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PENNY WISE?

*Desperate Times Beget Desperate Measures:
Boren's Sales Tax Plan Would Boost Education
Funding, But At A Higher Cost To Struggling Families*

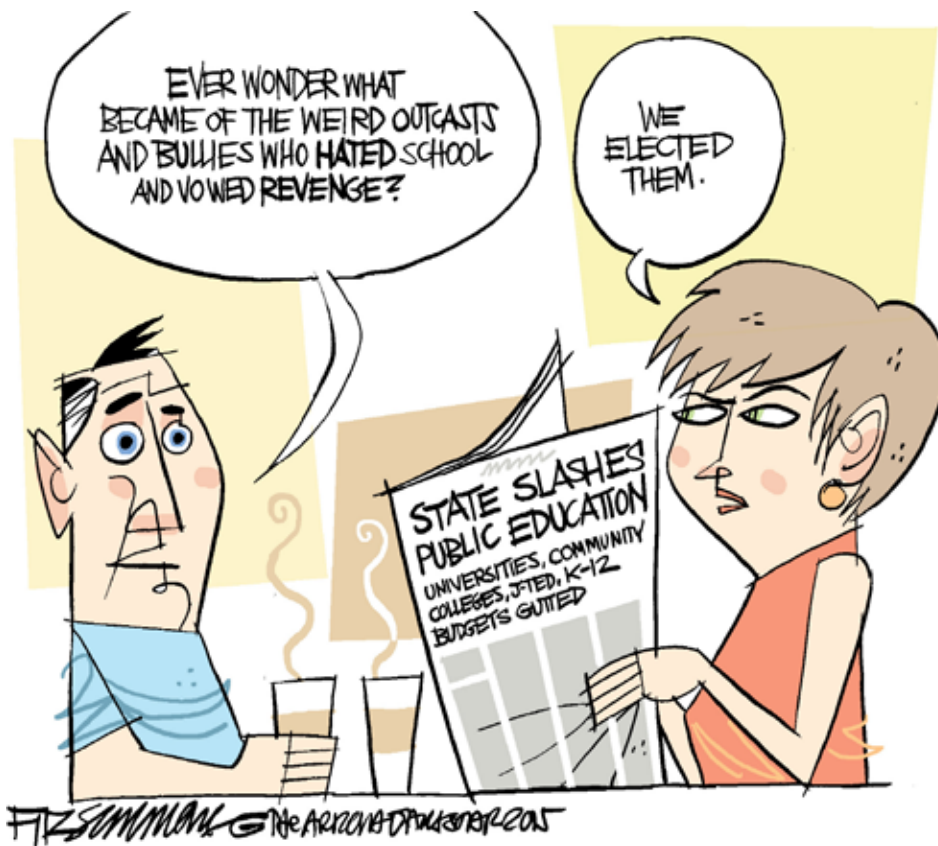
BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

Cheer or cry?
That was the question – for about a nanosecond – when University of Oklahoma President David Boren floated his plan to significantly boost education funding in Oklahoma via a one-cent statewide sales tax.

Cheer ... because a decade-plus of ill-conceived income tax cuts and corporate welfare is crippling public instruction, from kindergarten to university.

Cry ... because Oklahoma already owns the nation's sixth highest average sales tax rates, a burden disproportionately shouldered by the least among us.

Boren's political instincts are spot-on: it's much more likely voters will take action on the education funding crisis than a Republican-dominated Legislature beset by infighting between corporatists and Tea Partiers.



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combine to make them. This seeker,
is the promise of America.

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

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Observations

Denying Reality

For the fourth consecutive month – and fifth time in six months – state revenue collections were less in August than the year before. Oklahoma's unemployment rate is but a half percentage point below the national rate – after eight years of being significantly lower.

Chesapeake Energy last month announced 740 layoffs – 15% of its workforce – including 562 in Oklahoma City. A Dallas company's purchase of the Williams Companies casts doubt on the fate of 1,000 Tulsa workers.

State government's fiscal experts know what's coming – a collective migraine not experienced since the last great oil bust in the early 1980s. And they are subtly – and in some cases, not so subtly – signaling to Oklahomans to prepare for the worst, a budget shortfall that could exceed \$1 billion. Yes, *billion* with a B.

It's still four months until the next session – and we won't really have a clearer picture of the state's finances until the state Board of Equalization meets in December. This much is certain:

- Oil prices languish around \$50 a barrel, cataclysmic for state revenues.

- Another state income tax cut takes effect Jan. 1, a giveaway that primarily benefits the state's wealthiest residents and hurts Oklahoma school children.

- The House's chief budget writer, Rep. Earl Sears, R-Bartlesville, has all but declared teacher pay raises a non-starter heading into the next session.

- Gov. Mary Fallin's chief budget negotiator, Secretary of Finance Preston Doerflinger, is warning agency directors to find ways to save even more money – even though most already endured double-digit budget cuts in recent years.

Just consider one vital state service crippled by the nation's deepest budget cuts: education.

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THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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Observerscope



Check out The Observer's new Calendar at www.okobserver.net – a one-stop shop for progressive events across Oklahoma. To get yours listed, send an email to ahamilton@okobserver.net.

Dart: To U.S. Rep. Steve Russell, demanding proof the first two women graduating from Army ranger school “deserved to pass.” Female voters in CD5 should inspect Russell’s fitness to serve in Congress.

We mourn the passing of our friend and Pulitzer Prize winner Gaylord Shaw at age 73. The El Reno native was a terrific journalist, but an even finer person.

Laurel: To former Lt. Gov. Jari Askins, accepting another major state challenge – this time appointed by Gov. Mary Fallin to be administrative director of Oklahoma’s courts.

Ex-Sen. Randy Brogdon’s reign of error as state Republican chair lasted five months, doomed when embarrassed GOP donors slammed shut their checkbooks. The party is set to pick a new chair Oct. 11.

Dart: To AG Scott Pruitt, first arguing the Ten Commandments’ monument was historical, not religious – then that a court order to remove it from the Capitol grounds was “hostile toward religion.” Can you spell h-y-p-o-c-r-i-t-e?

A new lawsuit challenges the state’s ban on second-trimester abortions and tripling of pre-abortion waiting periods. The Legislature’s anti-choice fanaticism costs state taxpayers dearly – forced repeatedly to defend constitutionally indefensible laws.

Laurel: To the Oklahoma Retail Liquor Association, reversing earlier opposition to the sale of refrigerated, strong beer in grocery, convenience and liquor stores. It also is now backing wine sales in a “limited number” of grocery stores.

House Speaker Jeff Hickman’s press secretary, Republican Joe Griffin, is seeking to replace term-limited Democrat Richard Morrisette in south OKC’s HD 92. Two Democrats already announced as candidates: Forrest Bennett and Jess Eddy.

Dart: To Rep. John Bennett, R-Sallisaw, wailing about the state-Supreme Court defying the will of the people with its Ten Commandments ruling. Someone who can speak slowly enough should explain to him courts are independent arbiters – not rubber stamps for the [alleged] majority.

Who’s teaching our children? By September’s end, Oklahoma already had approved 500 more emergency teaching certifications than it did a year ago. The governor and GOP-dominated Legislature own this crisis.

Laurel: To former OKC Superintendent Arthur Stellar, honored Oct. 9 in Athens, OH by his alma mater, Ohio University, with its Medal of Merit for his work in national educational leadership.

Grace Period: Oklahoma taxpayers can pay outstanding obligations without penalties, interest or fees through Nov. 13. Visit www.tax.ok.gov or call 866.263.8612 for details and to make payments.

Dart: To state Finance Director Preston Doerflinger, aka Ostrich-In-Chief, still downplaying a looming \$1 billion-plus budget hole next year. There are plenty of reasons to panic, sir.

Mark your calendar: The Interfaith Alliance Foundation of Oklahoma’s annual awards dinner is Oct. 20 at Oklahoma History Center, featuring keynote address from Langston University President Kent Smith. For details visit www.tiaok.org.

Karma? The Oregon campus shooting occurred on watch of Sheriff John Hanlin, a fierce foe of gun control. He once shared on Facebook a conspiracy video suggesting 9/11 and Sandy Hook were staged by the Feds as a pretext for “disarming the public.”

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Letters



Editor, The Observer:

I love this man, Francis, who has made me laugh and shout for joy.

Like the world of his time, people ran with joy to him. But not today, Holy Father. News of your meeting [with Kentucky County Clerk Kim Davis] brought sorrow to men and women who are literally afraid daily.

Today, your priest wept in sorrow.

Father Henry Roberson
Archdiocese of Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

During his U.S. visit, Pope Francis noted the Catholic Church's rejection of "every form of unjust discrimination."

Then, after praising American nuns, he ignored the church's most cruel and cowardly prejudice, the second-class status for women.

The church's failure to ordain women as priests bars them from the pulpit.

So, we are denied the moral authority that only women can provide.

Without us acting as house mothers, all fraternities would

turn into *Animal House*, as the child abuse scandal in the Catholic Church proves.

As long as the Catholic Church teaches women to take orders from men, we will have chaos in the world of morals. Brains have no sex.

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner
Wagoner

Editor, The Observer:

Defenders of Kim Davis' religious refusal to grant marriage licenses should consider some historic Christian positions probably not a source of religious pride today.

Slavery was defended for 200 years in America using common scriptural references. "If it's in the Bible, it must be OK with God."

Racial segregation was defended for another 100 years using scriptural passages suggesting that God intended the races to be kept separate.

Laws prohibiting interracial marriage were common until the U.S. Supreme Court ruled them unconstitutional in the 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* decision.

Ms. Davis and many others, no

doubt, still consider homosexuality sinful or sick, or both, citing biblical scriptures as proof. However, most relevant professional organizations have expressed a different view, now commonly accepted by most Americans.

Sexual orientation, whether straight or gay, has been officially declared a normal human characteristic – neither sickness nor sin – by the American Medical Association, Psychiatric Association, Psychological Association, National Association of Social Workers, and others.

The Supreme Court simply ruled as they did in *Loving v. Virginia* that laws prohibiting marriage on account of sexual orientation or gender identity are unconstitutional.

In time, as with slavery, segregation and prohibition of interracial marriage, most folks will agree that everyone has the right to marriage, including LGBT people.

Nathaniel Batchelder
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Emily Rimmel's article [*An Environmentalist's Lament*, Sept. Observer] describes a person that we really need here in Oklahoma to protect our natural wonders and at the same time indicates she is the perfect candidate. Only she did not tell how we can get her to come home.

Chadwick Cox
Norman

Editor, The Observer:

I think the state should *not* cover the cost of ACT tests.

If the students parents do not have the money to pay for the test, how are they going to be able to afford to send him/her to college.

Donald Smith
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Received the current issue of the

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The Privatization Folly

For more than three decades, it was the corporate conservative mantra: Anything government can do, the private sector can do better. And Oklahoma bought into the political science experiment big time.

Private prisons were built. The Lake Texoma State Lodge was sold to private interests and bulldozed. High stakes tests developed and administered by private firms were imposed on public school students.

In these three cases, the drive to privatize proved disastrous.

Last month, four inmates were killed and at least three others were hospitalized after a riot at the Cimarron Correctional Center in Cushing – another in a string of deadly incidents at privately owned and operated prisons nationally.

In addition, state officials reached a settlement in the long-running dispute over the failed Pointe Vista project – more than a decade after heralding private development of a four-star Lake Texoma resort and water park that never materialized.

And remember, it was only 10 months ago the state jettisoned testing vendor CTB/McGraw Hill after widespread problems plagued end-of-instruction and other statewide exams over a two-year period.

We really shouldn't be surprised. After all, more businesses fail than survive. If it were true that private is always better, then everyone would rave about their cable providers and mobile phone carriers.

The reality is, government – for all its alleged warts and bureaucracy – is better positioned than private industry to deliver many services, in no small measure because it is more accountable.

Think about it: It took 10 years to resolve the Pointe Vista mess – now we're in effect starting over. It took two years to pull the plug on the high-stakes testing debacle. And private prisons? Many acute problems remain – prompting court battles around the country.

Have an issue with a government agency? Sure, it can take time to fix. Sometimes it's never resolved to your satisfaction. But believe me, when your congressional representatives or their offices contact federal agencies on your behalf, things tend to happen. The same is true on the state level.

Why? State and federal lawmakers control the public purse. Unresponsive agencies aren't viewed as favorably come budget time. Administrators and staffers can be – and often are – forced out.

No one who's paid attention to the Oklahoma Department of Corrections in recent years could seriously dispute that our prisons are dangerously overcrowded [operating at 118% of capacity] and seriously understaffed [67% of authorized levels].

Perhaps not surprisingly, Oklahoma owns the nation's highest in-prison homicide rate – 14 per 100,000 inmates, more than three times the national average.

It is absolutely unacceptable that 39 inmates were slain in state prisons between 2001-12 – an average of slightly more than three per year. But it's worth noting that the private Cushing facility endured four murders in one weekend alone. And it was not the first time violence erupted inside that prison.

Moreover, studies over the last 15 years have found that inmate-on-inmate and inmate-on-guard assaults occur at a significantly higher rate at private facilities.

Frankly, our state-run prisons are surprisingly safe, given that lawmakers have routinely under-funded their operations at the same time they adhered to a strict lock 'em up and throw away the key mentality.

We wouldn't have the need to assign nearly 6,000 inmates to private prisons – at a cost to taxpayers of nearly \$93 million last year – nor spend as much on state prison operations if lawmakers were to get serious about sentencing reform.

In the meantime, can we finally put to rest the canard that privatizing every government function is better?

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A New Northwest Passage

What Rep. Cyndi Munson's Upset Win In Traditional GOP District Likely Means For Progressive, Common Sense Politics In Oklahoma

BY CAL HOBSON

No, I'm not referring to Oklahoma State Highway 3, a strip of pavement that meanders northwesterly from Oklahoma County to our faraway and remote Panhandle.

Former Gov. George Nigh gave title to this route when he strongly urged that it be expanded to four lanes during the energy boom of the early 1980s. The price tag then was a whopping \$97.1 million and some legislators from metropolitan areas criticized the proposed expansion due to low traffic counts.

Even today, except for the section known as the Northwest Expressway in Oklahoma City, it is not one of our most traveled byways. However, in 1984 its improvements served a useful political purpose when the popular Nigh became the only governor in history to carry all 77 counties – including the three often overlooked ones known as No Man's Land.

Presently, and perhaps of greater interest to Observer readers, the new passage I am referring to is the surprising result delivered by voters as they cast their ballots in a special northwest Oklahoma County election on Sept. 8. This off-cycle contest in House District 85 was necessitated by the unexpected death last spring of incumbent Republican David Dank, who had long represented the OKC suburbs of Warr Acres, The Village and Nichols Hills.

The closely watched campaign pitted well-funded Republican favorite Chip Carter against financially strapped underdog Democrat Cyndi Munson. He easily raised and spent about \$250,000 while she struggled to top the \$100,000 mark.

To make matters worse for Munson, party registra-



ABOVE: Munson, surrounded by family and friends, is sworn into office Sept. 16 by state Supreme Court Justice Norma Gurich. Photo: centralconnection.org.

BELOW: From left, state Sen. Kay Floyd, Rep. Claudia Griffith, Munson, Rep. Emily Virgin and Rep. Jason Dunnington. Photo: Rep. Griffith's Facebook page.

tion heavily favored the proudly conservative Carter whose background includes stints as a field operative for presidential wannabe Steve Forbes and development director at the self-described free market think tank known as the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs [OCPA].

Free market it may be. Think tank, not so much.

For electoral confirmation of the longstanding conservative leanings of voters in HD 85, you need only to know that since the district's creation in 1965 – a result of the Oklahoma Supreme Court bribery scandal – its citizens have never sent to the Capitol a politician with a "D" after his or her name.

For example, Gov. Mary Fallin began her legislative career there in the early 1990s and the husband and

wife Dank Dynasty – Odilia and David – followed, as both were routinely re-elected with no serious opposition.

That all changed in 2014 when the little-known graduate of Lawton Eisenhower High School and meagerly funded novice candidate Munson garnered 44% of the vote against self-described “Don Quixote Dank” who for years loudly and unsuccessfully railed against the plethora of tax credits, gimmicks and giveaways that are safely and security ensconced into the Oklahoma tax code.

Comanche County native Munson lost that earlier battle, but clearly won the war – last month’s special election battle to fill Dank’s unexpired term.

What makes her selection by the reliably conservative HD 85 Republican plebiscite even more remarkable is that the main issue separating the two candidates was the clearest and most defining possible: Carter, as expected, fervently and enthusiastically supported the pending quarter percent reduction in the Oklahoma personal income tax rate while Munson strongly opposed it.

He said it was needed to enhance the “business friendly” environment in Oklahoma. She instead urged its repeal and proposed to use part of the revenue gained – about \$157 million – to pay for the first teacher pay increase in eight years.

Due to her comfortable 54% margin of victory, clearly many Republicans supported the Munson platform and thus endorsed with their votes her courageous stance for public school funding first and tax cuts later – when and if they could be afforded.

After all, due to the ongoing mismanagement of the state budget by the Fallin Administration, current projections are that a shortfall of at least \$1 billion awaits the Legislature when it returns to work next year. The irresponsible tax cut, still scheduled to go into effect Jan. 1, will only exacerbate the fiscal crisis.

Not surprisingly, the Oklahoman’s editorial page, in offering its analysis of the shocking election results, attributed Carter’s stunning loss to anything except the tax cut vs. education investment debate. In their lengthy Sept. 14 commentary, that defining difference between the candidates was never even mentioned.

After all, to do so would contradict the well-established mantra that lower taxes and smaller government will generate endless economic prosperity as well as relief from anything else that ails us – including gout, hemorrhoids, headaches, mothers-in-law, illegals and Trump tirades.

Remember, it was President Abraham Lincoln who once wrote, “You can fool all of the people some of the time and you can fool some of the people all of the time but you can’t fool all of the people all of the time.” Really? Who knew?

Chip, a public relations professional, concluded that his loss resulted from the fact that Cyndi “worked her tail off.” True enough. Door knocking, determined and loyal volunteers, a winning resume

and accomplished pedigree all contributed to her surprising success.

However, polling data during the campaign revealed to her brain trust that progressive policies matter to the knowledgeable and well-educated citizenry in northwest Oklahoma City.

Regardless of that, I can still understand why the moneyed special interests backing Chip, as well as every prominent party official from Gov. Fallin down to precinct chairs, disregarded the important information since Republican voters in adjoining legislative districts have routinely elected and re-elected vacuous know-nothings such as Rep. Sally Kern to represent them at NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd.

Carter is no Kern clone but, by contrast, he ain’t Cyndi, either.

Therefore, in the future, more of these *Friday*-land registered Republicans might want to study the detailed and accurate data found in reputable polling surveys rather than just accepting as gospel the predictable political onslaught waged against any Democratic candidate living amongst them.

This refreshing approach will benefit them in two ways: First, and most importantly, they will have more Cyndis representing them and fewer Sallys. Second, during leisure time at the Oklahoma City Golf and Country Club, they can “skin” their less well informed golfing buddies by betting on the always underdog and disregarded Democrat and, of course, always take the points.

In closing, and as election season looms, the important question is – *drumroll, please* – this: was the surprising success of the Munson Machine in 2015 a harbinger of additional upsets in 2016 or just a fluke that will soon be forgotten?

Since I am occasionally a betting man, I’ll wager there are many more Cyndis out there, registered in both parties, that recognize the current political leadership in Oklahoma is inept, has bankrupted the state, focuses on all the wrong issues, cares little about public education and, most importantly, knows the cost of everything and the value of nothing.

