

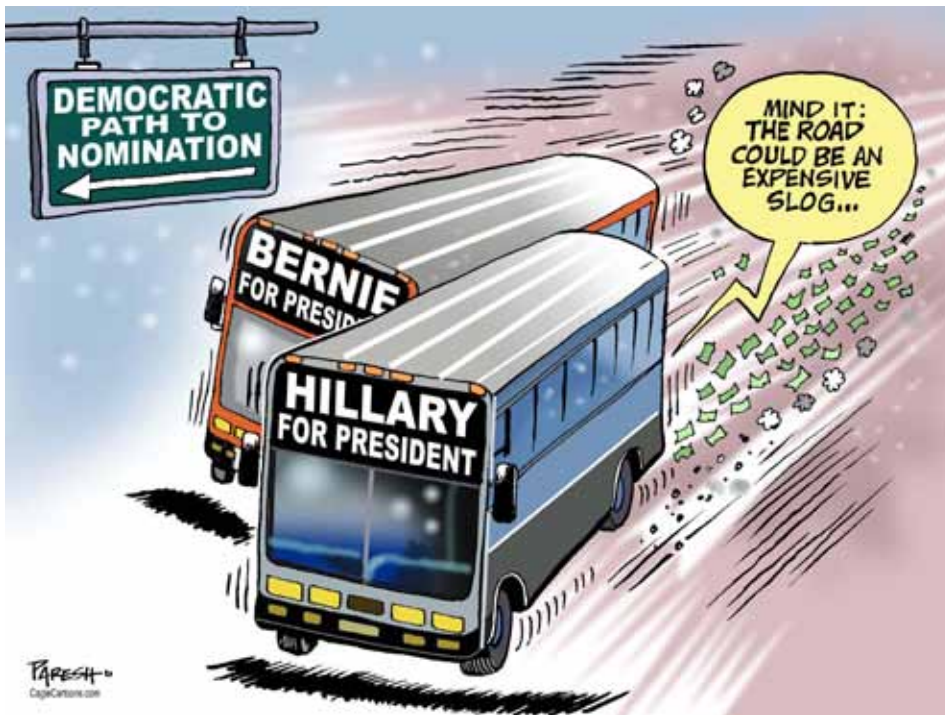
THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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Youth Movement

*Millennials In The Trenches As Hillary,
Bernie Fight For Oklahoma Delegates*



BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

Joe Buck and Xavier Jackson always were political junkies, of sorts. Aware of the personalities and issues. Mindful of public policy winners and losers.

This year, the two Oklahoma City-area Millennials are no longer just interested observers – they’re in the trenches, fighting on opposite sides as Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders vie for the Democratic presidential nomination.

“We all have a responsibility to be active politically, to have a position,” says Jackson, a University of Central Oklahoma graduate who now works as a student liaison at the Edmond school. “It’s a right not everybody has.”

In many ways, Buck and Jackson typify the younger voters Sanders and Clinton covet as they seek to recreate Barack Obama’s winning

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20



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OUR MOTTO

To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

OUR CREDO

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

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

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Observations

Judgment Day

Make no mistake: Gov. Mary Fallin and Republican lawmakers are feeling the heat.

After years of cutting taxes for the rich and doling out taxpayer-funded incentives to corporations, they've driven state government into a ditch – an impending \$1 billion shortfall on top of five years of cuts in services, all courtesy of a GOP-dominated Legislature and governor.

The voters have taken notice. Twice in four months, Democrats won legislative special elections in districts long considered to be safe Republican – Rep. Cyndi Munson in northwest Oklahoma City, Sen. J.J. Dossett in suburban Tulsa.

It's dangerous to read too much into special elections – often because voter turnout is so low – but it's clear from the GOP reaction that they sense Oklahomans recognize they aren't getting what they expected from an uber-Republican Legislature.

What they were promised was streamlined, more efficient government. What they got were diminished services and enormous budget holes. Worse, they lost the right to say, "Thank God for Mississippi," for Oklahoma now scrapes the bottom in nearly every measure of economic and social well-being.

In what amounts to a tacit acknowledgment of widespread voter unrest, especially when it comes to public education, Fallin and lawmakers suddenly are promoting teacher pay raises, ranging from \$3,000 to \$10,000 a year.

Most GOP lawmakers insist – with straight faces – their plans can be financed without new taxes. But not even the governor can bring herself to utter such malarkey. She not only embraced state Health Commissioner Terry Cline's call for a \$1.50 per package hike in cigarette taxes, but also urged extending sales taxes to some currently exempt services.

It's a sure bet neither will be greeted favorably by a GOP Legislature

CONTINUED ON PAGE 43

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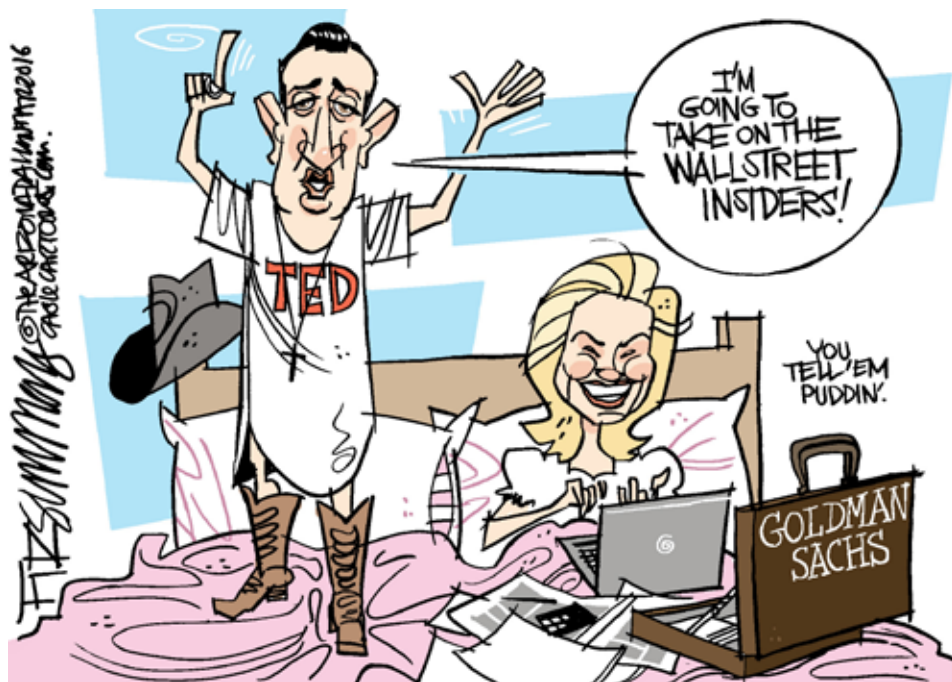
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Observerscope



Only the beginning? We warned that Gov. Mary Fallin's refusal to expand Medicaid would be a killer for rural hospitals. Sayre Memorial Hospital cited the obstinateness as a primary reason for its Feb. 1 shuttering.

Dart: To voters responsible for electing Republican lawmakers – including Sen. A.J. Griffin of Guthrie, Sen. David Holt of OKC, and Rep. Josh Cockroft of Tecumseh – all who insist the state can hike teacher salaries between \$5,000 and \$10,000 without raising taxes. And pigs fly.

Great news! State Auditor Gary Jones is one of seven new Freedom of Information Oklahoma board members. Serving as 2016 president is the Oklahoma Department of Libraries' Bill Young.

Laurel: To Jeff Dunn, Tulsa Regional Chamber's new chair, calling out Gov. Mary Fallin and GOP legislative leaders for failing to properly fund education. Speaking truth to power.

Our heartfelt condolences to Democratic National Committee member Betty McElderry of Purcell in the recent loss of husband Neil. He was only 79.

Dart: To Attorney General Scott Pruitt, very publicly sending a letter asking Gov. Mary Fallin and legislative leaders to cut his budget \$6 million. This, after he spent five years growing his office while other state entities shrunk.

Knee-slapper: James Taylor, an OKC middle school teacher, is entering the GOP's 4th Congressional District primary because incumbent Tom Cole is "too liberal."

Laurel: To U.S. Sen. James Lankford, urging President Andrew Jackson be replaced on the \$20 bill. The Trail of Tears' architect doesn't deserve the honor.

One reason Bernie Sanders' presidential bid is so inspiring: Fox's Bloviator-in-Chief Bill O'Reilly has vowed to move out of the U.S. if Sanders wins the White House.

Dart: To Sen. Clark Jolley, R-Edmond, and Rep. Jason Nelson, R-OKC, renewing their efforts to steal from under-funded public schools. Education Savings Accounts are v-o-u-c-h-e-r-s.

Gov. Mary Fallin reduced sentences for two drug offenders – her first commutations since 2012. It's a hopeful sign she's serious about criminal justice reform.

Laurel: To Tulsa area voters, sending Owasso teacher J.J. Dossett to the state Senate, replacing disgraced Republican Rick Brinkley. Huge win for Democrats – and for public education.

The Oklahoman's venal editorial writers persist in blaming the state budget crisis on low energy prices, willfully overlooking \$2 billion in annual revenue lost via income tax cuts and corporate welfare that disproportionately benefits their corporatist buddies.

We mourn the passing of former state Rep. David Craighead, as fine and honorable a public servant as ever graced the Capitol's halls. He was a terrific journalist, too!

Norman High School's Shawn Sheehan, Oklahoma's Teacher of the Year, was named one of four finalists for America's top teacher award. The winner will be revealed in an April White House ceremony.

Want to know a real threat to democracy? The number of full-time journalists at U.S. dailies declined 10% from 2014 to 2015. Since 1990, staffing has been cut 42%.

Laurel: To OKC attorney Garvin Isaacs, new president of Oklahoma Bar Association Board of Governors. Isaacs vows to lead fight against nitwit lawmakers seeking to politicize the judicial process.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 44

Letters



Editor, The Observer:

Had enough? The GOP has been campaigning for a smaller and more efficient government for years. In doing so, they have reduced state revenues to the point that we now face draconian budget reductions for existing state agencies and education due to an estimated \$1 billion shortfall.

They will argue that the decline in the price of oil is mostly responsible for the shortfall. They will further tell you that we must find and cut more waste and fat from state agencies and tighten our belts until the next oil boom comes spewing over the horizon.

Think of all that prosperity that will come and all the big business that will follow with all those high tech jobs and we will all be a happy family once again.

It should be obvious by now that the state has been incredibly mis-managed by the conservatives for years – but certainly difficult to get them to admit it.

Our state has a Powerball mentality. We keep buying into this reduction of revenue concept hoping by cutting revenue we will get lucky and make up for it with the prosperity that comes from such

insolvent ideas. The GOP has been hallucinating about this for years and we are now paying the price for this shortsighted, reckless and foolhardy concept of financing our government.

The only problem is – will the voters recognize it and act accordingly.

Michael R. Collins
Ponca City

Editor, The Observer:

It's hard to believe that a Baptist preacher would oppose ANY effort to curb gun violence in America. But that's exactly what our junior U.S. senator [James Lankford] is doing.

He's fighting President Obama's efforts in this direction tooth and nail. The only explanation that comes to my mind is that he's a right-wing Republican first and foremost and a Baptist preacher second.

Royse Samples
Cache

Editor, The Observer:

"Right to Farm" or SQ 777 is not right – or about farming.

If passed, this ballot measure would change the Oklahoma Con-

stitution by deregulating factory animal production and benefit only multi-national agribusiness.

It would tie the hands of future legislators to change the way any agriculture practice is used in the state. It would prevent neighbors hurt by water, air or land pollution from suing for damages. Furthermore, small or independent family farmers would be at a competitive disadvantage against Big Ag, which could afford to sell factory-produced meat at much lower prices.

Big Ag is not your family farmer or your friend. They don't care what happens in Oklahoma as long as the money keeps coming in. Those that are already here live and pay taxes out of state or even out of the U.S., including China.

If we aren't concerned about how animals in Concentrated Feeding Operations [CAFOs] are treated, and we aren't concerned about antibiotics, hormones and other chemicals in animals raised on top of each other – then we better be concerned about the impact of factories with 50,000 hogs or 500,000 chickens on our water.

What happens when they plop down right next to our homes or businesses?

Folks, if Right to Farm passes, it won't be – or smell – pretty. Vote no on SQ 777 on Nov. 8. It's the right thing to do.

Phyllis Bryant
Bethany

Editor, The Observer:

To those who support Hillary Clinton in this primary season, I'm not trash-mouthing or trying to deny the validity of your choice. Just don't try to tell me MY first choice for president, Bernie Sanders, is going to throw the White House to the GOPers.

Those who favor Sanders can vote for him in the primary with a clear conscience because if he doesn't get the nomination we'll have Clinton to stave off the GOP-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 45



A Taxing Psychosis

With the 2016 legislative session underway, there is a truism in American politics worth remembering: The people are often ahead of their elected leaders on issues – and solutions.

Consider taxes a prime example.

The legislative leadership at NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd. seems pathologically incapable of considering the possibility that higher taxes not only could be warranted, but also good public policy.

The governor, speaker and other legislative bosses won't even entertain the notion of suspending a .25% income tax cut that took effect Jan. 1, despite a "revenue failure" that forced deep mid-year cuts to already stretched state services.

Moreover, lawmakers suddenly producing myriad proposals to increase teacher pay uniformly insist it can be achieved without raising taxes.

Jesus fed 5,000 with only five loaves and two fish, but it defies logic to think lawmakers can give the region's lowest paid educators a \$5,000 to \$10,000 pay boost without new taxes.

Not only does the state face a projected \$1 billion hole next fiscal year, but also the probability that low oil prices are entrenched for the foreseeable future thanks to excess supply internationally, Iran's re-emerging oil fields, and growth in renewable energies.

At least Gov. Mary Fallin in her State of the State address piggybacked on state Health Commissioner Terry Cline's \$1.50 per pack cigarette tax increase as a way to help finance teacher pay raises. She also suggested extending sales taxes to some services currently exempt.

The tax idea drew immediate legislative pushback from a crowd convinced raises can be financed by trimming corporate tax credits, further tightening state agency budgets or some combination thereof.

Of course, it's the legislative majority's well-heeled campaign donors that benefit from the taxpayer-financed corporate welfare – and they aren't likely to be keen on losing their handouts.

Moreover, vital state services already have been

slashed in recent years. What's left to pare from mental health services or corrections?

This is where the people are way ahead of their elected leaders.

A SoonerPoll conducted last month for the state's two big city CBS affiliates, KWTW and KOTV, found that 64% of respondents statewide support a one-cent sales tax increase that would finance teacher pay hikes and boost funding to common and higher education.

Think about that: Two-thirds of Oklahomans say they are willing to impose on themselves *the most regressive tax* in government's revenue-generating arsenal to support public education and teachers.

If so, why are the state's GOP lawmakers so afraid of raising taxes?

The public is painfully aware of what years of income tax cuts and corporate welfare have done to the crown jewels of most Oklahoma communities – their schools.

They recognize that education and other vital state services – hello, roads and bridges – aren't cost centers, they are investments in Oklahoma's future.

In a recent Facebook post, state Rep. Jason Dunnington, D-OKC, neatly captured the political shell game being played when lawmakers contend they can hike teacher pay without raising taxes:

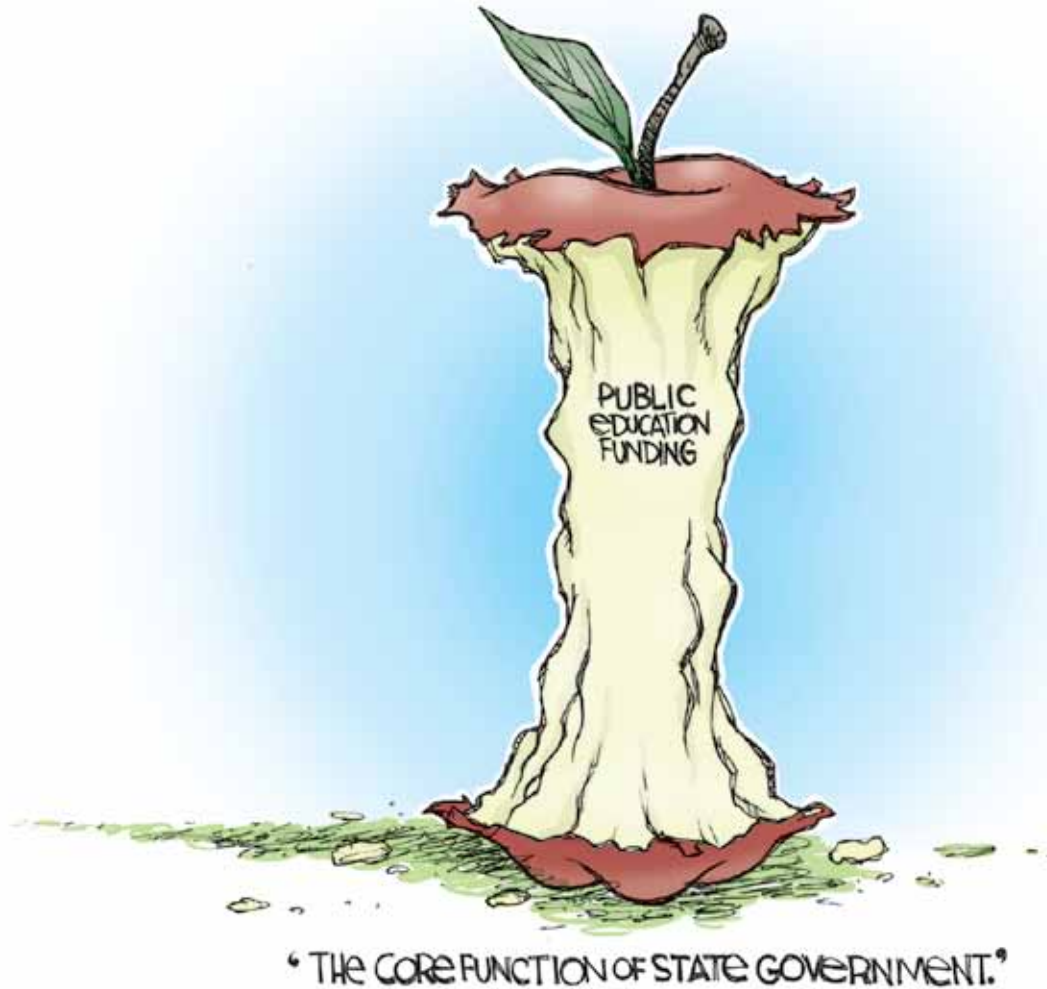
To propose future raises based off finding new efficiencies in government, or repealing available tax credits, deductions, rebates or exemptions would make sense if we didn't need those to cover our current \$1 billion shortfall.

