

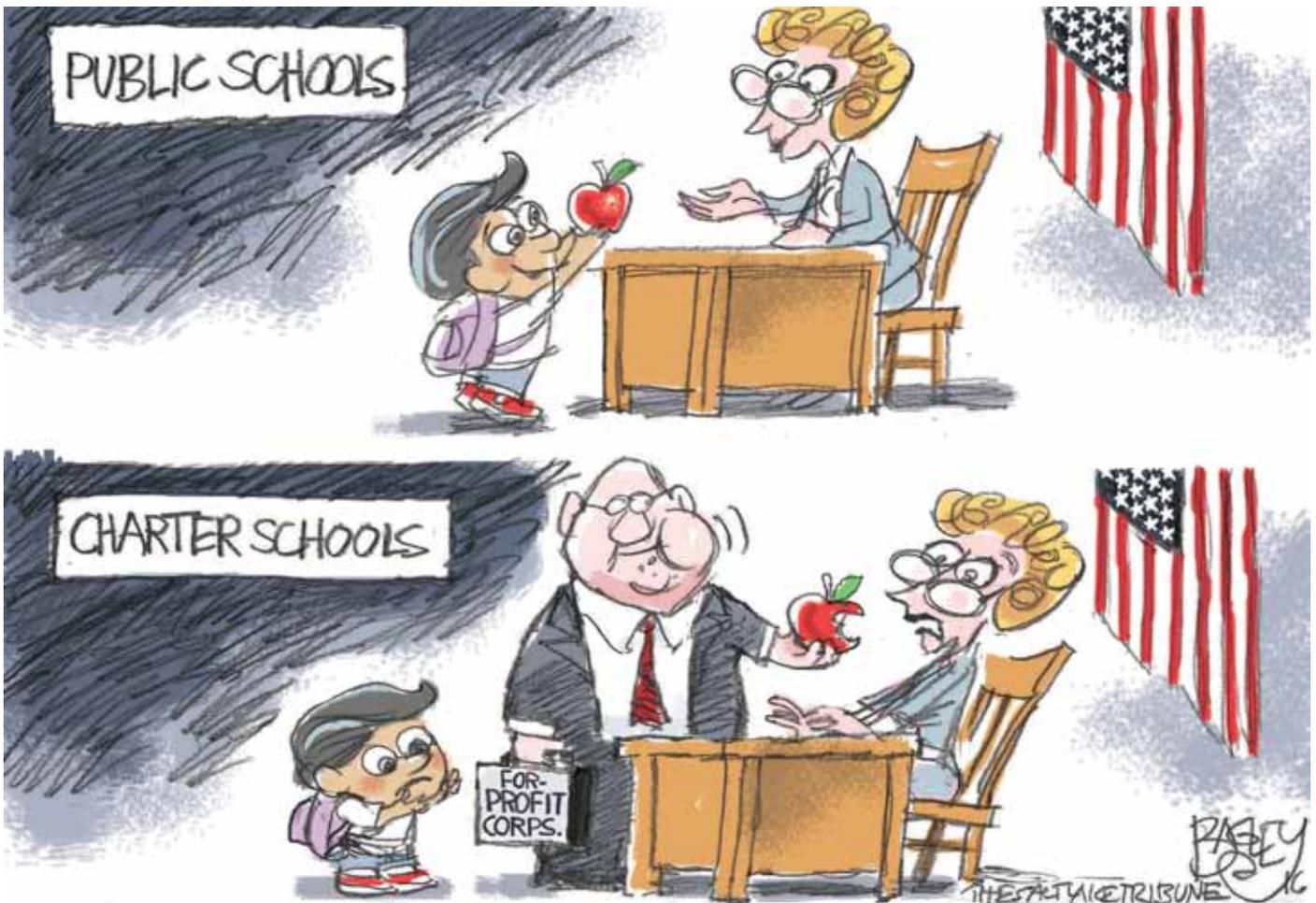
THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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CHARTER CREEP

Privatizers Taking Aim At Rural Schools



Special Report: Pages 24-25

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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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

FOUNDING PUBLISHER

Helen B. Troy [1932-2007]

FOUNDING EDITOR

Frosty Troy [1933-2017]

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LETTERS TO EDITOR

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Observations

Don't Celebrate Yet

Even though seven teacher pay raise bills won committee approval in the session's first month, don't pop the champagne corks just yet. Much legislative heavy lifting remains.