For proof I offer five facts describing the dismal dilemma our state is in. If proven wrong, I’ll gladly eat Mary Fallin’s tin foil hat.

- The FY 2017 Oklahoma budget shortfall is currently projected to be \$1.1 billion. [Source: Oklahoma Tax Commission and three independent economic models.]

- Every important health characteristic of our citizens ranks among the worst 10 states in America. [Source: Pew Charitable Trust.]

- Prison overcrowding is at its highest and most dangerous level – 119% of capacity – since records have been kept. [Sources: Oklahoma Department of Corrections 2014 Fact Book and the Tulsa World.]

- Public education funding as measured by its share of the general fund is 52%, the lowest since 1971. [Source: Office of State Finance annual budget reports.]

• More new proposals have been passed by the Legislature, signed into law by the governor and then subsequently struck down as unconstitutional during the Fallin Administration than any other in the last 50 years. [Source: Rulings of the Supreme Court, 1965-2015.]

I don't know about you, but as autumn arrives I sense a fresh breeze blowing through what's left of my hair. It seems to be sweeping down the plains from the northwest and, of course, like Cyndi's victory, it sure smells sweet!

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

Oklahoma's Purple Haze

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

It is undeniable that Cyndi Munson's victory in last month's Oklahoma House District 85 special election was historic.

First, no Democrat had ever held the reliably Republican, northwest Oklahoma City seat, previously occupied by now-Gov. Mary Fallin and more recently – back-to-back – by the late husband and wife team David and Odilia Dank.

Second, Munson shattered the district's half-century-old, social conservative mold – she's a young pro-choice, pro-equality, pro-public education, pro-organized labor woman of color who clearly won over more than a few traditional GOP voters.

Third, she knocked off a candidate, in Chip Carter, with a near-perfect Republican resume, including a stint at the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs; an early endorsement from the governor; and a boatload of campaign cash.

Impressive win, but it leaves a big question for both Democrats and Republicans: Is Munson's victory a singular event or proof that some once-reliably red [Republican] urban neighborhoods are trending blue [Democratic] – in other words, purpling?

In politics, it's dangerous to draw too many conclusions from a single campaign, especially a low turnout special election the day after a holiday weekend.

Munson undoubtedly was the right candidate at the right time. It was only a year ago she unsuccessfully challenged Rep. David Dank in the general election. When Dank died suddenly on April 10, Munson was uniquely positioned to run again, only a few months removed from her 2014 bid.

As soon as she started campaigning this year, Munson signs sprouted across the district – seeds plant-

“

**In a macro-political sense,
Munson's campaign will
become the Democratic model
to be deployed in other OKC
and Tulsa districts with
multiple neighborhoods in
transition.**

”

ed last year bloomed. She also plowed new ground: One doctor told me he was so impressed after a front-porch Q&A with Munson that he promised to vote for her, despite his lifelong Republican allegiance, and allowed her to put a sign in his yard in the traditional GOP stronghold of Quail Creek.

With the victory, Munson fills the final 14 months of Dank's unexpired term. She will have to face voters again next year. Republicans no doubt want to make her a one-hit wonder.

The district's long Republican history still looms large, at least on paper, but experience tells me that legislative races often turn on retail politics – on whether the incumbent connects and stays connected with the voters. Thus, it would not be surprising if Munson holds the seat for as long as she chooses to run or is term-limited.

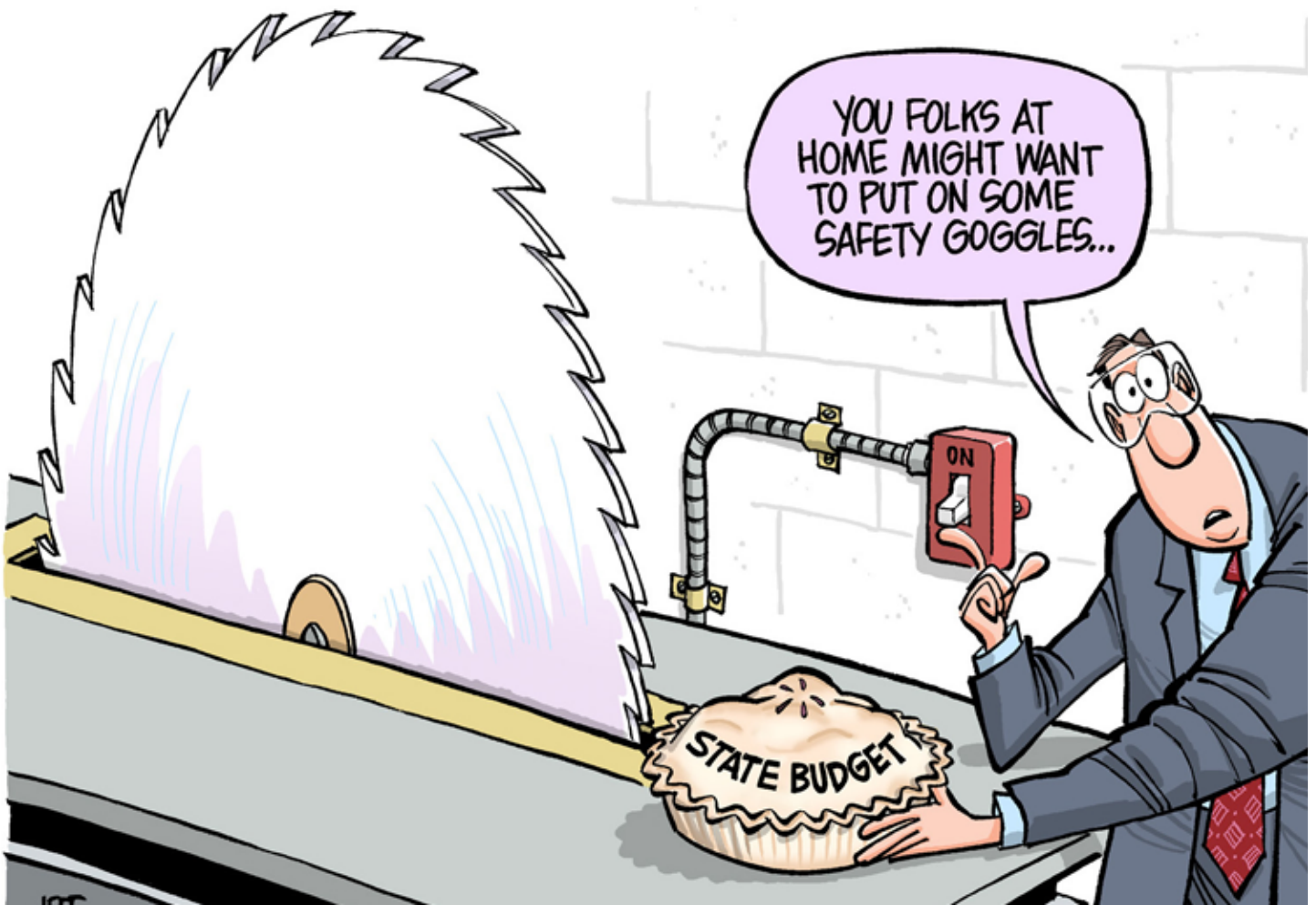
In a macro-political sense, Munson's campaign will become the Democratic model to be deployed in other Oklahoma City and Tulsa districts with multiple neighborhoods in transition – a gentrifying process in which longtime mostly white and conservative residents pass away, lower-income residents are sometimes squeezed out by increasing property values, and younger individuals, couples and families move in, renovate and upgrade.

Whether it can be replicated elsewhere depends on the district, the election cycle [presidential, gubernatorial or special] and, most importantly, the candidate.

This much, though, is certain: Munson's victory was a huge psychological lift for state Democrats. It barely dents the GOP's lopsided control of the House, of course, but fires a shot across the bow of an often-smug majority – making 2016 an even more intriguing election year in Oklahoma.

Finally, it was a step toward correcting a shameful fact about 21st Century Oklahoma: how few women serve in the Legislature. Even with Munson's win, only 21 of the state's 149 districts – just 14% – are represented by women, even though more than half the state's population is female.

Is a new day dawning in Oklahoma politics?



Is Oklahoma Headed For A Revenue Shortfall?

BY DAVID BLATT

The next legislative session is still four months off, and we're nine long months out from the start of the next fiscal year. Yet concern is already mounting that the state's protracted budget crisis is likely to get more severe.

Last year, legislators used nearly half-a-billion dollars in one-time revenue to balance the budget, even as they slashed funding to state agencies by up to 7.25%. The reliance on one-time funding, along with the full cost of the income tax cut scheduled to take effect in January, another automatic funding increase for transportation, and continued low energy prices are contributing to fears of a budget shortfall for FY 2017 of anywhere from \$600 million to \$1.2 billion.

Separate but related to anxiety about the budget crisis facing us for next year is concern over whether this year's revenue collections will meet projections. Recently, Finance Secretary Preston Doerflinger an-

nounced that August General Revenue [GR] collections had missed the certified estimate by 5.3%, or \$22.9 million. Collections from gross production taxes and the sales tax both came in well below the estimate, while net income tax collections were slightly above.

In an editorial, the Tulsa World warned that "only two months into the state fiscal year, it's starting to look like [this year's] budget might not hold water."

For his part, Secretary Doerflinger noted that August's weak revenue collections followed a fairly strong performance in July and that total general revenue through the first two months of the fiscal year is almost exactly in line with the certified estimate.

However, he acknowledged grounds for concern: "Our focus is on whether revenues meet estimates because falling more than 5% off the estimate for the year for too long means automatic budget reductions

could occur,” he said.

There’s no reliable way to predict what the revenue picture will look like over the coming months, although there are certainly troubling economic indicators. This year’s budget was built on projected energy prices of \$57.55 per barrel of oil and \$3.97 per MCF of natural gas. However, oil prices have been below \$50 per barrel since July, while natural gas is currently around \$2.60 per MCF and has been below \$3 almost continuously since June.

While Oklahoma’s unemployment rate remains at a modest 4.6%, over the past six months, the state has lost 10,800 net jobs and the unemployment rate has jumped 0.7 points, second most in the nation.

As we’ve discussed previously, one of the budget limits entrenched in Oklahoma’s constitution is that the Legislature may not appropriate more than 95% of certified funds for the upcoming year. This builds a 5% cushion into the budget in years when revenues come in below projections.

When revenues fall below 95% of the certified estimate, the director of the Office of Management and Enterprise Services [in this case, Secretary Doerflinger] is required to declare a revenue failure and to reduce agency allocations by an amount sufficient to bring them into balance with actual revenue collections.

In practice, the finance secretary has considerable discretion in deciding when and by how much to implement mid-year budget cuts. OMES can and regularly does borrow from various state funds in order to make appropriations over the course of the year, as long as the funds are repaid in full before the end of the fiscal year in June. This means that even if revenues fall below the 5% cushion for the next couple of months, there are unlikely to be immediate cuts.

However, if revenues fall substantially below the estimate for an extended period, ultimately a revenue failure will be declared and cuts must be imposed, as has happened three times since 2000 [in FY 2002, 2003 and 2010; in FY 2009, cuts were implemented and then restored].

The dilemma is that the more months OMES waits to implement cuts, the less time agencies will have to spread them out.

One option for addressing a revenue failure is to tap the Rainy Day Fund. The Constitution provides that up to three-eighths of the Rainy Day Fund is available for appropriation upon declaration of a revenue failure. This was done in FY 2003 and 2010.

With \$387 million currently in the Rainy Day Fund, up to \$145 million could be appropriated to help agencies get through this year. Of the remaining amount, three-eighths could be used for next year’s budget if revenues are projected to decline, and the remaining one-fourth could be used upon declaration of an emergency.

It’s unfortunate that it won’t be until the Board of Equalization meets in late December that the state will get a formal forecast of what this year’s revenue

picture looks like; in years when revenues begin to come in below projections, earlier forecasts would help guide decisions.

In the absence of reliable forecasts, agencies will be well-advised to spend carefully this year, knowing that the full amounts they have budgeted based on last session’s appropriations may become unavailable.

It’s especially unfortunate that lawmakers are going ahead with a tax cut – that was supposed to be triggered only when there is revenue growth – in a year when Oklahoma’s already deep budget cuts may be getting even deeper.

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

What Budget Cutting Hath Wrought

BY JOE DORMAN

State agency officials were warned recently to prepare for additional budget cuts for the 2016-17 fiscal year.

The Legislature and our governor were forced to make significant budget cuts last year across various agencies, and to raid a host of reserve funds kept by different agencies, boards and commissions, in order to balance the state budget as required by the Oklahoma Constitution.

The initial estimate given to agency officials recently was that the budget shortfall could range from \$600 million to \$1.2 billion fewer dollars available for appropriation next year. Remember, this is on top of the \$611 million slashed from the current state budget, which followed a \$188 million shortfall in 2014.

This means that next year, state expenditures for programs that affect the lives of you and your family will have been reduced in three years by more than \$1 billion, and perhaps as much as \$2 billion.

The Republican leadership of Oklahoma has been successful in its relentless campaign to “right size” government by reducing the amount appropriated to state agencies. Their agenda to continue to cut various taxes and replace some lost revenue with fee increases has been successful in the five years in which they have had complete control of Oklahoma

state government.

In their defense, you will hear them blame the plunging price of oil as an excuse. This is only part of the equation, as they have consistently campaigned to reduce the budget and have implemented policies which do precisely that.

Let's review what has happened in recent years as the Democrats slipped to one-third of the Legislature, and with a Republican governor.

Oklahoma has the worst funding levels for education programs in the nation since 2008, by inflation-adjusted dollars, in addition to creating additional unfunded mandates on teachers for additional high-stakes tests and administrative work. GOP legislators talk about putting in new dollars, but when they do not keep up with appropriations compared to the other 49 states, is that something they should really be bragging about?

Public school teachers and many state employees

figure out how to pay for essential programs that they must fund in order to not look bad to voters and donors who are the few who actually show up at the polls.

Some of that revenue loss has been recouped by state agencies raising fees on services for the middle class.

Just a few of these include multiple additional fees implemented on students attending our major universities, a broad range of Agriculture Department fees that increased Sept. 11, and further penalties implemented through the court system.

Driver's license fees were increased significantly in 2013 in order to raise funds for the Department of Public Safety, particularly its understaffed driver examiners.

As a result, the cost of a four-year new or renewed Class D operator's license jumped 56% – to \$33.50; in addition, the price for Class A, B and C commercial

When you hear the upcoming rhetoric out of our state Capitol about how bad things are due to the price per barrel of oil, remember that this is only part of the story. Your decision on who you vote for – or worse, if you choose to not vote and let others make the decision for you – makes a big difference on where we proceed as a state.

have not received a pay raise since the Henry Administration. There were well over 1,000 open spots in classrooms across Oklahoma at the beginning of this school year, and throughout last year, as well. This means local schools are forced to hire teachers who are not certified in their particular field to educate your kids and grandkids, nieces and nephews, friends and neighbors.

Teachers leave Oklahoma to receive much better pay in states surrounding Oklahoma, particularly Arkansas and Texas. In addition, college students are not entering teacher education/training programs because they view the future in that field as grim, thanks to our current politicians. This leads to the expansion of private programs funded by businesses for the kids who receive admission.

This is essentially modern segregation based on income levels rather than race.

Multiple income-tax cuts have been passed in recent years to give money back to the wealthiest of Oklahomans. The average amount returned to most Oklahomans through these cuts is equivalent to one tankful of gasoline – and that is at current levels with cheap gas. Politicians have campaigned on their tax cuts, while at the same time wringing their hands to

licenses, and the cost of a Class D operator's license for senior citizens and for motorcyclists, went up \$10 apiece.

A study performed in 2013 by the Oklahoma Policy Institute showed that in that year, the state collected more than \$600 million in fees, a 48% increase from just the prior year. Imagine what the budget shortfall would have been in recent years had Republican legislators not imposed these fee increases on programs that directly affect you!

So when you hear the upcoming rhetoric out of our state Capitol about how bad things are due to the price per barrel of oil, remember that this is only part of the story.

Your decision on who you vote for – or worse, if you choose to not vote and let others make the decision for you – makes a big difference on where we proceed as a state.

Vote for people who will work together for solutions, not just simply to be elected to a job that many refuse to do properly.

Joe Dorman served as House District 65's representative for 12 years and was the 2014 Democratic nominee for governor of Oklahoma. Currently he is community development director for Heart Mobile.



WAR ON TEACHERS

Classroom Crisis Reflects Moral Failing By State Leaders

BY DAN VINCENT

I'm a public school parent and I'm pissed off. I keep hearing that our state has a teacher shortage but I don't see it this way anymore. I see an unusually high causality rate from the War on Teachers.

Let me explain:

As a parent with two kids in public school I try to keep informed on issues related to education. I read the news, follow legislation and even research topics to be more informed.

For the past few years, at the start of the school year, I have read stories about the growing number of vacancies in Oklahoma classrooms – vacancies that districts cannot fill. Class sizes get larger and courses get cancelled. This number has gradually been creeping up and it has hit larger urban districts

particularly hard.

Now, even large suburban districts, where there has historically been an abundance of qualified applicants, are being hit by this shortage.

Over the past several years I have also observed waves of educational reforms crashing into the doors of classrooms and onto the desks of students – reforms initiated and passed into law by our state Legislature. If you are a student or teacher, you've felt it; my kids have felt it.

The changes included things like the A-F, the RSA [Reading Sufficiency Act], the ACE [Achieving Classroom Excellence] and the TLE [Teacher and Leader Effectiveness] to name a few. These have been widely recognized by educational leaders in our state as doing more harm than good, especially when it comes

to teacher morale and student engagement.

Professional associations, parent groups, blogs and personal anecdotes have documented how these reforms are negatively impacting Oklahoma districts, classrooms and kids.

There has also been much written about how these reforms are *driving good teachers out of the classroom*. Legislators have been told this over and over. Personally, I have had civil discussions about the issues I see; I have written umpteen letters to lawmakers pleading for change. I have friends who written many more.

So what I fail to understand with the “teacher shortage” in our state is why – *why* – legislative leaders have stood by and allowed this to happen. The teacher shortage is not an unforeseen consequence of a poorly timed tax cut, but the steady attrition of teachers who have *had enough* of nonsensical educational reform policy and poor pay.

The teacher shortage is not an unavoidable crisis caused by federal laws, but a compounding of state-level educational policies that fly in the face of what is known about learning.

And as a parent, I hold legislative leaders responsible; they have created a War on Teachers and our teacher shortage is a sad result of this war.

It is a moral failing by our state leaders in not taking seriously their job of properly supporting a free public education.

We know that money matters and we know that teaching climate matters. Legislative leaders have tremendous power over both and have done little to nothing to create *real solutions* for teachers.

In fact, I am not big on conspiracy theories but I am now seriously thinking our legislative leaders are purposefully making a teacher's life miserable so they can justify their own policies meant to “help” the problems in education – problems they have created with the war on teachers.

And this is all being done *to our kids*.

Imagine if we had a shortage of qualified STEM [science, technology, engineering and mathematics] candidates to fill the jobs in our state. Do you think our current legislative leaders would do anything to attract quality candidates? Do you think they would initiate policy to help the STEM industry will those positions?

Do you think they would be advocating for the STEM industry? Would our leaders actively seek out leaders in the STEM industry for ideas on how to attract applicants? Would they try to fill the STEM pipeline with qualified applicants?