The fact is, Oklahoma doesn't have enough revenue to cover our existing obligations let alone increase investment in our most basic functions of government.

If raising teacher salaries is really a priority, even a moral obligation, then new revenue must be a part of the conversation or recent proposals will be nothing more than lip service.

The SoonerPoll indicates the public gets it. The Republican-dominated Legislature? Not so much.

JOHN DOE
CHRISTMAS TREE
SERVICES
COLLECTIONS - 2016



YOU'RE FIRED!

Many Lawmakers Deserve Pink Slips For Abysmal Job Performance

BY CAL HOBSON

Dear Legislator, R-Anytown, OK:

Please clean out your desk and turn in your taxpayer funded cell phone and computer. Thank the wonderful staff that could have served you so well had they been asked. Don't forget to hug your executive assistant goodbye because she did all the heavy lifting anyway. Most importantly don't let the exit doors at the Capitol hit you on the butt as you thankfully disappear into the dustbin of history.

And just why, as the 2016 legislative session is in its infancy, must you, like Elvis, have to leave the building? It's simple. You won't do the job you were elected to do, at least not the important parts. Things like producing a budget that is in balance, funding the core services taxpayers expect you to, taking on hard, controversial work and not just filing thousands of inane, irrelevant and often unconstitutional bills.

Your performance during the last several years, both individually and in the aggregate as the domi-

2016 OKLAHOMA LEGISLATURE

nant party in Oklahoma, is why others not serving in elected positions have stepped up to do the job voters thought they paid you to do.

Examples abound – dozens, to be exact – but space limits me to report on just three of the most significant responsibilities you either thought were unimportant or were too tough politically for you to tackle. Maybe you have even heard of them – education, health care and public safety.

1. Public education – pre-kindergarten through graduate school and including career technology – has been and currently remains your sorriest performance. Wow, you've really driven this responsibility into the ditch, if not a canyon.

Funding for our kids, and presumably some of yours, now languishes at the bottom nationally and to listen to the debates ringing out of the ornate House and Senate chambers, some of you seem proud of it.

Remember, there were actually cheers during the closed Republican House caucus held in January as the budget staff told you of the financial plight of public education in Oklahoma.

Charter schools, vouchers and so-called Education Savings Accounts [ESAs] have your attention and priority and while these dubious enterprises serve fewer than 5% of Oklahoma's 650,000 students you spend 95% of your legislative time yakking about them. Except on Friday night when you and your family go the football games.

Therefore, it's fallen to University of Oklahoma President David Boren, who already has a full time job, and his allies to present a plan to fund our schools by offering for our citizens' consideration a one-penny sales tax increase dedicated to public education.

The vote would be during the general election this year, when most of you Neanderthals will also be up for re-election.

This monetary life-raft for education will pass just like a sales tax for schools did recently in Pottawatomie County [home county of America's most zealous, anti-education governor, Tecumseh native Mary Fallin] and it prevailed by a huge margin – 63% yes, 37% no on your side.

Parents do love their kids, want what's best for them and are tired of your performance, or the lack thereof, in office. And no wonder. You and your colleagues have cut funding for schools the deepest in the country – some 23% since 2010. And in case you haven't noticed, and apparently you haven't, there are about 45,000 more kids attending our 500-plus school districts today than in 2008.

By the way, if you think school consolidation is the answer to the current fiscal failure – the worst since at least the early 1980s – simply offer a plan to close some of the schools *in your district*. If you do, two things will happen: One, you will finally be taken seriously as you advocate consolidation, and second,

you will lose your job in November.

That will be a win-win for the rest of us.

Oh, speaking of Her Governess, you Republican solons were thrown under the bus by her in the Jan. 31 Oklahoman.

When speaking with that paper's editorial board, she characterized the \$1 billion shortfall as *your* problem not *hers*.

Also, in defense of the \$147 million dollar tax cut effective Jan. 1, our math-challenged state CEO indicated that amount was only one-tenth of the deficit so – like Alfred E. Neuman of Mad magazine, Her Highness basically said, "What me Worry?"

Why would she? She doesn't have to be at school before 8 a.m., then try to educate 30 youngsters per class, act as hall and recess monitors, discipline some kids whose parents won't, and haul paperwork home to grade at night. And then, before falling in bed exhausted, our educators only hear mindless criticism from Fallin and Co. about the bad jobs teachers do, for which they are compensated lowest in America.

2. Next the abysmal shape, literally, of the Sooner state's health care indicators is a close second to education because you small government R's have done permanent damage to hundreds of thousands of your most physically and mentally ill constituents.

As legislators, you – except for a few courageous stalwarts, such as Republican Rep. Doug Cox, a Grove physician – have danced to the tune of the Tea Party and left billions of dollars in Washington that could have been spent on health care in our state.

So, after being ignored by you and the governor for years, our outstanding state health commissioner, Dr. Terry Cline, stepped up and publicly advocated a \$1.50 tax increase per pack of smokes to help fund core responsibilities you gleefully ignore. The tobacco industry may own your soul, via campaign donations, but not so for Cline, state Mental Health Commissioner Terri White and many others who have been literally sickened by your sell-out to the worst special interest in the world.

Contrary to the hot air pouring forth about criminal justice reform, what you guys and gals have, in fact, produced is the worst, most over-crowded and dangerous gulag of a prison system in America, bar none.

Therefore, thanks to former House Speaker Kris Steele, R-Shawnee, and a bevy of private sector business leaders, a package of criminal justice reforms will also be offered to the general population that, if adopted, will be the first meaningful steps for criminal justice reform in decades.

Remember, right wingers, your just-as-conservative legislative colleagues in Texas reformed their system way back in 2007 and the results have been closed prisons, removal from the Lone Star plains of for-profit incarceration companies such as CCA and GEO, and billions of dollars in budget savings.

2016 OKLAHOMA LEGISLATURE

Did I mention the crime rate in Baja Oklahoma also went down over the last eight years, not up? Most of you Oklahoma elephants always say we should be like Texas so here is your chance to replicate its example and you'll save money at the same time.

P.S. Kudos to Republican lawmakers Pam Peterson, R-Tulsa, and Bobby Cleveland, R-Slaughterville, for their so far fruitless work on this thankless endeavor, but it's clear they are in a tiny minority within a big majority.

Thus, it will take outside leadership led by Steele, Oklahoma City Thunder Chairman Clay Bennett, Oklahoma County District Attorney David Prater, David Blatt of the Oklahoma Policy Institute, and even the editorial pages of our state's two largest papers, the Oklahoman and the Tulsa World, to produce the changes needed in our broken system. Of course, The Observer has been a lone voice concerning the abysmal criminal justice system for decades and continues to do so year after year.

In closing, I know my words have been harsh toward the current political ruling classes but, by almost any measurement, they have spent their time and our money on ruining the tax base, prioritizing all the wrong issues [think gays, Muslims, slaughter-

ing horses, saying Merry Christmas in schools, self immolation, unconstitutional offerings, etc.], and just generally being the laughingstock both locally and nationally.

If you don't think so, just take a trip out of state and tell anyone you meet that you are from Oklahoma. For the most part, those folks won't have anything to say about Gov. "It's Not My Fault" Fallin or the tomfooleries that dominate the Legislature. And that's because your new acquaintances were taught by their parents at an early age that if you can't say something nice about someone else, just don't say anything.

So prepare for deafening silence as you travel, and be aware that if anything good comes from public policy this year, it most likely will be due to citizen-generated state questions to be decided this November.

Rest assured they will appear on your ballots courtesy of non-elected officials such as Boren, Cline, Steele, White, Bennett, and thousands of others who have suffered in similar silence for years and have finally said loud and clear, We've had enough.

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

Tax Cuts Now Costing State \$1 Billion-Plus A Year

BY DAVID BLATT

A new report by OKPolicy finds that the cost of state income tax cuts since the mid-2000s has grown to over \$1 billion annually. Repeated tax cuts and shrinking state budgets have left state services severely weakened, even before next year's expected massive budget shortfall that could reach or exceed a billion dollars.

These billion-dollar tax cuts have come at the direct expense of funding for core public services that are important for the prosperity and well-being of Oklahomans.

At the same time, the report finds that tax cuts have not brought the boost to the state's economy that supporters predicted, and they have given the biggest cash benefits by far to the wealthiest Oklahomans while doing little for low- and middle-income families.

Under a series of bills passed under bipartisan agreements between 2004-07, the top rate was cut from 6.65% in 2003 to 5.5% by 2009. These mid-2000s tax cuts also included a "trigger" that automatically reduced the top rate to 5.25%, just as Oklahoma was

emerging from recession, in 2012. Now under legislation passed in 2014, the top rate has fallen again to 5% and could fall to 4.85% as early as 2018. Altogether, these tax cuts are reducing state revenues by \$1.022 billion per year, according to an analysis prepared for OKPolicy by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy.

Based on the budget proportions of the largest state agencies, that means without tax cuts Oklahoma could be investing \$356 million more into K-12 education, enough to provide raises of about \$6,000 per teacher or to combine teacher raises with additional days of instruction, reduced class sizes, and expanded priority programs such as early reading instruction. Higher education could have received an additional \$138 million, enough to fully fund the Complete College America Oklahoma Plan initiative.

The Department of Human Services would have an additional \$97.2 million, more than enough to serve the many thousands of families on the waiting list for home-and community-based services to help those

2016 OKLAHOMA LEGISLATURE

with developmental disabilities.

The Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services would have \$48.4 million additional dollars — a direly needed boost when Oklahoma has among the highest rates of mental illness in the nation and 60% of Oklahoma adults with mental illness are not receiving treatment.

Instead of investing in these and other core public services over the past decade, the state has experienced a continuing budget crisis.

Even after the economy recovered from a severe national recession, Oklahoma's funding for core services remains well below pre-recession levels. That has meant acute teacher shortages, college tuition and fee hikes, critically understaffed correctional facilities, longer waiting lists for services, and lower reimbursement rates for medical and social service providers.

With or without tax cuts, Oklahoma would be facing an immediate budget shortfall as a result of low energy prices. But without the tax cuts of the past dozen years, we would be approaching this latest downturn from a far stronger starting point. And with larger budget surpluses during times of growth, we might also have saved more money in reserves to help us through our current economic challenges.

While some tax cut supporters and state officials have claimed that reducing the top rate helps almost all Oklahoma families because it kicks in at a relatively low amount of taxable income [\$7,200 for a single person or \$12,200 for a married couple], the reality is that after applying the standard deduction and personal exemptions, a large number of Oklahoma families do not reach this income level.

Of the total \$1.022 billion in income tax cuts from lowering the top rate, the wealthiest 20% of households — those making on average \$246,000 a year — have enjoyed 72% of the benefit. And the top 5% of households — those making on average \$568,000 a year — alone received 43% of the benefit. Meanwhile,

those with household income of \$62,200 and less — 60% of households — have received just 10% of the income tax reductions. Altogether, the wealthiest 1% of households in Oklahoma has received nearly the same share of the tax cuts as the bottom 80%.

Meanwhile, based on the experience in Oklahoma and other states that have significantly cut income taxes in recent years, tax cuts have shown little benefit to the economy. Four of the five states that enacted the largest personal income tax cuts in the last five years have experienced total job growth and personal income growth below the national average since the tax cuts took effect.

Oklahoma did experience strong economic growth in recent years due to a booming energy industry, but as oil and gas prices have declined, the state economy has reversed course, with growth levels falling to worst in the nation in the most recent quarter. Even during those good economic years, the state slashed funding to many agencies by 20% to 30%, leaving us more vulnerable and unprepared for an energy industry downturn.

If Oklahoma is ever to emerge from its perpetual budget crisis, we must re-examine the priority being given to cutting taxes without responsibly assessing the impact on the state economy and what it will take to preserve vital public services.

The problem has been years in the making and will take years to fix. A sensible place to start is to repeal the most recent tax cut and to cancel the next tax cut already scheduled for as early as 2018.

As Oklahoma State Treasurer Ken Miller recently said, "Common sense dictates that until the state proves it can live within its means, it really should stop reducing them."

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

Kansas Tax Cut Experiment Has Close Cousin In Oklahoma

BY GENE PERRY

In 2012, Kansas enacted major income tax cuts and totally eliminated the personal income tax for owners of certain businesses. Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback boasted that these tax cuts would be "a shot of adrenaline into the heart of the Kansas economy," creating tens of thousands of new jobs. The jobs didn't materialize — Kansas has trailed

the national average and surrounding states in private-sector job growth since their tax cuts went into effect.

Now Kansas is making deep cuts to schools, highways, children's health care, and many other services, even while hiking the sales tax and several other taxes to cover a gaping budget hole.

2016 OKLAHOMA LEGISLATURE



Our northern neighbor's economic and budget problems have been well publicized by national media. Gov. Brownback's high-flying claims followed by an equally dramatic crash no doubt helped to attract attention to his state.

Oklahoma's budget problems have not received as much attention nationally, but over the past decade, we've conducted an experiment in tax cuts and budget shortfalls that goes even deeper than Kansas.

Back in 2004, the amount of state taxes paid by Oklahomans and Kansans were very similar, though Oklahoma was still slightly lower [\$2,655 per person in Kansas and \$2,505 in Oklahoma]. Then through the mid- to late-2000s, Oklahoma's per capita personal income taxes and total taxes dropped dramatically, in large part due to a series of income tax cuts now costing \$1.022 billion per year.

Kansas partially "caught up" with their tax decline under Gov. Brownback, as Kansas personal income tax revenues plummeted 24.3% in FY 2014. But over the entire period, Oklahoma's per capita personal income tax collections have dropped half again as much as Kansas.

For total state taxes, Kansas collected \$2,525 per person in 2014, which is still higher than what Oklahoma collected back in 2004 and well over the \$2,347 per person Oklahoma collected in 2014.

Oklahoma's greater drop in tax collections has been matched by a drop in spending on state services. Even before Kansas's tax cuts, Oklahoma spent significantly less on public schools per student, and

we've made larger cuts over the past decade.

In 2014 dollars, Oklahoma's total per-pupil spending dropped from \$8,486 in fiscal year 2004 to \$7,821 in fiscal year 2013, a 7.8% decrease. Oklahoma's state aid to schools dropped even more, but this was partially made up for by increased spending at the local level.

In Kansas, per pupil spending went from \$10,330 in fiscal year 2004 to \$10,019 in fiscal year 2013. That was a 3% decrease, but still well above what Oklahoma invests in public education.

Kansas is undoubtedly in bad financial shape today. That's why it is especially troubling that over the past decade, Oklahoma has cut an even larger percentage from a lower starting point of both revenues and spending. We've cut more when we can afford it less.

Tax cuts aren't the only cause behind revenue declines – the state of the national economy and each state's major industries plays a huge role.

Nevertheless, it's clear that income tax cuts have not lived up to promises that they would boost revenues in either Kansas or Oklahoma. And in both states, we're now seeing budget cuts that are very bad news for the economy and bad news for citizens' health, safety, and financial well-being.

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

Rural Oklahoma's Version Of The 'Blue Light Special'

BY DAVID PERRYMAN

In the 1960s corporate chain stores displaced Main Street merchants and altered the way that Americans shopped. They promised lower prices, but sometimes lacked quality merchandise or service.

The "bargain bin" in the basement of a multi-story department store was no longer the place where merchants sent discontinued or obsolete merchandise for quick sale.

The new marketing model involved a loud speaker and "Attention shoppers, we have a Blue Light Special on Aisle 9."

Today, opponents from every direction are undermining public education, trying to make it fail and treating it as if it needs to be placed in the bargain bin.

"Voucher" and "Education Savings Account" proponents are salivating to divert public education dollars to private and religious schools. Charter school proponents were not satisfied with just raiding public school funds in Oklahoma City and Tulsa. Last year they controlled enough legislators to get them to pass SB 782 by Sen. Clark Jolley, R-Edmond, and Rep. Lee Denney, R-Cushing, to let corporate charter schools set up anywhere in the state, even over the objection of the local citizens.

Those same groups appear to have enough votes to continue their assault on rural schools.

Sen. Greg Treat, R-OKC, has filed SB 1324 that will cut funding for Oklahoma's Pre-K early childhood education programs.

Senate President Pro Tem Brian Bingman, R-Sapulpa, has filed SB 1382 to eliminate all of the state's dependent or elementary school districts by July 2017.

Sen. John Ford, R-Bartlesville, has filed SB 1384 to consolidate all 297 school districts having enrollment of less than 500 students within the next four years and eliminating the right of local citizens to vote on the consolidation.

These are three bills that Oklahoma *does not need*.

Oklahoma's Early Education programs are just about the only education thing that the legislature has done right in the last 10 years. Oklahoma's Pre-K enrollment and curriculum are the envy of the nation. SB 1324 will cripple the state's ability to get Pre-K children started off on the right foot.

SBs 1382 and 1384 pander to a misconception that Oklahoma's dependent and independent rural schools are inefficient and wasteful. Those who trumpet rural school consolidation have no research to back up their claim and they are *dead wrong*.

State Department of Education records show that most smaller schools spend a lot less per pupil than their urban counterparts. For instance, Oklahoma City and Tulsa Public Schools spend nearly identical amounts per pupil educating their students.

However, Hobart Public Schools spend \$4,913 less per pupil than Tulsa and Pioneer School, a small dependent district located in my legislative district, spends \$4,648 less per pupil than does Tulsa.

Similar savings are evident all across the rural Oklahoma. For instance, the average per pupil expenditure of all school districts that are located wholly or partially in my rural legislative district is \$2,467 less per pupil than Tulsa spends and \$2,307 less than Oklahoma City spends.

