rural Oklahoma deserve to have the same advantages that people have in the urban areas. To ask people who are old, disabled, or lack resources, to drive 40 or 50 miles to receive services is one of the most unjust things that I can think of.

2. You are aware that the Frederick Hospital has closed its inpatient service and its emergency room services. Now people will have to travel 40 to 50 miles to receive emergency services. Many people will not survive that. One of the reasons our hospital is closing is because the Legislature has refused to accept the federal Medicaid reimbursement program that would augment and help every rural hospital in Oklahoma. I'm urging the Legislature to take the responsibility of working not to allow a 25% reduction in

Medicaid and to not allow further reductions in reimbursement to Medicaid providers. If a reduction in Medicaid occurs, we not only will have lost our hospital; we'll lose our nursing home. Then where are all those people going to be?

3. I find it incomprehensible that the Legislature has not taken on the governor to delay the tax cut of some \$200 million that would be an immediate source of revenue for the new budget, and just delay the tax cut until the general revenue fund reached the level that was intended for it to reach when the tax cut was canceled. You don't have to rescind the tax cut, you can just delay.

4. In 1965 when I was admitted to the Oklahoma Bar as a young lawyer, the Supreme Court was under indictment for bribery and fraud and income tax evasion. It was the blackest cloud in the history of the legal system in Oklahoma. We did not receive our license to practice law for almost a year, because the judge that was impeached and two that were indicted had signed our certificates; and the court system refused to issue those certificates which we all appreciated. Judicial reform occurred in 1966, and it has worked for 50 years. You may not like the decisions of the Supreme Court, but you have to make certain that you are enacting laws within the scope of the Constitution. I urge the Legislature to not allow that system to be penalized because of some who disagree with the court's decisions. We rural conservative lawyers need to have our opinion heard.

5. I just learned that our nutrition center which is located in the old Hotel Frederick that was restored with a HUD grant when I was in the Legislature, and which now has about 40 occupants in the apartments of the old hotel with the nutrition site on the first floor, is in jeopardy. This location has been in effect for almost 20 years. We provided that service so that the elderly, low-income individuals living in the hotel would have a place to eat their noon meals. I understand that ASCOG has granted the nutrition program for Tillman County to a for-profit organization rather than a non-profit that was operating the system. The nutrition center is one of the most important services that are provided to our elderly all over the state of Oklahoma. We should make certain sites are funded completely, so that people who depend on those meals on a daily basis will not go without a meal. I urge you to look into what has happened insofar as Frederick is concerned, as this is untenable for us to have a for-profit organization running the nutrition site, particularly when the organization wants to move the site from the location where the occupants depend on the meals.

I realize I have been rather blunt, but I think my 20 years invested in service to the people of Oklahoma allows me to at least express my firm opinions. Please consider seriously and diligently the issues that I have raised. If you are concerned about any of these issues, I urge you to contact your representatives and senators. Our Legislature needs to stand

up and be counted for the people in southwest Oklahoma.

Former House Speaker Loyd Benson, D-Frederick, sent this essay to eight southwestern Oklahoma legislators on April 22.

Balancing The State Budget

BY JERRY ELLIS

Ideas are being considered to fill Oklahoma's \$1.3 billion shortfall.

Democrats challenged Republicans to discuss the budget problem in a public meeting in late April. Meeting was delayed until early May.

Republicans have given tax breaks to Oklahomans with the most wealth for the past 10 years. The amount would have covered our shortfalls not once, but twice.

Many people support [1] turning back the quarter percent income tax cut, [2] accepting Medicaid match money, [3] soft drink tax and [4] \$200 million rainy day fund. Those four items will total approximately \$1 billion. The other \$300 million could come from 2% to 4% cuts.

Other ideas tossed around: [1] One cent sales tax. This costs lower income people more. [2] Gov. Fallin suggests going in debt several hundred million. [3] Sales tax on your doctor visit. [4] Sell your water to Texas. [5] Sales tax on a hair cut. With only half a head of hair, I pay double for a haircut; now they want to tax it.

Any legislator supporting the above five goofy schemes needs to give their state retirement back to Oklahoma.

The legislators and governor need to get some skin in the game. They have done nothing to deserve a retirement.

Former state Sen. Jerry Ellis, D-Valliant, is publisher of the Southeast Times newspaper, where this first appeared.

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Budget Crisis Could Be An Unprecedented Disaster For State

BY GENE PERRY

Last month came news that Oklahoma City Public Schools will cut 208 classroom teaching positions because of state budget cuts. Tulsa Public Schools is considering eliminating school buses for all but special education students. Other districts are imposing teacher pay cuts, shortening the school year, or moving to a four-day school week.

After years of strained education budgets, public schools can no longer only cut the “extras” and ask for more sacrifices from adult educators – they are now cutting where it hurts our children the most.

Schools are in this dire situation even though education has been relatively protected from Oklahoma’s annual budget slashing.

Going into this fiscal year [before mid-year cuts], appropriations for the Oklahoma Health Department were down almost 20% compared to 2009. So when the next round of cuts happened, the department announced they will eliminate a child abuse prevention program for 700 at-risk families.

They are also closing five to seven county health department sites, which could make immunizations, epidemic monitoring, and other key health services inaccessible for large parts of rural and small town Oklahoma.

The Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services made deep cuts this year that will reduce services for more than 73,000 Oklahomans. Without this treatment, the number of mentally ill Oklahomans in state prisons continues to rise – with enormous long-term costs to tax dollars and human welfare.

The Oklahoma Department of Human Services did get funding for court-ordered improvements to our child welfare system. But gains in child welfare are happening alongside deep cuts in every other part of this agency’s mission – altogether DHS has cut 1,200 non-child welfare positions, a 23% reduction in the staff responsible for safety net programs, protective services for vulnerable seniors and adults with disabilities, and inspections of child care centers and nursing homes.

Like public schools, DHS is past its ability to limit sacrifices to staff. Now the department is ending monthly checks for aged, blind, and disabled Oklahomans who may no longer be able to keep up with their food and utility bills.

The Oklahoma Health Care Authority announced reimbursements to Medicaid providers would be cut

25% in June if funding goes down as much as expected. If we go through with cuts this large, it will mean the closing of more rural hospitals and many fewer physicians willing to accept Medicaid patients. The Oklahoma Association of Health Care Providers said a cut of this magnitude could put 93% of Oklahoma’s nursing homes in the red.

All of these examples are limited to what has made the news. The damage also bubbles up in problems that go unaddressed because we never hear about them.

What abuses of tax breaks go undetected because the Oklahoma Tax Commission lost 12% of its funding since 2009? What mismanagement of taxpayer dollars goes unnoticed because the State Auditor was cut 30%? What polluting of our air and water goes unseen because the Department of Environmental Quality lost 30% of its state funds? What disasters are not prevented because the Fire Marshal was cut 29%?

Even amid this historic budget disaster, some continue to argue that tax increases are a nonstarter at the Legislature. That’s certainly been the way political winds have blown in recent years, but Oklahomans of all people should know that winds can change.

With a disaster of this magnitude blowing down our doors, lawmakers must change their approach to the budget. We have plenty of reasonable revenue options available; the only wrong answer is not to do something.

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



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SQ 777 Bad For Oklahoma Communities, Farmers

BY BILL JOHN BAKER

Protecting the environment and our precious natural resources are priorities for me as chief of America's largest tribal nation. Through our traditional values we embrace our natural world. It's so important to me and the Cherokee people that we recently named the tribe's first ever Secretary of Natural Resources.

This will ensure the next seven generations of Cherokee people have continued access to all that we have today – clean air, abundant fresh water and fertile land where we can grow our crops and raise our livestock.

Sadly, State Question 777 contradicts what we hold so dearly for our air and water and land. The proposed change would add a new section to the Oklahoma Constitution that would prevent our elected policy-makers from passing any law that “abridges the right of farmers and ranchers to employ agricultural technology and livestock production and ranching practices without a compelling state interest.” However, Oklahoma law already protects farmers, and this constitutional amendment is not needed.

Corporate farming interests want to use our state and our valuable resources without being subject to any state regulation or oversight. That's irresponsible, and all of us have a God-given obligation to protect what we hold so dearly.

Oklahoma has already seen polluted water from concentrated animal feeding operations. There is no reason to believe that tying the hands of the Legislature will make Oklahomans more safe or prosperous.

We have to take our stewardship of our world and our future seriously. As our Cherokee elders have taught us and we must teach our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, Mother Earth is what sustains us all and God has created us to live in harmony with the rest of creation.

This proposed constitutional amendment will only serve to shield that small percentage of corporate agricultural operators who seek profit at the expense of others and will deplete our natural resources. SQ 777 would allow a large and poorly run hog operation to move in next door to your family's farm, and there will be no recourse for the contamination of your water or the depletion of your resources. There may not be a compelling state interest involved, leaving your family's investment and land utterly destroyed.

Unregulated practices could happen on land next door to our jurisdiction and affect land, water and wildlife located inside the Cherokee Nation in the

heart of Indian Country.

Locally here in Oklahoma, we have witnessed the gradual demise of family agriculture as a result of the modern movement of mass-grown food production. In typical fashion, proponents of this issue are cloaking it in buzz words that will appeal and confuse voters. Oklahomans already have the right to farm. This is about a larger profit for a small amount of corporate agricultural companies, pure and simple.

In essence, it would not only take away the power of the Legislature and municipal governments to regulate agricultural practices and our rights to legal recourse, it effectively takes away the power of the people to vote on changes.

Things in the agricultural world change, and this amendment would hamper our abilities to respond to new threats. In the 1920s, state farmers tilled up huge swaths of land in the Oklahoma panhandle to grow wheat. Then in the 1930s, Oklahomans began to realize this common agricultural practice was leading the entire country toward an environmental disaster. Lawmakers were able to respond. With this constitutional amendment, the Oklahoma Legislature will be unable to make new laws to protect Oklahoma citizens from agricultural practices that are hurting Oklahoma families and communities.

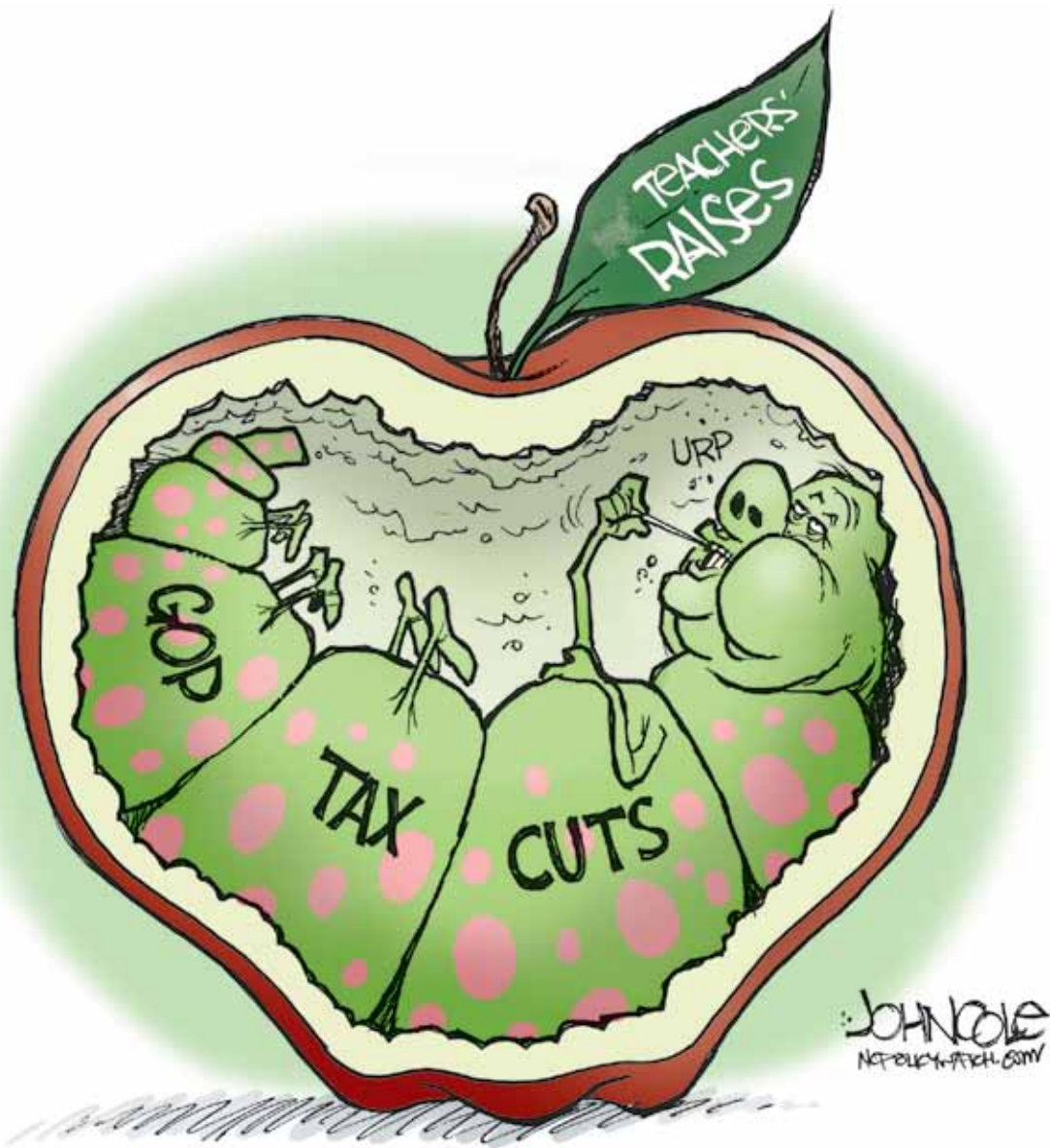
Even if the Legislature does make a new law to protect Oklahomans, they may find themselves hopelessly tied up in court against big agricultural companies and conglomerates who are happy to waste taxpayer money on frivolous litigation while their companies continue to rake in huge profits at the expense of ordinary Oklahomans. As anyone can see from looking at the Illinois River litigation, courts are no place to get quick answers to important questions when your community is being impacted by pollution.

This state question is designed to be exploited by huge agribusiness and corporate farms. Dodging oversight and polluting our land and water are not in the heart of what an Oklahoma farmer is all about, and they are most definitely not at the heart of what it is to be Cherokee.

I hope you will join me in voting no against 777 in November.

Bill John Baker is principal chief of the Cherokee Nation.

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Dear Legislators ...

An Elementary Principal Urges New Investment In Public Education

BY KATHY HUNT

Dear Oklahoma Legislators,

In 1965 my first grade teacher was Miss Lucy Masters – she was referred to as an old maid schoolteacher since she had never married. I didn't care what she was called – to me she was the world.

Within a week, she had taught me to read and that unlocked so many wonderful adventures for me. When I told her that my friends, Todd and Billy, had

drawn great bridges, she let me make my first bulletin board. [Billy and Todd went on to become architects.]

I loved her and first grade beyond words. She took me on my first field trip to her house where she showed us how she made lye soap. She read books to us and changed her voice for the characters. She taught me how to write and how to understand math.

When summer came and I discovered I had to go

home for summer vacation I cried. I never wanted to leave her! My friends still make fun of me for the breakdown I had that day. She inspired me to love to read and to love to learn.