You bet. In fact, Gov. Mary Fallin says there is a STEM shortage in our state, and our leaders have already done the things

above [in fact, our governor's third annual STEM Summit is Oct. 13 in OKC]. But not for our teachers. Not for our kids. War on Teachers continues.

A few weeks ago, I felt a glimmer of hope when I read House Speaker Jeff Hickman and House Republican education leaders calling for a “more cooperative approach” to address the teacher shortage. Not three weeks later, however, Speaker Hickman wrote an opinion piece for the Oklahoman blasting district administrators for not doing more themselves to pay teachers a higher salary; I also suspect school boards felt targeted.

I wonder if Hickman cooperated with any Oklahoma administrators on the ideas for this OpEd? I doubt it. War on Teachers continues.

More recently, the Republican leadership offered up a plan to allow retired teachers \$18,000 per year to come back to the classroom and teach. On the surface, this sounds admirable, but honestly, how many retired teachers would be willing to work for that pay under the same educational environment that drove many to retire in the first place?

Does this address the current issues our teachers face – pay and climate? Sounds like a Band-Aid solu-



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tion to a war-time wound. War on Teachers continues.

In short, the solutions offered up by Republican leaders thus far only deepens my suspicions of how serious they are about addressing our state's desperate need to put well-qualified teachers in *every* classroom. My kids deserve better. Our state's kids deserve better.

So here are some things I would offer as solutions. I would encourage every parent, grandparent and relative that has a kid in school to write their legislator and tell them to end the War on Teachers with some of these bullet points [no pun intended]:

- First and foremost, do your part to fix the educational climate in Oklahoma. Stop the blame game and be real about solutions to our teacher shortage. Ask the educational leaders in our state [who are really informed about the issues they see firsthand] for input and take it seriously.

- Stop the High Stakes Testing [found in the RSA, the ACE, the TLE, the A-F]. This would also save some money on administrative overhead and ink for signing RSA documents.

- Seriously rework the TLE. It is well known that value added measures are junk science yet our state leaders insist they can work. This could also save money by reducing administrative overhead.

- Stop the A-F charade. OU and OSU put together a pretty good summary of the charade. And this also could reduce administrative overhead.

- Publicly support teachers, but more importantly seek out educational leaders so your public support can be turned into fully-informed legislative action.

- Develop a workable plan to increase teacher pay. Money matters. Our state invests public money to support the STEM industry and others. Let's get real about how to invest in the profession that can support all industry.

- Either *unmandate* or *fully fund*. There are many unfunded mandates placed on schools and this solution could both create a better climate in schools *and* free up money that could be used on teacher salaries. One good example would be to eliminate the ACE graduation requirement.

In closing, I honestly hope our legislative leadership can do something soon to refresh the souls of educators in our state.

I hope parents will a) get pissed off with me and b) constructively express their frustration to leadership in our state.

Their current attempts are a far cry from the real, workable solutions needed to address the root causes of our teacher shortage.

With the upcoming session being near an election cycle, I think more ears will be open to listening.

Let's end this war.

Dan Vincent is an assistant professor of elementary education at the University of Central Oklahoma and a former public school teacher who has two kids in elementary school. This essay first appeared at okeducationtruths.wordpress.com.

Cost-Of-Living Doesn't Offset Low Salaries

BY GENE PERRY

Oklahoma's teacher shortage has resulted in more than 1,000 teacher vacancies statewide this school year and a huge spike in emergency certifications to get teachers in the classroom, even when they don't have the required qualifications.

Why is it so difficult to get enough qualified educators in the classroom? School administrators have pointed to Oklahoma's very low teacher salaries compared to neighboring states.

Whenever the issue is brought up, it's usually not long before someone responds that our teacher pay doesn't need to meet national averages because we have a low cost-of-living. That certainly helps, but we have to be more precise to understand whether the low cost-of-living makes up for our low salaries.

Fortunately, the Missouri Economic Research and Information Center [MERIC] provides detailed numbers on how each state's cost of living compares to the national average. MERIC, which is the research division for the Missouri Department of Economic Development, shows that Oklahoma's ranking for cost-of-living is similar to our ranking for teacher pay.

They show that in the most recent economic quarter [first quarter, 2015], the cost-of-living in Oklahoma was third lowest in the nation, behind only Mississippi and Idaho. Combining estimates for groceries, housing, utilities, transportation, health, and miscellaneous expenses, Oklahoma's cost-of-living was just 89.1% of the national average.

However, Oklahoma's low cost-of-living does not make up for our even lower teacher pay. The 2014-15 average salary for classroom teachers in Oklahoma was \$44,628 [including benefits], which was just 77.8% of the national average teacher salary and benefits [\$57,379].

It costs about 90 cents on the dollar to live here, but we are paying teachers less than 80 cents on the dollar compared to the national average.

To bring our teacher pay and cost-of-living into balance, the average Oklahoma teacher would need a raise of about \$6,500.

Even that understates the problem, because we must compete for teachers against neighboring states with similar costs of living. Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas, and Texas all have a cost-of-living within two or three percentage points of Oklahoma. But

their starting pay is in many cases thousands of dollars more.

As one Arkansas principal, who himself left Oklahoma in 2000, told the Tulsa World, "I hired two just this year from small districts just over the [Oklahoma] border – Westville and Oaks Mission. The pay is definitely better."

Lawmakers are feeling pressure to do something about Oklahoma's mounting teacher shortage, but they haven't shown any willingness to stop cutting taxes, much less to find new revenue to close our state's growing budget gap.

In this context, it's not surprising to see excuses pop up for why we don't need to find the money. The excuses don't stand up to reality.

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

Government Of, By And For The People

BY DAVID PERRYMAN

Few people remember that when Abraham Lincoln climbed the steps to the platform to deliver his Gettysburg address, he was ill. His illness was not simply the stress of a wartime president. Lincoln was actually weak and lightheaded with an oncoming case of smallpox on Nov. 19, 1863 as he visited the Soldiers' National Cemetery in Gettysburg, PA.

Perhaps the president's weakened condition contributed to the brevity of his speech. Perhaps he said all that he needed to say in the address that lasted just over two minutes.

While at the time, many may have been unimpressed by Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, over time its ending – Government of the People, by the People, for the People – has come to symbolize the definition of democracy itself.

For this reason, the trend away from voter participation in the United States, and particularly in Oklahoma, is alarming.

When citizens fail to engage in the process of knowing the issues and casting educated ballots in elections at any level, the government is no longer Of the People. The abdication of this duty allows special interest groups on the right or on the left to control the outcome of the electoral process and the government

is no longer By the People.

Oklahoma's voter turnout rate has been consistently under the national average. According to the 2012 Oklahoma Civic Health Index, only 7.2% of eligible voters younger than 30 vote in local elections; less than 5% have any contact with elected officials and fewer than one in five discuss politics.

Fewer than one in three Oklahomans between 30 and 50 discuss politics, less than 9% have contact with elected officials and only 17.3% vote in local elections.

However, the lack of engagement does not begin there. In 2012, 62.8% of the Oklahoma State House of Representative seats did not have a chance to be competitive because of the lack of an opponent.

It is essential that the cause of low rates of political engagement and participation be identified and addressed. Earlier this month, I sponsored a Legislative Interim Study that brought together four national and statewide non-partisan experts who presented information to the Legislature concerning the current situation and possible solutions.

A year or so ago when legislation concerning the elimination of the Electoral College came before the Legislature, I overheard a lawmaker say, "If this passes and we elect a president based purely upon who gets the most votes, our party will never elect another president."

We must overcome the temptation to judge whether voter participation and election reform benefits Democrats or Republicans. If the test for whether we want more people to vote is whether it will help or hurt our own political party, then we have already failed.

A government must reflect the needs, desires and concerns of an educated electorate and that requires engagement at all levels. Otherwise, this government that we claim to love so dearly will no longer be For the People.

David Perryman, a Chickasha Democrat, serves District 56 in the Oklahoma House of Representatives.



Sales Tax

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

And the former governor and U.S. senator is to be commended for devising a realistic plan to generate \$608 million annually for common schools and higher education – the cornerstone of Oklahoma’s economic future.

As admirable as his goal, the sales tax is the wrong funding source – the most regressive in the revenue-generating toolbox.

As the Oklahoma Policy Institute pointed out in a statement, “... it will most hurt the pocketbooks of those families who are already struggling and who have received little or no benefit from the past decade’s repeated cuts to the top income tax bracket.

“A sales tax increase also risks encouraging more people to shop online, further eroding the sales tax base on which the state, cities, and counties depend.”

There are much fairer ways to bolster Oklahoma’s educational system – slammed by the nation’s deepest budget cuts over the last six years.

If Gov. Mary Fallin and state lawmakers are serious that public education is their No. 1 priority, they could stop the quarter-percent income tax cut set to take effect Jan. 1 – preserving \$157 million in state revenues that otherwise will flow disproportionately to the state’s wealthiest.

They also could undertake real tax reform, reviewing everything from property taxes to sales tax exemptions, as well as accelerating already planned reviews of corporate tax incentives. A fairer tax system could generate hundreds of millions, if not billions, in new state revenue for sorely needed investment in infrastructure and services.

Sadly, the current governor and Legislature have shown little inclination to lead. It’s up to the voters to take matters into their own hands – not to approve a statewide sales tax hike, but to boot the legislative dead wood, starting in the 2016 elections.

Actually, the process already has begun. Rep. Cyndi Munson, D-OKC, won a special election last month for a legislative seat controlled by Republicans since it was created a half-century ago. Voters clearly shared her vision – roll back the tax hike and fund education properly.

Yet Fallin and Co. refuse to seriously address a crisis of their own making – a \$611 million budget hole this year is morphing into a \$1 billion hole next year.

That’s why Boren’s proposal will command serious attention from Oklahomans, exasperated that their children and grandchildren are often jammed into overcrowded classrooms and instructed by emergency personnel not certified to teach the subject.

Two key points to keep in mind, however, if Boren’s proposal gets to the 2016 general election ballot:

First, recall that the ballot initiative that led to the state lottery was carefully crafted to prevent the Leg-

islature from using lottery-generated revenue to replace general revenue. It didn’t. What’s to keep lawmakers from simply shifting an increasing percentage of education funding to the new sales tax stream?

Second, consider the regressive nature of the sales tax. According to the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, the one-cent sales tax would cost the poorest Oklahomans more than the richest – .7% [or \$90] for households earning \$12,700 annually, .5% [or \$262] for those earning \$49,800 and .1% [or \$1,691] for those earning \$1.6 million.

If lawmakers would do the right things – the fair things – tax-wise, we could properly fund public education without making life tougher for Oklahoma’s already struggling families.

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Millennials: Casualties Of The Culture War

BY CHRISTIAAN MITCHELL

First in a six-part series on American politics in the Millennial Age. The other five installments will appear on consecutive Sundays starting Oct. 11 at www.okobserver.net.

Every four years, the United States re-enacts one of our greatest cultural achievements: we have a contest for supreme political leadership that has only ended in bloodshed once in 226 years. Unfortunately, it also seems to amplify everything that's wrong with modern America.

So far this cycle has already shown the crassness, racism, and wealth-idolatry that characterizes far too much of our electorate; and the narrow-mindedness, secrecy, and dependence on wealthy donors that characterizes far too many of our politicians.

It has also presented us with a problem that gets more important with each go-around: "What are we going to do with these Millennials?" In particular, as Millennials are aging into political majority – the old-

est now reaching their mid-30s – our disengagement is becoming a vital issue for our democracy. How can we hope to survive as a democratic republic if the nation's largest age cohort is abandoning politics at historic rates? And, more to the point, what can we do to reverse this trend?

There have been volumes written about Millennials. And many people, usually and notably non-Millennials, are justifiably sick and tired of hearing about us. But so much of what's written misses the fundamental [and to my mind obvious] political problem, that it's worthwhile to at least try to talk plainly about where it comes from.

Some Facts About Millennial Disengagement

Recent electoral data shows historic lows in voter turnout both locally and nationally. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, voter turnout in the last election was 41.9%, the lowest rate in nearly 40 years. It was a mid-term election, which typically have lower

turnouts, but even by those standards it was an abysmal year. Turnout among Millennials was particularly wanting: only 21.3% voted nationally.

Recent research has found that traditional political involvement among Millennials is even more dismal. As a generation Millennials are more prone to volunteerism, but are still highly reluctant to participate in our political parties.

These trends not only hurt Millennials' long-term interests, but raise fundamental questions about whether American democracy itself can survive. An old professor of mine used to ask, "Can democracy survive if it depends on people like us?" Given this level of disengagement, I have to join him in fearing that the answer is "no."

What's Going On Here?

While that's certainly a depressing thought, the proposed responses to the problem are even worse. As politicians, analysts and pundits wrestle with this problem, they keep coming back to the same tired answers. We get solutions that are about making it easier to vote, simpler to register, easier to connect with [by which they mean "donate to"] this or that campaign.

Invariably, the Internet is somehow the solution to it all. Every one of the above solutions always involves online registration and voting, one-click donations, and so on. It's as if they could just find the right app, then Millennials will miraculously start turning out in droves.

But all of this misses the true root of the problem. We Millennials already know how to use the Internet to find what we're interested in. The problem is that the modern American political world doesn't give us anything to be interested in!

As a generation, Millennials are seeking connection, and work that gives purpose and substance to our lives. We've certainly not turned away from making money, and we're not any less interested than previous generations in having a comfortable life. But at the same time, and much to the consternation and baffling shock of our older relatives and would-be employers, we also insist that that not be the only things that matter to us.

The source of Millennial disengagement doesn't come from our inability or unwillingness to get involved. It comes from the fact that American politics has been almost completely stripped of substance and meaning. As a result, it's hard for us to see how participating in this impoverished system will add anything to our lives.

Baby Boomers, The Culture War, and Ideology

The poverty of our politics comes from the way the Culture War narrative interacts with our ideology-obsessed national politics.

We all spend a lot of time lamenting partisan gridlock in Congress. On one level, there's nothing new in gridlock. In fact, some argue that the notion of gridlock is built into the very structure of our constitutional architecture. But the past decade has been

a particularly bad stretch for us. It has seen unprecedented use of the filibuster, historically low levels of congressional activity, and the destructive near-shutdown of government itself more than once.

Of course, we all know that this has been a function of an increasingly polarized Congress and electorate. But this rise in dysfunction is also correlated with Baby Boomer political supremacy. So we have to ask if there is some reason that, as the Baby Boomer generation has come increasingly into power, our governing systems have become dysfunctional?

Part of the answer to that question lies in the persistence of the Culture War. The term has largely fallen out of use, but its dynamics are very much still at play. For the uninitiated, the Culture War is a term for the struggle between progressivism and traditionalism in American values. Its roots stretch back to the 1920s, but it flared into a full-blown "hot war" during the 1960s. The term itself comes from the 1990s, when the conflict emerged as the defining locus of our politics. It waned in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 but returned shortly thereafter. And though it's now unnamed, the underlying struggle remains as the "Yes We Cans" tussle with the "I want my country backs."

On its own, the Culture War is little more than an overly dramatic description of a national debate over which of our social arrangements are working and which ones need to be altered. As the physical conditions of national life change, there is inevitably friction between those who operated best under the old conditions and those who long for something new. But in the hands of ideology-driven Baby Boomer political leadership, this otherwise completely normal process becomes scorched-earth, internecine warfare.

Culture War As Ideological Conflict

The real trouble comes from the fact that the Baby Boomers are what generational theorists call an "idealist generation." In a short article for Brookings, Morley Winograd and Michael Hais describe the problem succinctly. "Idealist generations uncompromisingly adhere to ... deeply held principles all of their lives. This pattern produces a challenge for the American political system, which is constitutionally based on institutions that require compromise and coalition-building to get things done."

The fact that we have differing moral and political visions for the future of America is not the source of the problem. Rather it's that those differing visions are held by people who are committed to a way of looking at the world that makes compromise impossible. For a position founded on principles, to compromise is to be compromised. And any inch of ground that is given up is a betrayal.

Worse yet, ideology-driven approach leads to a near-total immunity to evidence. If our worldview is based in principles, then our job is to live by those principles and any bad consequences are simply tests of our faith – if our solutions don't fix the problem, the

world is at fault rather than our solutions. As a result our politics is built on ideas of the way the world should be, rather than on the way the world is.

Millennial Disengagement

The net result is that the Culture War fails to be a vigorous dialogue between progressive and conservative visions of America. Instead, it becomes farcical shouting match.

On the one side are regressives committed to returning America to a time of humble, pure innocence that exists only in fantastical childhood "memories" of the way America was. On the other is a conglomeration of special interest groups abstracting their commonalities into an American Jacobinism that would police everyone into an imagined utopia free

from offense, struggle, and to a large extent personal responsibility.

Millennials are disengaged because it is impossible to take this circus sideshow slap-fight between caricatures seriously. If it were just entertainment, it would be fine. But it's not. It's what passes for politics in America, and it is having a disastrous effect on our future.

Our disengagement doesn't spring from apathy. It springs from the fact that our future is being betrayed daily by the political system and those currently in charge of it.

Christiaan Mitchell is a lawyer who holds master's degrees in philosophy and education. He lives in Bartlesville.

This Ain't Politics

BY SHARON MARTIN

If you are more worried about getting the backing of the NRA than you are about the grieving families in Oregon, you are not fit to represent anyone.

If you believe someone's coming after your guns, you're an idiot.

The problem is the culture of violence, and there are solutions.

This week, a 10-year-old boy was among those shot following an argument at a barbershop in Tulsa. Oklahoma ranks third in number of women killed in single victim/single offender incidents. At school, we wear badges, lock our doors, and practice lock-downs. School shootings have become as common as the cold.

Violence isn't one problem, and there isn't one solution, but universal background checks to buy firearms might be a good place to start. It's true that people will get around the laws. Individuals sell guns to individuals. Criminals don't follow the rules. But if background checks will reduce the number of gun deaths, we have a moral duty to demand them.

The opportunity gap breeds violence. It makes sense to some young people to go into the drug business when the only other choice they see is grinding poverty.

If we want to stop gang violence and the destruction caused by drug trafficking, we need to look

at economic solutions. We have to plug the school-to-prison pipeline. Education and social programs can chip away at generational poverty. We must admit that racism is a problem.

Taxpayers can demand that our representatives spend our tax money wisely. Money invested in education and job training saves money spent on social problems. That's a fact legislators in Oklahoma choose to ignore.

Families are looking for mental health solutions. Universal healthcare is not only morally right, but it is economically sound. Healthy citizens are more productive.

Religion can be the answer or the problem. Humans are spiritual creatures. We need community. We need prayer and sacred thoughtfulness. We need our tribe.

But how many young people

have had their lives destroyed by the very idea of hell? Guilt kills. So does hate. If your religion teaches that your way is the only way, you need to question its truth. If you believe that those who aren't part of your religious inner circle are heretics and sinners who either must be saved or destroyed, you are part of the problem.

Violence is as dangerous as any other plague. We found a way to defeat smallpox. We are winning the war on polio. Healing our violent culture starts with honest discussions.

This is no longer about politics. We are tired of the platitudes and partisan talking points.

If you are not willing to offer solutions, shut up and get out of the way.

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

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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Common Ground For Our Common Home

BY KATHY D. RAND

Who is ready to heed the Pope's appeal to act on climate change? In his encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, *On Care for our Common Home*, the Pope declared that "the climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all."

As the Pope was welcomed to the U.S. during his recent visit, he stated that action on climate change "can no longer be left to a future generation. When it comes to the care of our 'common home,' we are living at a critical moment of history."