In stamping approval on pay raises of between \$500 and \$10,000, House and Senate committees took steps to defuse an increasingly irate pro-public education majority already gathering pitchforks and torches in the event lawmakers again fail to make a major investment in schools and teachers.

But the salary-hike hoorah means little if legislators cannot agree on a way to fund it. And so far, at least, there is precious little consensus on how to do so – especially with another revenue emergency crippling this year's lean budget and a nearly \$900 million hole to fill in FY 2018.

In fact, positions are hardening: 27 members of the Legislature's Republican supermajority adamantly oppose Gov. Mary Fallin's proposal to expand sales taxes to 164 services, while Democrats demand a rollback of personal income and gross production tax cuts that rob the state of \$2 billion-plus in annual revenue.

It's early in the session, but it's difficult to see how Fallin and legislative leaders can bridge the ideological divide in order to solve the state budget's long-term structural deficit.

As state Finance Secretary Preston Doerflinger noted, revenues have slowed to the point that lawmakers have no more budget "tricks" and "gimmicks" available to bandage the growing, self-inflicted fiscal wound.

In other words, don't hold your breath waiting for another oil and gas boom to bail us out. Even if it happens, Oklahoma won't be able to provide essential state services for a growing population unless it addresses the nation's lowest drilling taxes.

Fallin, Doerflinger and state Treasurer Ken Miller publicly acknowledge that Oklahoma has a revenue, not a spending, problem. Unfortunately, too many GOP legislative leaders and Lt. Gov. Todd Lamb cling to

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THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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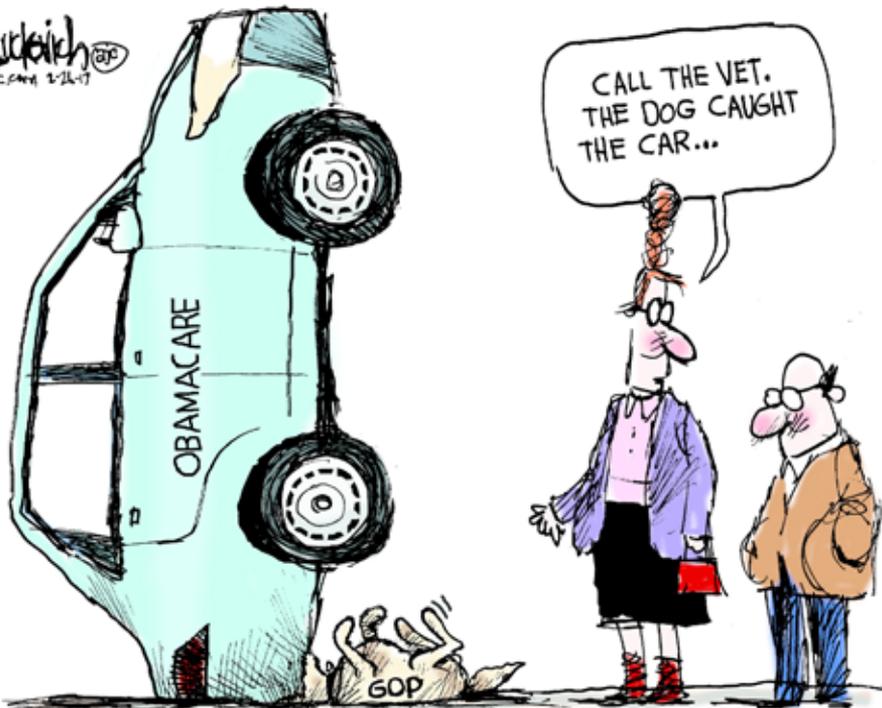
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Observerscope

MIKE LUCKY
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Thanks to all honoring Founding Editor Frosty Troy's memory with gifts to the Oklahoma Observer Democracy Foundation. Each dollar helps us keep alive Frosty's and Helen's dream of creating a more progressive Oklahoma.