When I graduated from McAlester High School, she was the first one to get a commencement card from me. I'm so thankful she knew how much I loved her. She has been gone for many years, but her influence still lives on in me.

Hopefully, I have shared the spirit of Miss Masters and her love of education to the children that have crossed my path over the last 35 years.

In first grade I also met my first best friend. Her name was Janan Lane and her mother, Sara, was Carl Albert's secretary. I first met Mr. Albert that year at their house.

Even though Sara explained to me what Mr. Albert did for a living, I had no idea I was meeting one of the most influential men of the time. Mr. Albert was such a kind man. He wanted to know how I was liking first grade. He shared how much he had liked first grade and how proud he was that I had learned to read. Turns out he loved reading, too.

Over the years, I had the honor of meeting him many times. When he retired, I started taking my fourth graders to visit him in his office in McAlester. I treasure letters he wrote me after bringing my students to see him.

My students were so impressed with his collection of pictures that included him with Queen Elizabeth, President Kennedy, President Johnson, and even Alex Trebek. [He loved Jeopardy.]

Mr. Albert always had Sara show the children his favorite picture of him standing with his teacher outside his two-room schoolhouse in Bugtussle, OK. He said that without the love and care of his teachers, he would have never accomplished all he did.

He also told about Rep. Charlie Carter visiting his school. He knew from a young age he wanted to be in politics after Rep. Carter told his class they could be anything they wanted to be.

Carl Albert understood the importance of public education. Sara said he often said that democracy without public education is doomed.

He also said, "I very much dislike doctrinaire liberals – they want to own your minds. And I don't like reactionary conservatives. I like to face issues in terms of conditions and not in terms of someone's inborn political philosophy."

Carl Albert, a coal miner's son from little Bugtussle, credited his teachers for helping him grow to become the third most powerful man in the United States of America. He is a wonderful example of the

influence of public education for all children, from all walks of life, and from all economic conditions.

Please stand up for public education. Please find ways to increase revenue to get our state back on track. Please take necessary measures to help our great state stop being the worst state for public education.

It's time for us to stop being the laughingstock of our nation. The children of Oklahoma deserve so much more.

The people that serve them do, too.

Please take care of us before all of our best and brightest teachers leave our state. Please visit our schools – maybe you will inspire a little Carl Albert to think he or she can be whatever they dream. Please help us be proud of the men and women we voted to help guide our state.

Thanks to everyone that is already on board for public education. I continue to pray for wisdom for all of you. I continue to have hope that *all* of you will do the right things necessary to create a strong public education system in Oklahoma.

Kathy Hunt is principal of Edmond Doyle Elementary School in McAlester.



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Four-Day School Weeks Could Leave Thousands Of State Kids Hungry

BY CARLY PUTNAM

One of the most visible consequences of the state's budget crisis is the increasing number of school districts that are considering or have already gone to a four-day school week. More than 100 districts are considering making the switch, according to the Cooperative Council for Oklahoma School Administration.

Shortened school weeks may save cash-strapped school budgets, but they also can create troubling side-effects ranging from the cost to families suddenly in need of child care to unanswered questions about how shorter weeks affect learning.

What's most troubling is that for kids whose most reliable meals come from school, a shortened school week can mean going hungry.

In Oklahoma, nearly two out of every three students – more than 400,000 in total – qualify for free- or reduced-price school meals. While lunches are the most common meal students get at school, school breakfasts are also important for many kids. In the 2014-2015 school year, 58% of Oklahoma students who ate a free- or reduced-price lunch ate a free or reduced-price breakfast, too.

School meals are a win-win because they take some strain off family budgets while keeping Oklahoma kids healthy and ready to learn. Schools participating in the Community Eligibility Provision, which maximizes access to school meals, report everything from better test scores to fewer behavioral issues.

Unfortunately, when schools cut back to four-day weeks, many parents' paychecks can't be stretched to provide their kids two or more additional meals per week. The impact can be devastating.

When Macomb Public Schools in Pottawatomie

County returned to a five-day week from a four-day week for the 2015-2016 school year, Superintendent Matthew Riggs said, "There were kids I firmly believe were leaving school on Thursday and weren't getting a good meal until Monday morning when we served breakfast again."

Oklahoma superintendents at districts considering a four-day week are aware of the challenge and looking for ways to minimize the harm.

At Wagoner Public Schools, whose board recently voted to begin four-day weeks in August, almost three in four students qualify for free or reduced-price meal. At two Wagoner elementary schools, four in five do.

Superintendent Randy Harris pointed out that it's a choice between bad options – Wagoner Public Schools was faced with either going to a four-day school week or laying off teachers. Harris says they're exploring options to try to minimize the negative effects on Wagoner students and families.

Extending the school day past 4 p.m. would mean they could offer another meal in the afternoons, and Harris is hopeful that Wagoner will be able to partner with a food bank to send backpacks of food home with students who need it for the weekend.

Nevertheless, a backpack of Rice-A-Roni and peanut butter isn't a replacement for nutritionally-rigorous school meals, and Oklahoma's food banks are already giving away record amounts of food. It's getting increasingly difficult for food banks to fill the gap caused by the state's persistent failure to fund basic services.

Carly Putnam is a policy analyst with Oklahoma Policy Institute; www.okpolicy.org.

Open-Carry By Untrained Gun Toters Is Scary

BY GEORGE E. YOUNG SR.

I am aware of a degradation of not only civil discourse, but also in how we as a people are beginning to place a lower value on human life and personal respect.

It is quite evident that we have moved to a point that it is OK, judging by the rhetoric, to say ugly things

to each other publicly and to even promote violence toward those with whom we have a difference of opinion.

I don't agree with this change, but do not think it is as rampant as news coverage would lead us to believe. However, what does cause me concern is a piece

of legislation considered in the Oklahoma House of Representatives.

A bill debated recently would allow the citizens of Oklahoma to openly carry a weapon of their choice – and there would be no requirement for them to be trained or familiar with the operation of that weapon.

I am all for anyone legally owning a weapon and keeping it in their home for protection, and going through training to be qualified to openly carry a firearm. The example the sponsor of the legislation put forth was Vermont. Our problems in Oklahoma are different from those in Vermont. We are no worse than citizens of Vermont but we are different.

I am afraid that individuals with Victim Protection Orders would be able to carry weapons to terrorize those who have sought protection from such individuals.

I am also just plain frightened that if I were to laugh too loud, talk too loud or walk too fast, someone

would shoot me simply because they have the means to do so. I am saddened by where we as leaders are going.

And if that were not enough, the debate on this bill was supported by misquoting and misrepresenting Scripture.

I have two passages that were not quoted on the House floor, but I would like to give them now: John 13: 34-35 and John 15:12.

"I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you must also love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

"This is My command: Love one another as I have loved you."

Try these on for size before you load your gun and buckle your holster.

George E. Young Sr., an Oklahoma City Democrat, represents District 99 in the Oklahoma House.

Want To Save Tax Dollars? Invest In Mental Health

BY DAVID PERRYMAN

Jimmy Stewart's 1950 portrayal as Elwood P. Dowd featured a carefree and kind man whose best friend was Harvey, a 6-foot, 3½-inch rabbit. The movie was a humorous approach to mental illness, sanatoriums and the somewhat frightening methods of treatment available 65 years ago.

Unfortunately, Oklahoma has some of the highest rates for mental illness and substance abuse disorders in the country, and it is not a comedy. According to Terri White, Oklahoma Mental Health and Substance Abuse Commissioner, Oklahoma is No. 2 in the nation in the number of adults struggling with mental illness.

Mental illnesses are often intertwined with other serious health issues such as obesity, smoking, alcoholism and other types of substance abuse. The stigma of mental illness has resulted in decades of untreated citizens and a consequential under allocation of resources.

In Oklahoma, more than one in five people [22.4%] are affected with some level of mental illness and nearly one in eight [11.9%] have substance abuse disorders at any given time. According to the website of the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, only 195,000 of the between 700,000 and 950,000 Oklahomans who needed treatment actually received services in FY15.

The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation reports that while the rest of the country spends \$120.56 per capita to treat mental health disorders, Oklahoma is spending less than half that at \$53.05 per capita. De-

cades of ignoring these needs means six out of 10 adults who need treatment do not receive it and consequently, Oklahoma's incarceration rates are among the highest in the country, we have an exorbitant demand for foster care and our rate of adults reporting serious thoughts of suicide is fifth highest in the nation.

As Oklahoma's economy worsens, demands for services rise. In February, the front of the Journal Record carried the headline, "Someone's Going to Get Hurt." The article by Brian Brus observed the direct link between bad economic conditions, young unemployed males who lack parenting skills and the incidence of non-accidental trauma to infants and children. Sadly, economic downturns mean decreased tax revenue and cuts to social service programs just as the need for those programs escalates.

In a 2013 Oklahoma Watch interview, Commissioner White stated that her biggest worry was the treatment gap of hundreds seeking services every day and no resources available.

Commissioner White stated, "If the goal is to shrink government and spend less ... put the dollars here. We can save you money in corrections, we can save you money in uncompensated health care, we can save you money in foster care. When mental illness and addictions are treated, people live full and productive lives. They have families. They run companies. They can do anything when they have treatment."

The cost of treatment is less than \$2,900 per year

CONTINUED ON PAGE 19



Monument Would Not Represent Our Practice Or Votes

BY GEORGE E. YOUNG SR.

Article 1, Section 2 of the Oklahoma Constitution states:

“Perfect toleration of religious sentiment shall be secured, and no inhabitant of the State shall ever be molested in person or property on account of his or her mode of religious worship; and no religious test shall be required for the exercise of civil or political rights for the exercise of civil or political rights. Polygamous or plural marriages are forever prohibited.”

Recently I witnessed the conversation and the vote in the House of Representatives to remove the above section from our Constitution to enable the Ten Commandments monument to be returned to the State Capitol grounds by a vote of the people on the November ballot.

Let me make this perfectly clear: I believe in the voice of the people of Oklahoma and I believe in the voice of the people of my district.

I represent individuals who are taxpaying, vibrant contributors, loving residents who are neither Jew nor Christian. So where do we draw the line of religious symbols on the Capitol grounds? Their rights

are being impinged upon if we allow the Ten Commandments monument on the Capitol grounds but won't allow their religious symbols to also be displayed on the Capitol grounds.

I have been a pastor for 30 years and possess a master's degree in religion, a Master's of Divinity [considered by many to be the professional degree in ministry], and a Doctorate of Ministry. Therefore, I believe I have some insight into the interpretation and application of the above-quoted section, and I contend it is not connected to the practical experience of those who serve in church and attend worship services.

Article 1, Section 2 of the Constitution speaks to honoring all citizens of Oklahoma and their preference or non-preference of worship style.

If we were to live those Ten Commandments through our actions and obedience, we would abolish capital punishment, protect our senior citizens, and care for the most vulnerable members of our society – instead of having a symbol on the Capitol grounds that does not represent our daily practice nor our votes.

George E. Young Sr., an Oklahoma City Democrat, represents District 99 in the Oklahoma House.

Lawmakers Could Use Refresher On Civil War Amendments

BY BOB DARCY

Recently the Oklahoma Legislature passed a bill to allow a privately funded monument containing the Bill of Rights on the Capitol grounds. The bill's sponsor, state Sen. Patrick Anderson, R-Enid, said this is "part of a nationwide effort to erect the monuments on the grounds of every state Capitol."

Let me quote the First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

Congress, but not the states, was restricted. Until 1844 the New Jersey Constitution, for one, provided "all persons professing a belief in the faith of any Protestant sect, who shall demean themselves peaceably under the government, as hereby established, shall be capable of being elected to any office ..."

The Bill of Rights restricted only the federal government. Our Founders did not intend a grant or acknowledgement of an individual's rights.

In another example, the Supreme Court held in a 1908 New Jersey case "Exemption from compulsory self-incrimination in state courts is not secured by any part of the Federal Constitution"

Mississippi courts allowed, with no other evidence, a murder confession extracted by a sheriff deputy and a white mob which "upon [the defendant's] denial, they seized him and, with the participation of the deputy, they hanged him by a rope to a limb of a tree, and, having let him down, they hung him again, and when he was let down a second time, and he still protested his innocence, he was tied to a tree and whipped, and still declining to accede to the demands that he confess, he was finally released ... A day or two thereafter, the said deputy, accompanied by another, returned to the home of the said defendant and arrested him ... and again severely whipped the defendant, declaring that he would continue the whipping until he confessed, and the defendant then agreed to confess to such a statement as the deputy would dictate ..."

This confession, the sole evidence of the prisoner's guilt, was admitted. The defendant was sentenced to hang despite the deputy and the state admitting at trial to all the details of the torture. Mississippi in 1934 gave no protection from coerced self incrimination.

Imperfections of the 1789 Constitution and the 1791 Bill of Rights led, 69 years later, to the Civil War. Problems under the Constitution that could not

be solved, and rights that could not be agreed upon, were settled on battlefields where between 620,000 and 850,000 soldiers died.

Between 1865 and 1870 Republican-dominated legislatures passed and ratified three amendments forever changing the Constitution. It is that changed Constitution our nation has peaceably lived under for the last century and a half.

In a process that continues to this day, federal courts are extending the federal Bill of Rights to actions of the states, as the Supreme Court did in the 1934 Mississippi coerced confession case, thereby transforming these rights from a limitation on the federal government to rights of persons against all governments.

It is these three amendments that should be placed on a monument for our state legislators, judges, other officials and visitors to read and ponder. Here they are:

Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution

Section 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

Section 2. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution

Section 1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws ...

Section 5. The Congress shall have power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.

Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution

Section 1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

Section 2. The Congress shall have power to en-

force this article by appropriate legislation.

Notice the shift from the First Amendment's "Congress shall make no law ..." to "Congress shall have power to enforce ..."

States would no longer be unimpeded nests of slavery, religious bigotry, brutal arbitrary law enforcement, and race, sex, national-origin and cultural bias. The federal government was mandated to stop states

from singling out persons for abuse, discrimination, brutality and slavery.

As our state officials enter the Capitol it could not hurt for them to refresh themselves on the Civil War Amendments – not just the Ten Commandments and the Bill of Rights.

Bob Darcy is a retired Oklahoma State University professor of political science and statistics.

The Time For Action On Climate Change Is Now

BY JAMES L. STOVALL

Given all of the conflict and competing interests in the world, how is it possible that 195 nations could come together and agree upon dramatic reductions in carbon emissions? Do they not understand the costs involved in making such a huge transition in energy usage? Do they not understand the fragility of the global economy? Do they not understand the number of jobs that will be lost if fossil fuels are going to be phased out and replaced by wind and solar? I can imagine that many people in Oklahoma are scratching their heads and wondering why such bold action would be necessary.

The world leaders who gathered in Paris last December at the climate change summit recognized that the science of climate change is settled and that action is required immediately. This agreement on a plan of action may be a surprise to some. Many people have not looked at the data. For those who have, the message is clear.

Climate scientists agree that past changes in the earth's climate have taken place over thousands of years but never before has the climate changed so rapidly. There is every reason to believe that the massive release of carbon pollutants is the reason for rising temperatures.

Military leaders see that climate change has already been disruptive to established governments as food supplies have been affected by changes in the weather. Oceanographers have looked at melting sea ice and rapidly rising oceans. Biologists have examined species extinction that is happening as a result of rising temperatures. Weather experts have looked at the rapid increase in extreme weather events like flash floods and hurricanes.