Speaking to all Americans before a joint meeting

of Congress, the Pope offered encouragement: "I am convinced that we can make a difference – I'm sure – and I have no doubt that the United States – and this Congress – have an important role to play."

Can we help this Congress find common ground for our "common home?" U.S. Rep. Chris Gibson, R-NY, has opened a dialogue in Congress. One week before the Pope's visit, Gibson introduced House Resolution 424, "Expressing the commitment of the House of Representatives to conservative environmental stewardship."

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The Clean Power Plan And Oklahoma's Response

BY JOHNSON BRIDGWATER

One of the most significant actions ever taken by the federal government to protect and improve the United States environment was just taken – and you probably do not even know about it.

On Aug. 3, the EPA issued the final rule for the Clean Power Plan, a Clean Air Act action intended to stop degradation to our air quality and ultimately reverse our march towards runaway climate change. It is specifically geared to target America's single largest cause of air pollution – coal-fired power plants.

The Clean Power Plan calls for America to reduce its overall carbon pollution by 32% by 2030.

Oklahoma's reaction to this environmentally beneficial action?

Along with at least 13 other states, Attorney General Scott Pruitt once again showed the rest of the United States that our state government does not intend to work towards improving our environment despite the fact that Oklahoma's energy companies, such as OG&E and PSO, have both stated they believe they can meet the standards set forth in the specific Clean Power Plan targets developed for Oklahoma.

To make matters worse, Oklahoma's governor issued an executive order stating that she forbade Oklahoma government from acting on or adhering to the Clean Power Plan.

The short-sighted actions of these two government officials is not only detrimental to Oklahoma's citizens, they are actually giving up on numerous financial benefits which will accrue to states that *do* enact compliance plans – the Clean Energy Incentive Program will give states credits for any investments they make in renewable energy before 2022, and an additional program specifically credits state governments that invest in low-income neighborhoods.

Once again, Oklahoma passes up true benefits for the needy, as well as our environment as a whole, merely to prove they are not fans of President Obama.

Under the Clean Power Plan, individual state plans will be established to reduce overall carbon pollution – and the EPA has given each state the chance to develop its very own, customized approach to reaching carbon-reduction goals. Various options including retiring coal-fired plants, improving coal-fired plants, adding more natural gas, adding more renewables, and developing

large-scale energy efficiency programs are some of these options.

It is *not* a "one size fits all/ government over-reach" – however, Oklahoma's choice to refuse to submit or even work on its own plan means that the EPA *will* come in in 2018 to introduce a federal plan. Our governor has essentially *guaranteed* that Oklahoma will have to follow a federal plan with her executive order.

And most energy companies believe the state lawsuits will ultimately fail, leaving businesses scrambling to find solutions to the federal plans that will then be forced onto non-compliant states.

Oklahoma-based energy companies such as Anadarko-Based Western Farmers Electric Cooperative and OG&E have recently announced and launched solar-based energy projects that would actually result in statewide incentives if our governor would shift her position.

WFEC announced it will launch 21.5 megawatts of solar power as part of its overall energy portfolio, and Oklahoma as a whole is now fourth in the entire nation in produced wind power.

Oklahoma is, in fact, exporting wind energy at this point. It is clear that Oklahoma businesses "get it," and that our government is out of step with the very people they claim to represent.

From 2004-14, Oklahoma's state energy portfolio has decreased coal by 13%, increased its renewables by 16%, and overall Oklahoma is now a *Top Ten* state in terms of overall renewable energy use. This fact, combined with ongoing growth of wind energy and the certainty that solar energy projects will continue to escalate in our state due to the drop in prices of these renewable energy sources, could bring Oklahoma into the national spotlight for positive reasons and sustainable business opportunities.

Instead, our officials continue to ignore what Oklahoma businesses and many Oklahoma citizens already know – it makes good financial sense to increase investment in these areas, and the time for ignoring climate change is long past. Because ultimately, what Oklahoma's government is doing by refusing to participate in the Clean Power Plan, is backing dirty fuels and ignoring legitimate threats to our state's, and our children's, futures.

Johnson Bridgwater is director of the Oklahoma Sierra Club.

Common Home

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

Ten Republicans have already co-sponsored the resolution, which commits the House of Representatives “to study and address the causes and effects of measured changes to our global and regional climates, including mitigation efforts and efforts to balance human activities that have been found to have an impact.”

Republicans are starting to realize the value of engagement on climate solutions. Regulation, including President Obama’s Clean Power Plan, is the least desirable option for conservatives, who are concerned about the role and size of government. Many conservatives prefer a free market approach to internalize any external costs due to damage from a product – like the damage caused by the free dumping of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere from the burning and extraction of fossil fuels.

A consensus among economists agrees that the most cost-effective way to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and internalize the cost of climate risks would be to put a fee on carbon-based fuels.

To protect consumers, some economists propose a steadily rising fee on fossil fuels with all of the revenue passed on to households equitably per family – a Carbon Fee and Dividend. George Shultz, who served as secretary of state under President Reagan, endorses this solution, calling it an “insurance policy” against the risk posed by climate change. The monthly dividend would protect two-thirds of consumers from higher prices passed down from fossil fuel producers and spread throughout the fossil fuel-based economy.

There would be a continuous, pervasive cost incentive for all – including fossil fuel producers – to conserve, reduce carbon footprints, and to shift to a non-fossil economy fueled by wind, solar, geothermal, water, tides, nuclear – anything not subject to the carbon fee. Every act to reduce carbon emissions would be financially rewarded.

A Carbon Fee and Dividend also employs adjustments at our borders when importing or exporting products from nations that do not similarly price carbon, thereby maintaining a level playing field for American businesses.

Such a solution would align with the principles in the Gibson Resolution:

“Any efforts to mitigate the risks of, prepare for, or otherwise address our changing climate and its effects should not constrain the United States economy, especially in regards to global competitiveness.”

A widely respected, nonpartisan economic forecasting firm, Regional Economic Models Inc. [REMI], has studied the effect of a Carbon Fee and Dividend with an annual increase of \$10 per ton on the carbon dioxide released by burning the fossil fuels. REMI found

that within 10 years, the policy would add 2.2 million jobs annually, and within 20 years, it would reduce emissions 52% below the 1990 level – better than the president’s Clean Power Plan.

A shift in position on climate change has started. Last January, 15 Senate Republicans voted yes, affirming that climate change is real and human activity contributes to it. Five of them voted that the human activity contributes “significantly” to climate change.

Last June, 800 Citizens’ Climate Lobby volunteers converged on Capitol Hill to lobby for a Carbon Fee and Dividend in over 500 congressional offices over two days. Seven of us traveled from Oklahoma and met with staff from each in our delegation. Some of us met briefly with Sen. James Lankford. Our conversation with each office is private, but in general, we can say that there was very little pushback on the science of climate change. This was true for most of our CCL volunteers in meetings with Republican offices.

Our CCL Executive Director Mark Reynolds summed it up this way on July 3 in a *Deseret News* op-ed:

In meeting after meeting with Republican offices, the unspoken agreement seemed to be: “Let’s not argue about the science; let’s talk about solutions and where we might find common ground.”

The Gibson Resolution highlights the narrowing partisan divide over climate change. The resolution provides a way for Republicans to join the dialogue and work toward solutions.

Since 97% of climate scientists are convinced, based upon the evidence, that human-caused global warming is happening now, the focus should be on what we must do quickly to minimize the risks – from droughts, extreme rainfall, and coastal flooding even before the advance of hurricanes like Joachim. We are in a race to avert deadly crises, and the physics of warming never rests.

For now, Republicans must take the lead to bring Resolution 424 to the floor for a vote. We can help by building relationships with members of Congress based on our common values, listening to their concerns, sharing personal stories, and joining with messengers they trust who share our commitment to conservation and stewardship.

House Resolution 424 by Gibson and his colleagues deserves our appreciation and support. Let us acknowledge their leadership and invite Oklahoma Reps. Markwayne Mullin, Tom Cole, Frank Lucas, Steve Russell, and Jim Bridenstine to co-sponsor it.

We must focus together on the crisis before us, and recognize our real enemy – time – if we are to protect our “common home.”

Kathy D. Rand has a PhD in biological sciences and leads the Norman Chapter of Citizens’ Climate Lobby.

Her Right To Choose

BY NATHANIEL BATCHELDER

For thousands of years, women have passed along secrets of how to end a pregnancy or how to prevent one. Until birth control, there was no sure defense against pregnancy; and until legalized abortion, there was no safe way to end a pregnancy.

Currently, in America, 99% of women in their fertile years will use some form of birth control, regardless of the roadblocks. An average of one in three women will have an abortion during their reproductive years, according to data from Guttmacher Institute, a nonprofit organization that advocates for reproductive health.

About half of pregnancies in America are unplanned, and of these, almost half are terminated. Specifically, Guttmacher Institute

data reveals that out of roughly four million pregnancies each year, some two million are unplanned, and of these, about 800,000 to 900,000 are terminated. Planned pregnancies, of course, are happily awaited and received.

Before legalization, millions of women risked infection or even death seeking illegal, "back-alley" procedures. Women who could afford them have always been able to obtain safer care and often traveled to other countries.

The Supreme Court's 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision still seems wise and fair. During the first three months, the justices ruled, it's her business. During the second trimester, the state may regulate in the medical interest of the woman. During the third trimester, the state may regulate "for the potentiality of human life" or may prohibit pregnancy termination procedures, with the exception of preserving the life or health of the woman.

Guttmacher Institute data also reveals that 90% of abortions take place in the first trimester. Third trimester abortions, though troubling, comprise just 1% of all procedures.

World population is above seven billion and is expected to reach nine or 11 billion this century. As human numbers threaten nature itself, it is paramount that adults have access to family planning services.

A full 97% of Planned Parenthood's budget sup-



ports health care and contraceptive services, serving millions of women. Only 3% of its budget supports abortion services.

Additionally, by federal statute, Title X of the Public Health Service Act, enacted in 1970, prohibits federal funds from being used for abortion services. Regardless, some conservatives in Congress want to eliminate Planned Parenthood's annual subsidy, which amounts to a third of its budget.

As an advocate for a broad spectrum of justice and peace issues, I have critically examined my support of the right of women to access family planning services, including abortion.

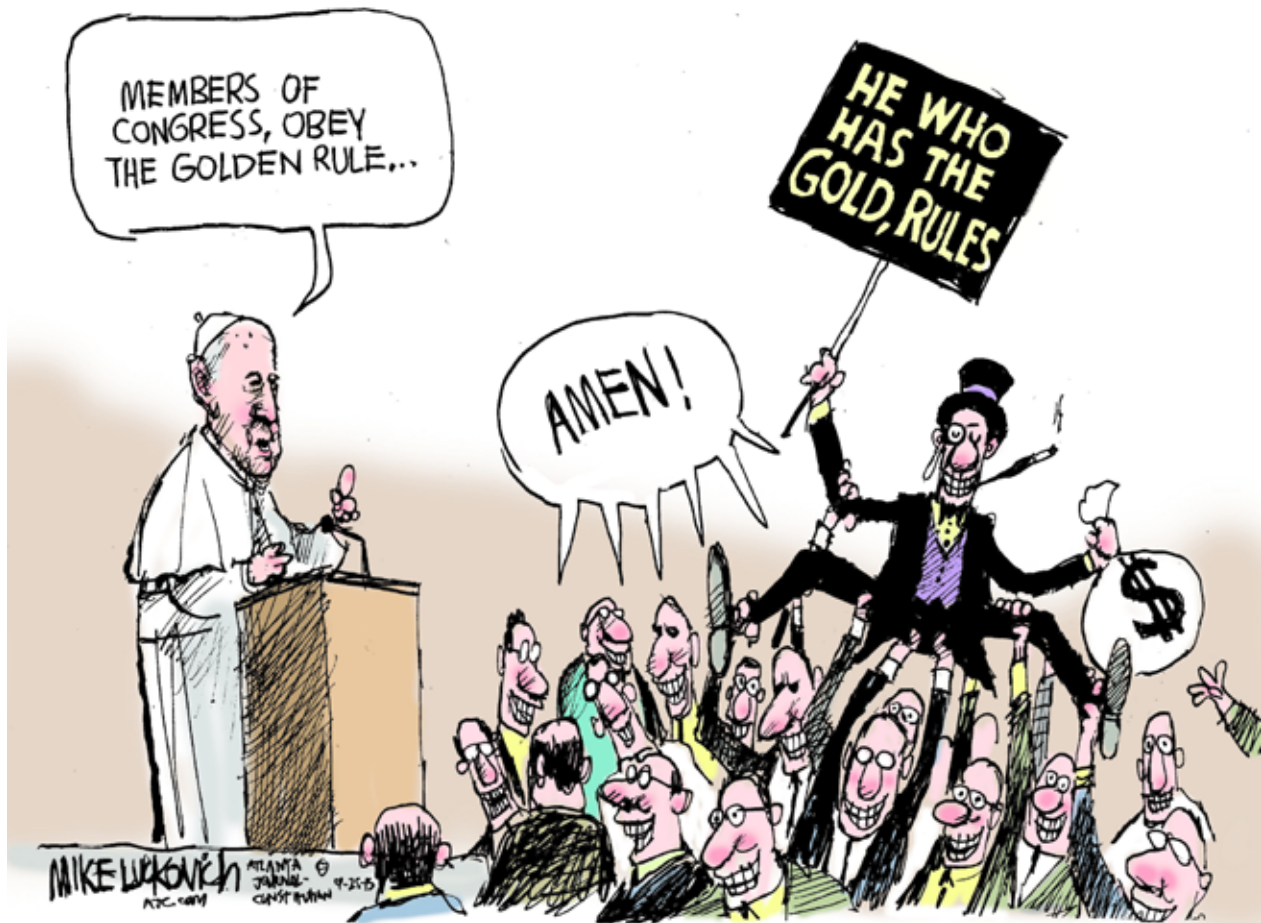
I oppose torture, the death penalty and avoidable military action. With a bachelor's degree in biology, I am completely aware of the entire nine months of development from a fertilized egg to a whole person, the miracle of procreation.

My conviction persists that because women are the only ones who can become pregnant, women should have the authority to decide when to become pregnant and whether to remain pregnant.

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

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What People Want

BY VERN TURNER

For some time polls have been showing what the general public wants from their government, but for about the same time frame their government has been giving them something else. That something else rhymes with size ... as in the size of the lies.

I wouldn't be writing about polls were it not for the repetition of the same results, basically since 2008, when Hope and Change were the buzz-words d'jour.

When I looked back into my archives of political-ly-related columns written since then, I discovered little had changed in the minds of American citizens. Those things that *did* change indicated a shift to the left, politically.

Here's what I mean referring to most recent polls about issues confronting this election cycle:

- Allowing government to negotiate drug prices, aka dumping Medicare Part D – 79%
- Make student loan interest rates the same as loans between banks – 78%
- Provide universal Pre-K education services – 77%

- Fair trade that protects American workers and their jobs – 75%
- End corporate tax loopholes and offshore hiding of profits – 74%
- End gerrymandering of Congressional districts – 73%
- Full disclosure of corporate lobbying – 71%
- Require NSA warrants – 71%
- Expand Social Security benefits – 70%
- Pass a full employment act with clean energy jobs – 70%
- End tax exemptions for Wall Street fines – 67%
- End the electoral college – 65%
- Close the carried-interest loophole – 63%
- Expand Medicare to cover everyone including veterans – 65%
- Background checks for gun purchases – 70%

There are only two current presidential candidates even mentioning these things and none of them are Republicans. They must be too busy pandering to their “base” for money while inflaming the public

PUBLIC FORUM

with idiotic rhetoric about immigration, religion and Planned Parenthood.

Why is that? Call me naive, but I seem to recall that this government of ours is a representative democratic republic. I mean, our founders actually wrote this stuff down. It's called the Constitution.

The letter and spirit of this document requires that those who presume to govern actually listen to the people who elected them and do their bidding. If this isn't the case, then we have devolved into a fascist dictatorship of the oligarchs.

Why hasn't Congress put forth legislation to attend to the desires of the people? How did we let lobbying become the great passion of government instead of serving the people?

It's about winning elections and doing the bidding of the monied special interests.

Lewis Powell requested of corporate/banking America to join forces to do these nefarious things in order to control government by corruption rather than by fair and responsible elections. So, naturally, Nixon made Powell a Supreme Court justice who led the charge against banking and investing regulations.

Maybe I've answered my own question: It's the money. It's only about the money. It is *not* about the people or their welfare.

In my latest book, *Racing to the Brink: The End Game for Race and Capitalism*, I include a chapter on the 28th Amendment should that opportunity arise.

In it I suggest, among other things, that all elections be publicly funded, and lobbying be made illegal while no elected official would ever be allowed to work as a lobbyist after their limited term of office.

What an interesting experiment it would be if all those poll items listed above were actually addressed by our Congress. Imagine the legislation passed that reflected the will of the people – we the unwashed wretches on the farms and in the streets who generate this massive economy with our toil, sweat and good will.

We the people make the rich richer, but shouldn't we also enjoy the fruits of our labor instead of having a "conservative" disinformation campaign ruled by lobbyists tell us that our government simply doesn't have the money to care for those of us who struggle?

Today's Republicans see no problem with borrowing trillions of dollars to fight illegal wars, running up a budget deficit, then blaming it all on the next administration.

Speaking of struggling, middle class incomes have fallen 10% in real value since Lewis Powell began the conspiracy to corruption by corporate/banking America.

Eighty-five percent of our current "middle-class" struggles to get ahead, own their own home and send their kids to college.