Laurel: To former Rep. Mike Shelton, honored with the Opio Toure Award by the Oklahoma County Democratic Party. The term-limited Shelton is sorely missed at NE 23 and Lincoln Blvd.

We remember when newly appointed state Attorney General Mike Hunter, then a young state rep, was considered a far right kook. In today's wingnut-driven GOP, he's positively moderate.

Dart: To Sen. Anastasia Pittman, whose shameful vote for vouchers ensured committee passage of SB 560. She defines D-I-N-O.

We mourn the passing of our friend and longtime subscriber Dr. Ed Kessler, first director of the National Severe Storms Laboratory and a fixture at Cleveland County's Cornbread and Beans luncheons.

Laurel: To Gov. Mary Fallin, threatening to veto the state budget if lawmakers fail to invest in vital state services. Her sales tax plan is a disaster, but at least she recognizes state has a revenue, not a spending problem.

Ignorance is this: 35% of Americans surveyed recently didn't know ObamaCare and Affordable Care Act are the same. Confusion is worse among 18-29 year olds earning less than \$50k. – Morning Consult poll

Dart: To U.S. Sen. James Lankford, working to dismantle church-state separation. The rightwing Baptist wants to free ministers to preach partisan politics without jeopardizing their church's tax-exempt status.

With redistricting looming, Democrats know '18 governor's race is critical. Already, former state Sen. Connie Johnson declared her candidacy. House Minority Leader Scott Inman won't be far behind. And OKC restaurateur Cathy Cummings launched a Draft Drew Edmondson movement on Facebook.

Laurel: To Pastors for Oklahoma Kids, a new ecumenical group fighting for better-funded and -supported public schools and against vouchers. Visit PastorsForOklahomaKids.com for more details.

We extend condolences to state Rep. George Young in the loss of his wife, the Rev. Dr. Thelma Chambers-Young, former University Place Christian Church pastor and Epron June Monson Clergy Consortium executive director.

Dart: To Senate Judiciary Chair Anthony Sykes and Vice-Chair Natham Dahm, working overtime to dismantle the state's independent judiciary. Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum, writ large.

Tulsa Rep. Dan Kirby's resignation amid a sexual harassment scandal affords Democrats a shot to close the GOP's state House supermajority. Special election primary is May 9, general July 11.

Laurel: To OK County Commissioner Willa Johnson, honored with the Kate Barnard Award by the Oklahoma Commission on the Status of Women. Well deserved!

Demographically, the male-dominated Legislature is stuck in the early 20th Century – only 13% are women and only 4% are African American, even though more than half state's population is female and 7% is black.

Dart: To rookie Rep. Travis Dunlap, who wants to make it more difficult for couples citing incompatibility to divorce. Yet another "small government" Republican meddling in private lives.

Mark you calendars: The Observer's Mar. 30 Newsmakers features former AG Drew Edmondson and Rep. Cyndi Munson. See back cover for details.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 44

Letters



Editor, The Observer:

Thank you for publishing your comments and those of others at Frosty's funeral service. It was on one of those mornings that I thought it best not to be driving on the turnpike into the city. My disappointment was lessened when I received The Observer and even more so with the inclusion of Frosty's "Wow, what a woman" reminiscing!

Mr. Troy will always be No. 1 on our Outstanding Oklahoman list – courage, integrity, intelligence plus that razor sharp wit! He excelled as cheerleader for public education and he was the provocative voice against unsavory politicians and policy.

I regret the times we did not thank him and Helen sufficiently for their hard work. With prayers for Marti and Philip ...

Beth Smalley
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Seventy-five years ago last month, Executive Order No. 9066 incarcerated all Japanese citizens for the duration [of World War II]. The only exceptions were the

young Japanese soldiers who volunteered to fight in the European theater where many were highly decorated for valor in combat.

All Japanese were expected to be loyal to Emperor Hirohito and consequently had high probability to become subversives opposing our war efforts. Were such notions true, there surely would have been cases of espionage, sabotage, and sedition during the six months it took our government to round up all people of Japanese descent, American citizens or not. Not a single such case occurred.

Did we learn any lessons from that experience?