As information about climate change has come out gradually over the past three decades, there has been some disagreement regarding the exact nature of the threat and policy experts have disagreed regarding how quickly humanity must respond in order to avert disaster. Some of us have taken this disagreement as a sign that we could wait; that we could ignore

the problem for now. We imagined that the day would come sooner or later when all the information would be in, the dust would settle and then we could formulate a clear plan of action based upon more solid evidence.

Sometimes we don't like to look at difficult problems. We hope that we will be magically rescued from having to make difficult choices. Maybe a new discovery or technological breakthrough will make this transition unnecessary. This is called a state of "denial." We are by no means alone in this denial but we must wake up and pay attention to this very real threat to our future.

I am the first to admit that scientists are sometimes wrong and a degree of skepticism is often justified when a new global threat is announced. Imagine that a doctor has told you that your child may have cancer and that it may be terminal if not treated immediately. You might seek a second opinion but you wouldn't wait too long. After 20 years of largely fruitless diplomacy, the governments of the world are finally starting to take the problem seriously. The deal reached in Paris in December commits every country in the world to take steps toward a significant reduction in carbon emissions.

The world's leaders and experts have taken their time in deciding on a course of action. For over 30 years, mountains of data have been gathered and thoroughly examined by climate scientists, economists and political leaders. The vast majority has concluded that now is the time for decisive action even if some questions remain unanswered. The time to wait for further research has already passed. There is too much at stake to do nothing or ignore the problem.

The transition that the scientists are telling us is needed will not be easy. Jobs and profits will be lost. Industries will become obsolete. Change will happen and it will not be easy for everyone.

This beautiful city and state have been developed with profits from the oil and gas industry. Every resident of Oklahoma has benefited to some degree or



another. Many leaders in the oil and gas industry have been civic minded and generous. The vast majority of those who have worked in the oil and gas industry have been honest, hard working people who are good neighbors and who love their children. They also had no clue about the long-term consequences of releasing such massive quantities of carbon into the atmosphere.

A lack of clear and convincing evidence may have caused some of us to delay supporting meaningful action on climate change. The great American writer

Upton Sinclair said, "It's very hard to convince a man of something when his salary depends on his not understanding it."

Whatever has been the reason for our reluctance to act, the time is now for serious action.

James L. Stovall, M.Div., is director of the Mediation Institute in Oklahoma City and an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. He serves as chair of the newly formed Environmental Committee of the Oklahoma Conference of Churches. He can be reached at j_stovall@site.net.

Mental Health

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

while the cost of jail, prison or foster care is seven to 10 times that amount as reported on the department's website in its FY16 budget request.

Instead, budget cuts of \$22.8 million have resulted in the loss of over \$17 million in federal matching dollars.

That \$40 million dollar hole has directly affected the availability of services to more than 73,000 Oklahomans. Deeper cuts are expected next year.

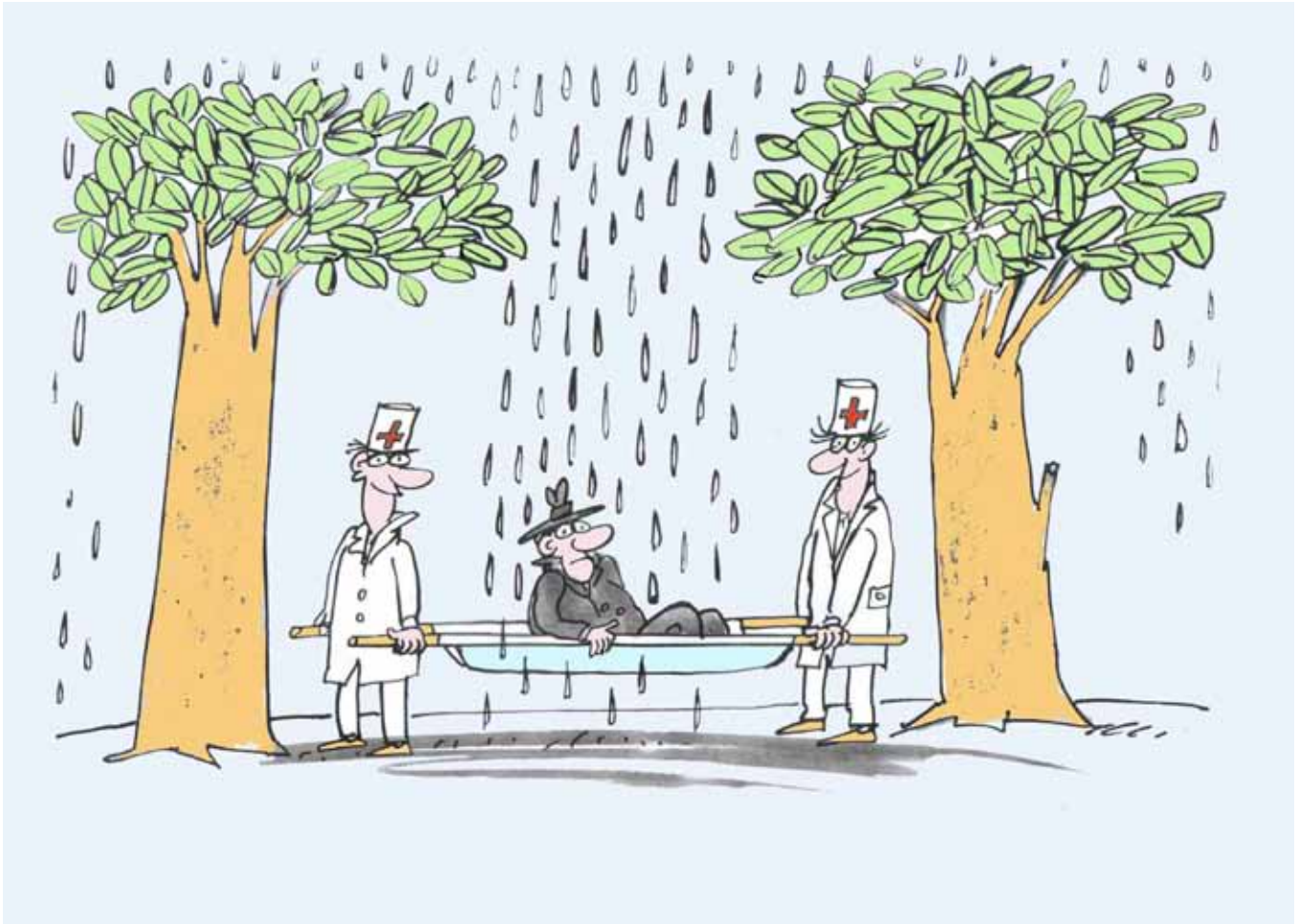
The treatment sought for Elwood P. Dowd by his sister, Veta, was not for his benefit, but so that his somewhat eccentric behavior would not interfere with her social status. When the stigma is gone, so is

the shame. In the nick of time, Veta realized the true value of a kind, loving and carefree brother.

Awareness is the key. In 2005, the television shows Huff, Monk, Scrubs and ER all won Voice Awards from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration for their portrayal of people who manage mental health conditions.

Mark Twain's observation that a jail is needed every time we close a school is equally applicable when we refuse to properly fund treatment for mental illness and substance abuse.

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



When Modern Medicine Could Learn From A Real Doctor's Visit

BY JUDY A. EICHSTEDT

An open letter to doctors:

In the early 1950s as a small child I have such a clear picture in my mind of a man I believed to be a family member. He was very tall with light brown hair.

When he came to visit he wore a suit and a brown hat. He had a funny mustache and wore glasses. When he came for a visit he brought his black bag with him and in the bag were suckers that my sister, brother and I gathered around to get. A huge smile would appear on his face as he opened his bag and handed out the candy. His robust laugh would fill the house as we children ate our candy.

There were times he stayed for dinner and other times he would sit at the dining room table drinking coffee and having a piece of warm apple pie.

Sometimes he came to visit us at very odd hours. It could be late at night or even early in the morning before we had breakfast. Sometimes he showed up a couple times in the same day. I could tell by my mother's and father's reaction that they both thought highly of him and cared a great deal about him.

They trusted him. I really believed this man was a family member.

As I got a bit older I realized this family member was not related to us at all. His name was Dr. Perloff, our family doctor. This doctor was treated as a family member. He came to our home whenever he was needed or just for dinner.

If my parents were ill they went to his office. However, when we were small children, he came to our

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home to see us children. Dr. Perloff would say a doctor's office is a scary place for children and preferred to visit children at home where they were more comfortable.

What I remember most about Dr. Perloff is that I knew without a doubt when he came to our home he would make it all better. It did not matter if we had a cold, the flu, or a fever, Dr. Perloff remained with us children until it was all better.

He would always say, "All better now," and when I would smile and reply, "All better" then and only then would he pick up his hat and bag and go home. I wonder now, did this doctor ever have time to sleep?

As we all know times have changed and I am not that sure it's for the better. Today, doctors do not make house calls. That blessing has been lost to the

care about me. When you really care about a person, you will do your best for them. Today we have no relationship at all with the doctors we see. We don't know them and they don't know us. Trust, I don't think so.

Some doctors I have found never seen to even look up from their computers. They are busy typing information into it and there is no eye contact made at all. I have questioned many times if the doctor is listening to me at all.

We are all human beings we need contact with each other. I need to know that you are going to do your best for me. I have wanted to scream, "Hey, look at me. I am not expecting you to come to my home and hold my hand but please look at me – let me see your eyes." Remember, the eyes are the window of the soul.

It's a two way street. There was an elderly woman

I have wanted to scream, "Hey, look at me. I am not expecting you to come to my home and hold my hand but please look at me – let me see your eyes."

past.

It's sad because today many people never know that experience and really miss out on something great. In the past a doctor was a family member even though he was not related by blood. It was a real treasure that now has been buried and I doubt anyone will ever go on a treasure hunt to dig it up again. Far too many of you will never realize the joy of your doctor as a part of your family.

When any illness hit our family, my father always said, "Well, let's see what the doc says." My parents trusted this doctor completely. They knew he had their best interest at heart at all times. The trust they had for this doctor was so thick you could cut it with a knife.

I am sorry, but today it's a different story. Our doctors today are far too busy to become a family member and that trust is just not the same anymore.

Average time with a doctor is 15 minutes today; in the past it was as long as it took to get you better. Can anyone today even imagine what that must be like?

Many years have passed and, at age 66, a part of me is still searching for Dr. Perloff. Perhaps because I experienced the doctors of the past it's harder for me and others my age to accept the doctors of today.

I openly admit that is a part of it. However, only a part of it. Many doctors now are in such a hurry to get to the next patient that I am left to wonder does he fully understand my illness. It's hard to develop trust in someone you see for 15 minutes.

When I come into your office, I need to know you

who lived across the street from us who saw the doctor once a week. She was in her 70s. I was about eight by then and at her house when the doctor showed up.

I recall her in her rocking chair and the doctor holding her hand while he sat next to her. As I look back on the event I can honestly say he treated her as if she was his mother.

However, what impressed me most as I look back is his words to her. "Together we will make a decision on what is best to do," he said. "I am right here with you."

I don't know what her illness was but she was not alone in it. He let his patient know that they were in it together and would face the problem hand in hand. Today when I leave a doctor's office I am sorry to say I do not feel as if the doctor and I are facing the problem together at all. I feel all alone.

What a gift it would be today if everyone knew in their hearts the doctors were standing side by side with their patients.

I believe that many of the things we left in the past need to be retrieved for today and tomorrow. We need to take a journey to yesterday in a time machine to take back some things that have been lost to us all.

A doctor needs to be a family member; there must be a bond between doctor and patient. We must be able to walk out of a doctor's office knowing the doctor's got our backs.

We need to be able to trust our doctors to do what is best for us.

Judy A. Eichstedt lives in Tulsa.



Living In The Past

BY BOB BEARDEN

Tennessee recently passed an anti-LGBT law similar to the one North Carolina passed earlier. Pointy-headed logic, I guess, says if you go back to the future things will be great again just like you remember them when that old La-Salle you owned ran great, right?

Taint necessarily so, McKee. You can't legislate morality and you can't make onerous laws that attempt to stem the tide of social progress.

As Rudyard Kipling said in his epic, prescient poem, *The Gods of the Copybook Headings*, "As it will be in the future, it was at the birth of Man, There are only four things certain since Social Progress began. That the Dog returns to his Vomit and the Sow returns to her Mire, And the burnt Fool's bandaged finger goes wabbling back to the Fire."

Why the southern GOP state legislators keep think-

ing they can somehow turn the tide of social progress and make things go back to the racist and bigoted days they so seem to love is beyond me. As someone said [might even have been a Republican who knows?], "You can't stand in the way of progress!"

But then the Scopes monkey trial was more than 90-plus years ago and the pointy-heads in Texas are still trying to teach children that creationism trumps the science of evolution. They are putting things in our children's school books that deny slavery ever happened. That an apple led to the creation of man. That climate change isn't happening.

Why, as Kipling said, "They deny the moon is still-ton, or that it is even Dutch!"

North Carolina is already starting to feel the backlash as "The Boss," Bruce Springsteen, has told them where they can stick their money and their onerous

PUBLIC FORUM

law and has cancelled his upcoming concert there. He won't likely be traveling to Tennessee anytime soon, either. Good for him! We need more socially conscious entertainers like The Boss to stand up for what's right.

And now the NBA, whose All-Star game is scheduled for Charlotte next year, is considering moving it to another city. Stupid laws do have consequences and dumb, pointy-headed, racist and bigoted decisions by ignorant backward thinking politicians can and do have negative impacts on the states they trot them out in.

These laws are not only onerous in nature but they don't take into consideration the impact that passing a racist and bigoted law can have on the economy of a state and its citizens. Money talks, and in these

cases it's well that it should. If common sense can't override the stupidity of idiot state legislators, money can and usually does.

These people who pass and design these types of laws really do think with their pocketbooks and not their minds [probably because their minds are a cesspool of insensitivity and just plain stupidity]. When the pocketbooks of the corporations they have lured to their states start to speak, just like E.F. Hutton they listen.

It would be nice if they actually used their heads for something besides a hat rack but as Forest Gump's mother once told him, "Stupid is as stupid does!"

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

Be Afraid

BY SHARON MARTIN

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

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

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

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

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

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

No! No! No!

No candidate is perfect, but if we want to have any chance to prevent a real catastrophe from befalling this country, Democrats have to support their candi-

date without tearing down his or her opponent. Save the fight for the fall.

When I suggested we stop spreading rumors, someone told me not to be afraid of the truth. It's not the truth I fear; it's the dishonesty and the meanness. And it's reality.

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

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

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

The country we save will be our own.
Sharon Martin lives in Oilton, OK.

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Taxes

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

tax,” a sure sign the state’s elected Republican leaders remain prisoners of a late 20th Century anti-tax credo losing steam amid the economic realities of the 21st Century.

How do we know it’s losing steam? It didn’t garner much attention in Oklahoma’s uber-conservative mainstream media, but two recent statewide surveys reveal a majority of residents are – finally – connecting the dots between taxes and services.

In fact, it is evident from the polling that “tax” is no longer a political epithet – and that Oklahoma’s elected leaders ignore this pendulum-swing at their peril.