More and more middle-class people have to work at

CONTINUED ON PAGE 34



Oklahoma responds to humanitarian crisis

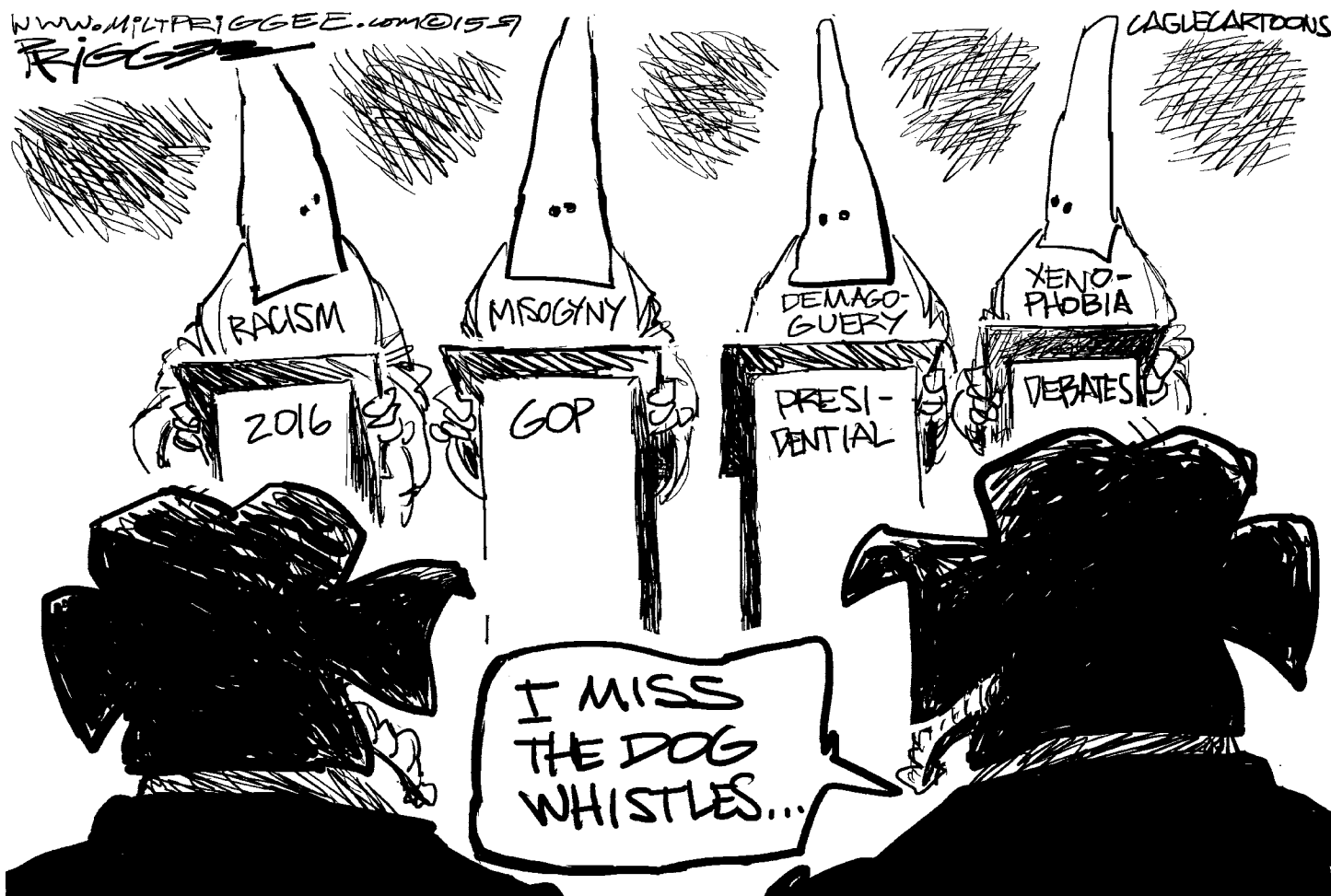
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Beware Of Demagogues

BY HAROLD V. SARE

The U.S. today finds itself in a political campaign for the presidency that likely could not be more disturbing to those of us who would like to see a sane, down-to-earth and capable president in 2016. We are being bombarded with demagoguery that far exceeds what we have experienced in past elections.

Somehow one very wealthy and powerful man has taken over the stage in the Republican Party and is making very personal and damaging remarks about other Republican candidates, as well as Democratic candidates.

He has talked about the failure of our political system because other countries' leaders – Mexico, China, Japan and others – are so much brighter and smarter than ours because those countries have taken away jobs from the U.S.

He states that former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is "the worst secretary of state in the history of the U.S." He argues that the president does not know what he is doing.

He says that President Obama has negotiated a very

damaging agreement with Iran that will give Iran \$150 billion to carry on its terrorist activities, and Iran will be able to develop nuclear weapons. He is misleading about where the \$150 billion is really coming from. It actually is Iran's own money.

He does not recognize that precisely because of the agreement the world leaders, including the U.S., will in reality have time to negotiate further with Iran.

This man with a megaphone says that he will build a wall between the U.S. and Mexico, and he emphatically states that he will make Mexico pay for it.

Further, he announces that Ford Motor Co. is planning to move a plant to Mexico. If they do, he warns, "I will make them pay a 35% tariff on every car shipped to the U.S." He also has promised that he "will ship all of the 11-plus million illegal immigrants in the U.S. out of our country."

His bombast at times gives voice to some common concerns about certain aspects of national government that aren't functioning as they should. Thus, he appeals to some of the disillusioned voters. But he also seems to appeal to the poorly informed and

extremists among our voters.

His appeal to these latter groups suggests some real hidden dangers to our system of government. Dictatorships have grown out of these kinds of circumstances!

This same candidate declares that our political representatives – senators and congressmen – as well as our president are not bright. Further, he argues that lobbyists control the political decision-makers in Washington.

While there is too much truth in the fact of the power of lobbyists and big money, he states, “I don’t need anybody’s money. I don’t want anybody’s money. ... I am very rich. ... I know how the system works better than anybody. ... Elect me president and I will make the U.S. so great and there will be so many good deals you will think they are coming out of your ears.”

It certainly is not good to have power controlled by a few ultra-rich people. But how could it possibly be better to have that power concentrated further into the hands of one ultra-rich man.

Demagogues have flourished in democratic political systems since Athens in ancient Greece. Initially the term applied to “leaders of the people,” but it soon became a negative term.

In more recent times the label of demagogue has been applied to political leaders who appeal to emotions of the uninformed and poorer classes and who incite mass movements by telling lies, working up discontent, and even violence.

The demagogue of today is of the same stripe. He or she appeals to discontent, emotions, prejudices, fears, ignorance and other weaknesses. They are not interested in deliberation or compromise or other thoughtful processes. They accuse their opponents of being ignorant, weak, feckless, and short of energy. They exploit crises and accuse those in power of not being loyal. They appeal directly to the unin-

formed, the poor, and the extremist!

The U.S. has experienced them in the past – Father Charles Coughlin, Sen. Joseph McCarthy, and Alabama Gov. George Wallace, for example. Unfortunately others are among us.

I would argue that the Republican Party has brought the demagogue to the surface in the U.S. For years they have argued for less government, lower taxes, elimination of programs for the poor, the ill, and the mentally ill. They freely raise doubts, suspicions, and fears to unsettle people and to make them more vulnerable to lies and half-truths. They argue that the individual should be self-sufficient and should not be leaning on the government for help.

Because they have gained power in Congress and in many of the states, they have generated a deadlock in decision-making that has led to less effective government. Many voters have been turned against the concept of government [at the same time they say, “Don’t mess with my Medicare”], and because they are so busy trying to make a living, they are not informed.

The demagogue has a rich field to harvest!

Let us hope that our nation can come to its senses. That is, try to rely less on hearsay and repeated lies, to learn how to gather their own facts and to think more for themselves. When we think more for ourselves, we of necessity must recognize our individual place in our democratic system of government – both our responsibilities [such as being an informed voter] and recognizing what government does for us [such as providing protection; overseeing public transportation, communication, utilities, and roadways; funding support for persons in need, and much more].

The best antidote to the propaganda and lies of a demagogue is informed people who think. Democratic voters will meet the test!

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

A Professor's Questions For Next Republican Presidential Debate

Dr. Bob Darcy, a retired Oklahoma State University professor of political science and statistics, suggests these questions for the next GOP debate.

AMERICAN TERRITORY

Concerning the Panama Canal, Ronald Reagan said, “We built it, we paid for it, it’s ours.” Yet in 1977 Jimmy Carter and Senate Democrats gave it to Panamanian dictator Omar Torrijos. President H.W. Bush showed in 1989 the U.S. military needed less than four days to take over Panama. As president, would you take back the Panama Canal? Or do you think Jimmy Carter and the Democrats did the right thing?

Follow-up: Would you ever, under any circumstance

give Guantanamo to Cuba? Would you favor settling the matter once and for all by making Guantanamo Bay Florida’s 68th county?

Follow-up: How about Wake Island. Would you, as president, consider turning Wake Island over to the Republic of the Marshall Islands which claim it?

Follow-up: In the Gulf of Maine, Canadians continue to occupy our Machias Island. Would you, as president, boot them off?

Follow-up: “Between 1836 and 1853 American presidents seized all or part of what are now California, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas from corrupt, ty-

rannical and incompetent Mexican governments. As president, how would you complete America's manifest destiny? Are there still remaining parts of Mexico that are ours by destiny?

THE SECOND AMENDMENT

In your opinion, does the Second Amendment permit Congress, the president, the federal courts, states, municipalities or the United Nations to restrict in any way the right of Americans to acquire weapons of their choice and dispose of such weapons as they wish?

Follow-up: The United Nations has a treaty the United States has not signed that would prohibit Americans, including arms dealers, from selling or shipping their legally owned weapons to organizations or individuals engaged in terrorism. As president, would you do anything to prevent Americans from doing what they want with their weapons?

Follow-up: There are weapons some claim have no legitimate civilian purpose – grenade launchers, armor piercing “cop killer” ammunition, ceramic “no detection” automatics, and the C-4 explosives such as used by terrorists to blow up airplanes, the Khobar Towers and the USS Cole, for example. As president, do you think the government should decide what weapons a citizen may need – or should that be left to the citizen?

MATHEMATICS

Do you agree with everything in mathematics? What part don't you agree with?

Follow-up: How about decimals, irrational numbers, imaginary numbers, zero? Christendom did fine before they got the zero from the Muslims. For that matter, algebra is Arabic. As president would your administration employ irrational and imaginary numbers? Use zero? Algebra?

Follow-up: Currently, Congress has limited the government's debt ceiling to \$18.1 trillion while the current debt is \$18.63 trillion. In Russia and many other places they claim a trillion is a million million million while others say it is just a million million. In your opinion, what is a trillion? As president how would you calculate our national debt? Is it currently \$18.63 million million million or it is a more manageable \$18.63 million million? Or is there even a better way to look at a trillion?

Follow-up: Revelation 13:18 tells us, “This is wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666.” Have you calculated the number of the beast? What do you think the Bible is telling us here?

THE FOURTEENTH AMENDMENT

The Fourteenth Amendment, never part of the Constitution given by our founders, guarantees the right to an abortion and same-sex marriage, it forces states to provide lawyers for criminals, forces states to integrate schools, grants citizenship to children of illegal immigrants, and many other things. Do you think the time has come to get rid of the Fourteenth Amendment?

Follow-up: The Eleventh Amendment guarantees each state's sovereign immunity. As president how would you guarantee each state's sovereign immunity?

Follow-up: Do you support the idea that Congress can pass any law it thinks necessary and proper?

Follow-up: What if Congress passed some law 100 years ago that makes no sense to you today. As president, are you obliged to enforce it?

Follow-up: Can you name a federal law you like? A federal regulation you like?

AMERICAN UNIQUENESS

Do you believe in American exceptionalism? As president, what will our exceptionalism allow you to do that leaders of other nations cannot?

Follow-up: Is America the only unique country, or do you think other countries are, or can be, unique as well? Is every country unique?

Follow-up: The Bible makes clear that the Jews have been chosen by God to be a light unto the nations. Now many believe Americans, not the Jews, are God's light unto the nations. Is this what you believe? Do you believe America became God's light unto the nations before or after the Spanish American War?

THE ECONOMY

William Jennings Bryan, in a famous July 9, 1896 speech said, “You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns; you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold.” How do you feel about the gold standard and bimetallism?

Follow-up: Some of us remember \$20 Gold Certificates, printed until 1928 and circulating long after; and more of us remember the silver certificates, printed through 1935 and still circulating. These could be redeemed with gold or silver. Until 1965 American coins were 90% silver. Today the metal content of coins is virtually worthless and paper money, Federal Reserve Notes, are backed by the assets of Federal Reserve Banks, which are Treasury Securities purchased by the Federal Reserve Banks, in a process called debt monetizing. Thus, American money is backed by government debt. Do you favor this system – or, as president would you issue an executive order to change it?

Saying Grace

Little Johnny and his family were having Sunday dinner at his Grandmother's house. Everyone was seated around the table as the food was being served. When Little Johnny received his plate, he started eating right away.

“Johnny! Please wait until we say our prayer,” said his mother.

“I don't need to,” the boy replied.

“Of course, you do,” his mother insisted. “We always say a prayer before eating at our house.”

“That's at our house,” Johnny explained. “But this is Grandma's house and she knows how to cook.”

– Thanks to A.J. Henshaw for this gem

What Every American Family Needs To Know About College

BY ROBERT REICH

After heavy lobbying from some of the nation's most elite institutions of higher education, the president recently abandoned his effort to rank the nation's 7,000 colleges and universities.

So, with college application season almost upon us, where should aspiring college students and their parents look for advice?

In my view, not U.S. News and World Report's annual college guide [out in early September].

It's analogous to a restaurant guide that gives top ratings to the most expensive establishments that are backed and frequented by the wealthiest gourmands – and much lower rankings to restaurants with the best food at lower prices that attract the widest range of diners.

Without fail, U.S. News puts at the top of its list America's most exclusive and expensive private universities that admit low numbers and small percentages of students from poor families.

These elite institutions also train a disproportionately large share of the nation's investment bankers, corporate chieftains, corporate lawyers, and management consultants.

Around 70% of Harvard's senior class routinely submits resumes to Wall Street and corporate consulting firms, for example. Close to 36% of Princeton's 2010 graduating class went into finance, down from 46% before the financial crisis.

And so it goes, through the Ivy League and other elite private institutions.

Meanwhile, U.S. News relegates to lower rankings public universities that admit most of the young Americans from poor families who attend college, and which graduate far larger percentages of teachers, social workers, legal aid attorneys, community organizers, and public servants than do the private elite colleges.

U.S. News claims its rankings are neutral. Baloney.

They're based on such "neutral" criteria as how selective a college is in its admissions, how much its alumni donate, how much money and other resources its faculty receive, and how much it spends per student.

Colleges especially favored by America's wealthy are bound to excel on these criteria. The elite pour money into them because these institutions have educated them and, they hope, will educate their offspring.

A family name engraved in marble on such a cam-

pus confers unparalleled prestige.

And because these institutions have educated such a high proportion of America's wealthy elite, that elite looks with particular favor on graduates of these institutions in making hiring decisions.

Which helps explain their high and increasing selectivity. As the income and wealth of America's elite has soared over recent decades, the financial benefits of being anointed as a graduate of such an institution have soared in tandem.

The U.S. News rankings perpetuate the myth that these elite institutions offer the best education – as if the economic diversity of a student body and the values and career choices of its undergraduates were irrelevant to receiving a high-quality education.

And as if educational excellence could be measured by the size of the wallets supporting it.

Public universities are at an inherent disadvantage on these criteria because they rely on state funding instead of wealthy alumni. They also admit large numbers of students, which often means a lower expenditure per student.

And because public universities have a special responsibility to be accessible to students from every economic class, they take more chances on a broader range of promising students, including many who are the first in their families to attend college.

Public universities are the major vehicles of upward mobility in America. They educate 73% of all college students. The Ivy League educates just .4%.

And the best public universities provide a higher-quality education, in my view, than many of the private elites.

Full disclosure: I was educated in private elite universities – Dartmouth and Yale. And I taught for many years at Harvard.

These venerable institutions rate at or near the top of the U.S. News rankings.

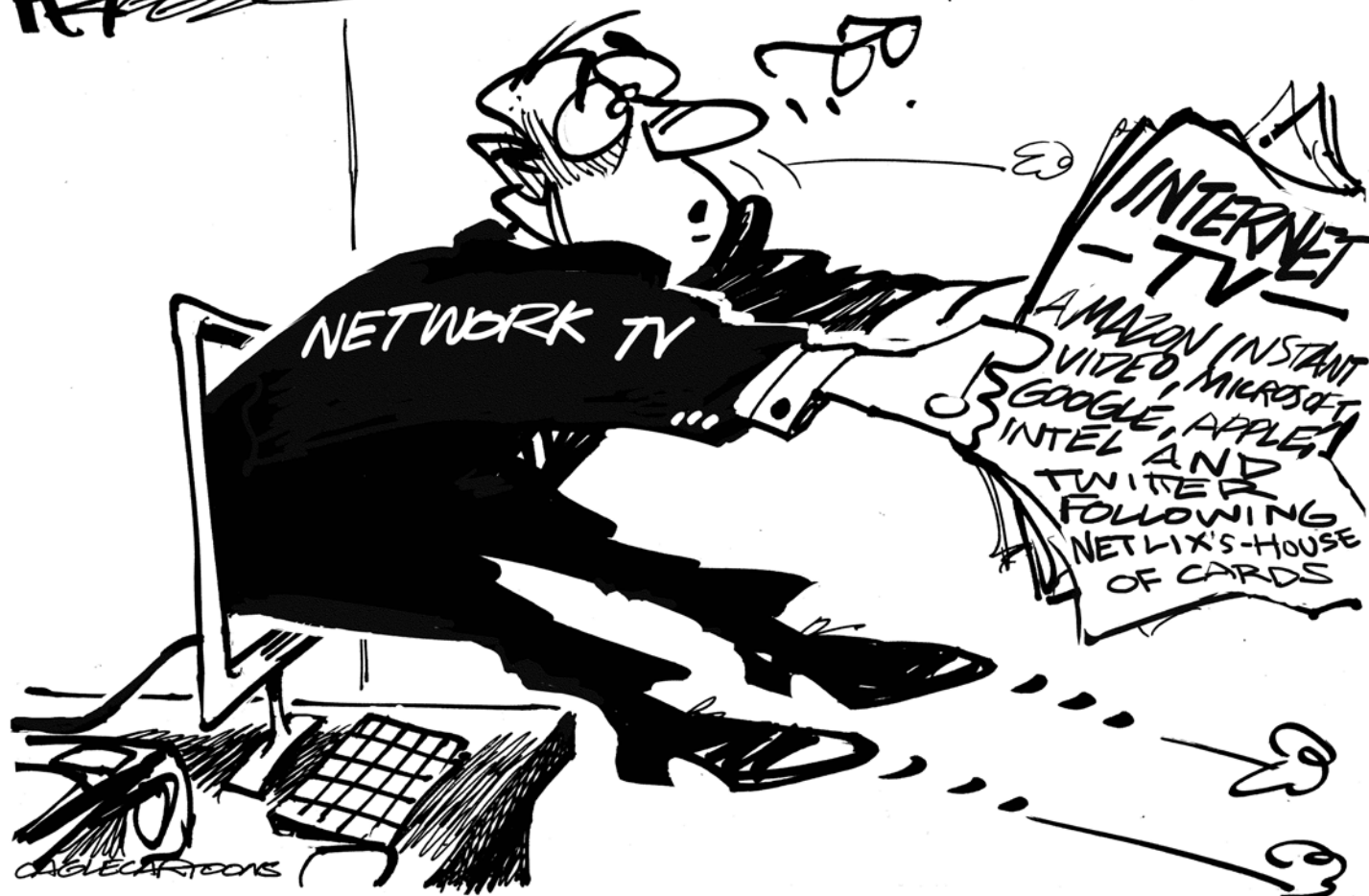
For the past decade, though, I've been teaching at the University of California at Berkeley.

One thing I've discovered: My Berkeley students are every bit as bright as the students I met or taught in the Ivies.

Another: More Pell-grant eligible students [a proxy for students from low-income families] attend Berkeley than attend the entire Ivy League combined.

And my Berkeley students are more involved in, and more of them are aiming for careers in, public service than any group of students I've ever had the privi-

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Fast, Faster, Fastest: Why The Rush?

BY RALPH NADER

Socrates and Plato were not in a hurry. Neither was Aristotle nor Heraclitus. They took time to think deeply. As far back as 24 centuries ago, they offered insights and observations about the human condition, character, and personality that are as true today as they were then.

Fast forward to our fast-paced society. Many people think if they talk faster, people will think they're smarter. Talking fast is not talking smart.

Evening TV news interviews of individuals may average five or less seconds – called sound bites – while they averaged about 18 seconds in the 1970s.

Standardized tests put a premium on how fast you can answer the questions, putting an emphasis on speed and memory rather than understanding. With standardized testing, deeper learning never really

had a chance.

Marketers aim for your instant gratification when selling you junk food and other impulse buys. “One-click ordering” has taken this system to a completely new level. Smart traders surrender to computerized trading, speculating in split seconds on the stock exchanges. I could give you 10 reasons why this is a bad idea.

You can now hear the evening news on National Public Radio in just three or so minutes – an absurdity. There are radio segments called the “academic minute” and the “corporate crime minute,” dedicated to shrinking attention spans.