So, there really are Blue Light Specials in Oklahoma's rural schools and it is not because they are discontinued or obsolete. It is because that, despite being undermined and underfunded, they are delivering a real bargain to Oklahoma. Rural schools provide quality education and turn out quality graduates.

The next time someone tells you that consolidation is the answer, remind them that if Oklahoma City and Tulsa schools were as efficient as the 13 rural schools in and around House District 56, there would be a savings of more than \$191 million.

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

Who's Overdrawn?

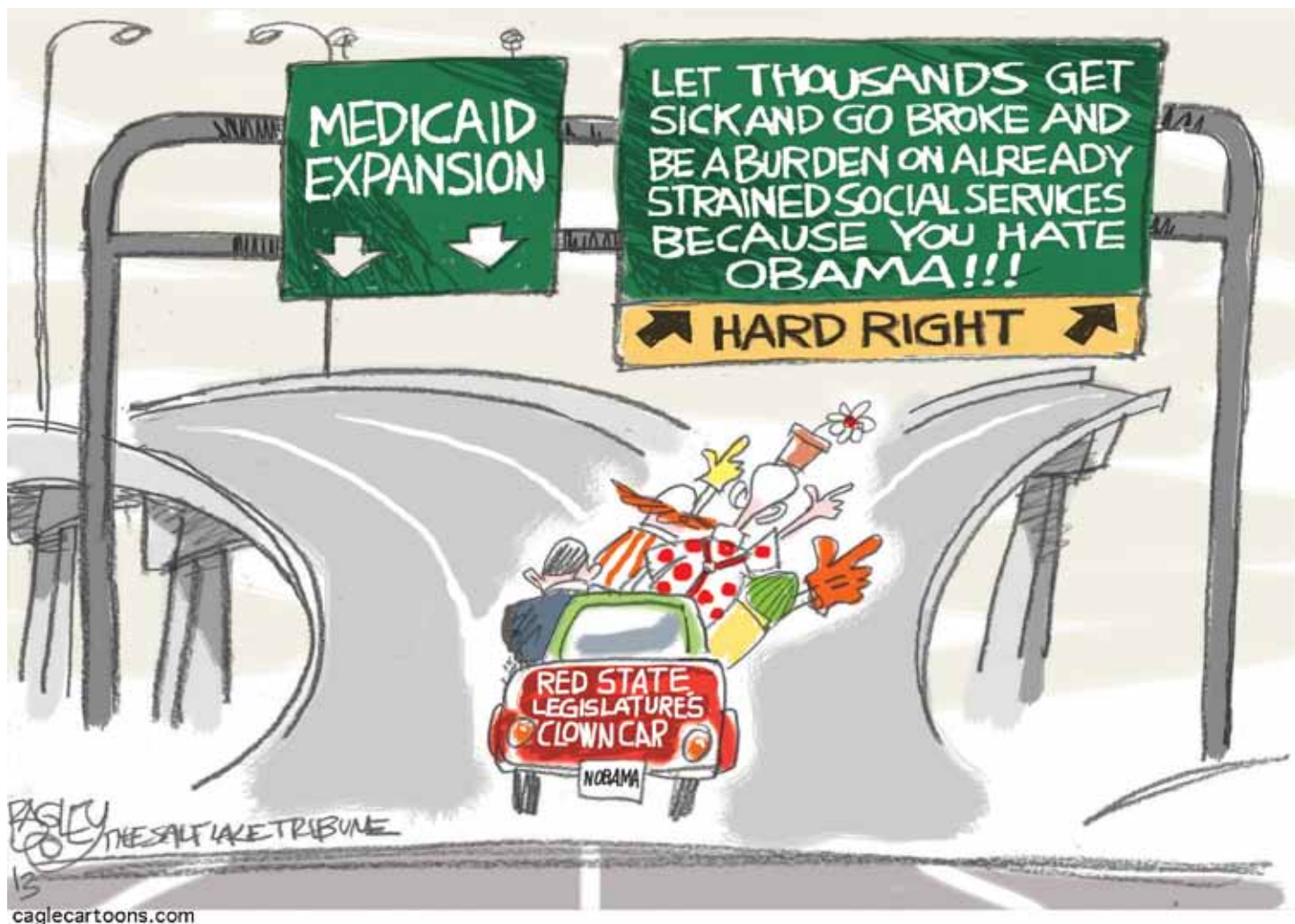
A letter to the bank from worried customer ...

Dear Sirs:

In view of current developments in the banking market, if one of my checks is returned "insufficient funds," does that refer to me or to you?

Yours faithfully,

A Concerned Customer



*In Oklahoma, The Aged, Blind And Disabled
Are Regarded By Big Insurance As ...*

PROFIT CENTERS

BY JIM WILSON

HB 1566, passed during the 2015 session, directs the Oklahoma Health Care Authority [OHCA] to pursue privatization of the management of Medicaid expenditures for Oklahoma's aged, blind and disabled.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Oklahoma, the Oklahoma Hospital Association and the Oklahoma Association of Health Care Providers [for-profit nursing homes] supported passage.

The special interests, along with legislators, disguised their advocacy as a cost saving measure. They

argued this fragile population will receive better care for less money under their privatized, pro-business and unregulated model.

Ironically, this argument is an indictment of the for-profit nursing homes and hospitals currently furnishing the care.

Intuitively, private insurers expect to profit from this measure. Perhaps the hospitals and nursing homes expect to benefit financially. To save money and create profit, services must be reduced. If reduction of services is desirable, it is reasonable to as-

sume the providers supporting this policy are ethically, morally and legally required to do so under the current system.

As this process moves forward, it is helpful to consider the growth and status of the health care industry in the United States in general and Oklahoma in particular. A perusal of past behavior and comparison of other systems demonstrates the need for caution in ceding the administration of Medicaid programs to for-profit industries.

Sixty years ago communities, through taxation and philanthropic organizations, ensured their citizens had access to health care. Medicare and Medicaid were implemented 50 years ago to further subsidize access.

Over the years, policymakers cleverly convinced the public there was no distinction between health care and health insurance – that the only path to health care is with health insurance.

They then distributed the community's wealth to a for-profit model benefitting insurance companies, corporations and hospital management. The insurance industry along with providers created cartels limiting options, decreasing competition and increasing prices.

The redistribution omitted protection of the uninsured. Those that manage the “for profit – pro business” model often seem to delight in their disdain for and denial of access for the uninsured.

Health care delivery continues to be hijacked by unethical behavior. The size of the industry and level of corruption has probably reached critical mass. The public and its elected representatives acquiesce to demands of the industry because they are unsophisticated, victims of Stockholm Syndrome or have selfish reasons to ignore obvious travesties out of deference to friends, relatives or campaign contributors.

It is undisputed that virtually every country with indoor plumbing does a better job delivering health care for less money than the United States and virtually every state in the United States has better health indicators than Oklahoma.

The health care industry in the United States contradicts the advertised and assumed hypothesis that the unregulated private sector can always perform better than the public sector. It falls short in quality and cost compared to other OECD countries.

If our policymakers actually want to save money and improve results, they would replicate the French system. The French have universal coverage, comprehensive care, freedom of provider choice and the best outcomes in the world at a per capita

cost of half the United States and a third less as a percentage of GDP.

Contrary to popular opinion, French health care is not a socialized system. Their citizens are required to have health insurance and most have additional voluntary supplemental insurance. Two-thirds of the hospital beds are public or non-profit with the other third private for-profit.

A patient may go to any doctor, specialist or hospital she chooses and be treated by any medicine, even experimental and high cost drugs. A majority of doctors and specialists are self-employed unlike in the United States where a majority is employed by governments or corporations.

The French system succeeds because the Ministry of Health manages pricing and resources. Most other OECD countries also deliver a better product and all do it for less money. In the United States the private, for-profit sector and their lobbyists manage pricing and resources.

As an example, the threshold for care under Medicare and Medicaid is defined as “medically necessary.” The Oklahoma Legislature refused to require the same threshold for insurance companies – allow-



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ing them to refuse payment for “medically necessary” care.

The 2014 average per person spending in the United States exceeded \$9,500. We insist on paying up to \$4,500 per person per year more than any other OECD country. The real travesty is we have an inferior product. But we have the satisfaction of claiming our system is based on the “free market.”

The “market” assumption fails immediately because it requires consumer knowledge of pricing, quality, risk and reward – which virtually no one purchasing health care has the ability to understand. Regulation is mandatory for the benefit of consumers. Unfortunately, the financial beneficiaries find it self-serving to resist regulation and maintain a convoluted system.

Medicare has an administrative overhead of 2%. The administrative overhead for Medicaid is less than 6%. The private sector, depending on the source, has an administrative overhead rate from 24% to 31%. This expense directly indicts the industry for incompetence or intentional disorganization.

The University of Utah just released the intuitive finding that being organized saves money and improves quality. It seems reasonable that the state of Oklahoma, in its purported desire to save money, would require implementation of the Utah model. Unfortunately, most providers and insurance companies disregard efficiency, finding it more profitable to be disorganized, discounting patient care as collateral damage.

Insurance companies see public dollars as a source of revenue for their shareholders. Medicare Advantage [\$172 billion in 2015] costs the taxpayers on average 14% more than traditional Medicare with arguably no meaningful additional benefit.

Insure Oklahoma, a much touted Medicaid subsidized plan to insure the working poor, is very expensive. The “Oklahoma Plan” as touted by the governor and legislative leadership takes straight-forward Medicaid expansion and creates a benefit for private insurance companies. Adjusting for 14% higher administrative overhead and excess provider payments of up to 60%, traditional Medicaid can cover almost two people [1.88] for the price of one person under Insure Oklahoma.

The current effort to privatize management of services for the aged, blind and disabled, or for any Medicaid service, is bound to increase cost or decrease services. The shareholders of private insurance companies demand a respectable profit. The only way a private insurer can “save” money for the state while delivering a profit to shareholders is to deny services to the most vulnerable recipients of Medicaid services – who can’t stand up for themselves.

It conjures up the image of Sarah Palin’s “Death Panel.”

Jim Wilson, a Tahlequah Democrat, represented District 3 in the Oklahoma Senate from 2004-12 and served in the Oklahoma House from 2000-04.

Redneck Lent

Each Friday night after work, Bubba would fire up his outdoor grill and cook a venison steak.

But all of Bubba’s neighbors were Catholic. And since it was Lent, they were forbidden from eating meat on Friday.

The delicious aroma from the grilled venison steaks was causing such a problem for the Catholic faithful that they finally talked to their priest.

The priest came to visit Bubba, and suggested that he become a Catholic.

After several classes and much study, Bubba attended Mass ... And as the priest sprinkled holy water over him, he said, “You were born a Baptist, and raised a Baptist, but now you are a Catholic.”

Bubba’s neighbors were greatly relieved, until Friday night arrived, and the wonderful aroma of grilled venison filled the neighborhood.

The priest was called immediately by the neighbors, and, as he rushed into Bubba’s yard, clutching a rosary and preparing to scold him, he stopped and watched in amazement.

There stood Bubba, clutching a small bottle of holy water which he carefully sprinkled over the grilling meat and chanted: “You wuz born a deer, you wuz raised a deer, but now you is a catfish.”
– Thanks to Iris Lochner for this Lenten laugh



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Gross Production Tax Need Not Create Budget Problems

BY CHADWICK COX

Oklahoma Treasurer Ken Miller has stressed the importance of having a consistent revenue flow as related to the unstable revenue from the gross production tax [GPT]. The Legislature perversely ignored his advice in that they keep reducing the individual income tax, a reasonably stable revenue, which makes the state more dependent on the GPT revenue. Of course, if you are only concerned with reducing the size of the government, especially the service section of government, there would be little reason to care.

The treasurer has provided a comparison of the revenue streams in 2014 before the oil industry bust and 2015 after the bust. The GPT revenue dropped by 46% between those years. Before you say how thankful we should be that GPT only made up 7.4% of the total receipts, let's look at this rationally. The fact that we did not elect to have a greater tax on the oil industry than the 2% rather than the 5% that North Dakota collected was an unnecessary gift to the oil industry rather than a blessing that we were not more dependent on GPT. GPT revenue need not create a budget problem and the extra GPT revenue that we could have collected, if we had followed North Dakota's tax plan, would be helpful here now.

Although a more historical review of the consequences that oil busts have had on revenue should be reviewed, the information in the chart can illustrate why the GPT can be useful without the threat of instability to our budget. If no more of the GPT is used in the general budget than is likely to remain during the bust, the budget will be stable. The remainder can be retained in the Rainy Day Fund or another fund for only one-time expenditures.

Of the GPT revenue in 2014, that was 7.4% of the total revenue; only 4% remained in 2015. The reduction was actually greater because the oil bust reduces other revenue streams as well. The reduction in the other revenue streams may result from other causes but to be conservative we need to include them here. Including those other decreases in the revenue leaves the remainder at 3.1%, or 40% of the 7.4% that remained. If only 40% of the GPT revenue had been included in the general budget, the bust would not

have been the problem cause by a marked change in general budget from one year to the next. This simple change in budgeting would keep some GPT revenue in the general budget but without the threat of having radical changes in budgets.

This is not helpful for the current Oklahoma 2016 budget. The bust is continuing so that budget will have the same budget hole from the depressed GPT revenue but a reduction to 40% does not help here, all of it is already desperately needed. Additionally, there will be a cut in the individual income tax revenue of \$147 million that the Legislature refuses to stop. There is built in a shortfall that is carried over from last year that was filled by raiding cash from revolving funds and other funds that will no longer be available for raiding this coming year. All of this adds up to the posted \$900 million shortfall, which will have them scrambling to find any other cash, so be wary and be ready to endure more cruel slashes of services they commonly referred to as "wasteful spending."

Chadwick Cox lives in Norman.

Dying Breed

BY JAMES LOCKHART

I'm a member of a dying breed. The old school Democratic legislators that have been a part of rural America ever since the Great Depression are more and more becoming a thing of the past.

My Dad worked a union job for over 30 years. I was raised believing in policies that benefit blue-collar workers and the farmers and ranchers that make up rural America.

Economically, as a rural Democrat, I believe in protecting the small businesses that make up so much of the local economies across rural parts of our great nation.

I believe overall the economy works better when we focus on the middle class and try to lift families out of poverty. Free, fair markets where Main Street, farmers and ranchers can compete with Wall Street; good paying, blue-collar jobs; and education are the three cornerstones of our economic policies.

Most rural Democrats do not buy into trickle down economic theories.

I believe in public schools and I believe a college education should be affordable for anyone that wants to go to college.

I and the vast majority of my rural Democratic colleagues vote with conservatives on social issues such as abortion and gay rights. Rural Democratic legislators strongly support the 2nd Amendment, and we regularly take hunting and fishing trips with our friends and families. Rural Democratic legislators al-

most always have an A rating with the NRA.

More and more we are witnessing a shift in rural America. The Republican Party has done a good job convincing folks in rural America a vote for any Democrat is the same as voting for the most liberal politician ever. The Republican rhetoric even has some people believing a vote for Democrat is basically the same as voting for the Devil himself.

Many Democrats would argue almost the exact opposite. The Democratic Party follows the teachings of Jesus: Help the poor, take care of the sick, and treat everyone decently. It seems the last few years Democrats have done a poor job of getting that message out to the voters. All too often in rural America voters choose to vote for candidates that are against the very things rural people need – public schools, rural health and economic policies that benefit their local economies.

The Republicans bet every election on four issues – Gays, guns, God and Obama/Clinton – as the worst things that ever happened to our nation. Never mind asking the Republicans about issues that will actually affect the lives of people in the local community.

Any way you want to slice it, the Democratic Party in rural America is in trouble. Special interest money and 24/7 entertainment news all too often drown out issues that actually matter on a local level.

I fought for holding large corporations accountable when they don't deliver what they promise. I fought for our public schools and cheaper college tuition. I fought for greater access to healthcare in rural Oklahoma. I fought to protect our water from special interests and being shipped out of state.

I fought for the issues that matter here at home, and I am part of a dying breed, the rural Democratic legislator.

James Lockhart, a Heavener Democrat, represents District 3 in the Oklahoma House. He has decided not to seek re-election to a fourth term this year.

Socialist Nation

BY BOB BEARDEN

Socialism in pure form doesn't work and probably never would. Most socialists [at least in this nation] understand that. The old Labor and Socialist firebrand Eugene V. Debs understood that. But he used socialism to inform and educate.

Socialism is a very misunderstood ideology and it is almost always [by opponents] equated with Communism. The two are poles apart. They do have a few things in common but Communism is a much different ideology.

Our founders were mostly socialist leaning and they

wanted a nation that would be socially relevant without the baggage pure socialism had. They came up with a socialistic idea that they incorporated into our nation's design and it has worked reasonably well, with a few glitches along the way, for over 200 years.

It isn't perfect but there is no perfect ideology. Our founders designed our Constitution so that it could be subjected to improvement and change while still retaining the original socialistic ideals that they wanted to espouse.

We keep getting sidetracked by others offering their ideas of ideologies that never work but often sound desirable, at least in the short term. And we as humans tend to live in the short term, ever pushing our destiny away because we don't really want to have to come to understand that we are mere mortals and we weren't intended to last forever. It is a very human failing that we all share whatever our ideology is.

People seek ways to last longer but eventually they all fail and there is no 'Fountain of Youth' and that is the reason Ponce de Leon never found it. But we are always enamored by politicians offering us their own kind of fountain.

As P.T. Barnum, wise man that he was, said, "There's a sucker born every minute!" And, Boy Howdy. did he know a thing or two.

Every four years we get inundated with Barnum clones seeking to tempt us into believing that they have found the right formula and will lead us to the promised land – just trust them or Ted and you will have all of your desires. As Lee Marvin said to Spencer Tracy in *Bad Day At Black Rock*, "The hotel here is to serve us cowboys every whim and comfort when we come to town!" The current crop of Barnum's are offering their version of Lee Marvin's lines.

Our current crop of Barnums are railing against socialism and its many follies and they are offering us comfort from fear, because fear is the aphrodisiac that will bring out the crazies to vote. FDR said, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself!" But now days we have to fear the fear mongers.