Frank Silovsky
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

I often see the Religious Right as no different than the Taliban and other such groups. The American Taliban wants government based on its interpretation of scripture and no one else's. Teach scripture in schools, but only the King James' version as they do not recognize any other that does not adhere to the KJV interpretation.

Our basic public school system

derived from Sunday school which had little to do with religion but to help the child labor force to learn to read and write. If we had banned those religious schools we could still have kids working in the mills. Or as Newt Gingrich suggests, let the poor kids clean bathrooms in school to learn a work ethic.

Muslim women must be submissive and under the power of the men. Just look at us with the anti-abortion legislation being pushed around the country, along with attempts to deny birth control to women while paying for Viagra for the guys. I guess women are not able to make important decisions for themselves. At least they don't have to wear veils like those Muslim women, yet.

The American Taliban claims it is not violent. We get upset about the violence, but we have right-wing fundamentalist religious leaders here who call for the assassination of foreign leaders. When someone kills a doctor for doing abortions or blows up a clinic, all we get from the Right is, "we don't approve, but we understand why they did it." If it is a Muslim religious leader that speaks that way, we beat the drums and call for military strikes.

Those silly extremist Muslims want to revert to the times and society where wealthy, educated men controlled the Muslim world. Not like those on the far right who want to take us back to the days when the robber barons of the industrial age ruled the country and workers had no rights. Just listen to the CEOs who tell their low-income workers that they can get by if they gave up more. Just ask the Walmart workers who helped raise donations of food and such for the Walmart workers who fell under the poverty level.

Perhaps it is time to put down the hate mongering and actually try to live a Christian life instead of demanding others conform to one group's point of view. Evange-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 45



Sketchy Supreme Court Selection

What would it say about Oklahoma if one of our sitting Supreme Court justices not only violated the letter of the law, but also the spirit?

In the case of recently seated Patrick Wyrick, it's no idle musing.

A plain reading of the state Constitution's Article 7, Section 2 suggests Wyrick fails the residency requirement to fill the high court's District 2 [southeastern Oklahoma] seat, vacated by the year-end retirement of Justice Steven Taylor.

"Each Justice, at the time of his election or appointment," the constitution declares, "... shall have been a qualified elector in the district for at least one year immediately prior to the date of filing or appointment ..."

In March 2016 – less than a year before Gov. Mary Fallin appointed him to succeed Taylor – Wyrick was registered to vote in Cleveland County, which is located in District 5, not in District 2. Which means he declared his residence to be in District 5, not in District 2.

Was he "qualified" at the time to register to vote in District 2? Perhaps. He's originally from Atoka. And he claimed in his high court application that he's been an Atoka resident since birth.

He theoretically could have declared an Atoka address as his voting address anytime. But he didn't ... until October 2016, two months after Taylor's retirement announcement and two months before the seat became vacant.

You may not think Wyrick's eligibility is a big deal. You may not have even known that Oklahoma Supreme Court justices are appointed by district. And it may not matter to you.

But it's a problem. A potentially serious problem.

The ACLU of Oklahoma, representing two District 2 residents, has challenged Wyrick's right to hold the seat, effectively asking the other eight justices to decide whether their new colleague can stay.

In the meantime, any cases in which Wyrick par-

ticipates and in which decisions are rendered could be clouded, if it turns out he was an unqualified, improperly seated justice.

So how could this happen?

The non-partisan, 15-member Judicial Nominating Commission reviewed applicants to fill the vacancy and recommended three possible candidates to the governor, who chose Wyrick, the state's solicitor general.

Did the JNC somehow miss contradictions in Wyrick's application – in one section he declared himself a lifelong Atoka resident, in another that he's lived in Broken Arrow, Norman, Moore and Oklahoma City the last 10 years?

Or did they parse the meaning of "qualified elector" to include anyone who *could* register to vote in District 2? Someone who simply owns property there? Is heir to property there? Once lived there?

For more than half a century, the JNC has mostly provided a hiccup-free process for governors to fill appellate court vacancies. But its process is opaque, akin to the College of Cardinals picking a new pope. You never know how the JNC picks its finalists. You simply wait for a puff of white smoke signaling the work is done.

For its part, Fallin's office punted when asked about Wyrick's residency problem, saying simply the JNC "exercised its constitutional authority" to select three candidates and the governor "accordingly selected Patrick Wyrick to fill the vacant position." Case closed.