As Republican pollster Pat McFerron put it, “Tax sensitivity is at a low point” – meaning state residents are more receptive to higher taxes than at any time in his “two decades of tracking public opinion.”

It’s not entirely clear what ended the taxes-services disconnect, but Oklahomans are restless over what’s happened to their public schools, rural hospitals and nursing homes, and child welfare programs since the GOP seized control in 2010.

They’re contacting their legislators. They’re showing up at the Capitol. They’re running for office in record numbers. They even gave a democratic socialist, Sen. Bernie Sanders, the most votes in the state’s Democratic presidential primary.

McFerron’s Sooner Survey – gleaned from a tele-

phone survey of 500 registered voters in early February [margin of error plus-minus 4.3%] – found only 41% of respondents think their taxes are too high while 9% view them as too low.

What’s particularly telling in those results is that for most of the last 20 years, the percentages of those who viewed themselves as overtaxed was much higher [typically in the high 40s and low 50s] and as undertaxed much lower [never more than 2%].

The Sooner Survey’s findings were bolstered by a subsequent Oklahoma Policy Institute-sponsored poll that found large majorities of Oklahomans not only favor halting the .25% income tax cut that took effect this year, but also restoring top rates to 6.65% for the state’s wealthiest households.

“Voters understand that the state budget has been cut to the bone, and it is time to raise revenue to protect state services from further cuts,” reported Global Strategy Group, which conducted the survey. “Voters are clear in their support for asking the wealthiest Oklahomans to pay more of their fair share to adequately fund state services.”

At NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd. these days, the legislative majority won’t even discuss the state income tax – the fairest of all taxes, because it is based on ability to pay – except to scheme for deeper cuts in the highest rates.

Moreover, neither the Legislature nor governor indicates any appetite for postponing the .25% cut even though it will cost the state treasury another \$147 million at a time the Rainy Day Fund is being raided and state services slashed.

The Global Strategy Group's April 4-6 survey of 500 registered voters [margin of error plus-minus 4.4%] found that large majorities oppose closing the \$1.3 billion budget hole with taxes that disproportionately impact low- and moderate-income families.

Voters are often ahead of their elected officials when it comes to public policy. This may well be a prime example.

Yet Republicans appear paralyzed by the budget crisis, struggling to come up with solutions that are acceptable politically – in other words, anything but new or higher taxes.

So far, with the exception of suggesting a teacher pay raise could be funded by cutting health benefits for educators, the GOP majority has spent most of its time publicly wailing that legislative Democrats aren't doing enough to help solve the state's fiscal crisis.

This is a classic political diversion. What the legislative leadership hopes is that most Oklahomans forget the GOP dominates the statehouse – 70 of 101 representatives and 39 of 48 senators.

Way more than enough votes to make things happen, no Democratic input required.

Further, the governor is a card-carrying, vice-presidential-aspiring member of the GOP team. It's not as if a Democratic Davey Crockett occupies the Mansion, drawing lines in the sand to thwart Republican initiatives.

So, what's really fueling leadership's off-Broadway over-acting? A fractured GOP caucus, especially in the House.

Speaker Jeff Hickman and Co. are what passes for mainstream, establishment Republicans in an era when so many of his House colleagues are entrenched on the uber right fringe.

The mainstreamers know Oklahoma can't cut its way out of a fiscal crisis they created by doling out dubious corporate tax breaks and income tax cuts that cost the state \$1.5 billion this year alone.

They also know a tax increase is a non-starter for its most extreme two dozen or so members that make no connection between taxes and services. Indeed, the fastest way for a House speaker to be deposed today is to propose a tax hike.

Sadly, it appears many legislative Republicans are willing to let Oklahoma burn, at least one more year. Their three-point strategy: Slash the budget deeply enough to balance it and cover the \$1.3 billion revenue hole. Take their political lumps this year, even if it means losing a few seats [though probably not enough to shift the balance of legislative power]. And pray for an oil and gas uptick that could finance modest spending increases next year.

Of course, the energy downturn isn't the main rea-

son for the state's budget calamity, despite what GOP lawmakers claim.

Remember when oil hovered around \$100 a barrel? The state already was experiencing shortfalls – the result of income tax cuts, corporate welfare, rising health care and pension costs, and sluggish sales tax revenues caused by consumers bypassing local brick-and-mortar stores in favor of on-line purchases [often from out-of-state sellers not required to collect and remit Oklahoma sales taxes].

The Legislature is nibbling around the edges of corporate welfare reform, but isn't likely to act in time to affect the FY 16-17 budget.

While taking steps in recent years to shore up the state's pension liabilities, lawmakers have been unable to forge a health care consensus – example: the proposed \$1.50 per pack cigarette tax increase languishes.

And it remains unclear whether state legislators, despite action this session, can fix the on-line sales tax problem – or whether only Congress has the power to level the playing field.

The income tax is the fairest, best solution. The top rate was 6.65% in 2004 when the tax-cutting frenzy took off – fueled initially by anti-government GOP rhetoric and Democratic political cowardice. It's now 5%.

By the time Democrats got off the tax-cutting bandwagon, Republicans had seized all elected levers of state government power and kept on pruning, including this year's .25% cut.

With less than a month left in regular session, Republicans will be hard-pressed to pass a responsible budget without Democratic help. Democrats are willing, provided this year's income tax cut is rolled back. That seems unlikely.

If Republican leaders fail to grasp that rank-and-file Oklahomans are willing to tax themselves to pay for services, their control of all levers of state government will be short-lived.





It Happened Here

BY TED RALL

It began with the global economic crisis.

All around the world, millions of people who had nothing to do with the stock market crash — who didn't earn enough money to save, much less invest, that much less speculate — lost everything nevertheless. They lost their jobs, then, in short order, their homes. They were scared.

The failure of democratic governance transformed their completely understandable fear into savage, uncontrolled anger.

Presidents and parliaments dithered. Part of the blame lies with the Constitution. It provided for a strong executive branch. Rather than grease the skids of government, it prompted members of the congress to dig in their heels, blocking every initiative they could because it was the only way to stay relevant.

The politicians knew they had a terminal systemic crisis on their hands, but they couldn't agree how to respond. So they didn't. The misery deepened.

Gridlock reigned.

The economy recovered. A little. Not much. But almost all the gains fell into the pockets of the wealthy and well-connected. Almost everyone else felt left out. They seethed.

Seeing opportunity amid the armies of the alienated and dispossessed, the perennial almost-candidate of the nationalist, nativist far-right began campaigning in earnest. Breaking all the rules of conventional campaigning, he drew huge crowds with a simple message:

Believe me.

Trust me, he assured his audiences, and I will make the country great again.

He was short on specifics and liberal with insults. Idiots, he called the incumbent politicians. They were losers — losers whose stupidity had betrayed a once-great country.

"People from this country can't find a job. They

can't earn a decent living," he ranted. "Foreigners must be expelled so our people can work!"

Forward-looking leaders within the establishment parties worried about the growing popularity of this strongman in the making. His intentions, after all, were dangerously radical – and they'd been published years before in a bestselling book. He was, he said himself, a "militarist." Wars, fragmentation, scapegoating were all in the cards if he were allowed to come to power. But the parties weren't motivated to respond. The system couldn't save itself.

Some establishment analysts thought he was a flash in the pan, a buffoon whose appeal would fade in good time of its own accord. "The ranting clown who bangs the drum outside the ... circus," The Guardian called him.

The future tyrant's natural ideological opposition couldn't get it together. During key elections, they split their votes between the socialist Left and moderate liberals. Ultimately, however, historians blamed the Right most of all, for failing to rein in one of their own.

Traditional conservatives had played a dangerous game for years, using political "dog whistles" to appeal to citizens' bigoted views of foreigners and ethnic minorities. As the economy worsened, this approach became more effective. Conservatives doubled down, setting the stage for what came next.

What the old guard didn't understand was, that given a choice between half-hearted racism and the genuine article, the electorate would choose the au-

thentic candidate. "He tells it like it is, and we need that now in a president," 44% of voters told a major newspaper.

The conservative establishment faced a choice, too: support a candidate of the left, or forsake true conservatism in favor of a fascist. To a man, they went with the fascist.

A tone of increasing violence accompanied the demagogue's rise in the polls. Not only did he personally condone violence against his movement's political opponents, his party offered its lawyers to defend partisans arrested for beatings in its name. Even his close associates were implicated in violent assaults; when they were, the leader stood by them. "I think it's a very, very sad day in this country when a man could be destroyed over something like that," he said.

The aging president was reluctant to issue an outright condemnation. "Troubling," he called the gathering storm clouds.

The Leader's authoritarian movement attracted a plurality of the vote – yet he wasn't popular enough to consolidate a simple majority. Had his opponents set aside their personal ambitions and ideological biases, and united in favor of the national good, he could have been denied the chancellorship.

Alas, twelve years later, all would be ruins. *Ted Rall, syndicated writer and the cartoonist for ANewDomain.net and Skewed.net, is the author of Bernie, a biography written with the cooperation of Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders.*

Trump Drives Spike Into Culture War Politics

BY FROMA HARROP

Days before the Indiana primary, Ted Cruz paraded his two young daughters in matching pink dresses and spoke darkly of "putting little girls alone in a bathroom with grown men."

This was a visual that, frankly, we could have done without. Thankfully, Donald Trump locked it in Ripley's museum of the politically bizarre by trouncing Cruz in that conservative state's primary.

It was Trump who had said that transgender people should use "whatever bathroom they feel is appropriate." It was he who noted that there have been "very few problems" with transgender people using ladies' rooms. Trump didn't say – but could have – that men presenting themselves as women have been using women's facilities for a long time, with the other occupants none the wiser or unconcerned.

So has Trump deep-sixed the culture war gambit in Republican politics? The formula is to draw votes by

pounding on some controversy of little consequence to most people, preferably with a sex angle attached. The 2004 presidential election in Ohio was a textbook case. Placing a measure to ban gay marriage on the ballot probably gave George W. Bush – whose main game was tax cuts – a narrow victory.

Our friends the Koch brothers routinely give money to socially conservative groups to win over middle- or working-class followers otherwise not served by the family's economic agenda. The brothers themselves have shrugged at gay marriage, saying they have no problem with it.

Perhaps, just perhaps, the working-class whites targeted by culture warriors don't really care all that much about these issues – or care a lot less about them than they do about their falling incomes. Perhaps they've been voting all these years for an attitude, hitting back at the "liberal elites" who they feel rap them on the knuckles when they speak their

mind. Trump's magic potion involves adding attitude while subtracting threats to Social Security, Medicare and other government programs average folks depend on.

Trump has stomped on so many of the right wing's most cherished wedge issues – while winning majorities among the Republican base – it gets you wondering how big that tide of moral umbrage really was. How much of it was a mirage pulled off with talk radio's smoke and mirrors?

Abortion is a truly difficult issue. Your writer believes an abortion should be easy [and free] to obtain early in a pregnancy and limited later on. Others oppose abortion altogether, and it is this group's genuine concerns that the right seeks to stoke.

As a result, it's the rare Republican who will put in a good word for Planned Parenthood, a nonprofit that provides a variety of women's health services in addition to abortions. But Trump praised the organization for doing the former without apology. And he won races in the heart of value-voter America – including

the entire Deep South.

For liberals and moderates alike, Trump deserves gratitude for putting away Cruz. [Too bad about John Kasich, though.]

It spared us from having to hear his running mate, Carly Fiorina, go on about Planned Parenthood's harvesting "body parts" from a kicking fetus, a complete fiction.

Making things up happens to be a Trump specialty, so there's some poetic justice in his volleying back some outright fabrications. His suggestion that Cruz's father helped John Kennedy's assassin is a classic of the genre.

Putting an end to culture warmongering as a political strategy – or at least dialing it back – could go down as Trump's second-best contribution to the quality of America's civic life. His best contribution would be to lose badly in November. Luckily, on getting himself not elected in the general, Trump has made a strong start.

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The Lesser Of Evils?

BY SUSAN ESTRICH

It's pretty darn depressing when political writers are essentially writing off the 2016 election as a choice between the lesser of two evils – seven months in advance of the election. It's one thing when, after months of negative ads, we shake our heads in disgust, but we haven't even really started yet.

If this is the way we begin, is there any question where we will end? Alienated, distrustful, angrier than we are now, having elected a president with no mandate at all.

We have to do better than this. If Donald Trump is the nominee of the Republican Party for the most powerful job on the planet, then it's time for him, and us, to start taking his candidacy seriously. He needs to start doing his homework. Enough with the off-the-cuff comments of a television talk show host playing for ratings. If Donald Trump wants to be the president of the United States, he ought to start trying to act the part, and see if he can pull it off. If not, fine. It will be clear.

As for Republican talkers, it's time for them to grow up, too, and stop blaming everyone and anyone for the fact that Republican voters are about to pick one of their competitors for a chance at the top job. To hear the chattering class complaining, you'd think Donald Trump was a three-headed monster who'd been foisted on an otherwise perfect party primed for victory.

Not so. The Republicans didn't have a credible candidate who could connect with voters. That's a problem you can't blame on Donald Trump.

I watched some of the early debates with my stu-

dents. I wanted them to get involved – dare I say, get excited – and the closest anyone ever came to inspiring that energy on the Republican side was Donald Trump. Blame the system all you want, but if you look at the candidates and ask the questions voters always ask ["Does he understand people like me?" "Do I feel like he's on my side?"], it doesn't take rocket science to see why we've gotten Trump. He isn't an aberration; he is the logical conclusion of the anti-government gospel that Ted Cruz has been spouting since he got to the Senate.

No one pretends the process is perfect, least of all those of us who had a hand in the compromises that the often inconsistent rules for selecting delegates reflect.

But here's the thing: Hillary Clinton is going to be the Democratic nominee because she is the most popular Democrat running among Democrats. Donald Trump is going to be the Republican nominee because he's the candidate who most Republicans favor.

Strange as it sounds, this is what we call democracy. It does not always produce the results that elites crave, which is actually one of its strong points.

But the results need to be taken seriously. I didn't think Donald Trump could be nominated. I was wrong. I didn't think he could be elected. I'm not saying that anymore. The anger is real. Trump is no joke. Sexism is alive and well, thank you, in both sexes.

Democrats can learn a lesson from all those former GOP front-runners sitting on the sidelines while the candidate who could hardly be taken seriously continues his march to the nomination.

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The Mental Disease Of Late-Stage Capitalism

BY JOE BREWER

I've been talking with a lot of my friends recently – in private where they felt comfortable letting their guard down – about the dirty little secret no one is supposed to talk about. The shame people feel when they can't find a job, or pay their bills, or go to the dentist, or that they have to move back in with their parents, or they can't afford to have children.

We are supposed to pretend, in this stupendously individualist culture, that it is our fault. The buck stops here. I am responsible for my failings in life.

Of course this is demonstrably not true. We are merely living through late-stage capitalism and our parents lacked the foresight to warn us about it. When a population explodes – as the human one did throughout the last century – eventually all manner of social institutions become over-crowded. From there, it's simply a numbers game.

Want that awesome job? Stack your resume next to

the hundreds of other people applying for it. Hoping to get into college? You'll have to pay out the nose in student loans [if, that is, you were fortunate enough to get through admissions]. Thinking of buying a house? You're too busy paying rent in a skyrocketing market of housing prices. But yeah, be sure to blame yourself. It's obviously your fault.