It is fear that will make us safe if we only drive out all the Muslims, Mexicans and the illegals. If we just carpet bomb all of the Middle East our fears will be allayed. Bomb, bomb, bomb Iran and our problems will be solved. Fear sells and it sells big time, and people who should know better by now are ready to buy it hook, line and sinker yet again.

And to ramp up our fears, we are fed a steady diet that the vast majority of our citizens are conservative and hate anything to do with socialism. Forgetting, of course, that in the Preamble to our Constitution, our founders sowed the seeds of socialism with these words:

"We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common de-

fence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

That is one of the most socialistic statements ever conceived or devised. And it set us upon a path of social justice and a grand experiment in social democracy that no human before had ever even dreamed of. All of the words of the preamble are socialistic in nature and ideology. Our founders understood what they wanted our nation to become.

A nation of the people, by the people and for the people – Lincoln’s words, but his inspiration came from the founders because he prefaced those words with, “Fourscore and seven years ago our founders brought forth on this continent, a new nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal!”

Dr. King reiterated that clarion call in 1963 when he said, “I have a dream that one day our nation will live out its true creed that all men are created equal!” That’s the brand of socialism we in this nation have practiced for over 200 years and for some reason the Gods of the Copy Book Headings have to keep limping up and explaining again and again.

We are the most socialistic nation ever devised and we have been practicing a workable brand of socialism for 236 years and counting. But we have to keep Trumpeting it over and over because the Gods of the Market Place keep promising us all these beautiful things and then they never deliver them. And the brand of Market Place Gods running in the GOP Nightmares on Elm Street are no different.

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

Why Right Should Oppose Corporate School Reforms

BY JOHN THOMPSON

School reform began during the Reagan Administration and it sought standards-based instruction. It called for academic standards [the main concepts and skills that should be taught], tests to measure learning, and choice. I opposed those efforts.

But the real harm of accountability-driven reform came two decades later as it morphed into standard-

ized test-driven corporate reform.

The first generation of liberal and neo-liberal market-driven reforms attached greater and greater stakes to tests in order to force compliance with top-down mandates. They rejected incrementalism or school improvements that did not unleash “transformational” change.

The most devastating damage was then done by corporate reformers who set the explicit goal of killing or crippling local school boards, teachers unions, and education schools under the assumption that “disruptive” innovation would magically replace the old “status quo.” They prescribed choice for students who were likely to meet test score targets and the opposite – drill-and-kill – for the poorest children of color.

Being an Obama supporter, it saddens me that the administration’s accountability- and market-driven school reform evolved into social engineering, a practice that conservatives, and most Americans, have long opposed.

The Billionaires Boys Club and the U.S. Department of Education [USDOE] under Arne Duncan have demonstrated contempt for our traditions of constitutional democracy. The federal government coerced more than three-fourths of the states into using an inappropriate algorithm and/or even worse metrics for teacher evaluations [that have proven to be unreliable, invalid, and hugely expensive.]

Despite lacking the legal authority, the U.S. Secretary of Education micromanaged states’ testing and curriculum. Even as Duncan leaves office, the USDOE is threatening states where patrons have boycotted high stakes tests. Those states could face sanctions if they do not intimidate parents who have their children “Opt Out” of bubble-in tests.

The best-known conservative, liberal, and moderate backlash against corporate/federal overreach in schooling is the opposition to Common Core. It was bad enough that elite reformers imposed that not-ready-for-prime-time curriculum and it’s testing on all students in our diverse nation.

Their mandates illustrate a more fundamental problem with test-driven, market-driven reform, however. Corporate reformers believe that they have the right to impose their vision on all types of schools.

Because they see education as an institution that produces economic champions in the global marketplace, they feel entitled to reverse engineer schools based solely on their preferences.

Conservatives, like everyone else, have a right to choose the type of learning that they see as appropriate for themselves and their children. Those who want one or more of their own children to focus on competitiveness should be free to do so.

But, regardless of political beliefs, Americans should be allowed to choose the learning style and

to celebrate the education values that they and their families prefer. Even the most fervent believers in test-driven competition, seeking to toughen up their own children for the economic battleground, should agree that they should not impose their values on all children in the rest of America.

Overstepping that boundary is the antithesis of conservatism.

Dr. John Thompson, an education writer whose essays appear regularly in The Oklahoma Observer, has a doctorate from Rutgers University and is the author of Closing the Frontier: Radical Responses in Oklahoma Politics. His latest book, A Teacher's Tale, is available through Tate Publishing. He wrote this essay in response to the Oklahoman's non-stop promotion of "School Choice" week in January.

The Eyes Know

BY ANN DAPICE

In case you've been too busy to notice, February has 29 days this year. Yes, it's Leap Year. We have an extra day. For some that will be good and others, not so good. It also means we accelerate the strange customs that have come to be part of our presidential election year.

We are closer, we hope, to the time when we will select a candidate for each of our two political parties. I've always found the word "parties" to be an interesting word to attach to our particular U.S. political process. I do remember that my grandmother would probably have agreed with that term since I have childhood memories of her saying with great frustration during a convention that they were "acting like a bunch of fools."

It seems like forever again that we are being told by a variety of "experts" what we should be looking for and where the numbers stand. There are the fact checkers but they seem to be ignored by most who prefer to choose facts that fit their personal world-views.

Let me offer some different guidelines. The first one is critical. Watch the eyes of the candidates during interviews when they are being questioned. I learned this in graduate school. In fact, doing this correctly determined whether we passed the advanced course in abnormal psychology or not. We had to interview a number of individuals and identify those who were diagnosed psychopaths by watching their eyes when they responded to questions. Caught off guard to their disadvantage, psychopaths' eyes flash anger in a unique way. That warning is critical to one's safety. Along with learning the alphabet and how to count, this has been one of the most important skills to learn in my lifetime.

Now I'm not inferring that politicians running for office are psychopaths. We want to look for more than psychopathy here. The trick is to go to the television screen or the laptop or the "smart" phone where the individual is being questioned and cover the face except the eyes.

I can tell you that already in this election season I've consistently seen fear, depression, anger, sadness, and more, in candidates' eyes. There are legitimate reasons for all of us to be sad, angry, fearful, happy, elated, and so on. To not have these emotions takes away our humanity and ability to be compassionate towards others.

The point is: What questions bring the candidates which emotions? The clue is to ignore the rest of the face – the smiles or smirks or frowns or blank looks. Ignore also the hand gestures that they've worked on and practiced endlessly – the pointed finger vs. the partly covered thumb, the diffusing laugh, the carefully practiced concern and even the planned jokes. People can practice different facial expressions and body language.

You know, don't fold your arms like you're trying to protect yourself. Hold your hands in an odd way one hand covering the other as professors and counselors tend to do so not to appear judgmental of their students or clients.

You want to know what the candidates fear – will improper or illegal actions be found out? What angers them – policies that harm them or policies that harm everyone? When do they show concern and compassion and for whom? Do the eyes smile when the mouth does? People can't change expressions in their eyes as easily as those in their faces and bodies.

Some decades ago I was observing a colleague who was on a phone call to her attorney. She began laughing, the angrier her eyes became the harder she laughed. For anyone not observing her eyes it appeared all was OK. But it wasn't.

The second guideline: What values do the candidates claim? In my cross-cultural research over the years I've studied hundreds of people's declared values – even how they ranked them. Then I compared these to their documented behaviors.

As it happened I began doing my values research in the early 80's when we first heard the term "moral majority." I was also studying moral development at that time so the slogan was of great interest to me. It was also the beginning of the "family values" talk.

Since "family, friends and God" were the top values listed by a large majority of people across age, gender, culture, religion, and country, I was especially interested in the "family" value. Repeatedly when asked anonymously in a pencil and paper instrument why family was important, I read answers like "having people to love me, support me, make me proud,

PUBLIC FORUM

take care of me in my old age,” and so forth. Family was seen as instrumental to other values – as were most other values listed.

One individual realized the repetition and wrote, honestly, “It’s all about me!”

For a full 93% of the cross cultural population studied, altruistic values were instrumental to more ego-ethnocentric concerns – and their ongoing behaviors agreed. Even “God” was valued to help me, help protect me and my family, help me succeed and so forth.

One woman was always involved in groups with social justice concerns, yet she moved from group to group. It turned out that when the group no longer praised her, she would leave and move on to another group. It wasn’t the social justice that was key but that she be praised and needed.

In the research, a small number stated altruistic values that were not just instrumental to more self-interested values. Their behaviors in regard to concern for others agreed.

Most importantly, if political candidates say that they value family, health, education, and the wellbeing of others, look for their behaviors over time and who the recipients of those behaviors are.

People may well be kind, pleasant, and generous until there is a conflict with a deeper value – in which case they will act according to what they most value.

On the other hand, some people like to brag about how strong and tough they are, and their behavior should be watched as well since some people talk like bullies – but may quietly act in caring ways. Others with bully language should be watched because they mean the words they use.

Values can also be private or public. We don’t expect most people and institutions to say, “We’re going to take your money and run.”

More socially acceptable values are given instead. Values may be instrumental or intrinsic, acted on to obtain other values such as obtaining an education to earn a higher salary or, seen as important in and of themselves. One example would be concentrating on an education that may not pay well but is seen as important to the needs of human beings.

The third guideline is related to the knowledge that informs people’s values and choices. Our form of government hopes for an educated people. Given the state of education in this country – and the refusal of many to be informed by quality science, this is a major concern.

Yet even the professionally educated too often ignore information that appears not to have occurred to them before. For example, since immigration is such a dominant issue in this election, it is important to remind everyone that it is not at all true that we are all immigrants to this country coming here for a better life, religious freedom, or liberty.

American Indians were here thousands of years before Europeans “discovered” this land. African Americans did not come here by choice. Millions died in slave ships and many attempted to jump off the slave ships preferring to drown until nets were placed on the ships preventing their suicide. And those who we often refer to as illegal immigrants mostly had ancestors here on this continent long before Europeans arrived.

Even here we seem to think people who speak Spanish in this country all have the same immigration history. Yet a simple distinction is those who came here fleeing Castro’s Communist Cuba and those who came here from Central and South America fleeing terrible violence, rape and drug wars.

For the groups forced here in slavery and those already here, the original European illegal immigrants are those who now make the rules. Was this history missing in everyone’s education?

Knowledge from science is growing by leaps and bounds. We do learn that some of what we were previously taught was not accurate. To some extent the problem lies with scientists and the distancing language of professionals who reserve special jargons for their scientific journals.

Knowledge is thus kept from the general population. Not only do scientists exist in distinctly different groups – biology, chemistry, physics, physiology, etc., they have seldom communicated with each other.

To some extent, we researchers are guilty when we do not educate the public in ways that can be understood. It isn’t easy. It is difficult to explain much cutting-edge research to the general public.

In the past, making knowledge known to people outside the profession has been frowned on by the disciplines and universities where they teach. Also little work was done between disciplines, which limited understanding by others.

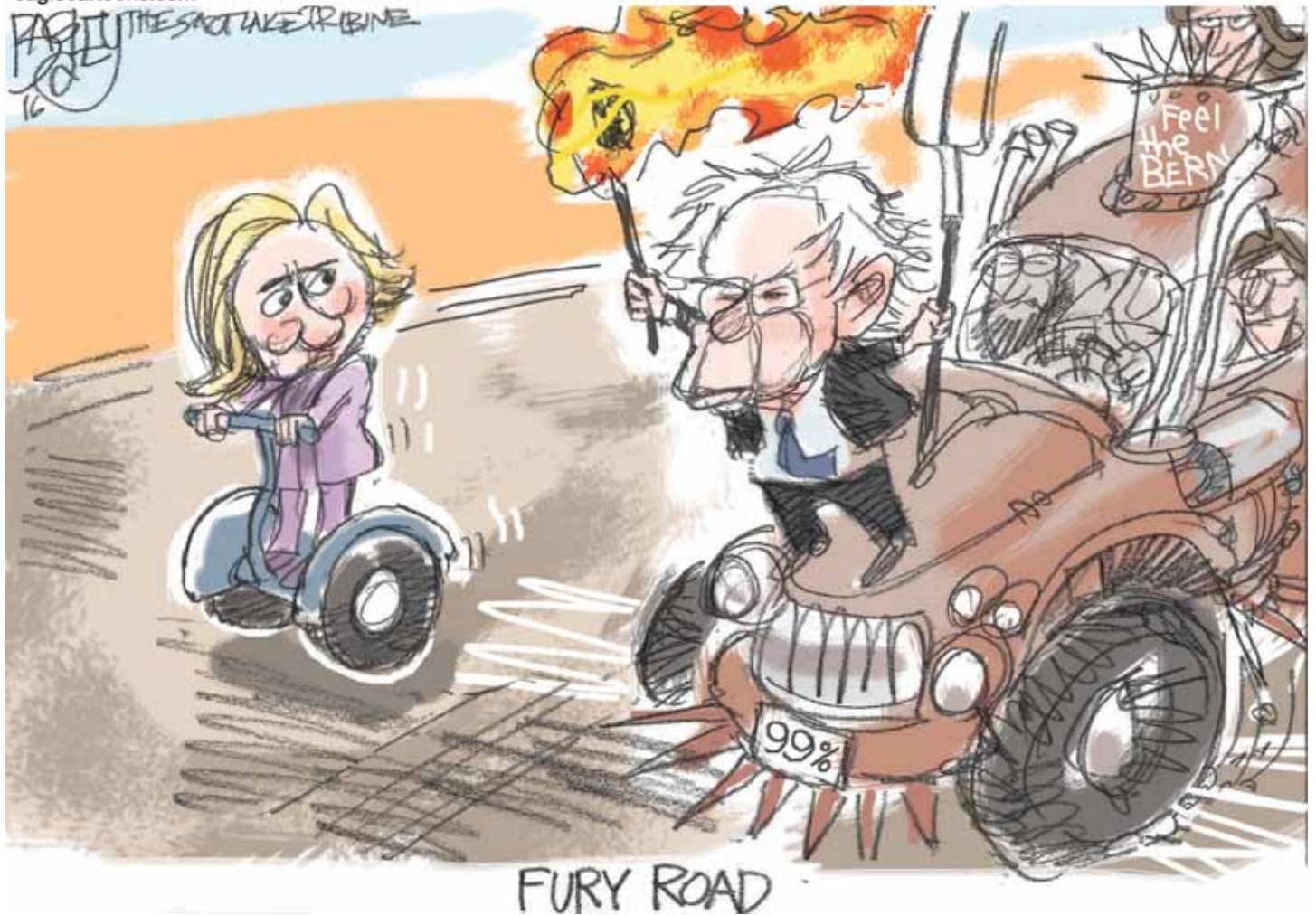
Perhaps the biggest problem now is that there is so much happening in so many fields of science that it is a legitimate challenge to stay informed. Yet each part of science affects all knowledge – and each of us as humans, so it is important to establish goals to make knowledge available to everyone not just the privileged few.

A different kind of problem is that we continue to ask candidates if they have changed their opinions – as if change is negative. A better question would ask how they have lived that they didn’t change since change is a necessary part of growth and development.

What we want to know is if they changed because of new lessons learned or are they only pretending because they want to be elected.

So we have three guidelines here: 1] Watch the eyes

CONTINUED ON PAGE 46



Millennials

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20

2008 and 2012 coalitions.

Buck, a 30-year-old stay-at-home father of four who's back in school seeking a second degree, and Jackson, a single 24-year-old, are both devoting untold volunteer hours each week to electing their candidates – Buck for Sanders, Jackson for Clinton.

"His ideals align with mine," says Buck, who grew up in Meeker, east of OKC. "We've always had to choose between the lesser of two evils; this year I don't have to choose. It got me off the chair and got me active."

It's impossible to know, of course, how much of a difference Millennials will make in the March 1 Oklahoma presidential primary – or even if there'll be much of a race left for the Democratic nomination.

But if the results of the Iowa caucuses were any indication, Millennials – those born after 1980 and the first generation to come of age in the 21st Century – will be key players in a nomination battle still likely to be raging.

In Iowa, younger caucus-goers skewed heavily toward Sanders – 84% of 17- to 29-year-olds and 58% of

30- to 44-year-olds backed the self-proclaimed Democratic socialist. However, there were fewer caucus-goers in the 17-29 age group this year than in 2008 – down to 18% from 22% of the turnout.

Sarah Burris, an Oklahoma native and expert on Millennials, says she believes the Feb. 9 New Hampshire primary will provide a better early test of the Millennial impact on the 2016 presidential race.

"Caucuses are harder to understand because [attendees] must move from one candidate to the other if there isn't enough support," says Burris, a Washington, DC-based writer for the on-line sites Raw Story and Salon. "That's why most candidates on the Republican side are still going to hold out.

"A caucus doesn't help anyone but three candidates. I was frankly surprised some of them, like Jeb Bush and Rand Paul, for example, even tried to be competitive in Iowa. I would have just put all my money in on New Hampshire and South Carolina since numbers were so low."

Buck, the Sanders' volunteer in Oklahoma, is something of a prototypical Millennial supporter for

the Vermont senator – a long-registered independent whose first presidential election vote went to Republican incumbent George W. Bush.

“I was raised to be very conservative,” Buck says. “I suppose it’s kind of typical of a lot of people of my generation, right or wrong.

“A couple of years out of high school my views started really trending toward the progressive side. I started gravitating more towards becoming an independent from my Republican roots.”

Buck says no single event sparked his political transformation, just a growing sense that Republican policies were exclusive not inclusive – especially

when it came to LGBT Americans.

“I began to sense the progressive movement encompassed everybody – that we’re all in this together, trying to make a better life for us all,” he says.

His move from right-to-left politically created some consternation in his family, he says, but mostly it’s created an unwritten rule that politics are best avoided at holiday get-togethers.

“I try not to ... well, it’s usually brought up casually to make a point, but you hope it doesn’t turn into anything [a more extensive discussion],” Buck says. “We talked about politics [over the holidays] but did so in a more general manner than getting into specifics.