Except, of course, that it isn't. Wyrick's eligibility will be determined amid a legislative assault on the state's independent judiciary, including a proposed remake of the JNC. Will the Wyrick dust-up strengthen the partisan forces hell-bent on overhauling a system that mostly works well?

Hopefully not. There is no reason to throw the baby out with the bath water just because the residency requirement was misinterpreted, misapplied or ignored in one case.



There Oughta Be A Law ...

BY CAL HOBSON

Hold your horses, or epithets, Observer observers. I realize most folks believe we have too many of these +%#@”# things already but since they are going to keep on sprouting, like dandelions in the spring, let me jump on the law-making bandwagon and offer a few of my own. So having fun!

- There ought to be a law that requires candidates for the presidency of the United States to prove they have some minimal understanding of democracy. Completion of a seventh grade civics course with a passing grade of 70 will suffice. Under this common sense proposal, retesting will be allowed twice but upon the third failure individuals would be forever barred from running for any elected office except county commissioner in Eastern Oklahoma. So glad.

- There ought to be a law that requires President Donald Trump to at least meet the modest ethical and financial standards currently imposed on those who serve in his cabinet. Such logical steps as the release of his tax returns and divestiture of assets that create obvious conflicts of interest only make sense. It would also clear up the rampant confusion among my devoted Trump pals who hate the lyn’ liberal press

for sayin’ their man is in violation of the immigration clause of the Constitution. It’s the emolument clause I’ve told them over and over, but they say emolument is a laxative. Who knew?

- There ought to be a law that outlaws anyone over the age of 18 from purposely having orange hair. Exceptions would be made for professional clowns, orangutans that look more human than most humans at Nascar races and, lastly, Oklahoma State University President Burns Hargis whose face and hair always look a bit orangy, especially when someone reminds him his salary is less than OU Prez David Boren. Sad.

- There ought to be a law that mandates Congress persons to physically attend at least one Town Hall mob scene annually in their own state. Although nothing relevant would be discussed, participants could have a great time interrupting each other, making obscene hand gestures for the cameras and booing the lawmakers they just overwhelmingly re-elected for doing what they promised to do. Of course, our busy DC denizens of democracy will find plenty of time to conduct dozens of confidential, closed-door confabs with Chamber of Commerce pooh bahs. In order to also participate, non-pooh bahs must show

Voter ID card, birth certificate, passport and at least five Republican candidate contributor statements. So normal.

- There ought to be a law that repeals the Bill of Rights. By doing so, the fake press will have more time to investigate what Americans really care about, such as [1] did Nordstrom make the right decision about Ivanka's stuff; [2] will future oligarch Barron Trump ever smile while on TV, spend one night in the White House or not be required to wear a tie to bed; and [3] has alternative president Steve Bannon told new EPA mis-manager Scott Pruitt and Energy Czar Rick Perry they and their agencies have been abolished by executive order? Upside is both Scott and Rick can now become full-time employees at Devon Energy instead of just part-time. So planned.

- There ought to be a law that requires Congress to spend at least as much of our tax money on us – the other 325,666,999 Americans – as the Secret Service must in guarding, lodging, flying, feeding, dressing, arming, heating, cooling, coddling, analyzing and mollifying the 20 Trumps. So glad.

- Speaking of public safety, there ought to be a law that requires every parishioner in Oklahoma to carry a loaded pistol into church. Sounds crazy – and it is – but here's why: State Rep. Jeff Coody, R-Lawton, authored a bill that allows anyone – repeat, anyone – to have a loaded firearm in a vehicle. No background check required. No need to prove sanity. No license to carry permit. No nothin' except to be armed and ready. When quizzed in a House committee about this nutty proposal, Jeff explained that in the Old Testament Jesus told Peter to always strap on his newly sharpened sword when mounting the family donkey for the dangerous trek into Bethlehem to buy locally produced goat cheese, fishes and bread loaves from the lake of Galilee, Egyptian dates and fine French wines imported via the Loire Valley.

Now I get it. Sword/gun. Then/now. Samo/samo. The bill passed. So absurd.