Seriously though, we should have seen this coming. Build an economic system based on wealth hoarding and presumed scarcity and you'll get what was intended. The system is performing exactly as it was designed to. That is why wages have stagnated in the west for 30 years. It is why 62 people are able to have the same amount of wealth as 3.7 billion. It is why politicians are bought by the highest bidders and legislation systematically serves the already-rich at the expense of society.

A great irony of this deeply corrupt system of wealth

hoarding is that the “weapon of choice” is how we feel about ourselves as we interact with our friends. The elites don’t have to silence us. We do that ourselves by refusing to talk about what is happening to us.

Fake it until you make it. That’s the advice we are given by the already successful who have pigeon-holed themselves into the tiny number of real opportunities society had to offer. Hold yourself accountable for the crushing political system that was designed to divide us against ourselves.

The mental disease of late-stage capitalism is shame, the devastating feeling that we failed ourselves in the Land of Opportunity.

This great lie that we whisper to ourselves is how they control us. Our fear that other impoverished people [which is most of us now] will look down on us for being impoverished too. This is how we give them the power to keep humiliating us.

I say no more of this emotional racket. If I am going to be responsible for my fate in life, let it be because I chose to stand up and fight – that I helped dismantle the global architecture of wealth extraction that created this systemic corruption of our economic and political systems.

Now more than ever, we need spiritual healing. As this capitalist system destroys itself, we can step aside and find healing by living honestly and without fear. They don’t get to tell us how to live. We can share our pain with family and friends. We can post it on social media. Shout it from the rooftops if we feel like it. The pain we feel is capitalism dying. It hurts us because we are still in it.

But those billionaires who rigged the game don’t get to tell me what I should or shouldn’t say to my friends. If I am struggling financially it is because the financial system is morally corrupt. This truth is a

mantric elixir – repeat it to yourself every time the habits of your mind whisper that it is your fault.

You are not to blame for the wealth hoarding of others. That is one burden you don’t have to carry any longer. Be healed. Find your strength. Speak your truth. And let the cascades of change unfurl across society.

We cannot begin the work of building new economic systems until we take off the mental shackles of the old ones. So let your shame fall away. Remember your pride in learning and growing as a person, loving life and other people, being with friends, and pursuing your dreams. Then hold tight to these feelings as you set clear intentions about how the future must be different from the past.

We can do better. We must do better. It might be true that capitalism as we know it is going the way of history. I say good riddance. Whatever good it might have done is in the past now. Moving forward will be a grieving process – and each of us needs to pay close attention to the feelings inside of ourselves. We are the capitalist system right now. But not for long.

The pain we feel is like that tugging of skin for the serpent as it sheds an outer layer. Deep inside ourselves we are human beings, which is about so much more than the money we have in the bank or the things we buy at the store. As we shed ourselves of the immoral economic ideology of insatiable greed [that has made the elites around the world very sick indeed!], let us remember our true nature and begin to heal.

Onward, fellow humans.

Joe Brewer is a Seattle blogger who works to integrate complexity research, cognitive science, and cultural evolution for the good of humanity. His web site is changestrategistforhumanity.com.

Young Farmers Aiming To Change Face Of Local Farming

BY STAN COX

Richard Nixon’s agriculture secretary in the early to mid-1970s was Earl Butz, a man best known for advising the nation’s farmers to “get big or get out.” Rural America has been following that advice ever since. Across most of the country, farms continue to grow in acreage and dwindle in number. Every state in the vast agricultural region stretching from Michigan to Kansas and Ohio to North Dakota has seen more than a doubling of average farm size since 1982.

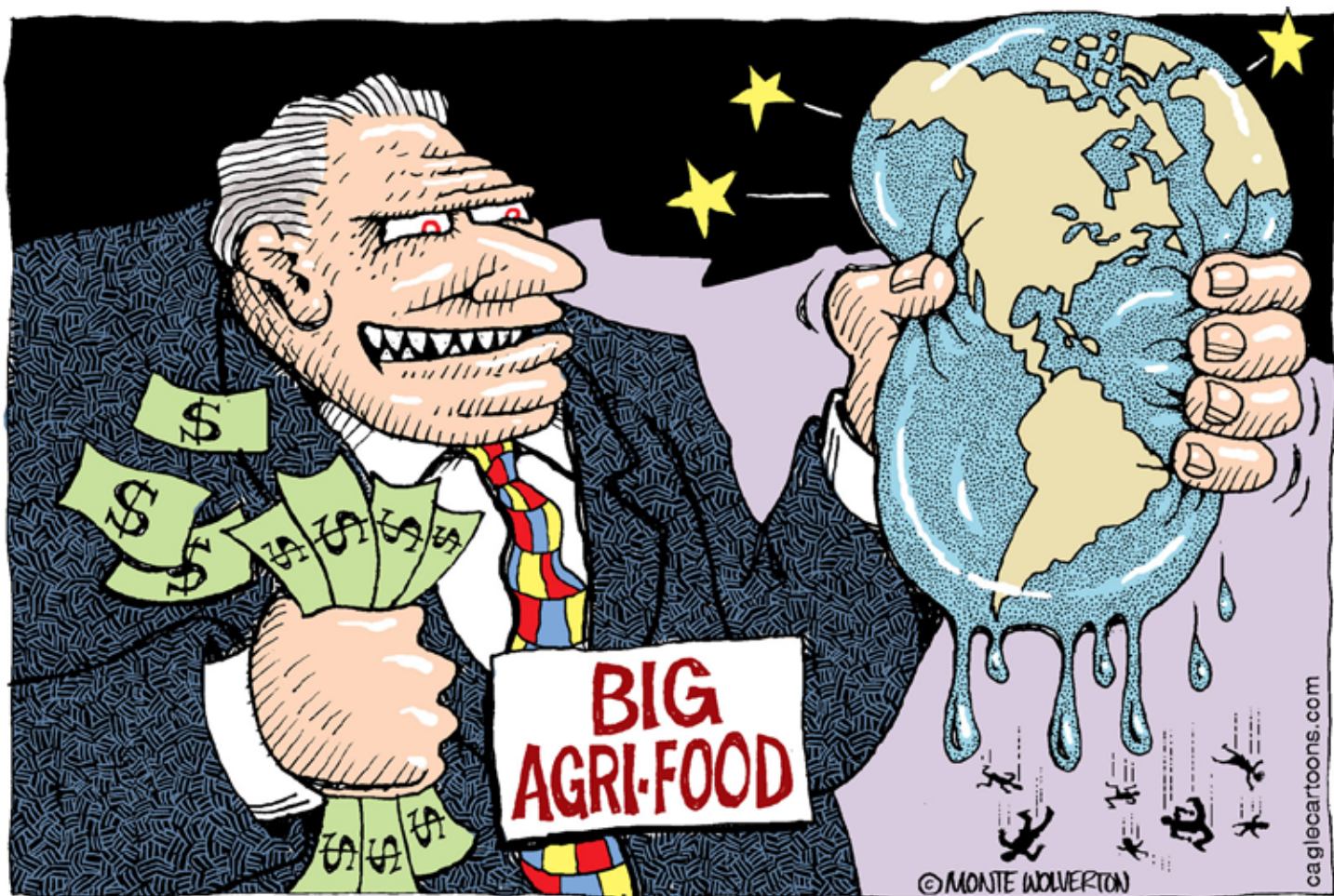
Meanwhile, the U.S. Department of Agriculture figures show that growing crops and raising animals has become an old man’s pursuit, with two-thirds of farmers now more than 55 years old, almost one-

third of them over 65 and 88% of them men.

But one region, New England, is having none of that. There, numbers of farms are increasing, with the biggest growth in the small-farm sector. And prominent in this boom are women and men in their 20s and 30s.

This movement gets support from organizations like the Young Farmer Network of Southeastern New England. Having started about five years ago as a series of potluck field tours known as Young Farmer Nights, YFN has grown into a deep-rooted community of new farmers determined to defy the old Butz Doctrine and get in small.

The network is riding the region’s extraordinary



wave of growth in numbers of new farmers, which increased 15% in Massachusetts and 27% in Rhode Island just between 2007 and 2012. [Nationally, the ranks of new farmers shrank by 20% during those same five years.]

YFN founder Margiana Petersen-Rockney is a Massachusetts vegetable and livestock farmer and a food-literacy coordinator at Harvard University. She has written that she started the network because “as a new farmer I saw that there were many of us struggling with the same issues as we developed our enterprises, but there wasn’t an education or support system – everyone was reinventing the wheel and wasting valuable emotional, financial and time resources.”

YFN’s work, she wrote, “focuses on cultivating personal and professional relationships and strong networks between new farmers of all ages and backgrounds in southern New England.”

For the most part, YFN’s members either run their own farms or are employed as farm workers [or both]. Young Farmer Nights still happen every couple of weeks from May through October, but the number of farms involved and the range of projects undertaken by the network have grown, while its membership has swelled beyond 300.

Recent public programs have featured sessions on practical topics such as tractor basics, small engine mechanics, apple grafting and irrigation. There are

also short courses that help new farmers with no previous experience learn not only how to grow crops but also how to deal with providers of inputs and insurance and how to market what they produce.

But YFN’s programs are now aiming higher and wider. Nationwide, only 3.5% of farmers are Latino, 2% are Native American, and fewer than 2% are African American. Likewise, the Northeast’s new-farmer community is very white.

So YFN organizer Tess Brown-Lavoie of Sidewalk Ends Farm, who is also on the board of the National Young Farmers’ Coalition [NYFC], says YFN and the many other young farmer groups around the country see a need to join forces and change the face of agriculture: “In New England especially, it makes sense for us to have a regional movement to address issues like policy, resources, our historical context and race – issues that don’t respect state lines.”

A top goal of NYFC is have 25,000 more people running new, viable farms across the country by 2022, according to Michelle Hughes, the coalition’s director of investments and partnerships. She says that in that effort, “we need to connect to issues faced by farmers of color, like land affordability, hiring practices and especially to have more people of color in our own leadership.”

To undertake food production in America today

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How Do You Make Change Happen? Show Up

In my travels and conversations this year, I've been encouraged that grassroots people of all progressive stripes [populist, labor, liberal, environmental, women, civil libertarian, et al.] are well aware of the slipperiness of "victory" and want Washington to get it right this time. So over and over, Question No. 1 that I encounter is some variation of this: What should we do?! How do we make Washington govern for all the people? What specific things can my group or I do now?

Thanks for asking. The first thing you can do to bring about change is show up. Think of showing up as a sort of civic action, where you get to choose something that fits your temperament, personal level of activism, available time and energy, etc. The point here is that every one of us can do something – and every bit helps.

Simply being there matters. While progressives have shown up for elections in winning numbers, our movement then tends to fade politely into the shadows, leaving public officials [even those we put in office] free to ignore us and capitulate to ever-present, ever-insistent corporate interests. No more. Grassroots progressives – as individuals and through our groups – must get in the face of power and stay there.

This doesn't require a trip to Washington, though it can. It can be done right where you live – in personal meetings, on the phone, via email and letters, through social media [tweet at the twits!], on petitions, and any additional ways of communication that you and other creative people can invent.

Hey, we're citizens, voters, constituents – so we should not hesitate to request in-person appointments to chat with officials back home [these need not be confrontational], attend forums where they'll be [local hearings, town hall sessions, speeches, meet & greets, parades, ribbon-cuttings, receptions, etc].

They generally post their public schedules on their websites. Go to their meetings, ask questions, or at

least say hello, introduce yourself, and try to achieve this: *Make them learn your name.*

OK, you're too busy to show up at all this stuff, but try one, then think of going to one every month or two. And you don't have to go alone – get a family member, a couple of friends, a few members of the groups you're in to join you. Make it an excursion, rewarding yourselves with a nice glass of wine or a beer and some laughs afterward.

Then there are times ["in the course of human events," as Jefferson put it] when citizens have to come together in big numbers to protest, to insist on being heard. Lobbyists are able to meet with officials in quiet rooms, but when we're shut out, a higher form of patriotism demands that ordinary folks surround a public official's district office or a high-dollar fundraising event to deliver a noisy message about the people's needs.

This is especially necessary for officials who get a substantial or even majority vote from progressive constituencies ... but still stiff us on such major needs as increasing the minimum wage, overturning Citizens United, endorsing a Robin Hood Tax on Wall Street speculators, and prohibiting the outrage of voter suppression.

We have a right to expect them to respect our vote, and stand with us on the big issues. We've been too quiet, too indulgent with such office holders, and they won't change until we start confronting them publicly.

Both in terms of having your own say and in demonstrating the strength of the grassroots numbers behind the policy changes we want, you and I are going to have to get noisier, more demonstrative, more out-front in demanding that elected officials really pay heed to those who elected them.

Let's make 2016 the year of reintroducing ourselves and our expectations to policymakers. At their every turn, we should be there, becoming a personal human presence [even an irritant] they cannot ignore.

Panama Papers Reveal Hypocrisy

It's always educational to observe the behavior of wildlife in their natural habitat. For example, we learn that there's nothing more vicious than a wild animal that's cornered. I would add that there's nothing more devious than a top political or corporate official caught in a scandalous hypocrisy.

We're now bearing witness to this latter phenomenon, for a whole menagerie of political critters have recently been screeching and scrambling after being backed into a corner by the "Panama Papers." This is a trove of thousands of Internet documents leaked to global media outlets, revealing that assorted billionaires, rich celebrities, corporate chieftains, and – yes – pious public officials have been hiding their wealth and dodging the taxes they owe by stashing their cash in foreign tax havens.

Of course, we've known for a while that tax dodging is a common plutocratic scam, but the details from the leaked files of an obscure Panamanian law firm named Mossack Fonseca now gives us names to shame.

One is David Cameron, the ardently conservative prime minister of Britain, who has loudly declaimed tax sneaks in public. But – oops! Now we learn that his own super-wealthy father was a Mossack Fonseca client, and that David himself has profited from the stealth wealth he inherited from the elder Cameron's secret stash.

Trapped by the facts, the snarling, privileged prime minister used middle-class commoners as his shield, asserting that critics of his secluded wealth are trying to "tax anyone who [wants] to pass on their home ... to their children." Uh-uh, David – we merely want to tax those who try to pass-off tax frauds on the public.

One of Cameron's partisans even claimed that critics "hate anybody who has a hint of wealth in them." No, it's the gross, self-serving hypocrisy of the elites that people hate. Yet now, doubling down on their hypocrisy, Cameron & Co. have announced that they'll host an anticorruption summit meeting to address the problem of offshore tax evaders!

The global web of corruption involving thousands of superrich tax dodgers and money launderers that the Panama Paper reveal is an explosive scandal – yet, interestingly, very few names of the moneyed elite in our country have surfaced as players in Mossack Fonseca's Panamanian shell game. Perhaps U.S. billionaires and corporations are just more honest than those elsewhere.

Ha-ha-ha, just kidding! Not more honest, just luckier. You see, America's conniving richies don't have to go to Panama to set up an offshore flim flam –

they have the convenience of hiding their money and wrongdoings in secret accounts created right here in states like Delaware and Nevada.