“I don’t talk about [Sanders] with them. They know I’m a passionate supporter and very involved ... When we did a Dirty Santa exchange, one of the things we included with our gift was a *Bernie 2016* button. There were about 30 of us in there and they all thought it was hysterical.

“They’re all pretty much in the opposite camp. But it’s to the point where we can laugh about it and joke about it.”

Jackson, by contrast, is probably just as stereotypical of the young Clinton supporter – a lifelong Democrat who “would have been involved in Obama’s campaign “except I was still in high school” at OKC’s Dove Science Academy.

“I’m a Democrat,” he says, simply. “I agree with lot of her positions. I like the experience she has” – former First Lady, U.S. senator from New York and U.S. Secretary of State – and I like the fact that she’s always been driven to serve our country.

“I find that pretty admirable.”

Burris says she sees a significant difference between Clinton and Sanders supporters across-the-

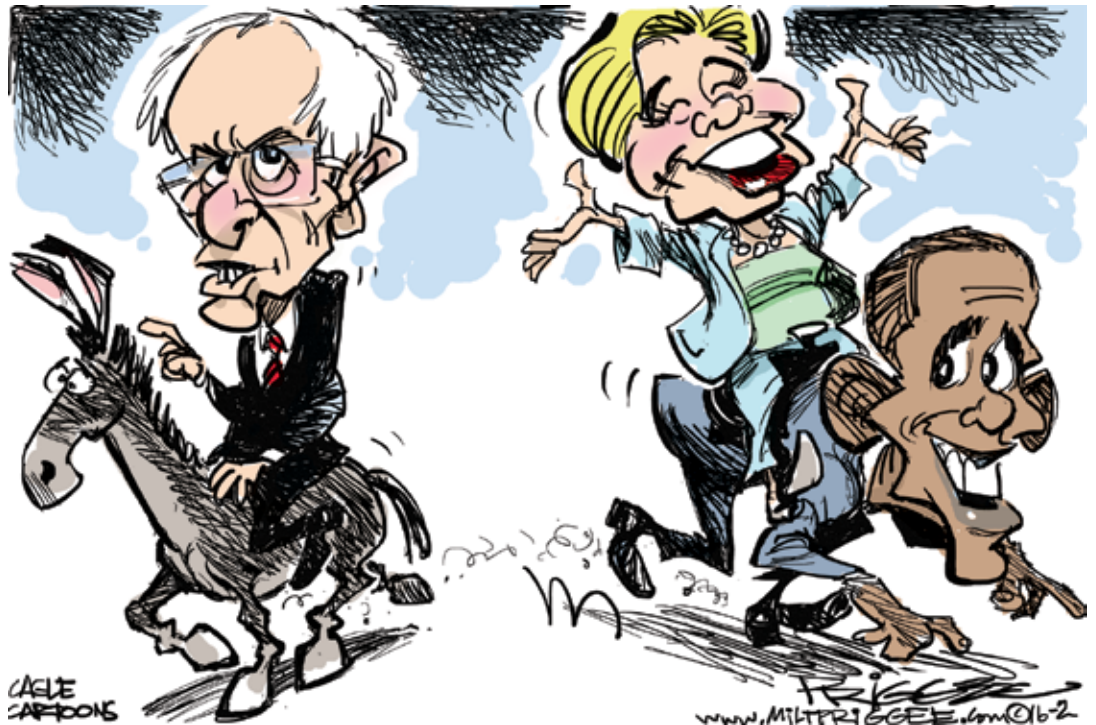


Republican Donald Trump’s recent stop in Tulsa yielded more than its share of campaign humor, some of it unintended. Check out the spelling of Tulsa on media credentials and of Trump endorser Sarah Palin’s last name on KOTV Channel 6.





At the January opening of Clinton's campaign headquarters in Oklahoma City, Millennial Meg Reeder, right, visits with Clinton supporters. Reeder is working to organize a Young Democrats club at Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee.



board, not just among Millennials. But there is a difference, she says, between Millennial voters and non-voters.

"Millennials are much more independent and progressive on the whole," she says. "They aren't fans of the two parties in general. They typically vote for Democrats nationally simply because they lean more progressive and traditionally Republicans have opposed the values Millennials hold."

"However, the soul of the Millennial vote is increasingly up for grabs for those willing to do the work, introducing their candidacy and issues and asking for their votes."

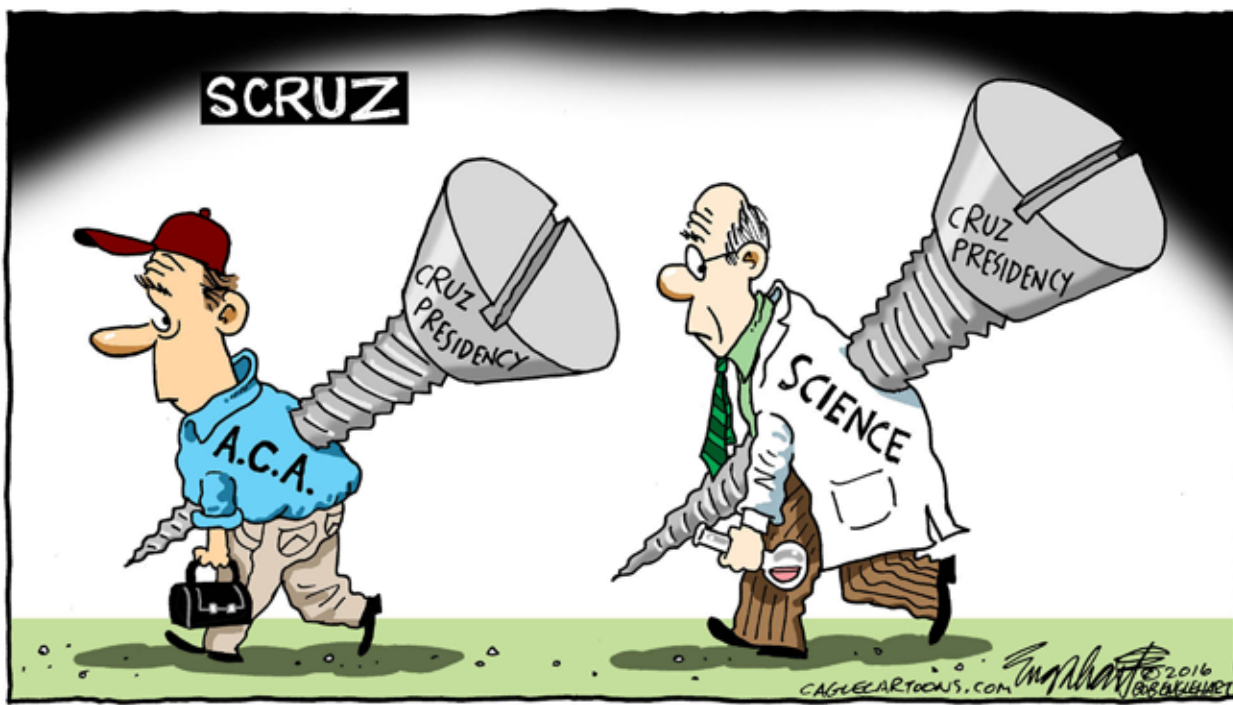
It's not surprising, given his Democratic roots, but Jackson says he, too, finds that more of his peers

tend to be more progressive than conservative. He suggests education is a prime reason why.

"If you look at my generation," he says, "a larger percentage of my generation has gone to a university than a Baby Boomer. Once you become educated, it helps you look at whether a candidate" has your best interests at heart.

Millennials like Buck and Jackson are working to get their peers engaged in politics because both believe it's important to their future success to help get the best candidate elected.

"Hypocrisy is such a huge turnoff to young people," Buck says. "They grow up being told 'this' or 'that' is the right path to take and then they look around and see it hasn't created an economy that's a good start-



ing line for us to make a good life.”

With his non-school-age children in tow, Buck and other Sanders’ supporters set up shop in UCO’s Nigh University Center the first week in February – not only signing up “Bronchos for Bernie” but also registering new voters.

About 65 students registered to vote the first two days – and about 100 signed up as Sanders supporters.

“Maybe a lot of them are just getting into politics for the first time,” says Buck. “They’re probably not

as informed about it.

“This is kind of their first step into the political process.”

One thing Buck says he and his crew help explain is that Oklahoma Democrats recently opened participation in their primaries to registered independents – a fact proving popular with Millennials who are registering as independents at far higher rates than other age groups.

“Students,” he says, “definitely do want to retain that” independence.

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Government Run Like A Business Poisons Kids

BY LEO GERARD

The people of Michigan hired themselves a GOP businessman to be governor in 2011. And what they got was children poisoned by public water in Flint.

That is, what they got was a government based on GOP business values.

To line the pockets of CEOs and shareholders, corporations cut corners in ways that frequently end up injuring workers and the public. Think of the Upper Big Branch mine disaster where safety violations killed 29 workers or the Takata airbag fatalities that occurred despite workers voicing safety concerns or the nine deaths and 714 illnesses caused by salmonella-contaminated peanut butter knowingly sold by Peanut Corporation of America.

So, really, the lead poisoning of Flint children by a government based on Republican business values is no surprise.

In his state of the state address last month, GOP Gov. Rick Snyder, formerly a venture capitalist, apologized to the people of Flint who have been drinking water tainted with a known, potent neurotoxin since April 2014. And then Snyder said, "I will fix it."

Lead poisoning is irreversible. It can't be fixed. In addition, now, two outbreaks of Legionnaires Disease that sickened 87 and killed 10 have been linked to the foul water. There's no fixing dead people.

The GOP businessman-governor also said in his state of the state address: "Government failed you." That's exactly what Republicans want.

They want government to fail so that they can justify crushing it, eliminating much of what it does for people and turning over the rest to private business, which profits by cutting corners the way Peanut Corporation of America did.

Then, when it all falls apart like it did in Flint, it's amazing how quick those Republicans put their hands out for a federal bailout. That's what Snyder did. He's a venture capitalist, after all. That's the Wall Street way.

Michigan didn't have to poison Flint's children. That was a values choice. And Republican Gov. Rick Snyder values big business more than little children.

Immediately after Snyder got elected, he gave his corporate buddies a big fat tax break and raised taxes on individuals, including poor people and pensioners. An analysis by the Detroit Free Press in 2014 showed individuals were forking over a total of \$900 million more a year. By contrast, businesses paid \$1.7 billion less annually after Snyder cut their tax bills.

If corporations had paid their fair share in taxes over the five years that Snyder has been in charge, Michigan would have an additional \$8.5 billion to help struggling cities like Flint afford clean water and struggling school districts like Detroit afford decent education. But giving businesses a tax break was more important to GOP businessman Snyder.

Long before Snyder took office, Flint fell into financial trouble as the auto industry abandoned it. But the Republican governor's administration appointed the emergency manager who decided to disconnect Flint from a safe public water source and draw instead from the Flint River to save between \$1 million and \$2 million a year.

Almost immediately, the people of Flint began complaining. The Flint River water was yellow, orange or brown. It tasted and smelled bad. It caused rashes and nausea. It produced so much corrosion at a GM plant that the factory switched to another water source.

The public water that had been piped to Flint homes from Lake Huron for nearly five decades had been treated to prevent metals in the pipes and pipe joints from leaching out.

The water from the Flint River was untreated, even though it is more corrosive. So lead and iron leached into the water drawn by Flint residents. Both metals are dangerous.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says there is no safe blood lead level in children. Iron pulls chlorine out of water, allowing bacteria to thrive. This creates a particularly fertile environment for Legionnaires because that bacteria needs iron to grow.

Smelly, foul-tasting orange and brown water was good enough for Flint residents as far as the Snyder administration was concerned. Beyond ignoring the concerns of Flint residents, officials within his administration aggressively mocked and belittled them.

Last year, in February, the U.S. Environment Protection Agency (EPA) warned Michigan state officials

that lead and other contaminants were leaching into the untreated Flint water. The state did nothing. In June, an EPA regulations manager reported that the state appeared to be deliberately testing the water in a way that would seriously understate the levels of lead.

Instead of intervening immediately to stop the poisoning, state officials argued Michigan wasn't required to treat the water to fix the problem. Months later, when independent studies confirmed high levels of lead, state officials reacted initially by denying the results.

That's definitely a government run on GOP-business values failing the people. Just like Peanut Corporation of America.

One of those independent studies was conducted by pediatrician Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha. Last September, she found a spike in blood lead levels in Flint children, some three times higher than those in earlier routine tests.

Among the poisoned is four-year-old Gavin Walters, who lost 27 pounds after the water switch and who sometimes seemed unable to pronounce words he knew, his mother, LeeAnne Walters, told the New York Times. "He is going to deal with the side effects of this for the rest of his life," Ms. Walters said. "I don't think there's a word angry enough to describe my anger."

Last fall, after the state couldn't deny the results of the independent studies anymore, Snyder's administration agreed to come up with most of the \$12 million needed to restore Lake Huron water to Flint. Had the state given Flint \$12 million three years ago, the children of Flint would not have been poisoned.

Then, in late January, Snyder asked state lawmakers to allocate \$28 million to help Flint. And he appealed President Obama's denial of his request to declare Flint a federal disaster area and give him \$96 million to fix it.

The president said federal law limited what he could do. He awarded Flint \$5 million in response to what could be legitimately described as a federal emergency. But he could not make a disaster declaration because the calamity was man-made.

This was not a Hurricane Katrina or Super Storm Sandy. The tragedy in Flint was a choice. This was a values decision about what was important. Giving a break to big business was the top priority for venture capitalist Snyder. Operating a shoddy government, over-taxing pensioners and poisoning Flint's children was the result.

And now Snyder is demanding a \$96 million federal bailout. Just like Wall Street. When those capitalists mess up, then all of a sudden they think government works.

Leo W. Gerard president of the United Steelworkers union. President Barack Obama appointed him to the President's Advisory Committee on Trade Policy and Negotiations.

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The Truth About Charter Schools

BY RANDI WEINGARTEN

When you hear the words “charter school,” what comes to mind? High expectations? High student attrition? High achievement? Lack of transparency?

There’s no right or wrong answer because charter schools, like other public and private schools, vary widely. The top-ranked high school in Louisiana is a unionized charter school. On the flip side, a recent study of students enrolled in online charter schools found that they lost 180 days of learning in math over the 180-day school year. [You read that right.]

Charter schools are publicly funded schools with flexibility in program design and operations. The late AFT President Albert Shanker was one of the first proponents, believing public school teachers could incubate innovative ideas, sharing successes and learning from setbacks. That was our goal in creating University Prep, a charter school in the South Bronx that the United Federation of Teachers co-founded with Green Dot Public Schools when I was UFT president. Now in our eighth year, 98% of students graduate, and almost all go on to college. The goal was never to undermine the many extraordinary district public schools – or to close or make it harder for traditional public schools.

Unfortunately, some charter proponents have shifted the intent of charters from incubating ideas and

sharing successes to competing for market share and taxpayer dollars. A pro-charter group in New York recently ran deplorable ads suggesting they care more about equity than Mayor Bill de Blasio does. The reality is that some charter operators want to take public funds, yet behave like private entities that can play by different rules.

Charter schools tend to enroll fewer students with disabilities, fewer English language learners, and a less-poor population of students than do nearby public schools. Reuters has reported on practices some charter operators use to “get the students they want.”



Some require character references from a religious or community leader, entry exams, or completion of lengthy forms [often only in English]. A Philadelphia charter school accepted applications only one day each year – at a suburban country club.

Some charter schools reportedly “counsel out” or expel students just before state testing day. Recent exposes reveal that the Success Academy Charter Schools chain has suspended or expelled children as young as kindergartners – often for minor infractions – at a rate seven times higher than elementary students in New York City’s public schools.

A new report revealed more than \$200 million in fraud, waste and mismanagement in the 15 states examined of the 43 states that allow charters. The U.S. Department of Education this fall awarded \$71 million for charter schools to Ohio – whose charter schools are notorious for financial and ethical scandals and academic results that lag far behind traditional public schools – prompting an outcry from the state auditor. Federal officials have since placed restrictions on the funds.

Since 1995, the Education Department has awarded more than \$3 billion to create and expand charter schools throughout the country, despite warnings by its inspector general that the department has provided inadequate oversight of federal funds sent to charter schools.

These failings hurt the charter school operators who are trying to operate above-board with students’ best interests in mind. And rampant charter expansion undermines traditional public schools. A proposal to “charterize” half of the public schools in Los Angeles would not just disrupt the public school sys-

tem; it would destroy it. Neighborhood public schools would be stripped of essential resources, programs and personnel, and the district would be bankrupted. These schemes – also playing out in Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia and elsewhere – aim not to supplement public schools but to supplant them. There must be robust debates about proposals that so radically privatize public education.

“Charter” does not mean “better.” A well-regarded Stanford University student found that 25% of charter schools perform significantly better than traditional public schools, while 31% produce academic results that are significantly worse.

Hillary Clinton, a longtime supporter of charter schools, was recently lambasted when she called for accountability for all public schools. She noted that some charter schools “don’t take the hardest-to-teach kids, or, if they do, they don’t keep them. And so the public schools are often in a no-win situation, because they do, thankfully, take everybody, and then they don’t get the resources or the help or the support that they need to be able to take care of every child’s education.” She’s right.

The public education landscape is enriched by having many options – neighborhood public schools, magnet schools, community schools, schools that focus on career and technical education, and charter schools. They all must be held to educational, financial and ethical standards, particularly now, given that half the children in public schools are poor. This is a solemn responsibility to both students and the public.

Randi Weingarten is president of the American Federation of Teachers.

Questions That Haunt

Why do banks charge a fee on “insufficient funds” when they know there is not enough money?

Why does someone believe you when you say there are four billion stars, but check when you say the paint is wet?

Why do they use sterilized needles for death by lethal injection?

Why doesn’t Tarzan have a beard?

Why does Superman stop bullets with his chest, but ducks when you throw a revolver at him?

Why did Kamikaze pilots wear helmets?

If people evolved from apes, why are there still apes?

Why is it that no matter what color bubble bath you use the bubbles are always white?

Is there ever a day that mattresses are NOT on sale?