- There ought to be a law that requires the parents

of kids enrolled in Norman's superb public schools – at least those who voted last November for incumbent Sen. Rob Standridge rather than Oklahoma's Teach of the Year, Shawn Sheehan – to explain briefly ... why? I politely propose this requirement because after being sworn in for a new term, full-time pharmacist but only part-time thinker Rob immediately filed SB 560 that will divert even more scarce public dollars from Norman schools to private ones. Meanwhile, back in his high school math classes, full-time educator Shawn, age 31, married and with a one-year-old baby, has more recruiting offers to teach out of state than local basketball phenom Trae Young did to dribble a round ball brilliantly anywhere he chose in the nation. Sen. S – so wrong for Norman.

- There ought to be a law that requires our fashion plate president to occasionally wear any color tie except red or blue. However, regardless of color, no string, bolo, western, cravat or regular neck wear can extend below our leader's private parts unless designed and sold exclusively by favorite daughter Ivanka's hot, new accessory fashion line available only to powerful dictators in a hurry to perhaps reshape the shape of the world. Trademarked company name is "Keepin' Up With Putin, Don John and Un" but the NYSE shares will be issued by Goldman Sachs under ticker name "PDJU," pronounced "pigeoned you." So true.

- Finally, and thankfully, there ought to be a law requiring members of the world's most deliberative body, the United States Senate, to answer the following question before being sworn into office: Would you, Sen. Newbie, vote for a resolution that allows a mentally ill person to legally buy guns and then move in next door to you and your Newbie family?

A majority of the NRA-owned nitwits did just that Feb. 15 on a bi-partisan vote of 57-43. So very sad.

And that should make you so very mad.

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

Taking Another Swing At Divorce

BY JAMES STOVALL

House Bill 1277, authored by Rep. Travis Dunlap, proposes to restrict courts from granting a divorce based upon grounds of incompatibility if one spouse objects to the divorce. The bill would prolong the waiting period for couples wanting a divorce and would also require that the party at fault pick up the tab for the litigation that would likely ensue. Dunlap's idea is that if the Legislature makes divorce more difficult, then fewer people would seek a divorce.

Even under the best of circumstances divorce is plenty difficult for the individuals involved and it places additional stress on our society as a whole.

Good will, generosity and respect are often in short supply when divorce happens. Effective solutions to the problem are not easy to find. Encouraging a court battle over who is at fault is not a scenario that will likely help anyone get through the pain and upset that divorce usually involves.

Some observers of our current system have said that we live in a disposable society in which too many people think of marriage as something that can be lightly tossed away. Indeed, many couples should work harder before giving up on a marriage. For the vast majority of children, parent's divorce is a frightening and difficult transition. Unfortunately for some

children, the battle continues for years after the divorce is finalized.

As a professional divorce mediator, I work with people that have made the very difficult choice to end a marriage. Most of the couples that I work with have not made the decision lightly. For most, extending the waiting period would only prolong the uncertainty and chaos that is part of divorce. This period of uncertainty can be especially hard on children seeking to re-establish equilibrium following a divorce. For most couples, the more time they spend in court playing the blame game, the less likely it becomes that they will be able to establish a cooperative parenting arrangement following the divorce.

More and more couples are looking for a respectful and relatively peaceful approach to ending a marriage. The driving force behind such a move is usually a desire to protect the children from the effects of a messy breakup. Couples also want to avoid the prolonged and expensive battle that often takes place when litigation ensues. The legal system too often pits parents against one another in an adversarial process that further increases hostility and reduces their ability to work together in the future as parents.

Policymakers wanting to reduce the negative impact of divorce might be wise to look at efforts intended to

encourage cooperation between couples through and after divorce. Many states have successfully made mediation a mandatory step in the process of divorce. Mediation reduces costs and allows couples to make their own decisions regarding how they will parent together and how they will divide up assets. Most people prefer to avoid handing over decision-making to a judge in these matters. With a trained professional guiding the process, mediation also has major advantages over the high-risk “do-it-yourself” divorce that often generates more problems than it solves. Most often, a professional mediator can guide individuals through a process that helps parents make decisions that benefit the children being affected by the divorce.