To state the obvious, there are fast food outlets everywhere – so many that a modest slow food movement is underway.

Many hospitals have been known to admit women in labor and discharge these new mothers less than 24 hours after they have given birth – exhibiting a corporate form of “attention deficit disorder.”

Advertisements for drugs and other consumables end with warnings of adverse effects that are described so swiftly that they are simply incomprehensible.

A top sushi restaurant in Tokyo charges by the minute, not the amount ordered – running you about \$300 for a 30-minute meal.

Ever count how many images flit by in an ordinary TV news show while it is being narrated? Play it again – does the viewer even have a chance to absorb and mentally react? TV advertisements are, of course, more emotionally charged this way.

Then there is Twitter with its limited 140 character tweets, the ping-pong exchanges of text messaging scores of times throughout the day, and the constant immersion in video games.

Back in 1999, Barbara Ehrenreich, in her review of James Gleick’s book *Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything*, pauses to ponder: “What we lose, as ‘just about everything’ accelerates, is the chance to reflect, to analyze and, ultimately, to come up with moral judgments.”

Not quite everything in our society, however, is speeding up. Rush hour speeds have slowed to 10 or 15 miles per hour in many cities. Banks, in a computer age, deliberately take days to clear checks, maybe hoping to penalize you with a \$35 bounced check fee. Try getting through to a business or another institution on an automated phone line. You may have to work through 10 levels of “press one, press two ...” After choosing, you may only have the opportunity to leave a voicemail message.

As a society, it has taken far too long to implement proven policies that could address and abolish poverty, including raising the minimum wage that has been long gutted by inflation.

As a society, we are too slowly expanding mass transit, confronting climate change, converting to renewable energy, and improving the miles per gallon of our automobiles.

Except for Medicare reimbursements, physicians know how long it takes for insurance companies to pay up. Our companies and governments take a long time to clean up their own pollution or respond to complaints from consumers and citizens. These days, it’s looking like a contest of who can care less.

On the other hand, a bizarre, frantic emphasis has emerged to get the packages you order delivered faster and faster. Amazon is following through on their wildest dreams and even thinking about using drones to make deliveries. Likewise, Walmart is gearing up to deliver to your homes and businesses as fast as they can.

Pretty soon, people won’t have to go to stores; they’ll just order everything online and never see any other shoppers or have chance meetings with friends and

neighbors. Let’s hear the applause from those people who haven’t thought through these “improvements” and the resulting destruction of communities.

Entertainment is a bubble waiting to burst. People do not have more than two eyes, two ears, or 24 hours in a day. In the 1950s, there were three national television networks. Now, there are hundreds of cable channels and over-the-air TV stations, not to mention the avalanche of Internet-based programs and diversions.

The pressure for ratings is starting to implode on its vendors. In an article published on Aug. 31 in the New York Times titled *Soul Searching in TV Land*, reporter John Koblin sums up the “malaise in TV these days,” namely, “there is simply too much on television.”

Too much is colliding with too fast and our technological wonderland is fraying.

Hewlett Packard (HP) has just started an advertising campaign with the headline: “The Future Belongs to the Fast.” The text includes this message: “HP believes that when people, technology, and ideas all come together, business can move further, faster.”

By contrast, 15 years ago, Bill Joy, the famous technology inventor/innovator wrote an article titled *The Future Doesn’t Need Us*, citing the oncoming converging technologies of artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and nanotechnology.

So which is it? Got a minute to think about it? Hurry! Oops, you’ve just lost 63 nanoseconds already trying to decide.

Nader.org

College

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lege of teaching. [Each year, around 10,000 Berkeley undergraduates engage in off-campus public service projects and programs.]

In an era when income and wealth are more concentrated at the top than in living memory – much of it in the hands of Wall Street bankers, corporate executives, and their retainers – U.S. News has become a major enabler of American inequality.

We need another guide for ranking colleges – one that doesn’t look at the fatness of alumni wallets or the amount spent on each student, but does take account of economic diversity and dedication to public service.

Fortunately, there is one. It’s a relatively new one, provided by the Washington Monthly.

My advice: Use it.

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

A Flagrant Liar For President?



We've got a new darling in the GOP presidential race: Carly Fiorina!

Being the darling du jour, however, can be dicey – just ask Rick Perry and Scott Walker, two former darlings who are now out of the race, having turned into ugly ducklings by saying stupid things.

But Fiorina is smart, sharp-witted, and successful. We know this because she and her PR agents constantly tell us it's so. Be careful about believing anything she says, though, for Darling Fiorina is not only a relentless self-promoter, but also a remorseless liar.

Take her widely hailed performance in the second debate among Republican wannabes, where she touched many viewers with her impassioned and vivid attack on Planned Parenthood.

With barely contained outrage, Fiorina described a video that, she said, shows the women's health organization in a depraved act of peddling body parts of an aborted fetus.

"Watch a fully formed fetus on the table, its heart beating, its legs kicking," said a stone-faced Fiorina, looking straight into the camera, "while someone says, 'We have to keep it alive to harvest its brain.'"

Oh, the horror, the monstrosity of Planned Parenthood! And how moving it was to see and feel the fury of this candidate for president!

Only ... it's not true. Although she dared the audience, President Obama and Hillary Clinton to go watch it, turns out that there is no such video – no fetus with kicking legs and no demonic Planned Parenthood official luridly preparing to harvest a brain.

So did Fiorina make up this big, nasty lie herself, or did her PR team concoct it as a bit of showbiz drama to burnish her right-wing credentials and advance her political ambition? Or maybe she's just spreading a malicious lie she was told by some vicious haters of Planned Parenthood.

Either way, there's nothing darling about it, much less presidential.

I remember back in 1992 when the third-party candidate Ross Perot chose Admiral James Stockdale,

a complete unknown, to be his presidential running mate. In his first debate, the vice presidential candidate began by asking a question: "Who am I? Why am I here?"

We should be asking the same about Carly, as she has recently surged in the polls of GOP primary voters. Her campaign is positioning her as a no-nonsense, successful corporate chieftain who can run government with business-like efficiency.

During the debate, Fiorina rattled off a list of her accomplishments as CEO of Hewlett-Packard, the high-tech conglomerate:

"We doubled the size of the company, we quadrupled its topline growth rate, we quadrupled its cash flow, we tripled its rate of innovation," she declared in PowerPoint style.

Statistics, however, can be a sophisticated way of lying. In fact, the growth she bragged about was mostly the result of her buying Compaq, another computer giant in a merger that proved to be disastrous – in fact, Hewlett-Packard's profits declined 40% in her six years, its stock prices plummeted and she fired 30,000 workers, even saying publicly that their jobs should be shipped overseas. Finally, she was fired.

Before we accept her claim that "running government like a business" would be a positive, note that the narcissistic corporate culture richly rewarded Fiorina for failure.

Yes, she was fired, but unlike the thousands of HP employees she dumped, a golden parachute was provided to let her land in luxury – counting severance pay, stock options, and pension, she was given \$42 million to go away.

But here she comes again, lacking even one iota of humility. Fiorina is throwing out a blizzard of lies, not only about Planned Parenthood, but also about who she is.

She's the personification of corporate greed and economic inequality, and she's trying to bamboozle Republicans into thinking she belongs in the White House.

Wall Street's Wealthy Thieves

With the 2016 presidential campaigns in full swing the burdens of the working middle class have taken center stage. And believe it or not, there is bipartisan support from the front-runners on a key issue brought up over and over again. Donnie Trump is for it. Hillary Clinton is for it. Jeb Bush is for it. Bernie Sanders is for it. Even Barack Obama is for it. And the American people are overwhelmingly for it.

The "it" that's drawing such broad support is the idea of ending a ridiculous tax loophole that was written by and for the richest, most pampered elites on Wall Street. An obscurely titled "carried interest" tax break allows billionaire hedge-fund hucksters to have their massive incomes taxed at a much lower rate than the one retail workers, Main Street businesses, carpenters and other modest-income people must pay.

Keep that carried interest tax loophole in mind when I tell you this number: 158,000. That's the number of kindergarten teachers in America. Their combined income in 2013 was \$8 billion. Here's another number for you: 25. That's the number of America's highest-paid hedge fund operators whose combined income in 2013 was \$21 billion. Yes, just 25 Wall Street greedmeisters hauled off \$13 billion more in pay than was received by all of our kindergarten teachers – the people we count on to launch the educations of the next generation.

Which group do you think is rewarded by law with the lowest rate of income tax? Right: the uber-rich Wall Streeters!

Incredibly, Congress [in its inscrutable wisdom] gives preferential tax treatment to the narcissistic money manipulators who do practically nothing for the common good. Even flamboyant celebrity narcissist Donnie Trump sees through the gross inequality of this tax scam: "The hedge fund guys didn't build this country," The Donald recently barked. "These are guys that shift paper around, and they get lucky. The hedge fund guys are getting away with murder."

Indeed, while dodging through this loophole, they pay about half the tax rate that kindergarten teachers are assessed. In effect, Wall Street's puppets in Congress let this tiny group of moneyed elites steal about \$18 billion a year that they owe to the public treasury to finance the structure and workings of America itself.

This privileged treatment of pampered paper and money shufflers over people who do constructive work in our society adds to America's widening chasm of inequality. It's so unfair and unpopular that

even Donald, Hillary, Jeb, Bernie and others are saying that it has to go. So it's bye-bye, loophole, right?

Ha – just kidding! Trump can mouth all he wants, but no animal hath such fury as a hedge-funder whose special tax boondoggle is threatened. Trump had barely gotten the word "unfair" out of his puffy lips before the tax-loophole profiteers deployed battalions of lobbyists, PR flacks, and front-group operatives out to defend their precious carried-interest provision. One group, with the arcane name of Private Equity Growth Capital Council, rushed a dozen Gucci-clad lobbyists to Capitol Hill to "inform" lawmakers about the virtues of coddling Wall Street elites with tax favors.

Of course, "informing" meant flashing their checkbooks at key members of Congress. After all, even the loudest blast of political talk is cheap – and it's the silent sound of a pen writing out a campaign check that makes Washington World keep spinning in favor of the rich.

Sure enough, Rep. Paul Ryan and Sen. Orrin Hatch, the two lawmakers who head Congress' tax-writing committees, quickly announced that – the will of the people aside – there would be no repeal of the hedge-fund loophole anytime soon. The inequality that is presently ripping our society apart is not the result of some incomprehensible force of nature, but the direct result of collusion between financial and political elites to rig the system for the enrichment of the few – i.e., themselves – and the impoverishment of the many.

There's a word for those elites: thieves. – *Jim Hightower*

Do Remote Bosses Cause Inequality?

BY FROMA HARROP

Could there be a reason for the widening pay gap that's not exactly economic? There could be.

The employment rate has fallen to a very low 5.1%. A tightening labor market is supposed to lead to higher wages, but that's not happening. Some of the lowest wages are actually falling.

Productivity gains – whereby workers produce more in the same amount of time – traditionally boost paychecks. Not nowadays.

Bosses and their investors are grabbing most of the profits. That's not just because they can but because there's no longer much of a social cost for not sharing. Technology and globalization have created a thick buffer between the top earners and public opinion.

That wasn't always the case. After World War II, lin-

gering public anger over the Great Depression and some profiteering during the war created an expectation that business and labor would share in the postwar prosperity, former MIT professor Frank Levy once told me.

A golden age for the American worker ensued. Productivity rose fast and wages along with it. Until 1973.

Between 1973 and 2014, net productivity grew over 72% while the real wages of the median worker rose just 8.7%, according to a new study by the Economic Policy Institute.

"If the hourly pay of typical American workers had kept pace with productivity growth since the 1970s," the report said, "then there would have been no rise in income inequality during that period."

There could be several reasons for this. One must be employers becoming ever more remote from their employees. That has turned working people from being their teammates to being mere economic inputs, alongside the cost of energy, raw materials and borrowing.

As the old black-and-white movies showed, factory owners and Main Street merchants lived in the same town as their workers, even if on opposite sides of the tracks. Bosses who treated their people badly were shunned.

Owners and workers now often live on different continents. The captains of the growing gig economy, as epitomized by Uber, may not even set eyes on those enriching them. The dealings are done impersonally online.

[Uber is fighting against having to even recognize its drivers as employees. That would entitle them to

some added benefits.]

Walmart's decision last year to start raising its infamously low wages came out of world headquarters in Bentonville, AR.

Wolfe Research had downgraded Walmart stock because the chain's overworked staff was unable to keep the shelves stocked. The stores were looking shabby because of "Walmart U.S.'s relentless focus on costs," it said.

So the pay raise – still well below the \$15-an-hour level being legislated in some states and cities – was clearly not motivated to win the affections of the 500,000 workers. [The good opinion of stockroom clerks – and their families – would have mattered to the local retailers that Walmart had long ago put out of business.]

We can accuse these employers of greed until we're blue in the face. But shaming is a dull weapon against weakened social restraints.

The very rich are more and more separated from everyone else. In their circles, net wealth is often regarded as the supreme mark of personal excellence. The workers, as the conservative movement tells them, should be grateful they even have a job.

It's hard to see what can change all this. Higher minimum wages are an obvious place to start – as are labor laws mandating paid vacation.

One thing that might raise the social price for gross inequality is publicizing the difference in pay between the top executives and the lowest workers. The question always remains, Are the bosses too cushioned to care?

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People

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multiple jobs just to make ends meet and maintain their lifestyle.

Why aren't there enough good-paying jobs to permit the majority of our citizens from enjoying the fruits of their labor?

Nobody is even mentioning the poor, that chronic 15% of our population that has *never* gotten ahead. Nobody is addressing that bottomless pit in our national landscape.

Productivity in industry has increased by triple-digit percentages since 1971, but buying power has declined or flat-lined, depending on the job sector.

So, the next time you hear about improved productivity from some Fox News mouthpiece, ask yourself why those who are the engines of such productivity don't get to share in the profits.

Most of these above questions are answered, in the abstract, by understanding that those who have been financed to run for office lie to us.

The parties are funded by liars who want to control

profits and worker benefits to the advantage of the bottom line.

The stockholder is now the tail that wags the corporate dog, and that dog must eat ... all the time and as much as possible.

In all fairness to responsible corporate operators, they are compelled to be the whores of the stock market and therefore Wall Street and the hedge fund billionaires.

Maybe there should be polls that show how dissatisfied the people are with how the profits are actually distributed to those slaves of productivity, the middle class.

I think I know how they would look. Let's give it a try and see how good I am at predicting a leap in lifestyle improvement and national vigor.

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

A Failed Experiment Indeed

BY BOB D. ROUNSAVELL

In the June 8 Time magazine, the death penalty in America is explored in an excellent article by David von Drehle. He concludes that it's a failed experiment, citing five reasons it may now be ending in our country. There are certainly more than five reasons that capital punishment is no longer relevant or effective in the 21st Century.

The most obvious reason to me is probably the recent spate of bungled executions, the crap-shoot of successful ones, and the release of innocent victims of long years of incarceration. Remember in April 2014 Oklahoma's 40-minute attempt to kill Clayton Lockett before a fatal heart attack.

Reason 2: The crime rate is on the decline, and there is a positive correlation between it and capital punishment. After we read the lurid description and nauseam of the massacre in the Colorado movie theater and see the expressionless James Holmes in a red wig, some of us wonder no more why it happened and accept the sentence. But then we also wonder why our children should see him or any other get his just desserts.

Reason 3 is dwindling justification because of more secure prisons, less overt racism, and better sense of justice among our citizenry. Someday, we may even leave the likes of our peers [Iran and China] and join the more enlightened Europe.

Reason 4 is the high cost of capital punishment. Florida costs for capital punishment are six times more and North Carolina costs eight times more compared to a life sentence, due to the lengthy process of appeals and review. In addition, there's the high cost of health care for death row inmates, especially those with decades of waiting for execution.

Reason 5 is the judges' and the Supreme Court justices' long anguished deliberations on capital punishment, reflecting our own societal consciousness raising over crime and punishment, especially capital punishment. This concise recap does little justice to Von Drehle and his Time essay.

Way back in a college speech course, I was assigned to take a position on capital punishment as the topic for my final speech. It did not take me long to become convinced that putting people to death for the crime of murder was not a just punishment. I chose the anti-capital punishment position for my speech and have faithfully supported that position since.

First, it simply made no sense to me that the state could commit murder in order to punish it. After all, isn't capital punishment identical to murder? Think about it. How can we kill a person for committing murder? By killing him? The punishment, it appears to me, is the same as the crime.

Have you seen the bumper sticker von Drehle cites?

Why do we kill people who kill people to show people that killing people is wrong?

Since the 17th Century America has chosen an array of methods for capital punishment: hanging, burning, firing squad, electrocution, gassing, and now lethal injection. If we believe in a just creator, then there is no way we can believe in capital punishment. And if we believe in one who enjoins us to forgive someone 70 times seven and want to be a faithful follower of his, then where are we as regards capital punishment?

Today 32 states still allow capital punishment for the most heinous crimes like rape of a child or capital murder. Yet since the start of 2014, all but two of the country's 49 executions have been carried out by just five states: Texas, Missouri, Florida, Georgia, and, yes, Oklahoma. Surely most people can see that answering an act of inhumanity with another act of inhumanity is not justifiable in any way.

One of the best reasons for not continuing the death penalty is the disproportionate rate of dishing out the death penalty to persons of color. Black and Hispanic males seem to receive the penalty of death far more than do white males.

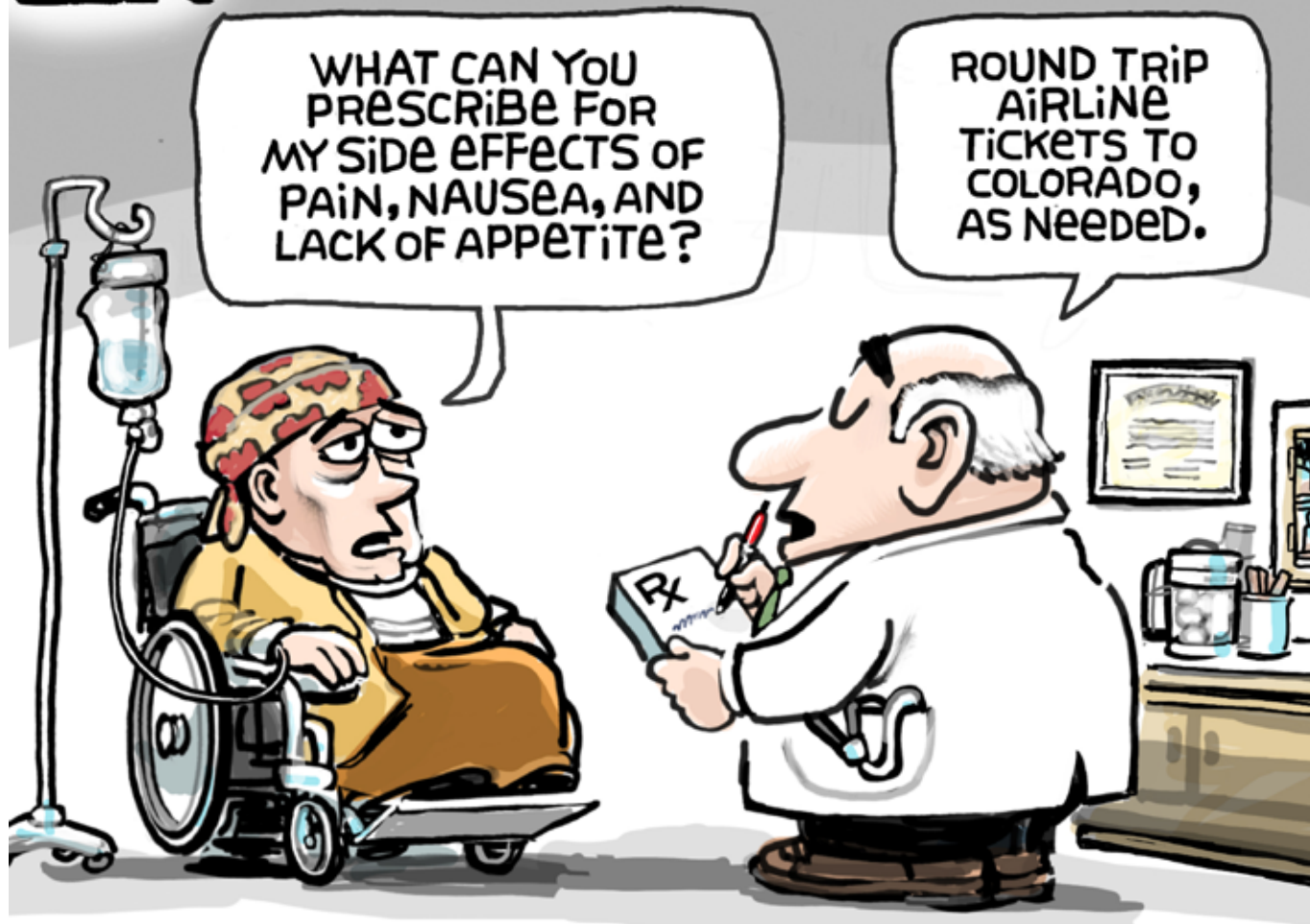
It also makes no sense economically. Many studies clearly show capital punishment, due to the high number of appeals that are pursued before final sentence is carried out, does nothing but run up the cost. In fact, for a long time now, it has cost states more to employ capital punishment than have long jail time. It simply no longer makes any economic sense to continue capital punishment.