Why do people constantly return to the refrigerator with hopes that something new to eat will have materialized?

Why is it that no plastic bag will open from the

end on your first try?

How do those dead bugs get into those enclosed light fixtures?

Why is it that whenever you attempt to catch something that’s falling off the table you always manage to knock something else over?

How come you never hear father-in-law jokes?

The statistics on sanity show that one out of every four persons is suffering from some sort of serious mental illness. Think of your three best friends – if they seem OK, then it’s you.

Thanks to A.J. Henshaw for sharing.

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CAN YOU TELL THEM APART?



A Few Terrorists I Have Known [About]

BY BOB DARCY

In James Cameron's *Aliens*, Bill Paxton's PFC Hudson asks: "Is this going to be a stand-up fight, sir, or another bug hunt?" These days I view a stand-up fight as involving uniformed soldiers and tanks on both sides. A bug hunt, in contrast, has uniformed soldiers and police struggling against fighters in mufti. Ironically, mufti is from an Arabic word meaning an Islamic scholar.

Today, fighters in mufti are essentially terrorists. Terrorists have some long-term goal they think not achievable through military might or political process. Theirs are "soft" targets: civilians, power plants, civilian airplanes, teachers, churches. They use improvised bombs, assassinations, hit-and-run shootings.

The intent is to cause the "authorities" or a targeted civilian population to give up and pull out. Over the past 70 years, that is, with the close of World War II, many have practiced terrorism. Here are just a few.

The Zionist Irgun bombed the King David Hotel

in Jerusalem, headquarters of the British Palestine Authority in 1946. In 1948 they carried out the Deir Yassin massacre of 107 Palestinian men, women and children to clear the site that became Tel Aviv University. Irgun offshoot, Lehi [aka the Stern Gang], assassinated U.N. mediator Count Folke Bernadotte. Irgun was declared terrorist by the United Nations, and the United States.

Today all over Israel are plaques honoring places where Zionist terrorists blew themselves up or were killed attempting to kill Arabs, British soldiers or officials. Lehi tried to form an anti-British alliance with Nazi Germany and carried out the 1944 Cairo wartime assassination of Lord Moyne, the British Minister Resident in the Middle East. The assassins were honored with Israeli postage stamps. Former terrorists Yitzhak Shamir [Lehti] and Menachem Begin [Irgun] later became Israeli prime ministers.

The Mau Mau, largely drawn from the Christian Kikuyu tribe, terrorized white and African supporters

of the British in Kenya between 1952 and 1960. The Mau Mau terrified the tiny European minority scattered among a massive African population.

Mau Mau murdered 1,819 Africans, 32 Europeans and 26 Asians. Most notorious was the Lari massacre of 74 Kikuyu men, women and children and the hacking to death of a European family – Michael Ruck, age 6, and his parents along with their African farm worker. Jomo Kenyatta, convicted by the British in 1953 for “managing” the Mau Mau, became Kenya’s first prime minister and later, president. Kenyans today honor the Mau Mau on Oct. 20, Mashujaa Day.

The Catholic-based Provisional Irish Republican Army [IRA, Provos] waged a shooting and bombing campaign against Northern Irish Protestants and the United Kingdom between 1971 and 1997. Provos received support from Libya, although the strongest support was from Irish American politicians and organizations.

The IRA was responsible for killing about 1,100 of the British security forces and 640 civilians in Northern Ireland and Britain. They lost about 300 of their “soldiers.”

My daughter and I lived in Belfast in 1987-88 and experienced the “troubles” directly. The Provos saw themselves as a continuation of an anti-British, anti-Protestant terror campaign dating back to the 1500s. Foxe’s Book of Martyrs [1563] outlines earlier Catholic-Irish atrocities against British Protestants.

The Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia [ASALA], the Armenian Revolutionary Army and the Justice Commandos Against Armenian Genocide between 1975-87 blew up the Beirut offices of the World Council of Churches, and assassinated or attempted to assassinate Turkish, Swiss and French diplomats in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, France, Greece, Hungary, Iran, Lebanon, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and the United States. They bombed airports and airline offices in Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Lebanon, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, The United Kingdom, and the United States.

One ASALA leader, Monte Melkonian, was born in California and graduated from the University of California-Berkeley before he “took part” in the assassination of Turkish diplomats in Europe. In the Nagorno-Karabakh War, where he was killed, he led 4,000 Armenian soldiers in an attempt to wrest a province from Azerbaijan and ethnically cleanse it. Armenia made him the sixth National Hero of Armenia. Melkonian’s funeral was attended by between 50,000 and 250,000 people. Armenia was the first Christian country [A.D. 301] and today remains 95% Christian.

If there is a classic terror/anti-terror war it is that in Algeria between 1954 and 1962. The Algerian National Liberation Front [FLN in French] leader Ahmed Ben Bella authorized the liquidation of Muslims willing to work with the French and began a series of bombings and massacres against Algerian Europeans.

The FLN’s 1955 Philippeville massacre killed 123

Dr. Harold Sare explains why President Obama’s strategy to contain ISIS strikes the right balance. – Page 39

men, women and babies, including 71 French. The FLN turned to kidnapping, ritual murder and civilian mutilation – Europeans and Muslims alike – as well as hit-and-run attacks on French military. It is hard to estimate the death toll inflicted by the FLN but the total inflicted by the French and the FLN together is about a million.

Franz Fanon, a FLN member, became a philosopher of violence. To over-simplify, he argued if a regime’s existence is due to its massive military strength, as is the case with colonial systems, resistance must be violent. The first sentence of Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* [1961] is “National liberation ... is always a violent phenomenon.” Fanon’s two books, *Black skin, White Masks* [1952] and *The Wretched of the Earth* are still mainstays of American college courses and rank among Amazon’s top 4,000 best sellers. FLN leader Ben Bella became Algeria’s first president.

I have talked many times with Israeli, Kenyan, Irish and Armenian friends about terrorism. They accurately point out the atrocities carried out by the ‘other side:’ Arabs, British, Turks, Protestants. The formula is roughly, “I do not support terrorism, but ... ” It is difficult to find a nation today that does not have some monument or statue honoring someone or some group the “other side” considers terrorist.

John Brown, in 1856, led a group of abolitionists that murdered five pro-slavery men in Kansas. His statue stands on the site of the former Western University in Kansas City, about 100 miles from the massacre site.

I am trying to make several points. First, there certainly have been, and are, Muslim terrorists. But terrorism is not characteristic of being Muslim, nor is it exclusive to them. Nor is terrorism Irish, Armenian, Kikuyu, Catholic or Jewish, although their victims tend to think of terrorism as an Irish, Armenian, Kikuyu, Catholic or Jewish characteristic.

Second, in every terror campaign there are some who sympathize, “understand” or “balance” the terrorist against the forces opposed. These sympathizers or apologists sustain and comfort the terrorists. Too often a group is simultaneously labeled “terrorist” by some and “freedom fighters” by others.

If terrorism is to continue all we need to do is to continue to venerate “our” terrorists, oppose acts of terror “but ... ” “understand” why it is being carried out or “balance” it against actions of the opponents. Or, we – the United States, the United Nations, all countries, all religions, all movements, all people – need to agree together what is an act of terrorism, and then offer the terrorist absolutely no support, comfort or sanctuary.

Bob Darcy is retired regents professor of political science at Oklahoma State University.



Take The Movement To The White House

At a recent dinner with my work team, I was reminded that I had said I wanted to travel less for work this year so I could focus on other projects. Instead, I find myself bouncing across the country campaigning for my friend who decided to run for president.

I first met Bernie Sanders in the 1980s, after he pulled off a surprising upset to be elected mayor of Burlington. Throughout his time as a public servant, Bernie has never abandoned his working-class roots, remaining unusually free of the peacocking strut that afflicts too many in high office.

For example, he's not "Senator Sanders" but just "Bernie" – as everyone calls him that. He lives modestly, flies coach class and considers \$25 a major campaign donation. It's also worth noting that he has not used his official positions to get rich. While most people in Congress are millionaires, Sanders' financial net worth is in the six-figure range, one of the lowest of any senator.

Bernie happily calls himself a "democratic socialist," a loaded term that initially spooks many people. But as Vermonters [who keep electing him – last time with more than 70% of the vote] have come to know from his actions and policies, and as the hundreds of thousands of people turning out to hear him are learning, the phrase essentially means being a feisty FDR populist, willing to take on the economic royalists [and welcoming "their hatred," as Roosevelt put it] in order to [in Bernie's words] "revitalize American democracy so that government works for all of us, not just the large campaign contributors."

For Bernie, the key word in democratic socialism is "democratic" – rallying and organizing workaday people to reject the plutocratic corporate order and build "a society in which all people have a decent standard of living – not a society in which a few people have incredible wealth while 47 million live in poverty."

Sanders comes straight out of America's historic continuum of progressive boat-rockers: the pamphleteers, abolitionists, suffragists, Populists, unionists, Progressives, New Dealers, anti-war protesters, along with marchers for women's equality, gay rights, the environment and the civil rights movement.

Bernie himself was active in the civil rights movement as an organizer for Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, getting arrested at anti-segregation sit-ins, and participating the 1963 March on Washington. And his activism and fighting spirit carry on into today's struggles over inequality, oppression and corporate hegemony.

Bernie is serious about winning his run for the highest office. This is not a symbolic run to raise issues, nor is it an ego trip.

"I am not running to fulfill some long-held ambition," he told *Rolling Stone*. "I never believed that I would ever become a mayor, a congressman or a United States senator [much less a president]."

"... I am running for one simple reason: This country today is facing extraordinary crises in terms of climate change, income and wealth inequality; in terms of a political system which is now corrupt and leading us toward oligarchy; in terms of the collapse of the middle class; in terms of more people in jail than any other country on Earth, and in terms of an immigration policy which is clearly completely broken.

"I just do not believe that establishment politics are going to address these issues. ... I do not say 'Elect Bernie Sanders, I'm going to solve all these problems.' We need millions of people to stand up and fight back."

In other words, we need "a movement."

Sanders is as offended as the great majority of people are that Washington is so totally in the pockets of moneyed elites. Someone finally has to rebel, and no one had stepped forward, so he did. He's saying: Use me. I'll be your mechanism, your political tool in 2016 for building a democratic movement that can govern in the people's interest, rather than for the 1-percenters.

"My job," says Bernie, "is to activate people to fight for their rights and to force Congress to respond to the needs of working families." Bernie recognizes that the people's yearning for such a movement is what has created him as a presidential contender. He's not only aware of this basic truth, but he's turned it into an alter call, saying: "I can't do this. But *we* can."

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Is There Only One True Progressive?

In our polarized politics, the Democratic Party is trending leftward – not as sharply or as rapidly as the Republican Party has turned toward the far right, but still the party is moving further left than a generation or even an election or two ago. The stunning rise of Bernie Sanders, who proclaims himself both a democratic socialist and a political revolutionary, provides powerful evidence of desire at the grassroots for substantive and perhaps radical change.

Yet many Democrats understandably wonder, as the primary season begins, how far their party can go without risking a catastrophic loss of the White House and the Congress to Republican extremists like Ted Cruz and Donald Trump. They also wonder whether Hillary Clinton, whose surname is synonymous with triangulating centrism, will inspire their base – and whether her candidacy represents any kind of change, beyond gender.

The response of the Sanders faithful is straightforward enough: Their man is not only more faithful to progressive principles but more likely to win in November, because his “revolution” will bring out millions of new voters. [Evidently the Republican Party, which attacks Clinton relentlessly while sending out messages supportive of Sanders, doesn’t agree.]

Such was the argument advanced by *The Nation* magazine – a venerable publication of the left, celebrating its 150th anniversary – in its recent cover editorial endorsing Sanders for president. Along with many other *Nation* articles over the past several months, that lengthy essay leaves the unmistakable impression that Sanders is the only progressive choice for Democratic voters.

Those who doubt Sanders’ electability or qualifications may still ask themselves whether a true believer can support Hillary Clinton, however. And they might well find an answer in the pages of *The Nation*, too.

Just a month ago, the magazine published its 2015 Progressive Honor Roll, an annual feature compiled by John Nichols – a veteran journalist and author who happens to be a highly enthusiastic Sanders supporter. But he apparently applied no political litmus test to his list of America’s “most valuable” progressives,

because it included several prominent supporters of Clinton. In fact, of the individuals honored by *The Nation*, nearly every single one is backing her.

Topping the list is Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, D-RI, named “most valuable Senator,” who officially endorsed Clinton back in January 2014. Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-CT, the list’s “most valuable House member,” endorsed her last April. State Sen. Pam Jochum, the Dubuque Democrat who presides over the Iowa State Senate – and was chosen from among thousands of local elected officials across the country as the “most valuable state legislator” – announced her support for Clinton last October.

Cecile Richards, the Planned Parenthood president named as the country’s “most valuable activist,” led her organization to back Clinton last month [and earned a sour-grapes dismissal by Sanders as “the establishment”]. Newark, NJ’s Ras Baraka, chosen as the “most valuable mayor,” hasn’t officially endorsed a presidential candidate yet, but his political organization has shown every sign of backing Clinton since last summer. And “most valuable memoir” author Gloria Steinem, the revered feminist leader and thinker, is currently campaigning for Clinton in New Hampshire.

Incidentally, Health and Human Services Secretary Sylvia Mathews Burwell also makes the list as “most valuable Cabinet member.” She must observe administration neutrality in the primary but – as a former top Clinton White House official – would very likely endorse the former first lady.

Whatever their reasons for supporting Clinton, these are all serious progressive leaders who don’t take a presidential endorsement lightly. Agree with their choice or not, it still carries weight.

As the first wave of voting unfolds, campaign rhetoric gets super-hot and sometimes angry. Partisans on both sides will inevitably utter silly, uninformed, and even offensive remarks about the opposing candidate. But at such moments it is worth emphasizing that progressives can differ honestly over which of these two leaders can represent the nation’s real interests most effectively. That will be even more important to remember when the nominee finally emerges.



The 'Brains' Behind Trump

BY MARTY KAPLAN

@marty kaplan Let me guess Marty you believe in global warming too Doctoral degree holder here

There it was, captured in a single sad, hilarious tweet: the whole maddening trainwreck of American democracy, 2016.

Two days before that taunt from someone I don't know was launched into the twitterverse, I had posted a piece about a psychological disorder I called "Too Much Trump Media."

Swiping Elizabeth Kübler-Ross' model of dying, I'd described how people like me were coping with the possibility, hyped by the media, that Donald Trump could actually win the Republican nomination and the general election, following the seven stages of shock, denial, anger, bargaining, guilt, depression and acceptance of a more-than-hypothetical President Trump.

The next day, a right wing website whose mission is to expose "bias and abuse" on the nation's college campuses ran an investigative report putting my column on its readers' radar screen. The title of their

alert: "USC prof. says Trump supporters are 'least educated segment of the population.'"

The subhead noted that Prof. Marty Kaplan had described Donald Trump "as a fascist, narcissist, and extremist bully," but it was the this-jerk-says-you're-stupid headline that went viral in conservative media.

They quoted me accurately. "His supporters are the least educated segment of the population," is what I wrote.

On Twitter and in online chat rooms popular with the right, the alert, as intended, lit a little firestorm, prompting responses like these: "I have an MBA, proudly supporting Trump." And "I have my Master's in Education ... I support Trump. My wife has a B.S. in Clinical Laboratory Science ... She supports Trump." Plus the aforementioned doctorate, who had guessed, accurately, that I "believe in global warming too."

Other comments weren't about their education; they were about my religion. "L.A. Liberal democrat. Love going to watch you squirm when the Gentile Trump takes office." "Kaplan. Wouldn't expect him

to be a Trump supporter.” “Just another self-hating Jew.”

Race came up, too. “Is anyone less educated than Barack Obama’s racial rabble?” “When I think of the inner cities ... [you know places that had almost 100% Obama support], the first thing that comes to mind is stratospheric levels of education.”

I considered jumping into that fray. After all, I had the facts on my side. What I’d reported about Trump supporters’ education wasn’t a smear; it was data.

It was the National Journal’s Ron Brownstein who in October first laid out the evidence of a “Trump gap” in education. “Even in a sprawling field of 15 candidates,” he wrote, “Trump has opened a wide lead among Republicans without a college education almost everywhere,” a point he documented with polling data from Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Nevada, Virginia, Florida, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

“The Diploma Divide” was how David Wasserman’s piece the next month, on the website FiveThirtyEight, described a Republican Party “badly divided by education” and Trump’s weakness among college graduates. “Trump’s strong showings,” he wrote, “are entirely attributable to huge leads among voters without a college degree.”

In three separate polls taken in December by CNN, NBC News/The Wall Street Journal and Quinnipiac, “Trump led by double digits among voters without degrees, but trailed among degree holders.”

Yes, I know that people with a college degree can be boobs, and people without one can be geniuses. But demographics are demographics. College-educated Republicans prefer Trump’s GOP opponents by a country mile.

So why didn’t I rebut Doctorates for Donald with the numbers? Because facts don’t matter the way we wish them to.

If data made a difference, graphs of rising atmospheric carbon dioxide and earth surface temperatures would melt a climate-change-denier’s denial like greenhouse gases are melting Greenland.

If facts had standing, no sane person could maintain that the slaughtered children of Sandy Hook Elementary were actors.

If reality had a vote, no radio host could persuade his listeners that Operation Jade Helm, a Navy Seal/Green Beret training exercise, was a false flag operation – a cover for imposing federal martial law, seizing citizens’ guns and transporting political prisoners to FEMA camps secretly set up in West Texas Wal-Marts.

I’m not making this up. Republicans are the only climate-science-denying party on the face of the earth; Donald Trump, Ted Cruz and Dr. Let-me-guess-Marty-you-believe-in-global-warming-too would be considered loons and cranks in every other democracy on the planet.

Another PhD, an associate professor of communications at Florida Atlantic University, until recently was telling his students that the mass shootings in Newtown, CT; Charleston, SC, and San Bernardino,

CA, were Obama Administration hoaxes concocted to boost support for gun control; that tenured professor was fired, though not for being nuts – it was for failing to file paperwork about outside income. It was like nailing Al Capone for income tax evasion.