The New York Times notes that it's easier in some states to form a dummy money corporation than it is to get a fishing license. Indeed, the ease of doing it, and the state laws that provide strict secrecy for those hiding money, have made the U.S.A. a global magnet for international elites wanting to conceal billions of dollars from their own tax collectors, prosecutors ... and general public.

State officials in Delaware even travel to Brazil, Israel, Spain and other nations to tell "the Delaware story," inviting rich foreign interests to stash their cash in corporate hideaways that the state sets up, no questions asked.

Likewise, Nevada flashes a dazzling neon sign inviting the global rich to incorporate their very own shell corporations there, promising – shhhh – "minimal reporting and disclosing requirements."

The money-hiding industry is so hot in Nevada that it attracted none other than Mossack Fonseca to get in the action by opening a branch office there.

The law firm is being branded as a criminal enterprise for the rich. OK, but it shares that shameful brand with our own state governments.

– Jim Hightower

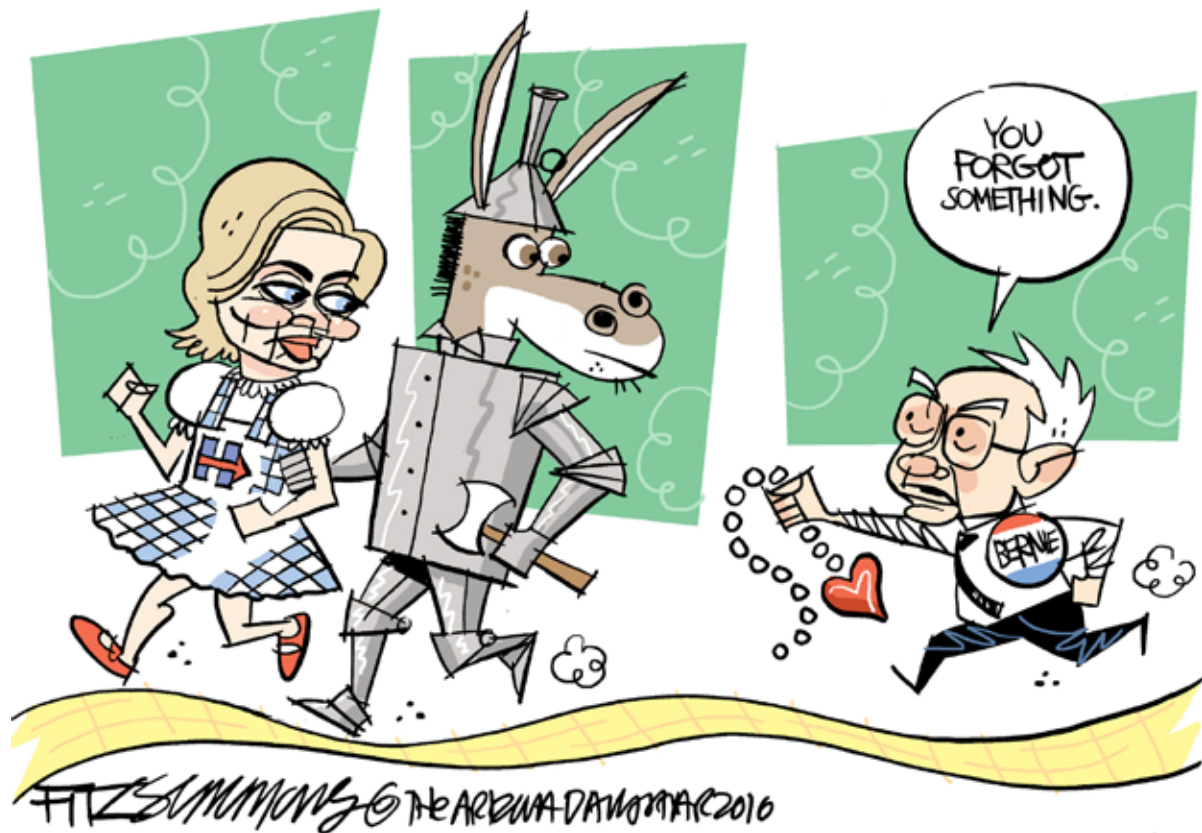
Why Bernie Will, Should And Must Stay In The Race

Surprisingly, the latest prize for "Stupidest Political Comment in the Presidential Race" doesn't go to Donnie Trump or Ted Cruz.

Rather, the honor goes to the clueless cognoscenti of conventional political wisdom. These pundits and professional campaign operatives have made a unilateral decision that Bernie Sanders must now quit the race for the Democratic nomination. Why? Because, they say: "He Can't Win."

Actually, he already has. Sanders' vivid populist vision, unabashed idealism, and big ideas for restoring America to its own people have jerked the presidential debate out of the hands of status quo corporatists, revitalized the class consciousness and relevance of the Democratic Party, energized millions of young people to get involved, and proven to the Democratic establishment that they don't have to sell out to big corporate donors to raise the money they need to run for office.

Bernie has substantively – even profoundly – changed American politics for the better, which is



why he's gaining more and more support and keeps winning delegates.

From the start, he said: "This campaign is not about me" – it's a chance for voters who have been disregarded and discarded to forge a new political revolution that will continue to grow beyond this election and create a true people's government.

From coast to coast, millions of voters have been "Feeling the Bern." That's the campaign slogan that grassroots supporters created to express their passion for the unconventional presidential run being made by Bernie Sanders.

Yes, *passion* – an outpouring of genuine excitement that is [as we say in Texas] "hotter than high school love." All this for a 74-year-old Democratic Socialist who is openly taking on the corporate plutocracy that's been knocking down the middle class and holding down the poor. Sanders is the oldest candidate in the race – yet, politically, he's the youngest candidate, exuberantly putting forth an FDR-sized vision and agenda to lift up America's workaday majority. And, guess what? It turns out that workaday Americans really value democracy over plutocracy, so that's where his passionate support comes from.

Need I mention that the moneyed powers – and the politicians hooked on their money – hate this affront to their cozy politics-as-usual/business-as-usual system? Especially shocking to them is that Sanders' supporters have found their way around the usual Wall of Big Money that the establishment always throws us to thwart populist campaigns.

This time, though, a counter-force of common folks has created a widely-successful campaign fund of

their own to support their Bernie Rebellion. How successful? A whopping \$182-million has been raised in millions of small donations. How small? They average \$27 each.

That's a revolution, right there! Every revolution needs a slogan, so here's one that used to be on the marquee of a vintage, locally-owned motel just down the street from where I live in Austin: "No additives, No preservatives, Corporate free since 1938." That perfectly sums up the unique people's campaign that Bernie-people have forged for themselves.

The keepers of the Established Order fear this grassroots uprising by no-name "outsiders," and they know that this year's Democratic nomination is still very much up for grabs, so they're stupidly trying to shove Sanders out before other states can vote. But Bernie and the mass movement he's fostering aren't about to quit – they'll organize in every primary still to come, be a major force at the Democratic convention, and keep pushing their ideals and policies in the general election ... and beyond.

As Sanders puts it: "I run not to oppose any man or woman, but to propose new and far-reaching policies to deal with the crisis of our times ... It may be too late to stop the billionaire class from trying to buy the presidency and congress ... But we owe it to our children and grandchildren to try ... We need to face up to the reality of where we are as a nation, and we need a mass movement of people to fight for change."

That's what *real* politics should be – not merely a vacuous campaign to elect a personality, but a momentous democratic movement fighting for the common good. – *Jim Hightower*

How Bernie Sanders Can Squander – Or Expand – His Victory

BY JOE CONASON

The time is coming when Bernie Sanders should declare victory – not because he is going to be the Democratic presidential nominee, but because he has already won so much.

Of course, Sanders knows very well that he cannot wrest the nomination from Hillary Clinton. He lags well behind her in pledged delegates, superdelegates and the popular vote, where he trails by well over three million.

Nobody should be surprised that he couldn't beat Clinton, whose political durability is routinely underestimated by hostile media coverage. What did seem surprising, however briefly, was the mere possibility that a self-described democratic socialist from a tiny New England state could win the nomination of a party he had never condescended to join.

Even more astonishing is how much this ruffled, sometimes cranky, and formerly obscure politician has achieved during his meteoric flight to fame.

Sanders has proved a concept that many on the left have always cherished: Social democratic ideas, given a fair hearing, can appeal to a much broader segment of the American public than most political scientists ever imagined. No doubt most voters would still shun "socialism," but millions this year have embraced social democracy, European style, with its emphasis on economic security, worker rights, environmental quality and gender equality.

He has pushed both Clinton, the presumptive Democratic nominee, and her party well to the left of where they were when he entered the race. Although she can point to much evidence of her own progressive inclinations, his challenge has provoked her to speak up forcefully on income inequality, paid family leave, infrastructure spending and financial reform. Substantive differences remain between them, but their disagreements are narrow compared with the gulf between the two parties – or between them and the likely Republican nominee.

And he has led a remarkable mobilization of young activists, from every background, now widely seen as representing the future of the Democratic Party. If they remain active, there will be senators, representatives and perhaps even a president who remember Bernie as their inspiration.

For now, as an "independent" sitting in the Senate Democratic caucus, Sanders can still look ahead to a very productive future. But he must choose a way forward that advances rather than squanders this year's

achievements. Already he has taken several steps in the wrong direction.

The relentless personal assault he mounted against Clinton has contradicted his proud assertion that "I've never run a negative ad in my life." Over the past few months he has spent millions of dollars on harshly negative advertising, which has caused real damage to her.

Now he seems to be contemplating a strategy that blatantly violates his own democratic instincts, by persuading superdelegates to switch their allegiance to him. This doomsday scheme would be troubling even if Sanders' supporters hadn't gathered nearly half a million petition signatures already, demanding that the superdelegates support the candidate with the most pledged delegates and highest vote total. To pursue it would deepen party divisions and forfeit any claim to the moral high ground.

That doesn't mean Sanders ought to quit, not until he has seized every last opportunity to deliver his message. As he continues, however, he must consider carefully what path best serves him, his movement and his country.

More than a few of his angry supporters sound as if they intend to punish Hillary Clinton by refusing to vote for her in November, even against Donald Trump. They seem to hope that Sanders will withhold his full support from her, too. They evidently don't realize that Clinton herself will be fine either way.

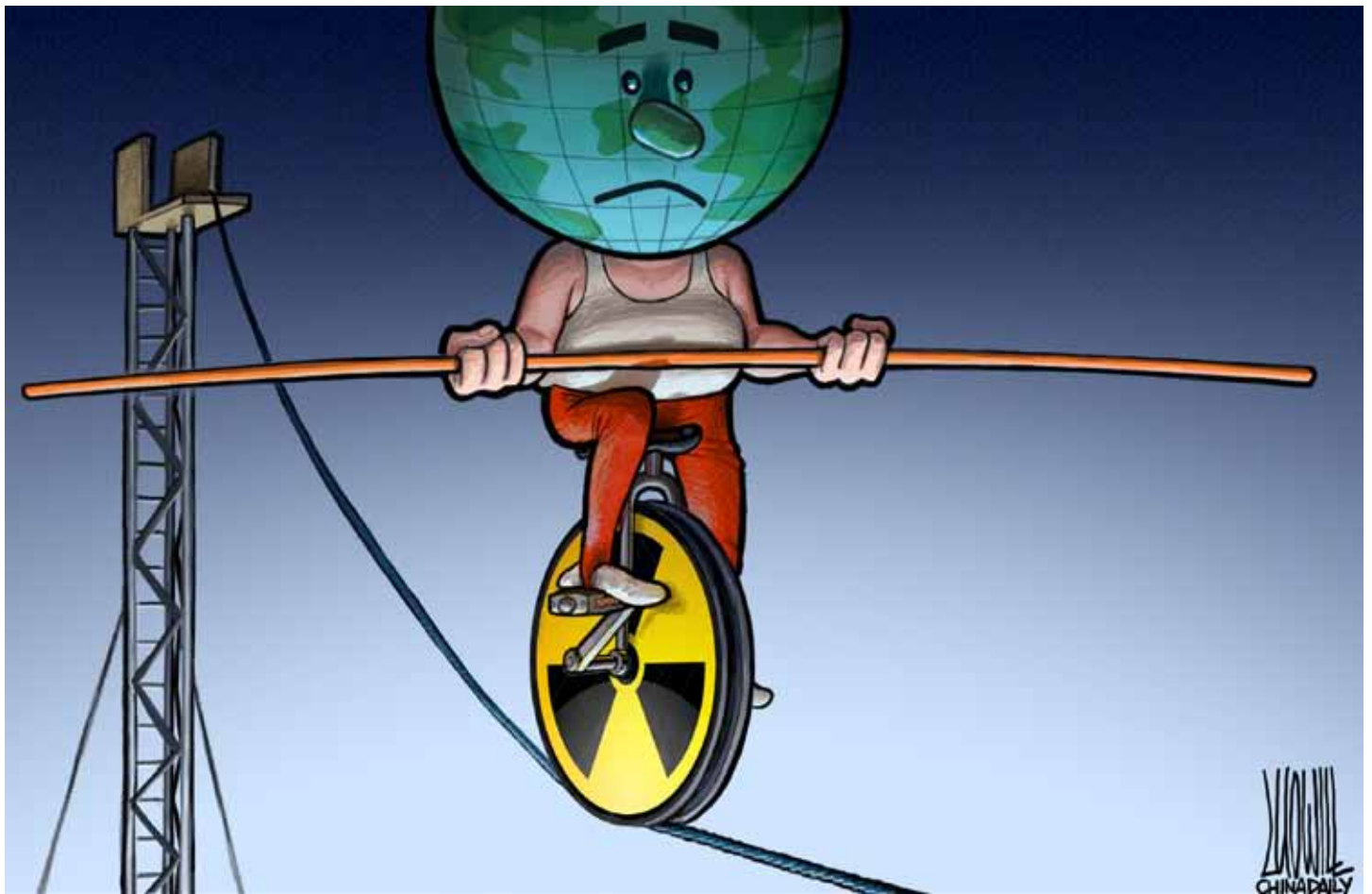
But a Democratic defeat would badly injure millions of other Americans – and losing to the Republicans would permanently diminish Sanders, too.

If the Democrats can mobilize enough voters for a big victory, their party may well regain control of the Senate. That shift would give Sanders the chairmanship of the Senate Budget Committee, with substantial influence over taxes, spending and the fiscal priorities of the next White House. His new position would amplify that now familiar voice, speaking up on the issues that matter most to him. And as the new administration begins, he would have in hand the necessary tools to hold Clinton to her progressive campaign promises.

Yet if the Democrats lose because the Vermont Senator and his supporters refuse to unite with Clinton, he will remain muted in the minority – and his uplifting campaign will be seen as the prelude to a national disaster.

This is not a hard choice.

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Why Risk Nuclear When Wind, Solar Power Free For The Taking?

BY ACE HOFFMAN

Everyone starts out the day they are going to have a fatal car accident the same as any other. They get up, wash up, dress up, head out, and drive off, never to return.

Nuclear power has lived the same way, day after day, ignoring the reality of what is down the road.

Even a perfectly-operating nuclear reactor is a nightmare-waiting-to-happen: It produces mountains of nuclear waste, which has to be cooled for five to 25 years in a deep cooling pond with special very-clean water. Then it is stored on-site in huge thin [one-half-inch thick] stainless steel containers nearly the size of a school bus, which are subject to corrosion because of the heat, humidity inside and out [mostly out but some water always remains inside], and radiation effects.