The simple solution is to discontinue capital punishment and issue life sentences without a chance of parole. Then we run into a replay of who's going to pay for incarceration, the county or the state. The door of hope is still open so that many prisoners are given sentences that offer a chance of rehabilitation. Let's hope so as it bodes well for the human race, especially in this hemisphere.

Case in point: Go to the Muskogee Creek Nation Courthouse in downtown Okmulgee and find a moment of epiphany. I found a plaque describing how one Indian nation dealt with murder.

The perpetrator was sentenced to spend a certain time living with the victim's family and fulfilling the victim's role. The intent is that he would ultimately be released back to his family and community to be a productive Muskoki. Now that's justice with a capital J and mercy with a capital M shown by human beings of the highest caliber.

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



Research Upends Decades Of Myths And Fearmongering About Pot

BY PAUL ARMENTANO

Scientific discoveries are published almost daily rebuking the federal government's contention that cannabis is a highly dangerous substance lacking therapeutic efficacy. But most of these findings appear primarily in obscure, peer-reviewed journals and often go unnoticed by the major media and the general public.

Here are five new cannabis-centric studies that warrant mainstream attention:

Early Onset Pot Use Isn't Associated With Adverse Outcomes in Adulthood

Kids who experiment with weed are far less likely than non-users to be healthy and successful adults. So says the conventional wisdom. But new science says otherwise.

Investigators from the Pittsburgh School of Medicine and Rutgers University prospectively examined

whether male subjects who consumed cannabis between the ages of 15 and 26 differed in terms of socioeconomic, social, and life satisfaction outcomes by their mid-30s as compared to those who were either abstinent or only consumed it sparingly. After controlling for potential confounders, such as the use of alcohol and other illicit substances, researchers reported that pot-consuming subjects – including those who used the substance habitually – were generally “not at a heightened risk for maladjustment in adulthood.”

A separate evaluation of this same cohort published in August in the journal *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors* reported that younger pot smokers were no more likely than their non-smoking peers to experience physical or mental health issues later in life. The finding defied researchers' presumptions, as

they acknowledged that their motivation for conducting the study was to “provide empirical evidence regarding the potential adverse consequences of marijuana legalization.”

Providing Medical Cannabis Access Reduces Opioid Abuses

Is legalized pot a gateway to fewer opioid-related deaths? The data says “yes.” According to findings published in July by the National Bureau of Economic Research – a non-partisan think-tank – states that permit qualified patients to access medical marijuana via dispensaries possess lower rates of opioid addiction and overdose deaths as compared to those that do not.

Researchers from the RAND Corporation and the University of California-Irvine assessed the impact of medicinal cannabis laws on problematic opioid use, as measured by treatment admissions for opioid pain reliever addiction and by state-level opioid overdose deaths. They concluded, “[S]tates permitting medicinal marijuana dispensaries experience a relative decrease in both opioid addictions and opioid overdose deaths compared to states that do not.”

The findings were not the first time that researchers have reported a relationship between increased medi-pot access and decreased opioid deaths. Research published in the Journal of the American Medical Association in 2014 also concluded, “States with medical cannabis laws had a 24.8% lower mean annual opioid overdose mortality rate compared with states without medical cannabis laws.”

Pot Is A Frequent Substitute For Alcohol, Other Drugs

Legalized pot isn’t just associated with the less frequent use of opiates. Data published last month in the journal Drug and Alcohol Review also reports that most people who consume weed also report reducing their use of alcohol, as well as their consumption of other licit and illicit drugs.

“Substituting cannabis for one or more of alcohol, illicit drugs or prescription drugs was reported by 87% of respondents” in the cohort, Canadian researchers reported, “with 80.3% reporting substitution for prescription drugs, 51.7% for alcohol, and 32.6% for illicit substances.” Rates of substitution were highest among respondents between the ages of 18 and 40.

Authors concluded, “The finding that cannabis was substituted for alcohol and illicit substances suggests that the medical use of cannabis may play a harm reduction role in the context of use of these substances, and could have implications for substance use treatment approaches requiring abstinence from cannabis in the process of reducing the use of other substances.”

Forget ‘The Munchies’ – Pot Consumers Are Less Likely to Be Obese

Smoking pot may stimulate appetite, but it isn’t likely to make you fat. That’s the conclusion of a recent study published in journal Obesity.

Investigators from the Conference of Quebec Univer-

Oklahoma Petition Drive Underway

Green the Vote is circulating an initiative petition aimed at forcing a 2016 general election vote on a proposal to legalize medical marijuana in Oklahoma.

The group needs to collect 123,724 valid signatures and submit them to the Secretary of State’s office no later than 5 p.m. Dec. 29 in order to get State Question 778 on the statewide ballot.

At press time, nearly 50 businesses across Oklahoma were serving as petition-signing sites. Green the Vote also planned to collect signatures at the Tulsa State Fair, which runs through Oct. 11.

For more information on the proposal and the petition drive, visit greenthedevoteok.com.

sity Health Centers assessed cannabis use patterns and body mass index [BMI] in a cohort of 786 Inuit [Arctic aboriginal] adults ages 18 to 74. Researchers reported that cannabis users possessed an average BMI of 26.8 compared to an index of 28.6 for non-users, after controlling for age, gender and other factors. Investigators further discovered that pot users possessed fewer diabetic markers than non-users.

They concluded: “In this large cross-sectional adult survey with high prevalence of both substance use and obesity, cannabis use in the past year was associated with lower BMI, lower percentage fat mass, lower fasting insulin, and HOMA-IR [insulin resistance]. ... [C]annabinoids from cannabis may be viewed as an interesting avenue for research on obesity and associated conditions.”

While these latest findings run counter to stoner stereotypes, they are hardly novel. Observational trial data published in 2012 in the British Medical Journal reported that marijuana users possessed a lower prevalence of Type 2 diabetes and possessed a lower risk of contracting the disease than did those with no history of cannabis consumption, even after researchers adjusted for social variables such as subjects’ ethnicity, family history, and levels of physical activity.

Additionally, cross-sectional data published in 2011 in the American Journal of Epidemiology similarly reported that the prevalence of obesity in the general population is sharply lower among those who consume the herb compared to those who do not.

Despite Legalization, Teens Aren’t Using More Pot [But They Are Consuming Far Less Alcohol and Tobacco]

Proponents of pot prohibition repeatedly claim that liberalizing marijuana laws will increase young people’s use of the substance. And when the data refutes their claims – and it has time after time – they simply

lie about it.

Nonetheless, the evidence is clear. According to the federal government's own 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health report, current use of marijuana by those between the ages of 12 to 17 has remained largely unchanged over the past decade, while young people's self-reported consumption of alcohol and cigarettes has fallen to record lows.

Specifically, the percentage of respondents ages 12 to 17 who reported past-month use of marijuana remained steady from 7.6% in 2004 to 7.4% in 2014. By contrast, teens' use of tobacco, cigarettes, and alcohol fell dramatically during this same period. Over the past 10 years, adolescents' use of tobacco fell from 14.4% to 7%, their use of cigarettes fell from 11.9% to 4.9%, and their use of alcohol fell from 17.6% to 11.5%. Binge drinking by young people fell from 11.1% in 2004 to 6.1% in 2014.

Separate data published by researchers at the University of Texas at Austin further reports that a greater proportion of younger adolescents are now acknowledging "strong disapproval" of marijuana use.

In short, more teens are not turning to pot. But they are turning away from more dangerous substances like alcohol and tobacco like never before.

Paul Armentano is the deputy director of NORML, the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, and serves as a senior policy advisor for Freedom Leaf Inc. He is the co-author of the book Marijuana Is Safer: So Why Are We Driving People to Drink? [Chelsea Green, 2013].

Hope For Peace: The Cost Of Conflict In South Asia

BY NYLA ALI KHAN

On Oct. 26, 1947, Maharaja Hari Singh, monarch of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, signed the "Instrument of Accession" to India, officially ceding to the government of India jurisdiction over defense, foreign affairs, and communications.

The accession of J&K to India was accepted by the last British Viceroy and first Governor-General of India, Lord Mountbatten, with the stipulation that once the region was stabilized, a referendum would be held in which the people of the state would either rat-

ify or interdict the accession. In January 1948, India referred the Kashmir dispute to the United Nations.

Subsequent to the declaration of the cease-fire between India and Pakistan on Jan. 1, 1949, the state of Jammu and Kashmir was divided into two portions. The part of the state comprising the Punjabi-speaking areas of Poonch, Mirpur, and Muzaffarabad, along with Gilgit and Baltistan, was incorporated into Pakistan, whereas the portion of the state comprising the Kashmir Valley, Ladakh, and the large Jammu region was politically assimilated into India.

Currently, a large part of Jammu and Kashmir is administered by India and a portion by Pakistan. China annexed a section of the land in 1962, through which it has built a road that links Tibet to Xiajiang.

The strategic location of Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir underscores its importance for both India and Pakistan. The state of Jammu and Kashmir borders on China and Afghanistan.

Although Pakistan distinctly expresses its recognition of the status of Jammu and Kashmir as disputed territory, it dithers from doing so in areas of the state under Pakistani control.

Pakistan arbitrarily maintains its de facto government in "Azad" [purportedly free] Kashmir. Gilgit and Hunza are strategically important to Pakistan because of the access they provide to China through the Khunjerab pass.

Therefore, advocating self-determination for the entire former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir would irreparably damage Pakistan's political and military interests.

Jammu and Kashmir is cradled by the Himalayas in the south and the Karakoram range of the Pamirs in the north. The state of Jammu and Kashmir is so geographically located that it depends for its economic growth on an unhindered flow of trade to both countries. Kashmiri arts and crafts have found flourishing markets in India for decades.

At the same time, the rivers and roads of Kashmir stretch into Pakistan. Prior to 1947, Rawalpindi used to be Kashmir's railhead, and Kashmiri traders would use Karachi as the seaport for overseas trade.

The welfare of the people of the state can be guaranteed by securing the goodwill of the political establishments of both India and Pakistan, and by the display of military discipline and efficiency at the borders.

The role of the armed forces of a country, to the best of my knowledge, is national security, not national interest or foreign policy.

If the political evolution of a society is nipped in the bud by a belligerent military establishment, state policies always fall short of becoming coherent. The more the military establishment makes incursions into democratic spaces, the more shaky institutions of state remain and the more fragmented the polity becomes.

Once a populace begins to question the validity of the choices it exercises in the electoral process be-

cause processes of electioneering and institutions of democratic governance lack transparency, the socio-political fabric is ripped to pieces.

The “sovereign” role played by the General Headquarters in Pakistan is an example of such a scenario. In civilized societies, political dissent is not curbed and national integrity is not maintained by military interventions. It is an egregious mistake and one that has severe ramifications to allow the military of a nation-state to bludgeon its democratic processes.

A strong and prosperous India is a guarantee to peace in the region, but a strong and prosperous Pakistan would strengthen that guarantee. So gloating over the instability in either one of these countries serves no purpose and proves detrimental to peace in our region.

The goal should be to find a practical solution to the deadlock that would enable preservation of peace in the Indian subcontinent, while maintaining the honor of everyone concerned. The translation of a political and social vision into reality requires an efficacious administrative set-up and vibrant educational institutions, which produce dynamic citizens while remaining aware of the exigencies of the present.

A political movement that pays insufficient attention to the welfare of the populace, good governance, and rebuilding democratic institutions ends up leaving irreparable destruction in its wake. Sabre-rattling by the representatives of India and Pakistan is futile, and there will be no headway until the process of political negotiations and accommodation begins.

Obviously, an important challenge then and now is the restoration of a democratic process in both India and Pakistan, the validation of a secularism that recognizes diverse religious identities and allows for the accommodation of those identities within a secularist framework, creating new openings for people, including the young, to discuss public issues and become active participants.

The youth in India and Pakistan clamor for democratic rights, efficient governance, a stable infrastructure, and a much less fractious polity, which would restore pluralism in South Asia.

The electoral principal is discussion, not autocratic decisions.

It is essential to create either conceptual frameworks or political and sociocultural discourses in which the young people of today would be energized and persuaded to actively participate.

It is imperative that civil society actors work in collaboration with one another to focus on the rebuilding of a greatly polarized and fragmented social fabric to ensure the redress of inadequate political participation, insistence on accountability for human rights violations through transitional justice mechanisms, reconstruction of the infrastructure of the productive capacity of both India and Pakistan, and resumption of access to basic social services.

We require a quality education for these mammoth

tasks. This is where we need to bridge the divide between the civil society of India and that of Pakistan in order to pave the way for the education of the younger generation.

In order to create democracy, there must be a minimum of participation and adequate pluralism in a society. Democratic, social, and educational institutions cannot function in a country without participation by citizens. Nurturing a civil society that bridges regional and communal divides is a prerequisite for the effective and legitimate functioning of educational institutions.

The identity of a state or a nation cannot be built on unquenchable hate and certainly not on cashing in on the pain and grief of other people. The perpetuation of a politics that emphasizes, reinforces, or creates cultural myopia and mono-cultural identities, in societies as diverse as those of South Asia, would be the bane of its existence.

Dissatisfaction with the policies of the governments of India and Pakistan should not encourage the glorification of reactionary politics. The last thing that South Asia needs is Taliban ideologues in any guise, either civil, or political, or military. Such an extremist ideology or even a mild form of it confuses local, national, and international observers, and ends up encouraging reductive interpretations of the politics of India and Pakistan.

The truth is that it is time to summon up the courage to initiate a politics of construction. Can we begin the process of developing a cohesive society with coherent state policies? A fragmented society cannot accomplish anything, either politically or socioeconomically.

As Abraham Lincoln said in 1858, “a house divided against itself cannot stand.

Not just in my state, Jammu and Kashmir, but in many parts of the world, women can play an important role in establishing a more inclusive democracy and new forums for citizen cooperation. Female leaders can lead the way by offering new ideas, building broad-based political coalitions, and working to bridge organizational divides.

Perhaps it is time to seriously consider a new regional order which would be capable of producing cross-economic, political, and cultural interests among the people of the region. Women in civic associations and in government can lead the way toward a peaceful pluralistic democracy and support international negotiations for a sustainable peace in the region.

Nyla Ali Khan is a faculty member at the University of Oklahoma and a member of the Scholars Strategy Network. She is the author of The Fiction of Nationality in an Era of Transnationalism [Routledge, 2005]; Islam, Women, and Violence in Kashmir: Between India and Pakistan [Palgrave Macmillan, 2010]; Parchment of Kashmir: History, Society, and Polity [Palgrave Macmillan, 2012], and The Life of a Kashmiri Woman: Dialectic of Resistance and Accommodation.

How Zuckerberg's \$100M Gift Failed To Remake Newark Schools

THE PRIZE

Who's In Charge Of America's Schools?

By Dale Russakoff

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

256 pages, \$27

BY MARK WEBER

Dale Russakoff's *The Prize* – a chronicle of the education “reform” efforts in Newark, NJ that were supposed to be a model for the nation – is as remarkable for what it doesn't report as it is as for what it does.

Russakoff, formerly a reporter for the Washington Post, tells the story of the effort to remake Newark's schools following a highly publicized donation in 2011 from Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg.

The \$100 million gift [which was nearly doubled by matching grants] provides a catalyst for Newark's mayor, now U.S. Sen. Cory Booker, and New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie to implement a series of changes in the city that are often referred to as “corporate education reform” – charter school expansion, teacher merit pay, and the closing or reconstitution of “failing” schools.

Confident that parental “choice” and promises of transformation will be enough to generate local support for their plans, they recruit a small army of consultants, pollsters, and advisers, all happy to get their share of Zuckerberg's money.

While Russakoff does a good job of documenting the political plays and backroom deals that follow from the donation, she fails to note that Newark already had a school reform plan in place: the Global Village, designed by prominent education scholar and activist Pedro Noguera. Based in part on the Harlem Children's Zone, the plan called for increased community support and wrap-around services for students.

Zuckerberg's gift, however, changed the agenda in Newark, and the Global Village died on the vine.

As Russakoff's book progresses, two additional figures dominate the story. Ras Baraka – a city councilman, a high school principal, and eventually Booker's replacement as mayor – emerges as the primary critic

of the reforms. Baraka's election becomes a de facto referendum on local control of the schools, which had been under state control for two decades. His decisive victory is widely seen as a rejection by the local community of the Booker-Christie-Zuckerberg plans.

The other prominent player is Cami Anderson, recruited by Booker and Christie to serve as the state superintendent. A bureaucrat with a reformer pedigree [Teach For America, New Leaders for New Schools, Joel Klein's NYC-DOE], Anderson almost immediately alienates both the city's leadership and the families whose students attend the public schools. Her autocratic style, tin ear, and penchant for disruption doom any chances of the community rallying around her plans.

For those who closely follow New Jersey education policy, the story of Anderson's subsequent travails is painfully familiar. Russakoff does a fine job documenting Anderson's many missteps; however, Russakoff's credulous acceptance of Anderson's reluctance to expand charters actually betrays a larger problem with her book.

The story is largely told through the interactions of the power players, interspersed with reports from two Newark schools: BRICK Avon, a district school, and SPARK Academy, an elementary school that is part of the national KIPP charter network.

The stories from BRICK are the most compelling part of *The Prize*. Russakoff artfully details the struggles of the staff to overcome the effects of poverty on their students. There are small triumphs, but often followed by crushing setbacks. The story of Alif Beyah is particularly poignant: a standout basketball player who struggles in middle school, he makes great strides thanks to a relentless teacher, only to backslide when he enters high school.