Last month, at CNN’s “Guns in America Town Hall,” President Obama told Anderson Cooper that Jade Helm paranoia and other “conspiracy theories floating around the Internet these days all the time” were wrapped up in the opposition to gun control.

What followed was revealing about journalism, about politics and about the epistemological toxin poisoning democracy.

Cooper: Now, let me just jump in here, is it fair to call it a conspiracy –

Obama: Well, yeah –

Cooper: – because a lot of people really believe this deeply, that they just don’t –

Obama: No –

Cooper: – they just don’t trust you.

OBAMA: I’m sorry, Cooper. Yes, it is fair to call it a conspiracy. What are you saying? Are you suggesting that the notion that we are creating a plot to take everybody’s guns away so that we can impose martial law –

Cooper: – not everybody, but there’s certainly a lot of –

OBAMA: Is a conspiracy? Yes, that is a conspiracy! I would hope that you would agree with that. [Applause] Is that controversial, except on some websites around the country?

Follow the reasoning: Cooper says that it’s unfair to suggest that Jade Helm conspiracy theorists are conspiracy theorists, that it’s unfair to fault them for claiming that Jade Helm is part of an Obama plot to take everyone’s guns away, because “a lot of people really believe this deeply.”

In other words, whether a claim is true or false doesn’t hinge on facts; it turns instead on the sincerity of public feeling

I love how Obama nailed Cooper for that. Way worse than the so-called political correctness that Trump assails is the learned helplessness of journalists, public intellectuals and anyone else with half a brain and access to a media platform.

Why be disingenuous about knowledge and learning? Why be defensive about objective criteria for true and false? Elites making cultural excuses for the popular appeal of proto-fascism: that’s what George W. Bush, who knew whereof he spoke, called “the soft bigotry of low expectations.”

There is a social institution called education, and there is a faculty called critical thinking that education is designed to hone. It is not a statistical fluke that, on average, the more education Republican primary voters have, the less they support Donald Trump. That’s how it’s supposed to work.

Marty Kaplan is the Norman Lear professor of entertainment, media and society at the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism.

“...AND THIS IS the FIRST 77¢ I’VE EVER EARNED.”



Right-To-Work Movement's Attack On Women Workers

BY SHEILA BAPAT

Amanda Sheppard, 33, has been a home-care worker for 10 years, caring for ill and elderly people in Vermont. Sheppard is also the president of Vermont Homecare United, a group that won its ability to collectively bargain for higher wages in 2013.

Before they were able to collectively bargain, some Vermont home-care workers were paid the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour. Some were earning a “day rate” of \$2 to \$3 per hour – even though they worked for an entire day.

According to Sheppard, once the union bargained its first contract with the state in 2014, hourly wages increased to \$10.80, and the day rate minimum pay became \$160 for a full day’s work. These benefits were achieved for all Vermont home-care workers –

not just those who identify as members of Vermont Homecare United.

“I knew home-care workers who had been working three jobs and still couldn’t make ends meet,” Sheppard told Truthout. “This collective bargaining contract helped so many home-care providers in Vermont.”

But soon after this 2014 contract was secured, the right-to-work movement – a movement that seeks to disempower collective bargaining and labor unions generally – won a U.S. Supreme Court case that, based on a First Amendment argument, undercuts home-care workers’ collective bargaining activity.

Home-care work is a field dominated by women and rife with low wages. The right-to-work movement may now succeed in undercutting collective bargaining

across a range of sectors dominated by women if the Supreme Court again rules in favor of its First Amendment argument in *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association* [CTA].

Feminist legal theorists have long argued that there are gendered implications of laws and policies that may seem “neutral” or rooted in constitutional doctrine. Indeed, the First Amendment argument touted by the right-to-work movement is a thin veil, underneath which lies a serious gender problem. Effectively, this argument is an attack on women’s economic security.

On Jan. 11, the Supreme Court heard oral arguments in *Friedrichs v. CTA*, which could weaken collective bargaining for a range of public sector employ-

the First Amendment.”

Breyer’s comment notwithstanding, early analyses of the oral arguments indicate that the court will side with *Friedrichs*, upending the longstanding precedent set by *Abood v. Detroit Board of Education*.

If the court does side with *Friedrichs*, many workers may choose to stop paying agency fees, thus gutting many public sector unions of a longstanding source of revenue that supports collective bargaining activity – which could negatively impact the many women who hold positions covered by collective bargaining agreements.

“Petitioners in *Friedrichs* are arguing that every time a union bargains, that is an inherently political act,” said Emily Martin, vice president and general

If strong public sector union jobs are eroded as a result of the right-to-work movement’s attack on agency fees, this will be an added setback for women’s economic status in the United States.

ees, including police officers, firefighters and nurses, in addition to teachers. The named plaintiff in the case is Rebecca Friedrichs, a third grade teacher in Anaheim, CA. Friedrichs has been a teacher for nearly 30 years.

Represented by the Center for Individual Rights, Friedrichs and approximately 10 other plaintiffs are arguing that being required to pay agency fees – or “fair share” fees – to the CTA to help pay for the CTA’s work in bargaining for higher wages and better working conditions are in violation of their First Amendment right to free speech because she is not a member of the union and does not support its collective bargaining activities.

The right-to-work movement has consistently targeted women-dominated fields like home-care work and teaching.

Agency fees, or fees paid by non-union members to support collective bargaining efforts, have been deemed constitutional for 39 years, since the Supreme Court ruled in *Abood v. Detroit Board of Education*. This case held that agency fees are not in violation of the First Amendment if they support “legitimate, non-ideological, union activities germane to collective-bargaining representation.”

Even though she is not a member of the CTA, as a California teacher, Friedrichs benefits from the agreements the union secures through bargaining with the State of California.

Per *Abood*, Friedrichs and all teachers can also opt out of supporting any lobbying activity the CTA may engage in, so her money is not supporting political speech. As Justice Stephen Breyer said during oral arguments, negotiating for wages, hours and working conditions is “pretty far removed from the heart of

counsel of the National Women’s Law Center. “That is a really naked attempt to strip ability for public sector workers to bargain for very basic protections like better wages and health benefits.”

Women represent the majority – 55% – of public sector employees, and women public sector employees like Friedrichs who are covered by union collective bargaining agreements are paid 24% more than women who are not covered by collective bargaining agreements, according to the National Women’s Law Center.

The gender wage gap is also narrower among public sector union jobs: Women who are represented by public sector unions also tend to earn about 89.3% of



what their male counterparts earn [as opposed to the standard wage gap of 78 cents on the dollar]. Women in public sector unions are also more likely to have employer-based health-care coverage.

Thus eroding public sector unions' collective bargaining prowess could affect the wages and working conditions of many women who hold secure union jobs.

Indeed, the right-to-work movement has consistently targeted women-dominated fields like home-care work and teaching. In the 2014 Supreme Court decision of *Harris v. Quinn*, the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation represented the plaintiff, a home-care worker named Pam Harris.

Harris sued the state of Illinois and its governor, Pat Quinn, for assessing agency fees for the same reason Friedrichs is suing the CTA – Harris believed that the collective bargaining activity that her fees supported violated her First Amendment right to free speech. Harris said she opposed her home being a union work place.

The state of Illinois assessed these fees on all home-health aides who are paid by the state in order to support collective bargaining efforts of that sector. Several other states have similar practices, including California, Massachusetts, Missouri, Oregon and Vermont.

The Supreme Court disagreed with the state of Illinois' argument that states do have authority to assess such fees "to support legitimate, non-ideological, union activities germane to collective-bargaining representation."

At its core, the right-to-work movement is arguing that paying agency fees represents political speech. Labor organizers disagree.

"Our work is not political," Sheppard told Truthout. "Unfortunately the right-to-work movement has turned us into commodities and assets. It's like our health and our lives are commodities that we have to earn."

One California study echoes the benefits of collective bargaining that Sheppard speaks to. It shows that home-care workers in San Francisco who are represented by collective bargaining agreements earn better wages, and are more likely to stay in the job for a longer period of time.

As a result of *Harris v. Quinn*, Sheppard says Vermont Homecare United's revenue will now largely be dependent upon fees paid by their 1,300 members as opposed to the roughly 10,000 home-care workers in the state of Vermont.

Since home-care workers labor in individual homes as opposed to an office, communicating with her colleagues on wages, benefits and other issues germane to collective bargaining is not easy – making the revenue of agency fees even more critical.

"Home-care workers are spread throughout the state; we don't have an office bulletin board where you can hear news and updates about wages changing or benefits being cut," Sheppard said. "Our orga-

nizing is hard work."

Vermont Homecare United's contract must be renewed this year, and Sheppard is guardedly optimistic.

"We have faith that our contract renewal with the state of Vermont will sustain good terms," she said. "But being able to ensure this depends on our strength as an organizing force."

Now, if the Supreme Court's ruling in *Friedrichs* mirrors *Harris v. Quinn* in assessing that agency fees are in violation of the First Amendment, the uncertainty Sheppard is facing could be something that teachers, nurses, police officers and firefighters' unions will face going forward.

Katherine Myers has been an eighth grade writing teacher in Chicago for the past 20 years. She is also a Chicago Teachers Union [CTU] delegate at the Peck School in Chicago and a member of the CTU's contract negotiation team, or "Big Bargaining Team."

"As a union, the things we consistently ask for [through collective bargaining efforts] are librarians, nurses, social services, smaller class sizes, limits on high-stakes testing, racial equity across schools, and protection and retention of experienced teachers," Myers told Truthout. "Our work is about the well-being of women and families."

Both *Friedrichs v. CTA* and *Harris v. Quinn* are preceded by extensive state-level political activity by the right-to-work movement that also targeted women-dominated fields. Most prominently, in 2011, Gov. Scott Walker, R-WI, restricted the collective bargaining rights of teachers, nurses and child-care workers. [Walker deliberately excluded police and firefighters for fear that these employees would strike.] Michigan and Tennessee passed similar initiatives around this time.

Against the backdrop of overall gender-wealth disparities in the United States, the right-to-work movement's erosion of collective bargaining capacity is even more alarming.

Women systemically earn less than men across sectors. Women are more likely to fall into poverty in their elder years. Women often spend more on health care. And as they continue to be primarily responsible for unpaid domestic work, women are often struggling to care for children while working in low-wage sectors.

If strong public sector union jobs are eroded as a result of the right-to-work movement's attack on agency fees, this will be an added setback for women's economic status in the United States.

"Our organizing is about our quality of life," Sheppard said. "Fighting to improve our quality of life is not political."

Sheila Bapat is a recovered attorney who now writes about gender and economic justice. Her first book, Part of the Family? Nannies, Housekeepers, Caregivers, and the Battle for Domestic Workers' Rights, was published by Ig Publishing in 2014.

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President Obama And ISIS

BY HAROLD V. SARE

ISIS is a major focus in United States political debates between the Republicans and the Democrats. This discussion is stimulated by the San Bernardino terrorist shooting that killed 14 people and wounded many others.

Presidential candidate Donald J. Trump has complicated the political discussion by advocating that Muslims should not be admitted to the U.S. even if they are citizens returning from abroad. Congressional hearings on foreign and defense policy raise questions, arguing that the president has not developed a strategy for dealing with ISIS. The president has not provided a time line for critical military attacks and is unwilling to put "boots on the ground" in the conflict.

Dealing with the ISIS problem has many dimensions – such as the states involved, the various Middle Eastern conflicts, and the hesitancy of both Arab and European states. Actually, the U.S. faces a very delicate situation in the Middle East that has to be handled very carefully or we will face a serious and brutal war between two world religious orders – Christians and Muslims. This must be avoided! Sadly, the world has already experienced that big conflict many centuries ago.

It is obvious that many of our political leaders do not know the history of Christian-Muslim relations. In fact, Muslims, in two rather long periods of history as far back as the 7th Century AD, attempted to build a Muslim world. Interestingly, they developed the largest empire known to the history of man in the Middle East and parts of Europe. There was a real possibility that the entire western world would become Muslim.

In fact, when Muhammad died in 632 AD, almost all of what we know as Arabia was under his control. By the end of the century, Muhammad's followers had brought under their rule Armenia, Persia, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, North Africa, and Spain, and had moved into the Pyrenees in France [Houston Smith]. However, in 733 AD they were defeated by Charles Martel in the Battle of Tours, which stopped their take-over of all of Europe [Smith]. Over the centuries other wars were fought in central and eastern Europe. Muhammad created a movement that united large parts of the world and established a religion that became a major world religion.

ISIS is an extremist group that seeks to spread its version [or perversion] of Islam worldwide. That is why they have established a Caliphate and seek supporters from major parts of the world including Europe and the Americas, seeking to broaden the fight worldwide.

Today, there are more than 2.08 billion Muslims

located in the Middle East, North Africa, South and South-East Asia, and other parts of the world. [Christians have a population of about 2.18 billion.] President Obama and any subsequent president must keep these large population figures in mind when they deal with the Middle East. A worldwide religious war in the 21st Century would be brutal. It would be very different from past wars in that it would involve any persons, anywhere, and many heinous acts – not just soldiers on a battlefield.

There are major complications in working for a peaceful Middle East. Christians have their internal conflicts, but they are nothing like the conflicts in the Muslim world. The Muslim majority is Sunni; there is a minority, the Shias, located prominently in Iran and Iraq and other countries, including India and Pakistan. This divide goes back hundreds of years. It is prominent in world news today because Saudi Arabia recently executed a Shia religious figure, which has created a very bitter conflict between the Sunnis and the Shias.

The U.S. is caught up in that conflict because of the ISIS development in Syria and parts of Iraq. Further complications are created because Russia supports the Shia president of Syria, as does Iran, and the U.S. has called for the Syrian president to be removed. The U.S. in resisting ISIS is "working" with Iraq, and in reality is working with Iran in that fight.

Another conflict lies between the Turks and the Kurds. Turkey is an ally of the U.S. by way of NATO, but the U.S. finds itself assisting the Kurds who are fighting ISIS. The Turks seem to be more interested in resisting Kurds than fighting ISIS. Other conflicts exist in North Africa – Libya, for instance. Our relationships with Egypt and Saudi Arabia often are precarious. Also, we seem to be bogged down in Afghanistan, and are unsure of relationships with Pakistan.

President Obama has been very cautious about putting U.S. forces into the fight because he does not want to get the U.S. into a war with the Muslim world. ISIS would like to see the U.S. put military forces on the ground against them in order to recruit other Muslims to turn against the Christian West.

So many of our leaders simply have not studied the history of Muslim-Christian conflicts, and do not see future dangers when they argue that President Obama does not have a strategy or know what he is doing. I think he has a good grasp of U.S. problems and is acting accordingly.

The U.S. faces an extremely delicate situation in the Middle East, and much will depend on careful diplomacy to work our way through the existing problems. *Harold V. Sare is regents service professor of political science emeritus as Oklahoma State University.*

The Dystopian Slippery Slope To No Government

THE WATER THIEF

By Nicholas Lamar Soutter

CreateSpace Publishing

252 pages, \$14.99 [paperback]

BY JOHN WOOD

The *Water Thief* is Nicholas Lamar Soutter's futuristic dystopian answer to Ayn Rand's Objectivism in general and her fictional *Atlas Shrugged* more specifically. In Soutter's imagined world, corporations own everything that matters, especially people. The book's protagonist, Charles Thatcher, starts to wonder why this is, but laments: "Well, at least it's not government."

Thatcher, who is a private property of Ackerman Brothers Securities Corp., has one vice – he smokes to rebel against the system that doesn't quite seem right. In a world where he finds his wife wanting to sell herself to another corporation, the price of air, electricity, and especially water seem to always go way up. And his colleagues either want to just make money off of him or want to get him in trouble. It's not surprising he needs a smoke once in a while.

The consequence of getting into trouble is a big deal, even televised quite often to the delight of the populace – tossing people into lye vats to make profitable soap. The Ackerman Brothers corporate office gets its pound of flesh regardless.

Life changes for him when he stumbles across a report about a low-ranked woman who was in court defending herself against the accusation that she stole rainwater. In Thatcher's world, Ackerman Brothers owns all rainwater; contrariwise, this woman argues that it should be free.

For Charles, such information is invaluable and could mean a hefty promotion from his lowly Delta grade desk job in Perception Management. He reports

her as a dangerous revolutionary who believes in that long-lost idea – government and the common good.

The woman's disappearance takes him down a rabbit hole of sorts. Charles feels lonely after his wife leaves him because he wouldn't go with her to sell her to another corporation to get a better deal because it seemed risky.

He also finds himself worried about the whereabouts of the woman he reported on who "stole" rainwater. In search for the missing woman, he calls a "friend" agency where she worked. Thinking he was able to hire her, he is surprised to find another Low-sec [low security, or poor] woman who took her place, Kate. He has an intense conversation with her about how the whole corporate system is based on faulty logic, mainly on Rosenbaum's Bible, which is probably a pseudonym for Rand's writings. In this line of thinking, she says people "cling to the 'free hand of the market' as a perfect god."

While Charlie defends corporate rule, Kate holds her own during the conversation. She says, for example, "We've lost the ability to believe in any power but unadulterated self-interest. Communism may breed laziness, but capitalism breeds greed. And, it's killing us." Charlie asks, "And what does corporatism breed?" Kate responds, "Paranoia." Charlie is enthralled to have such a mind-opening debate lasting hours until 5 a.m.

He is immediately smitten.

Charlie goes back to work the next morning and stares at a now jarring poster praising Al Capone.

A coworker explains: "Everyone knows he was a great capitalist" because he made profits from alcohol and prostitution, but the government derogatorily called the "leviathan" was jealous of his success.

Later, his intrigue for Kate draws him to search for her outside the walls of his corporate stronghold to where the Lowsec's live off the grid on the outskirts of town. Before he is able to see Kate, he is beaten up by Lowsec ruffians for being a suspected Highsec before finding Kate.

Nevertheless, he finds himself staying overnight with Kate more and more and realizes he doesn't want to go back. However, once he disappears from work, Ackerman will get their pound of flesh by taking him back, making a profit from their property one way or another.