Nothing can stop the decay of the containers. Yet the waste has nowhere to go.

Now, Congress is considering how to continue financing and regulating the nuclear industry into the

future. Many members of Congress want it to live. We, the people, need it to die, and gracefully. That's not going to be easy.

Nuclear power faces a number of daunting problems today. First and foremost is the aging condition of the reactor fleet. "Only" four reactors are being built – all four are over budget and are boondoggles of an ancient era, of back door politics, of old designs, and are poorly sited, with no plan for the waste they will produce, and no consideration of what the same money put into solar and wind would have done. And absolutely no consideration of what the land around them will be worth if there is a meltdown [note that Chernobyl and Three Mile Island were both newly-started reactors, where nothing had aged].

But five reactors have closed recently and at least as many are liable to close in the next few years – mainly due to aging issues and other economic strains. Possibly several dozen will close in the next five to 10

CONTINUED ON PAGE 38

Support Oklahoma Libraries And Education

Grappling with deep budget cuts, Oklahoma's public libraries and public schools are being forced to make tough financial decisions. Many are electing to cut subscriptions to publications like The Observer. You can help ensure that educators, students, parents and library patrons continue to have access to facts and viewpoints the state's rightwing mainstream media suppress. Your tax-deductible \$35 gift to the Oklahoma Observer Democracy Foundation will provide a one-year Observer subscription to a library or school in your area.

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years. Hopefully even more. Hopefully all.

Only one reactor in America is younger than about 25 years, some are 40 years old or more. Would you want to ride in a 40-year old commercial jet? One that was in flight almost continuously and could only be inspected about every year and a half? And where most of the internal damage simply cannot be inspected in any way?

Well, that's the state of our nuclear power fleet. Right now, Indian Point II in Buchanan, NY, is shut down due to rusted out bolts inside the reactor itself. About 20% of the bolts are rusted beyond regulatory permissible levels, and have to be replaced, which takes a long time and requires a lot of radiation exposure to the workers. But that's not the worst of it.

Some of the bolts at Indian Point are so rusted, the heads have fallen off and flowed downstream from the reactor to other internal components of the primary coolant loop. Technicians are looking for the bolt heads throughout the system, but they could already be stuck in valves, or will become so at a crucial time when a valve needs to shut tight, but can only shut 98%.

In a nuclear power plant, that could easily be the difference between a meltdown and a nice, profitable day. Or between Fukushima and San Onofre.

[Fukushima was shut down by triple meltdowns caused by overheating due to lack of power for coolant pumps; San Onofre was shut down permanently by careless design errors that caused a replacement steam generator to vibrate excessively until it got a pinhole-sized hole.]

With the cost of solar and wind power literally plummeting, the economic future looks very bleak for nuclear power. But still the industry hangs on to what they've got, which is [or usually is, depending on the regulatory environment] a very lucrative cash cow.

First off, the federal government has promised to take the waste – some day. That promise remains unfulfilled at this time and will remain so for the foreseeable future, but it's still being made by the feds to the utilities. A hot potato “get out of jail free” card [charged to the taxpayer, \$30 billion so far].

Second, their customer's rates are usually regulated by the state in such a way that the utility covers their costs *and makes a 10%-plus profit*. See how tricky that is? When things go wrong for the nuclear power plant, it costs money to fix. So the state public utilities commission [California, I'm looking at you!] not only gives them the money to fix the problem – covers the cost entirely through electricity rate increases – but allows the utility to make a profit for their shareholders on all that extra cash that comes in.

That future still looks great for the utilities. Most Public Utilities Commissions around the country that regulate electricity rates also make large solar and wind farms pay exorbitant hook-up fees, or won't help pave the way for transmission lines to be built to move that power to where it's needed, or simply won't approve large or small renewable energy plans because then the nuclear power plant's power wouldn't be “needed.”

At a Congressional hearing last month, one after another nuclear proponent [including a former NRC commissioner who now works for the nuclear industry as a lobbyist] was given time to testify as to what the industry needs from government in order to move forward with nuclear power in America.

No opposition view was invited to speak. No expert in the medical consequences of internal radioactive emitters.

No, this was about getting “Small Modular Reactors” into the marketplace. It was decidedly not: “Why in the world should we do that when we don't need it?” [the logical viewpoint] but: “What can Congress do to cut costs or even provide funding for ‘SMRs’?”

Solar and wind were not mentioned as alternatives, of course. Coal was. It was pointed out that the projected need for America was 1,000 small [300 Megawatt] coal plants over the next couple of decades, were to we go that route. Very polluting and it isn't going to happen. What the pro-nukers think will happen instead – and want you to pay for – is an equal number of equal size SMRs.

The waste from these reactors will have to go in several “interim storage sites” across the country, along with the waste from the 120 reactors that operate or have operated in America so far, all of which have nowhere to store the waste other than onsite or, in a few cases, in Idaho at a national research lab or similar facility.

In fact, nobody on earth knows what to do with nuclear waste. A few countries are moving forward with various “deep repositories” [which really aren't so deep, considering how long the waste needs to be isolated from humanity].

All those plans have elements of risk that include numerous unknowns, but one known risk is the transportation of all that waste to those sites, and the vulnerability of that waste, during that transport, to accidents, terrorism, and perhaps just cracking open due to corrosion while the waste sat for decades, waiting to be transported.

Nobody gets up in the morning expecting to die in a car accident. And yet 30,000 Americans die every year that way. No truck driver of nuclear waste will ever expect to have an accident, but tens of thou-

sands of shipments will be needed just to move the waste that already exists.

We don't need 1,000 more reactors, so-called "small" but really quite significant, *and* – to be profitable – probably as many as a dozen will have to be located at any one site – do we really need 1,000 more potential Chernobyls, Fukushimas, Three Mile Islands, or even San Onofres? When wind power and solar energy are free for the taking?

Americans cannot afford even one nuclear power plant accident. If Indian Point II were to be restarted and then melts down due to flow constrictions caused by these rusted-out bolts getting loose and either changing the flow in the reactor itself [causing fuel damage, if not a meltdown], or by damaging something down the line, it will cost America tril-

lions of dollars and thousands, or tens of thousands of lives [mostly from cancer years down the road].

And Unit III is quite probably suffering from the same degradation, but won't even be inspected for two more years! Why not? Because the utility can't make money when the reactor is being inspected or repaired. The utility loses hundreds of thousands of dollars every day it is not operating, and a reactor cannot be shut down for just an hour or two. It has to cool for weeks before the fuel can be removed so workers can go in and check the bolts. It's expensive, so no one is in a hurry to do that.

They are driving blind.

Ace Hoffman, a Carlsbad, CA-based author, has been following nuclear issues closely for nearly half a century.

Young's New Album Inspired By Natural World

Neil Young has announced his new, full-length album EARTH. The 98-minute record, out June 17, features an unusual set of collaborators: live animals.

Young described his latest project on social media:

We made a live record and every creature on the planet seemed to show up. Suddenly all the living things of Earth were in the audience going crazy. Then they took over the stage, letting their wild sounds mingle with the Vanilla Singers perfect corporate harmony. Earth's creatures let loose, there were Bee breakdowns, Bird breakdowns and yes, even Wall Street breakdowns, jamming with me and Promise of the Real! The show was non stop bliss for 98 minutes, no breaks. EARTH does not fit on iTunes. It breaks all their rules [and couldn't all really be heard that way anyway]. No one who was there will ever forget the love, wonder and beautiful madness of EARTH. I know I won't. Neil

EARTH consists of recordings from Young's tour last year with the band Promise Of The Real for his preceding album, The Monsanto Years. AlterNet described Young's 36th studio album, as a "concept-based criticism" of Monsanto, the world's biggest seed company, and also a condemnation of other multinational agriculture giants like Syngenta, Dow, Dupont and Bayer that have also, like Monsanto, "garnered control of global seed production."

Promise Of The Real guitarist Lukas Nelson lauded the new LP.

"I just listened to our new record EARTH with Neil Young ... One of the single greatest audio experiences I've ever had," he wrote on Instagram.

The world premiere of EARTH will be hosted by the Natural History Museum in Los Angeles on May 6. And, according to an announcement about the event, it's sure to be spectacular:

Against the backdrop of the Museum's blossoming outdoor Nature Gardens, musician and icon Neil Young will present the first public playback of his upcoming release, EARTH, in its entirety in Pono high definition fidelity audio, before its June 17 release. The album features "After the Gold Rush," "Vampire Blues," and an explosive 29-minute version of "Love & Only Love," and includes some unexpected accompaniment – the sounds of many different kinds of wildlife.

The Grammy Award-winning artist and environmental crusader said in a press release that EARTH "flows as a collection of 13 songs from throughout my life, songs I have written about living here on our planet together. Our animal kingdom is well represented in the audience as well, and the animals, insects, birds, and mammals actually take over the performances of the songs at times."

Young also told Rolling Stone last year that EARTH is "like nothing that I've done. It's more like a giant radio show."

"It has no stops," he continued. "The songs are too long for iTunes, thank God, so they won't be on iTunes. I'm making it available in the formats that can handle it ...

"Imagine it's a live show where the audience is full of every living thing on Earth. And also they overtake the music once in a while and play the instruments. It's not conventional, but it is based on live performance."

Reader Supported News

Have We Learned From 2008 Financial Crisis? Apparently Not!

GRIFTOPIA

***Bubble Machines, Vampire Squids, And
The Long Con That Is Breaking America***
By Matt Taibbi

Random House Publishing Group
320 pages, \$16

BY JOHN WOOD

Griftopia is a critical but satirical look at the 2008 mortgage crisis, and Taibbi tells stories punctuated with facts illuminating how the elite have clearly taken over the finance system.

Taibbi writes for Rolling Stone and won the National Magazine Award for his work. In addition, he won the Sidney Award for an article that is the basis for this book, called “The Great American Bubble Machine.”

While this book is nearing six years old, it's a great way for you to gain a deeper understanding about the mortgage crisis, without which we are likely to repeat the mistakes made by these bankers who are numb to the consequences because they were largely not punished for their outlandish greed directly leading to the crisis.

Have we learned from the crisis? Apparently not!

For example, in April 2016, Bank of America, JPMorgan Chase & Co. and three other major U.S. banks could not convince regulators that had they gone bankrupt, they wouldn't disrupt the financial system worldwide, in essence, they were certainly still “too big to fail.” This outcome is important not only because it creates potential instability and may lead to future crises, it flies in the face of reforms to prevent it, such as the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and

Consumer Protection Act passed in the aftermath of the mortgage crisis in 2009.

As Sen. Elizabeth Warren said recently: “There's been a lot of revisionist history floating around lately that the ‘Too Big to Fail’ banks weren't really responsible for the financial crisis. Wall Street lobbyists have tried to deflect blame for years. But the claim is absolutely untrue.”

In fact, Warren stated, “there would have been no crisis without these giant banks.”

Therefore, we need to understand how the crisis happened to understand and possibly prevent the next crisis that Warren says looms on the horizon unless we take reforms more seriously.

Griftopia is a good way to place what happened in context.

As the title suggests, grift is the involving of oneself in petty swindles. Taibbi gives specific examples about bankers and politicians blameworthy for manufacturing the “real estate bubble” and reducing the financial system's net worth by whopping 25% – an astronomical \$7 trillion.

Taibbi says that the moral corruption in the financial sector is pervasive from the bottom up, but he focuses on Lehman Brothers, Bear Stearns, and AIG. He says these banks are guilty of greed and stupidity

– as were those selling and rating those subprime mortgages. The risky loans couldn't have been sold, Taibbi notes, without solid ratings by the "Big Three" agencies – Fitch Ratings, Standard & Poor's, and Moody's.

Tiabbi writes, as if in a whisper: "America's dirty little secret is that for this small group of plugged-in bubble-lords, the political system works fine, not just without elections, but without any political input from any people at all outside Manhattan."

Wall Street couldn't have done it all by itself, he says. The mortgage crisis is connected to our country's economic thinking at the top. The author points to former Federal Reserve Chief Alan Greenspan's policies as the root cause. He blames Greenspan for leading us to the 2001 Internet bubble and financial crisis of 2008 by making interest rates artificially low to pump the stock market with easy money and to bring stocks up to unsustainable levels.

Are markets fair or rigged?

Markets are seemingly faceless, but in reality it's made up by millions of people who are buyers and sellers. Part of the problem, Taibbi argues, is that price matching mechanism between traders is broken. Traders often exploit each others' advantages through insider trading and lending rates, which were altered by Greenspan.

While the market is ostensibly based on trust, Tiabbi asserts that most Americans actually perceived it to be rigged. And people still feel this way.

A 2014 Better Markets survey found 64% believe the market is rigged, undermining our financial system. Sixty percent of respondents in the same poll expressed support for stricter bank and financial regulation.

Consider Goldman Sachs, which profited with \$5 billion by storing aluminum in Detroit. Taibbi describes a New York Times investigation that revealed Goldman created an aluminum shortage by moving the product around warehouses and not selling it for 18

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months. The longer it stays in the warehouse, the more it costs on the shelf.

They had 27 storage buildings. They shuffled aluminum from storage building to storage building in the form of sheets, later to be sold to make soda, aluminum

siding, foil, etc., driving up costs for consumers.

Taibbi cites Galleon Group's standard practice of trading on corporate insider tips as one of the few cases in which someone went to jail for their role in the financial crisis. In this case, Galleon's CEO

Raj Rajaratnam, was convicted of conspiracy and securities fraud and is serving 11 years in jail.

Galleon had an intense environment – you have to add to the bottom line or leave. This kind of behavior was common place, Taibbi says. There were no consequences. Morality, for these guys, was not right or wrong, just consequences for them, but not the world outside them.

The financial community is rather insular, Taibbi says, making fast money and cutting corners. Decisions are made as if their spreadsheets were reflected numbers only – not real people's lives or their pensions.

It's a short sighted mentality.

Occasionally people like Raj are caught, but there are hundreds who get away with it.

Why are most not prosecuted? It's not worth it. Prosecutors have limited resources for complicated cases. For big business, it's the cost of doing business – if they get caught, they write a check that comes out of the shareholders' pockets.

Taibbi's fast-paced, fact-filled book is a great one for anyone trying to get his or her brain wrapped around the mortgage crisis – and why the next one might occur within the next two to seven years if Sen. Warren is correct.

John Wood, PhD, is an assistant professor of political science at the University of Central Oklahoma.

Secretly Serving The President

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By Ronald Kessler
The Crown Publishing Group
304 pages, \$16**

BY WANDA JO STAPLETON

"Never before has a journalist so penetrated the wall of secrecy that surrounds the U.S. Secret Service."

So proclaims Barnes & Noble, describing this New York Times best seller published in 2009.

Secret Service agents observe everything that goes on behind the scenes. Although they're sworn to secrecy about what they learn, they sometimes tell, as this book indicates.

For example, agents knew that President John F. Kennedy led a double life. He was the charismatic leader of the free world. But in another life, he was

the cheating, reckless husband whose aides snuck women into the White House to appease his sexual appetite.

According to the Secret Service agents, Kennedy also had sex with Marilyn Monroe in New York hotels.