These portraits, however, are used to reinforce frameworks that reflect the views of the book's powerful players – frameworks that Russakoff herself largely accepts with little challenge.

Take school budgets: repeatedly, Russakoff states that charter schools are able to put more of their funds into the classroom, as opposed to the district schools, which are hampered by a large central bureaucracy. But data from the state's Department of Education directly contradicts this claim.

In my analysis of spending figures from 2012-13,

I found district schools actually spend about \$1,000 more on classroom instruction than their charter school neighbors. Russakoff also doesn't challenge claims that Newark, like other urban districts, is plagued by unusually high numbers of ineffective teachers. Tenure and seniority rights keep these teachers in their jobs; if they could be removed, the district would see a rise in student achievement.

Certainly, there is evidence that teachers in urban schools with high numbers of disadvantaged children are less likely to be highly qualified. But affluent districts with high-performing schools have faculties with tenure and seniority rights; why are their schools "successful" if they are hindered by the same teacher protections?

All of the power players in *The Prize* view teachers in the same way: getting "great" ones into Newark's schools is the key to meaningful education reform. But no one, including Russakoff, ever stops to ask if there is any more than anecdotal evidence that Newark's teachers are inordinately lousy given the amount the state is willing to spend on its school system.

Give Russakoff credit for documenting how the political ambitions, ideological predilections, and, at times, sheer incompetence of the lead players in her tale kept them from meeting their goals. It's a shame, however, that Russakoff didn't go further and question some of the core orthodoxies of the reform movement.

Had she taken this next step, *The Prize* could have been more than it is now: a well-written tale of politics with some compelling anecdotes of urban education included.

Russakoff had the chance to use this story to break down some of the fundamental tenets of corporate-style education reform; instead, she embraces them with little to no challenge.

Perhaps telling the behind-the-scenes story and unpacking the premises of the reformers is too much to ask from one book. But

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tales of power, while captivating, aren't what we need right now; we'd benefit much more from an in-depth analysis of how "reform" is proceeding in our cities.

While a worthy read, *The Prize* isn't that analysis.

Mark Weber writes the daily blog *Jersey Jazzman*, which focuses primarily on education and politics. This is an abbreviated version of his review of *The Prize*. The entire review can be read at jerseyjazzman.blogspot.com.

Obama, Putin Both Wrong On Syria

BY JUAN COLE

President Obama seemed awfully defensive in his speech at the United Nations last month. The reason is not far to seek. Russia's Vladimir Putin has surprised Washington by volunteering to get militarily involved in Syria and by arguing that only by enlisting the Baath regime of Bashar al-Assad can Daesh [ISIS, ISIL] be defeated.

Obama is defensive because a) his own plans for confronting Daesh have largely failed, and b) because Putin's plans for doing so are concrete and involve trying to prop up dictator Bashar al-Assad.

Putin is arguing for a unified push against Daesh by a wide range of countries, and for allying in this effort with the government of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad. He says only such a unified response has a hope of prevailing. He points to Libya as an example of the chaos that occurs in the wake of Washington's insistence on going around overthrowing governments.

So ironically the Russian Federation and its ex-Communist president is taking a conservative position here, of trying to prop up the status quo, while the U.S. views itself as a radical democratizer, a la Thomas Paine.

Obama, I think, tried to get the Libya comparison out of the way by apologizing for the way NATO abandoned that country after the successful intervention of 2011. He said:

In such efforts the United States will always do our part. We will do so, mindful of the lessons of the past. Not just the lessons of Iraq but also the example of Libya, where we joined an international coalition under a U.N. mandate to prevent a slaughter. Even as we helped the Libyan people bring an end to the reign of a tyrant, our coalition could have and should have done more to fill a vacuum left behind. We are grateful to the United Nations for its efforts to forge a unity government. We will help any legitimate Libyan government as it works to bring the country together. But we also have to recognize that we must work more effectively in the future as an international community to build capacity for states that are in distress before they collapse.

Obama is trying to say that the original sin was not intervention or the overthrow of a dictator but the absolute neglect of Libya in the aftermath.

By analogy, he is saying that a joint effort to remove Bashar al-Assad could work out fine if all the participating countries join together in rebuilding the Syrian army and state in the aftermath.

Obama is a smart man but this plan is completely unworkable. Daesh in Syria would likely take advantage of the fall of the Baath to western forces, who,

staying in the skies above Syria, could no more take them on efficiently then than they can do now.

Obama offered to work with Russia against Daesh, which has allied with the Baath regime of Al-Assad, but said, that "there cannot be, after so much bloodshed, so much carnage, a return to the prewar status quo."

This statement is true in both international law and in everyday practice.

Al-Assad is too tainted by mass murder to continue as president. And the third or so of his population who have seceded from his rule are heavily armed and don't want him coming back.

Obama indicted al-Assad:

Let's remember how this started. Assad reacted to peaceful protests by escalating repression and killing that in turn created the environment for the current strife. And so Assad and his allies can't simply pacify the broad majority of a population who have been brutalized by chemical weapons and indiscriminate bombing.

Confirming what many of us have long suspected, that Obama is a fan of the realists in political science, he added, "Yes, realism dictates that compromise will be required to end the fighting and stomp out ISIL. But realism also requires a managed transition away from Assad into a new leader and an inclusive government that recognizes there must be an end to the chaos so that the Syrian people can begin to rebuild."

Obama blamed al-Assad for the rise of Daesh, omitting mention of American responsibility via the destruction of Iraq.

How hopeless the situation is in Syria is clear from the speech of Vladimir Putin.

Putin complained that the problems in Syria come from U.S. and its allies backing so-called moderate rebels, who the moment they can run off to join Daesh: "And now, the ranks of radicals are being joined by the members of the so-called moderate Syrian opposition supported by the western countries. First, they are armed and trained and then they defect to the so-called Islamic State."

Putin then went in for some conspiracy thinking, blaming the U.S. and the west for creating Daesh [they did not] to overthrow secular regimes [which they don't want to do]. "Besides, the Islamic State itself did not just come from nowhere. It was also initially forged as a tool against undesirable secular regimes."

Putin's own fears about the possible spread of Daesh to Russian provinces such as Chechniya is palpable: "Having established a foothold in Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State has begun actively expanding to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 47

Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Oklahomans are acutely aware of the state's teacher shortage – and that lowest salaries in the region are among the chief reasons why hundreds of classrooms are being filled with emergency fill-ins who aren't necessarily trained in the subjects they'll be teaching. Polls show Oklahomans want this problem fixed – now.

Sears' remarks suggest a political reality in Oklahoma City eerily similar to Washington: A Tea Party-corporatist divide in the Republican dominated Oklahoma Legislature makes it all but impossible to do the right things to bolster state revenues and get teachers [and other vital public employees] above the poverty level.

What are the right things? First, be honest with the taxpayers. You get what you pay for. Highways and schools don't magically build themselves. We pool our resources to make them happen. Second, it's time to speed up the process of examining special interest tax breaks and credits and eliminating those that amount to nothing more than corporate welfare – hundreds of millions worth each year stolen from Oklahoma's most serious needs.

As is often the case with insiders, Doerflinger downplays the dire budgetary warnings, telling the AP, "There is concern, but I would also say that it's still manageable. Concern does not equal panic."

Remember the climactic scene in *National Lampoon's Animal House*? Where an ROTC cadet Chip Diller, a young Kevin Bacon, pleads with the stampeding homecoming parade crowd to "remain calm ... all is well!" Doerflinger similarly denies reality.

Some of the state's elected leaders – Auditor Gary Jones and Treasurer Ken Miller, for example – get it. Both have warned repeatedly the GOP-dominated Legislature's budgetary shell games are unsustainable.

Jones, in fact, offered some "positive suggestions" in a recent Facebook post:

1. *If you find yourself in a hole quit digging. You can't continue to cut revenues at a pace faster than you reduce expenses. Eventually you are going to run out of savings or, in the state's case, revolving funds.*

2. *People are more willing to pitch in to help and sacrifice when you lead by example.*

3. *Every budget is different. Cutting an agency's appropriations because they spent more or taking money based on the average balance of a fund over a five-year period is, let's just say, not the way to run a state. Finances are a little more complicated than that.*

4. *If you punish people for good behavior you will only encourage bad behavior. Advising agencies to save as much as they can then telling them to get ready to have their revolving funds taken sends a*

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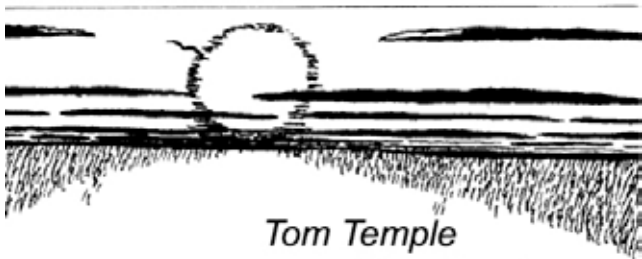
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It's time for Columbus
Day ... and then comes
the Ghosts and Goblins
of Halloween!

bad message.

The jig is up. Since the legislative majority has shown little inclination to make the hard decisions, it's up to rank-and-file Oklahomans who care about the future we leave our children to get involved, stay involved and demand lawmakers do their jobs.



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Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Laurel: To Attorney Damario Solomon-Simmons, honored Oct. 15 with the Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher Diversity Award at the Oklahoma Bar Association's annual Diversity Dinner in OKC.

Tulsa County Sheriff Stanley Glanz resigns after two criminal misdemeanor indictments. Gov. Mary Fallin set a March 1 special primary election and April 5 special general election to fill the vacancy.

Three-term state Rep. James Lockhart, D-Heavener, won't seek re-election next year, citing family considerations. We know all too well our children grow up fast!

We note the passing of ex-Rep. Jerry Sokolosky, renowned OKC attorney known for his work with Oklahoma Press Association and as an Oklahoma Real Estate Commission judge. He also wrote a fine novel *Politics Money and Drugs*.

The latest oil bust hammers Oklahoma – dead last nationally in personal income growth during the second quarter. And that was before Chesapeake laid off 526 in OKC alone.

Former Senate Sergeant-at-Arms and Altus Times Publisher Robert “Bob” Kirk Gilmore died recently at 94. He served under six president pro tems – Democrats Bob Cullison, Stratton Taylor, Cal Hobson and Mike Morgan and Republicans Glenn Coffee and Brian Bingman.

Did you notice only about 8,500 showed up recently in OKC to hear bigoted evangelist Franklin Graham? His father Billy, by contrast, drew standing room only crowds to Chesapeake Arena.

ObamaCare haters, take note: There were 33 million Americans without health insurance in 2014 – down 21% from the year before. – Time

Heartbreaking: More than 25,000 Oklahoma school children are homeless, including 4,000-plus in Putnam City and 3,000-plus in Oklahoma City. Our brother's keeper?

Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

Observer today – another fine issue!

I also noted with some sense of pride that contributions from three former legislators were included. The three former legislators – myself, Wanda Jo Stapleton and Cal Hobson – served together during an era when taxes were raised to keep public services from being reduced by 15% across the board, including mental health. Education reform measures were passed and funded, with another tax increase; namely, HB 1017.

The governor was a Republican, Henry Bellmon. He signed the bill into law after Democrats joined together to pass it. [Subsequent Republican legislatures dismantled the reforms.] And during that time legislation was enacted to diversify the economic base of Oklahoma. It was a progressive time for Oklahoma.

With the win by Cyndi Munson in House District 85, the trend toward responsible legislation may be at hand.

The late '80s and early '90s were productive years under Democratic leadership; that should not be forgotten. [And it was a time of bipartisanship. I was even voted in as an honorary member of the Republican Caucus and received an official pin. First time I have made that public! But now is the time!]

Jeff Hamilton
Midwest City

Editor's Note: Jeff Hamilton represented House District 101 from 1986 to 1994.

Editor, The Observer:

I have a friend who I highly respect asking if we humanist progressives should take any notice of Kim Davis' private life, such as multiple marriages, pregnancy through adultery, since she lost in the courts while being well represented and thoroughly duped by the snake-oil lawyers of the Liberty Counsel.

Kim Davis is the self-styled Apostolic Christian and elected clerk of Rowan County, KY who puts her private religious beliefs ahead of the duties of her public office.

For what it's worth this is what I think: Legally, she was in jail because she ignored legitimate court orders related to her publicly-funded job. I haven't seen a transcript of the testimony, only news stories, but it seems that some mention of her multiple marriages, her conversion to Jesus-love due to a deathbed re-



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quest of one of her mothers-in-law was discussed in the court in order to establish whatever depth of religious belief she could prove. To that extent, yes, it's correct to discuss her private life in court.

For me and my gay brothers and sisters, it was a great opportunity to make catty, smarmy, cheesy, joyous smart-mouth remarks about a fulsome, obnoxious enemy of our civil rights. She chose of her free will to interpose her private beliefs in the public office of fulfilling legal requirements of her job as county clerk. She failed to understand and refused to educate herself about the conflict she inflicted on herself. The lead plaintiffs in the lawsuit brought to force her to issue the licenses publicly stated they only wanted the license that was legally theirs. Her ignorance and puffed-up righteousness posing as "the authority of God" was her own fault.

Sexual expression for the joy of it, and not for the need of procreation, might be unique to humans and perhaps the bonobos. There is no need for many of us to adhere to religious strictures developed in the Bronze Age.

I'm sure Kim Davis makes use of many modern devices developed from technology using the laws of physics that would have worked in Old Testament times if we could time travel – such as a flashlight, a mainspring-driven watch, sulfur matches that would be considered magic of the gods. She uses them to facilitate her life and her work. But why is the sexual part of the human psyche such a contentious issue 2,000 or more years later?

It's the guilt of the individual, either self-developed or imposed by authority figures, not gay/lesbian or interracial couples getting married. It's Kim Davis who has the ridiculous life history, not me or Don [Chabot] were he still alive.

James Nimmo
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Sarah Palin was at a Tea Party event to stop the Iran deal. You really need to watch her say this, but here

is the transcript:

"So up there in Alaska, across the way Russia," Sarah Palin said. "You know there is a name for this taking advantage of America. There is a Russian name for that. And it is called 'fortushka.' And that means Obama's window of opportunity. So as Obama leads from behind the skirt of his right-hand man, Valerie Jarrett, then it's up to Congress to close that window. He may propose. You dispose, Congress. You gotta be in it to win it because we want peace. With unapologetic mighty red, white, and blue, will have peace."

OK, I looked up Valerie Jarrett, but I already knew she was an advisor of some kind to the president. Valerie Bowman Jarrett is Assistant to the President for Public Engagement and Intergovernmental Affairs, which doesn't exactly sound like she is in on those foreign negotiations, and she isn't. Jarrett manages the White House Office of Public Engagement, Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, and Office of Urban Affairs. She also chairs the White House Council on Women and Girls and the White House Office of Olympic, Paralympic, and Youth Sport.

So what has got Sarah Palin's panties in a wad about Jarrett with reference to the Iran deal? It doesn't seem to be in Jarrett's bailiwick. Now, on Iran, according to shrieking Sarah, "Obama leads from behind the skirt of his right-hand man." The president is a lefty so I doubt he leads with his right, and Valerie isn't a man, but I think I found why Sarah is in her usual snit.

Valerie Bowman Jarrett was born Nov. 14, 1956 in Iran. *Bingo!*

So is she the daughter of terrorists? No, her parents are both U.S. citizens and were in Iran with a group of doctors and farming experts to help developing countries. I am pretty sure in 1956 Iran was not developing nukes. Her father was a doctor and helped run a children's hospital in Shiraz. They left Iran when she was five and lived in London for a year before moving to Chicago in 1963, and as far as I can tell she has lived in the U.S. since that time.

Sarah and the Tea Party seem to be truly impressed with the abilities of black kids to become terrorists at a very young age. Obama was in Indonesia from the time he was five until he was 11 and went to school there, so by the time he was 11 he was already a radicalized Muslim and his mother was an anthropologist.

Valerie was incredibly precocious because she managed to become a Muslim terrorist without even attending a school in Iran. She wasn't even old enough for Muslim kindergarten when she left, but her dad was a doctor. They did both end up in Chicago. The only thing I know is that Sarah has a terminal case of paranoia when it comes to small black children spending five years, living with their parents, in Muslim countries. Valerie wasn't even old enough to go to school and is still dangerous to Sarah. She is definitely brighter than Sarah and probably was at five.

Karen Webb
Moore



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other regions. It is seeking dominance in the Islamic world. And not only there, and its plans go further than that. The situation is more than dangerous.”

Putin is alarmed in a way that Obama really never has been by Daesh. For the U.S. security establishment, Daesh is bad but not near or all that big or all that urgent. The U.S. approach to Daesh has seldom gone beyond aerial containment. Putin begs to differ.

The Russian president denounced the hypocrisy of denouncing terrorism but de facto supporting Salafi fighters in Syria.

Putin then got to his point: “We think it is an enormous mistake to refuse to cooperate with the Syrian government and its armed forces, who are valiantly fighting terrorism face to face. We should finally acknowledge that no one but President Assad’s armed forces and Kurds [ph] militias are truly fighting the Islamic State and other terrorist organizations in Syria.”

But actually during the past two years long periods of time have passed in which the al-Assad regime seldom militarily engaged Daesh, leaving it to prey opportunistically on the other rebel groups. You couldn’t call that valiant.

So Obama wants al-Assad to stand down as a prerequisite for effective U.S. action against Daesh in Syria [a few air sorties and even fewer air strikes are

ineffectual]. Putin thinks al-Assad is key to defeating Daesh and that everyone should ally with Damascus.

Putin is blind to the ways that al-Assad and his military brutality is prolonging the civil war. Backing his genocidal policies will just perpetuate that war. The Guardian says he showed more flexibility after his speech: “However, Putin showed more flexibility than he had in his general assembly speech, acknowledging that political reform in Damascus could be part of a solution, but indicated that Assad would be a willing participant in that change.”

Some sort of synthesis of the Putin and Obama plans is likely to emerge. Obama’s romance with drones and aerial bombardment blinds him to the poor progress the U.S. has made against Daesh using those tools. His search for “moderate” forces to back seems also in Syria to be a pipe dream. If Putin ties himself too closely to the sinking ship of Bashar, he will go down with it.

As Obama said, though, Syria policy-making is the most complex problem the U.S. has faced in over a decade.

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

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- [3] Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Non-USPS Paid Distribution: 0

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- c. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation [Sum of 15b. [1], [2], [3], and [4]. Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 3,262. Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 3,134.

- d. Free or Nominal Rate Distribution [By Mail and Outside the Mail]:

- [1] Free or Nominal Rate Outside-County Copies included on PS Form 3541: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 13. Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 14.

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- [3] Free or Nominal Rate Copies Mailed at Other Classes Through the USPS: Not applicable.

- [4] Free or Nominal Rate Distribution Outside the Mail: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 52. No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 37.

- e. Total Free or Nominal Rate Distribution Outside the Mail (Sum of 15d [1], [2], [3] and [4]): Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 92. Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 78.

- f. Total Distribution (Sum of 15d and 15e): Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 months: 3,354. Actual No. Copies of Single Issue published Nearest to Filing Date: 3,212.

- g. Copies Not Distributed: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 months: 177. Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 63.

- h. Total [Sum of 15f and 15g]: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 months: 3,531. Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 3,275.

- i. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation [15c divided by 15f x 100]: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 97.25%. Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 97.57%.

16. Publication of Statement of Ownership required. Will be printed in the October 2015 issue of this publication.

17. Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner: Beverly Hamilton, Publisher. Date: 9-24-15.

I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanctions (including fines and imprisonment) and/or civil sanctions (including civil penalties).



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