Kate explains to Charlie that Ackerman is already broke and has to keep up the impression that nothing is amiss. She says that the business will go under at any time, so he has to keep working until then.

Without spoiling the plot any more than I have already, this book is certainly well written and surely material for a sci-fi movie in the future.

To be clear, Soutter's book, not unlike Rand, has deeper meaning to his fiction novel. His book, named the Kirkus Reviews' Best Books of 2012, has deeper philosophical points in his Afterword. In Rand's fictional worldview of Objectivism, he points out that her theory works only if two truly impossible ideal requirements happen.

First, transactions "must be in good faith, the product of a mutual and informed agreement in which those making the agreement do not lie, cheat, steal, or deliberately dupe others."

Second, "people must be genuinely responsible for their own actions-subject to the negative consequences of their behavior."

In reality, these two things do not exist. Thatcher points out several examples of how corporations fail

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these requirements constantly.

For example, corporations themselves are created as limited liability and can write off negative consequences of their fight for profits – advertising itself is certainly duping others.

The problem is that corporate apologists will focus on government failures and inefficiencies, but ignore those of corporations.

Soutter points out that capitalism fails Rand's requirements, but ideally would likely work pretty

well if they were met, but “so would socialism.” The problem with capitalism is that it is what dominates today and has a blind spot in that “it is not now, nor will it ever be, the primary domain or function of a publicly held corporation to ask if there’s anything more important than money. It’s simply not their job. It’s the job of the people, and their government.”

Soutter’s tale moves readers from the current conservative mantra of “small government” to the slippery slope of a dystopian “no government,” reminiscent of the book’s opening with the British economist John Maynard Keynes’ ironic quote: “Capitalism is the astounding belief that the most wickedest of men

will do the most wickedest of things for the greatest good of everyone.” This is certainly another jab at Rand’s notion of rational self-interest.

Check out *The Water Thief*, which seems to be popular among liberals who favor “Occupy Wall Street.” But it is also likely to find an audience with those readers who recognize Rand’s imaginary tales, so often cited by Libertarians and many in the Tea Party, as just that – fiction.

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

Second Generation Wanderlust

MY LIFE ON THE ROAD

By Gloria Steinem

Randon House Publishing Group

304 pages, \$28

BY WANDA JO STAPLETON

When nationally-known feminist Gloria Steinem was a young girl, her father had the wanderlust.

As soon as his regular job [of booking dance bands] ended on Labor Day, he packed the family in the car and drove across country searching for adventure.

Along the way, he made money buying and selling antiques.

Gloria’s parents believed that travel was an education in itself. So she missed a lot of school, but got her education partially by reading road signs.

For example, rhyming Burma Shave signs like: “If you don’t know whose signs these are, you can’t have driven very far. Burma Shave.”

The “wanderlust” has become a part of Gloria Steinem’s present life as well. She says that, “for more than four decades, I’ve spent at least half of my

time on the road. So I began to make notes about many trips, past and present.”

This book details some of these trips, including two to Oklahoma City.

I already knew about Steinem before she got to Oklahoma City, because I had read the first issues of *Ms*, a magazine that she co-founded.

I’ll never forget the May 1973 issue. That issue contained a 1964 photo of Gerri Santoro, dead from a botched, illegal abortion, abandoned in a motel room, sprawled face down. Santoro’s bloody, nude abandoned corpse became a powerful symbol of the pro-choice movement.

In 2012, Steinem attended a tree planting ceremony on the Oklahoma City University campus in honor of her dear friend Wilma Mankiller. Mankiller, recently deceased, was the first female chief of the Cherokee Nation.

In 2013, Steinem again came to Oklahoma City as guest speaker at an event to benefit Planned Parenthood of Central Oklahoma. This well-attended event was held at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum.

I attended both the 2012 and 2013 events and heard her speak. It would be good if she would return to Oklahoma. We need her here.

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

Oklahoma Friends Meetings (Quakers)

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

- Author unknown

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

that simply cannot abide new or higher taxes, much less the thought of reining in corporate welfare that benefits its special interest benefactors.

Indeed, the session was barely 24 hours old when the Senate Finance Committee rejected a bill that would have prevented companies from double-dipping in the taxpayers' trough – simultaneously collecting on two separate tax incentives.

The reality is, the Republican legislative majority is so large and so disparate that it will be all but impossible this session to secure enough votes to resolve the most vexing budget and revenue issues.

Which means the GOP could pay a dear price for its failures in November, despite the advantage of a presidential election year that typically spurs more casual, straight-party voters to the polls.

Religious Bigotry

Oklahoma's junior U.S. Sen. James Lankford sorely needs a refresher course in civics, especially the separation of church and state.

The ex-Southern Baptist camp director and preacher can't seem to grasp that the U.S. Constitution – to which he routinely declares his fealty – guarantees all Americans an equal place in society, regardless of their religious preference or lack thereof.

On a far right radio program, Lankford recently expressed dismay that Democratic Rep. Alcee Hastings of Florida dared invite as his State of the Union guest an official from the Council on American-Islamic Relations, Broward County Deputy Sheriff Nazar Hamze.

After the show's host, Frank Gaffney, decried the "Muslim Brotherhood infiltration of Obama's" speech, Lankford lamented Hamze's attendance as "one of those sad moments" and suggested it undermined national security and American values:

... [T]here are parts of the world, and many Muslim countries around the world, where the individual is not valued, the individual is not important, the state is more important, and that's not who we are.

It's also an issue for us that we look at it and to say we believe in male and female and those individuals in the balanced rights of each of those, and that's not so for many others. So when people bring in someone who has any connection to CAIR or other organizations, I look at it and say, OK, you may be driving a message home of faith, this is not about faith, this is an American value and basic national security.

Lankford's theocratic rhetoric no doubt appeals to the GOP's evangelical fringe – a world inhabited by the likes of Rep. Sally Kern and self-proclaimed pa-

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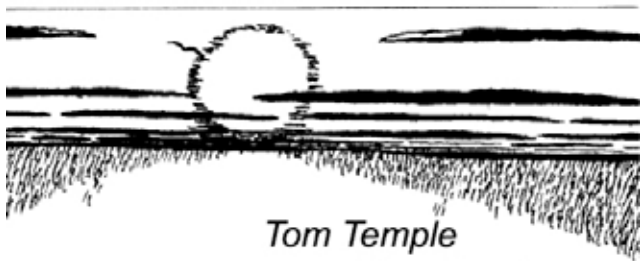
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triot preacher Paul Blair – but it is a real disservice to the America the Oklahoma senator claims to love.

In fact, it betrays the wisdom of America's Founders who strove to create a society free of religious tests.

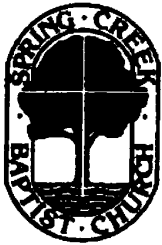


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Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Republicans saluted Joe Allbaugh's selection as interim corrections director. Why? He was part of the team that produced America's worst presidency – George W. Bush's. He also was campaign manager for Rick Perry's disastrous 2012 campaign. Oops!

We, too, succumbed to Powerball fever last month, buying a few tickets ... just in case. Despite reports of slumping sales, the average U.S. household spent \$630 on lottery tickets in 2014 – more than on sports tickets, books, video games, movies and music combined.

The “marijuana movement” isn't just figurative – it's literal. A new Harris Poll finds one in five Millennials would consider moving to a state because pot is legal there.

It's not your imagination: 2015 was hottest year on record, eclipsing the mark set in 2014 – temps up 1.62 degrees over the 20th Century average. Sadly, Sen. Jim Inhofe's brain remains frozen solid.

Staggering: Oxfam reports 62 people – 53 of them men – control as much wealth as the rest of the world's 3.6 billion residents combined. Superrich wealth increased \$542 billion since 2010.

Ringier endorsement: Oklahoma Sen. Jim Inhofe is backing Florida Sen. Marco Rubio's presidential bid. Of course, Inhofe supported former Texas Gov. Rick Perry four years ago. He's as successful picking candidates as he is picking runways.

Is Sen. Lindsey Graham auditioning to become a pundit? Asserting the GOP would lose if it nominated either Donald Trump or Sen. Ted Cruz, Graham noted: “Whether it's death by being shot or poisoning doesn't really matter. I don't think the outcome will be substantially different.”

Notable: The average age of first time mothers in the U.S. is now 26 – highest ever.

About 3.3 million people, many of them seniors, were victimized by a tech-support con last year at a cost of \$1.5 billion – an average of one American duped out of \$454 every 10 seconds. – AARP

Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

ers in the general election in November. We can make our stand for Sanders and not worry about the GOP-ers winning. That's the great benefit to Demos and Indies in this year's primary season. Sanders's supporters need not feel guilty about not supporting the establishment candidate in the primary.

On the complimentary issue of our gay equality being recognized by federal and state laws and falling into line with establishment quid pro quo, I'm sick of being led around by the nose by the A-list self-appointed leaders – gay and straight – who tell us progress is being made behind the scenes on defeating anti-gay bills but our “friends and allies” risk their elected positions if they're seen publicly supporting any facet of gay/lesbian equality. I won't be a doormat or the stepladder for other people any more. If I sound pissed and cranky, then good, I'm using the right words.

We out-gays have been coached for years to make ourselves visible, to tell our stories to the people we do business with, to be unafraid of letting people know how non-threatening we are. Wouldn't you think the same openness would work for our closeted friends and allies by demonstrating to *their* friends that this wanton, baseless discrimination directed at gay and lesbian taxpayers has to stop? If our enemies see no opposition from their own side of the aisle they assume they're holding all the cards.

As blogger Robyn Morton put it,

... Maybe you don't really understand what you're asking of me when you advise me to make decisions based on “practicality.” And notice, I'm not even saying you're wrong. What I am saying is that for me to choose Hillary over Bernie right now is to literally choose to give up on the best chance we have ever had to finally become a reasonable, civilized nation, and say instead “No, we can't do it, I am too scared of what might happen.”

If we don't elect Bernie, but at least we try, then maybe someday – four years from now, eight, maybe when my kids are grown, who knows – we will make forward progress again. But to lay down now and accept the position that our political system is so thoroughly bankrupt that I should drop any expectation of living beyond paycheck to paycheck in order to prevent something even worse from happening ... well, that's it. It's over.

The powerful can sit back and relax, knowing that



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*Only a fool would try to deprive working
men and women of the right to join the union
of their choice. —Dwight D. Eisenhower*

if we didn't stand up now, we never will – they know their manipulations work, their place [and ours] is set. We shut the door and I embrace the hand-to-mouth class status we've tried to move out of for so long.

James Nimmo
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

I read the letter to the editor from Tom Ellis in the January edition of The Observer. I thought he must have read my mind.

Chris Kyle was a good guy with a gun. So was Chad Littlefield. Both of them were sharp shooters. Chris Kyle was, supposedly, the most lethal sniper in the history of the U.S. military. But they were both murdered at a shooting range in Erath County, TX on Feb. 2, 2013.

They had their mentally unstable murderer outnumbered 2-1, and they lost.

Every time there is a terrorist attack or a mass shooting you get some obnoxious loudmouth like Wayne LaPierre or Donald Trump on television bloviating about if only some of those people had had guns. Really?

If Chris Kyle and Chad Littlefield couldn't prevail in a shootout, what hope would there be for an average person?

The only thing you get with more guns is more dead people.

Debbie Lewis
Garland

Editor, The Observer:

I recently watched an interview on PBS with Ralph Nader and so enjoyed his comment on voting for president. This is not a direct quote, but he said there should be a box for "None of the Above" and if no candidate received a majority, the vote would have to be held again only with all new candidates. Truer words were never spoken in my estimation.

Deborah Wolek
Guthrie

Editor, The Observer:

Love The Observer. Questions to ponder:

Why does Gov. Fallin skip the earthquake meeting and go see Donald Trump and idiot Sarah Palin?

Why do poor Okies gush over the Republican Party? And take Social Security and Medicare, but bash government?

At least there is a glimmer of hope in the Democratic wins in those special elections.

Jana Wilson
Choctaw

Editor, The Observer:

Political chameleons worry me. They take on the color of anyone more powerful around them so I can never be sure what they will do next.

The current examples of these "Slick Willies" are:

Donald Trump, running for president; after years as governor cutting taxes, University of Oklahoma President David Boren wants to raise taxes on the backs of the poor; and David's son, Dan Boren, is exploring a run for governor in 2018.

Dan Boren, Muskogee's ex-Democratic congressman, needs to switch parties and run as a Republican for governor.

Here's why:

1. We, Democrats, have had enough turncoats – David Boren, George Nigh, Brad Henry – in the governor's office. Tax cuts for the rich by Boren and Nigh led to the state's current financial crisis and Henry refused to build our Democratic Party.

2. Dan Boren showed his Republican colors when, in Congress, he voted against President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act.

3. Dan Boren was in the gallery cheering when his hunting buddy, Republican Paul Ryan, was sworn in as U.S. House speaker last October.

Ryan's wife, Janna Little Ryan, from Madill, is Dan Boren's first cousin.

Ryan is "the enemy" for us, Democrats, for proposing to change Medicare to a voucher plan or premium support system.

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner
Wagoner

Eyes

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

of those who would be our leaders for a better understanding of the emotions that will guide or impede their actions. 2] Pay attention to what the candidates say – and more importantly, what they do over time. 3] Determine the knowledge base that will inform them in decisions they make.

Finally, as citizens making decisions about our leaders in the voting booth, we must check the emotions, values and knowledge that guides us as we vote.

Ann Dapice, PhD, is executive director of the Institute of Values Inquiry, a 501(c)(3) research organization, and director of Education and Research for T.K. Wolf, Inc., a 501(c)(3) American Indian organization. She consults with the University of Pennsylvania on development of Native American Programs.

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Why GOP's Fence Fantasy Is A Farce

BY JIM HIGHTOWER

A long time ago, in a not-so-faraway land, a civilization existed that was governed through a fairly rational political system. Even conservative candidates for high office had to have a good idea or two – and be quasi-qualified.

That land was the USA. It still exists as a place, but these days, Republican candidates don't even have to be qualified – much less sane – to run for the highest office in the land.

All they need is the backing of one or more billionaires, a hot fear-button issue to exploit and a talent for pandering without shame to the most fanatical clique of know-nothings in their party. Also, they must be able to wall themselves off from reality, erecting a wall of political goop around their heads so thick that even facts and obvious truth cannot get through to them.

Indeed, the GOP's "One Great Issue" of the 2016 campaign for president is: The Wall. Ted Cruz practically snarls when he declares again and again that he'll "build a wall that works."

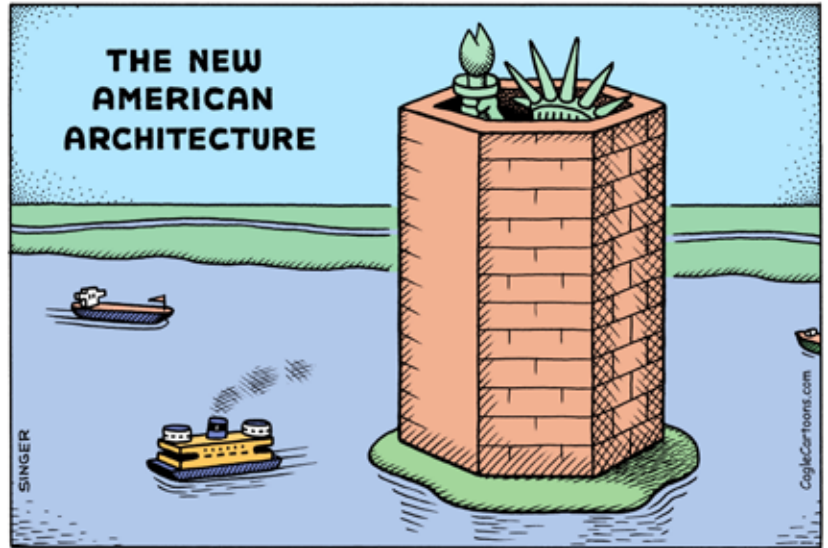
Marco Rubio is absolute about it: "We must secure our border, the physical border, with a wall, absolutely." And Donnie Trump has basically built his campaign atop his fantasy of such an imperial edifice: "We're going to do a wall," he commands, as though he's barking at one of his hotel construction crews.

There are, of course, certain problems that you might expect them to address, such as the exorbitant cost of the thing, the extensive environmental damage it'll do, and the futility of thinking that people aren't clever enough to get around, over, under or through any wall. But don't hold your breath waiting for any common sense to intrude on their macho posturing.

Trump even made a TV ad depicting hordes of marauding Mexicans invading our country – proof that a *huge* wall is necessary! Only, the film footage he used is not of Mexican migrants, but of Moroccans fleeing into Spain. But after all, when trying to stir up fear of foreigners, what the hell does honesty have to do with it?

A proper wall, we're told, makes good neighbors. But an 18-foot high, 2,000-mile-long wall goes way beyond proper, and it both antagonizes your neighbor and screams out your own pitiful fear and weakness.

Besides, haven't we been trying this for years? With the Secure Fence Act of 2006, Congress mandated construction of a wall along the 1,954 miles of our border with Mexico. A decade later, guess how many miles have been completed? About 650. It turns out that erecting a monstrous wall is not so simple after all.



First, it becomes prohibitively expensive – about \$10 billion just for the materials to build it from the tip of Texas westward to the Pacific, not counting labor costs and maintenance.

Second, there's the prickly problem of land acquisition – to erect the scattered segments of the first 650 miles of fence, the federal government had to sue hundreds of property owners to take their land. Odd, isn't it, that right-wing politicians who loudly rail against overreaching Big Government now favor using government muscle to grab private property?

Third, it's impossible to fence the whole border – hundreds of miles of it are in the Rio Grande's flood plain, and more miles are on the steep mountainous terrain of southern Arizona.

Trump, Cruz, Rubio and the other "just build a wall" simpletons either don't know what they're talking about or are deliberately trying to dupe voters.

Before you buy a 2,000-mile wall from them, take a peek at the small part already built – because of the poor terrain and legal prohibitions, it's not one long fence, but a fragment here, and another there, with miles of gaps in between.

Anyone wanting to cross into the U.S. can just go to one of the gaps and walk around the silly fence.

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