Secret Service agents knew that Lyndon B. Johnson was "uncouth, nasty, and often drunk." Once, his wife Lady Bird Johnson caught him having sex with one of the secretaries on a sofa in the oval office. Lady Bird rationalized it by saying: "You have to understand, my husband loved people. And half of the people in the world were women."

On to President Richard Nixon who did not sleep in

the same bedroom with his wife Pat and seemed to have no relationship with her. Unknown to the public, Pat was an alcoholic. By the time Nixon left the White House, Pat was in a stupor most of the time.

In conclusion, since President Obama took office, threats against the president are up 400%. But the X-rated stories about marital infidelity are over.

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

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

A good place to start is by reading *Justice For Sale: The Shocking Scandal of the Oklahoma Supreme Court* by retired Justice William A. Berry and James Edwin Alexander.

We also recommend Laurence Leamer's *The Price of Justice: A True Story of Greed and Corruption*, detailing the bribery antics of West Virginia coal baron Don Blankenship, sentenced last month to a year in prison for conspiring to violate federal mine safety standards.

There is no need to monkey with a system that works. Oklahomans should demand lawmakers resolve the state's real problems first, rather than search for solutions to those that do not exist.

Medical Marijuana

Oklahomans are getting another chance to do the right thing. A new initiative petition aimed at legalizing medical marijuana is set to launch May 14 with the goal of giving voters the opportunity this November to decide whether it's good public policy.

Previous petition drives failed to garner enough signatures to secure a spot on the statewide ballot – evidence, opponents say, that Oklahomans don't want to liberalize marijuana laws.

Not exactly. It's difficult for a band of rank-and-file citizens in their spare time to collect thousands of valid signatures in only three months, regardless the issue. Even well-funded campaigns with paid signature-gatherers often fail.

Just months after Green The Vote failed in a similar endeavor, Oklahomans For Health is trying again, this time hoping to give voters the opportunity to pass judgment on a statutory, rather than a constitutional change.

A proposal to modify Oklahoma's Constitution currently requires more than 120,000 valid signatures to force a statewide vote. Modifying an Oklahoma statute – in this case, creating a law that legalizes and regulates medical marijuana – only needs about 66,000 valid signatures to reach the statewide ballot.

The Legislature, of course, could tinker with a statute, something that cannot be done with the Constitution. But it would be tricky politically for lawmakers to alter a voter-approved statute without appearing to be undermining the will of the people.

The proposal's ballot fate would hinge, of course, on who turns out to vote, but it's hard to imagine a majority of Oklahomans opposing strictly regulated legalization. Why? Well, many Sooners are related to, or friends of, someone who benefits medically from illegally securing marijuana.

Today Oklahomans flock to Colorado to take ad-

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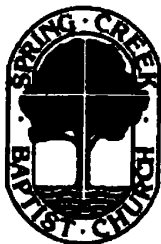
vantage of marijuana legalization. Some purchase creams to rub on arthritic hands. Others choose edibles that help with anxiety or headaches.

It's inevitable that medical marijuana will be legal someday in Oklahoma. Why not now? Tax it. Regulate it. Give people the option to use it – in consultation with their doctor. What's to lose?

Spring Creek Baptist Church

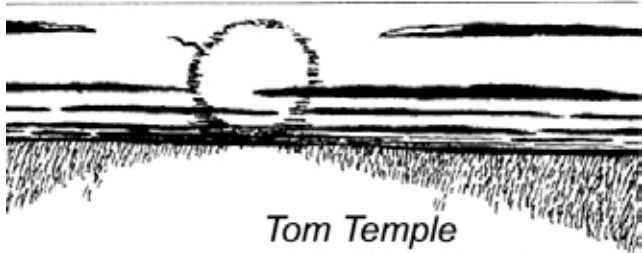
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of their choice. —Dwight D. Eisenhower*

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Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

A recent Morning Consult poll found approval ratings below 50% for U.S. Sens. Jim Inhofe and James Lankford. Same survey discovered one in five Okies had no opinion of Inhofe, who's been in and out of elective office for a half century. Go figure.

Gov. Mary Fallin, possible vice-presidential running mate? Is that any crazier than the phrase "Donald Trump, presumptive GOP nominee?"

Amazing Race cowboys Jet and Cord McCoy hope to cash in politically on their reality show fame – Jet is running as Republican for Senate seat to be vacated by term-limited Democrat Susan Paddock and Cord as a Democrat challenging incumbent McAlester Rep. Donnie Condit.

We note the passing of Dick Hershberger, longtime minister at OKC's Westminster Presbyterian Church and loyal Observer reader. He helped found Urban Mission and served on various boards, including the Interfaith Alliance.

Ex-California Assembly Speaker and San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown, writing in the San Francisco Chronicle: "I heard a great line the other day: 'This year's presidential race is a classic case of elect-ile dysfunction.'"

Take note: April's Observerscope incorrectly reported the number of FBI agents investigating Hillary Clinton's emails. It's actually only about a dozen. A GOP member of Congress leaked the higher, erroneous number to the Washington Post.

Notable: In 2014, 37% of Latinos ages 5-17 were raised in homes where only English was spoken, up from 30% in 2000. – Pew Research

Fox News' cable dominance wanes. CNN ranked No. 1 in prime time in April – fifth time in last eight months. It's Fox's worst eight-month prime time performance in 14 years.

Parts of Oklahoma are as active seismically as parts of California, mostly due to oil and gas drilling. There were 907 temblors of 3.0 or greater in Oklahoma last year. – U.S. Geological Survey

Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

to our state income tax which will start at a \$57,300 income for a single person or at \$65,600 income for a married couple with one child. Both will have a taxable Oklahoma income of \$50,000, and the increase will be very, very small starting at this level.

Who really wants more of the poor to miss meals, miss taking needed drugs, or be forced out of their homes, or file for bankruptcy because of increased sales taxes?

If we go with my plan, maybe the extremely rich will have to reduce the number of summer cruises from three to two!

My solution is this: Use \$50,000 as the end point for chart income tax calculations – then calculate all higher incomes at \$2,413 [single] and \$2,231 [married] plus 0.0525% for all over \$50,000. This might not be enough to provide a \$5,000 per year raise for all teachers. The 0.0525% could be raised in small increments until the desired amount is reached.

Lastly, I would like to repeat a cryptoquote [from the Oklahoman, March 31, by Agnes Repplier]: “A world of vested interests is not a world which welcomes the disruptive force of candor.”

Jerry A. Gowman
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

The Oklahoma GOP is the epitome of Greed Over People. Oklahoma ranks at the bottom in the nation on quality of life measures. Another way to conceptualize it is as a human misery index!

For example, the United Health Foundation ranks Americans by their health. Oklahoma ranks 46th. Drugs, alcohol, addiction, mental illness, number of children in foster care, poverty, underemployment, low wages, funding of education, health care, care of children and the elderly – you name it! Oklahoma ranks at the bottom.

The Oklahoma GOP has no concern whatsoever for the poor and powerless – those who Jesus championed. They have their heads so far up the petooties of corporations and the well-to-do that their ears are brown. They would rather give corporations and the well-to-do \$1.7 billion a year while imposing a \$1.3 billion deficit on the state and pushing many fellow citizens who Jesus called “the least of mine” into deeper and deeper human misery. They sit in church and proclaim to voters how much they “love Jesus.”



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Oklahoma is a corporate fascist state. It is a state of sheep run by wolves and owned by pigs but they love Jesus and everybody else.

John Karlin
Tecumseh

Editor's Note: John Karlin is a Democratic candidate for state House District 27.

Editor, The Observer:

From time to time issues related to faith and the institutions that try to define what it is and isn't prompt me to emote. So for those who see no reason to be concerned – don't waste your time with this post.

There is a term found in the bible that sets the stage for what follows. It is Pharisee. For those that might not know, a Pharisee was a member of an ancient Jewish sect, distinguished by strict observance of the traditional and written law, and commonly held to have pretensions to superior sanctity.

To understand that in contemporary terms, one only has to look at organizations that use, as their fall back authority, a code of behavior, a rulebook or a Book of Discipline.

Twenty-first Century Pharisees devote their attention and loyalty to their rules, their codes of behavior or an obnoxious volume known as The Book of Discipline, and individuals or a group of individuals that enforce the rules.

A parallel and related issue is an organization called The Institute on Religion and Democracy. It is the Heritage Foundation of the institutional church. The IRD has its tentacles deep within many, if not most, mainline denominations, to include the Untied Methodist Church. Its mission is to force conformity on "believers" and separate the wheat from the chaff, so to speak.

There are so many comparisons one can draw regarding the direction the IRD wants to move the victims of its influence. One will suffice – purity of faith, fundamentalisms inerrant word of God.

What you might ask has prompted my angst?

Here in Lawton, OK for the past 48 years there has existed a campus ministry know as Cameron Campus Ministry. It was a true ecumenical organization – one which reached out to all persons of faith with no expectation or proselytizing. It was a ministry to students and faculty, alike.

As of May 27, 2016, Cameron Campus Ministry will no longer exist as a UMC-recognized campus ministry. The Oklahoma Conference of the United Method-

ist Church has seen fit to dissolve and close it.

This is where the Pharisaical nature of the institutional church shines the brightest. Denominationalism is at its heart Pharisaical.

I hold ordination in the UMC and I am, today, ashamed of the UMC. For those who want to come to the defense of the UMC, understand this – your arguments are null and void. I have not left the church – it left me 50 years ago. It began the shift to the right and the social gospel got lost in the seeking for numbers and money and property.

Jesus wept for Jerusalem ...

Don Nelson
Lawton

Young Farmers

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

means trying to break into an economic sector that is notoriously resistant, even hostile, to new entrants of any color. New farms almost never generate a livable income; as a result, beginning farmers [defined by the Agriculture Department as having less than 10 years' experience] derive, on average, 98% of their income from nonfarm jobs. Similarly, most of YFN's farmers are supporting themselves with jobs in commercial agriculture or through nonfarm employment while they try to develop their own farms to the point of sustainability.

Brown-Lavoie says that kind of life can be unsettling. "Many younger farmers are finding it hard to understand their options," she says. "They're asking, How full-time do I want to be? Will this be sustainable or not? What will be the rewards? They are working out some emotions." And among the many obstacles they face, one of the most formidable is the price of land.

In New England, the close proximity of cropland to populous urban areas has provided fertile ground for the boom in small-scale farming to serve local markets. But that same geography has driven ridiculous increases in the cost of farmland. Most farmers associated with YFN cannot afford to buy land and instead have lease agreements, either long-term, short-term or "rolling."

Some, like Brown-Lavoie, see the farming of leased land as perhaps a good compromise. On this, she offers the long view: "Owning land here becomes complicated when you think about its history, about it having been stolen from the original inhabitants."

Operating costs are another headache for farmers with just a few acres who can't achieve the economies of scale that big operations have. Most are producing vegetables or animal products, both of which are very labor-intensive. But when small-scale farmers have to hire extra people in order to get all of the farm's work done, they face that age-old dilemma of agricultural labor: when they pay employees a living wage – something more than the current minimum



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agricultural wages of \$9.60 in Rhode Island and \$8 in Massachusetts – the resulting increase in output often doesn't compensate for the increased payroll costs, and their net income goes down. On the other hand, the notion of improving their balance sheets by paying farm workers minimum wage [or even less] is repugnant to many young farmers.

Margins are tightest for new farmers, and when the new \$15-per-hour minimum wage goes into effect in New York, it will put even more pressure on that state's small-scale growers. Hughes, who lives in Hudson, NY, says, "They want to pay that much, but it's really, really hard."

Over in the Young Farmer Network, people who run their own farms regularly rub shoulders with people who are employed on other people's farms, and that strengthens the resolve neither to exploit nor to be exploited. Those with their own farms have sought various ways around the problem. Some are simply working longer hours to get all of the work done themselves; meanwhile, many of them help out on one another's farms when seasonal workloads become heavy.

At the same time their costs have risen, the young farmers have also come under pressure to keep their prices down. Hughes says the price of their product is effectively higher than that of food from industrial-scale farms largely because the big farms attract government subsidies and externalizes many of their costs. As a result, responsibly produced food from small, local farms is often out of reach of low-income families, including those who participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP, formerly known as food stamps].

New England's young farmers and food marketers have sought to address the affordability problem. Two dozen farmers' markets in Rhode Island, for example, have adopted a policy of returning 40 cents worth of food-buying credits to customers for every dollar's worth of SNAP credits they spend. A Brown University project with funding from USDA, called Food on the Move, serves low-income areas with a grocery van; customers who buy out of the van with SNAP credits get double their value.

In addition, Brown-Lavoie and Hughes say that many farms with community-supported agriculture [CSA] projects – in which customers subscribe to regular deliveries of in-season produce – price their subscriptions on a sliding cost scale, making them affordable for lower-income customers. In the CSA she co-owns, says Brown-Lavoie, "We have some members with good jobs and incomes. They can afford to pay more so other members can afford the food."

As for lack of diversity in the new-farm sector, neither YFN nor NYFC has yet reached the stage of taking concrete action. "We're still in the stage of processing this," says Hughes. But some routes to diversity are clear enough. For example, she says, "Farmers of color have been getting started largely through urban agriculture. We need to support that and other path-

ways into farming that people of color are already following."

During an earlier tenure as director of the New Farmer Development Project in New York City, Hughes, with her coworkers, fostered the establishment of 19 immigrant-run farms covering 400 acres. "We saw so many immigrant families with such a wealth of agricultural experience, people who were now underemployed in the city." So the project conducted training courses, largely in Spanish ["Not on how to farm – they knew that – but in how to start a business"] and advocated to help the new farmers get their produce into local farmers' markets, which can be highly competitive. The farms that were established are still going strong.

YFN and others in New England continue seeking ways to diversify their farming community. Meanwhile, says Brown-Lavoie, she and her fellow farmers are growing tired of being featured in pat-on-the-head media stories that paint images of plucky young white folks working the soil as a lifestyle choice.

In response, she says that it's going to be essential to "unearth the mythology" of the movement, and that will mean "trying to figure out how to organize communally, how to respond to calls for more a justice-oriented approach and incorporate a framework on race in a landscape of labor versus farm ownership."

Some unearthing went on last December, in western Massachusetts, when those difficult questions emerged at an all-day gathering of Northeastern new-farmer groups, cosponsored by NYFC. Brown-Lavoie was there, and she says this was no traditional agricultural conference; it was less about crops and livestock and more about the human context.

The first session was to be a training workshop on oppression, structural racism and white privilege. Most attendees, including Brown-Lavoie and Michelle Hughes, expected that session to be lightly attended, with most people trickling in through the afternoon and the crowd peaking toward evening, when there was scheduled a mixer with free pizza.

But by the time the workshop got started first thing in the morning, says Hughes, "more than a hundred white farmers had shown up, ready to talk about race and how it plays out in food production. As an African-American woman, I saw that and I thought, Wow. Maybe this shows how white privilege can actually be put to good use!"

The session, says Brown-Lavoie, involved "three hours of discussion about racism and how the community of young farmers can seek justice in our work as we seek a future rooted in our history."

That discussion among the young farmers of the Northeast will most likely continue through this growing season and the seasons that follow.

Stan Cox is research coordinator at The Land Institute in Salina, KS. He is co-author, with Paul Cox, of How the World Breaks: Life in Catastrophe's Path, From the Caribbean to Siberia [The New Press, 2016].

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