For many years now around the country, mediation has proven to be a safe, inexpensive and relatively satisfying way of helping couples make difficult choices that are part of a divorce. A skilled professional mediator can guide a couple through the minefield that divorce so often represents. Mediation doesn't magically take away all of the turmoil of a divorce but it does increase the chances of a peaceful and respectful path to ending a marriage.

James Stovall has served as Director of the Mediation Institute in Oklahoma City since 1992

Take A Shot For The Common Good

BY DAVID PERRYMAN

San Francisco is famous for its cable car lines. Since cable cars have controls on only in their front end, they must be turned around at each end of the line. Turntables have been used for centuries when trains are “headed in the wrong direction.”

On a number of levels, Oklahoma is in serious need of a massive turntable.

One area that needs such a 180-degree reversal relates to childhood immunization and the dropping rate of vaccination.

In Oklahoma, the problem is two-fold. Even though scientists have produced vaccines that have all but wiped out Polio, Measles, Mumps, Diphtheria, Per-

tussis, Meningitis and other serious infections, parents have become lax about their childrens' shots. Secondly, despite a number of outbreaks around the country over the past 24 months, a group of Oklahoma parents are pushing back against mandatory vaccination.

In early 2015, 17 states were experiencing outbreaks of measles. Nearly every other state heard the wake-up call and began tightening their childhood immunization laws to counter the epidemic, but Oklahoma headed the other direction with efforts to expand the vaccination requirement exceptions.

Nowhere in society is “the Common Good” more applicable than the area of immunization. Because of a concept called “herd immunity” the refusal of to immunize is an open invitation for a number of preventable diseases to “go viral” in the traditional sense of the phrase.

So in a pre-vaccination world where the U.S. had 16,000 cases of polio per year and now has zero and had 530,000 cases of measles per year and now has around 100, there can be little debate over the value of a vaccinated population.

For U.S. children born in 2009, routine childhood immunizations are projected to prevent 42,000 early deaths and 20 million cases of disease, according to Vaccinate Oklahoma.

Deborah Astley

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Herd immunity exists when the vaccination of a significant portion of a population provides protection to those who have not yet developed immunities or who have not been vaccinated. According to the Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Organization, so long as 94% of the population has received the measles vaccine, herd immunity exists.

According to Vaccinate Oklahoma, only 73% of Oklahoma's children have received all recommended vaccines.

During the 2014-15 school year, 571 Oklahoma children who were not fully vaccinated were allowed to use loopholes and enroll in school, thereby placing other children at risk.

Unimmunized children are susceptible to preventable diseases, can transmit infections to individuals who have compromised immune systems and can contribute to outbreaks of disease, such as the measles epidemic that started at Disneyland in late 2014.

The bottom line is that you and I have children and grandchildren with immature immunity systems and elderly parents with compromised immunity systems who are being placed at risk because of non-immu-

nized persons who have been misinformed about vaccines.

Claims that vaccines are unsafe have been disproven by a robust body of medical literature, including a thorough review by the National Academy of Medicine.

Despite claims to the contrary, thousands of studies with hundreds of thousands of subjects from all over the world have failed to show a link between autism or any other neurodevelopmental illness for that matter, according to reports of Vaccinate Oklahoma and its president, Dr. Thomas Kuhls.

"The anti-vaccine movement has forced scientists and public health officials to rigorously scrutinize the safety of vaccines, over and over again," says Dr. Kuhls.

Now is the time to find Oklahoma's turntable and reverse course on the attempts to discredit vaccinations. Let's get the train headed in the right direction by strengthening Oklahoma's immunization requirements. Take a shot for the Common Good.

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

Rural Students Forgoing Higher Ed

BY JOSEPH H. CARTER SR.

Rural student's low college attendance in a special New York Times report includes the telling views of a Union City High School dean who laments that only half of her 25 graduating seniors are considering higher education.

Union City, an hour's drive west of Oklahoma City and home to about 1,645, hosts the quoted dean, Jeanne Minton: "In the small area where we come from, there is not a lot of high expectations. We are not striving to be valedictorian or have a C average or better. We are striving to get graduated."

Elsewhere in the "Education Life" section of the Feb. 5 Times, a headline shouts: "A high school diploma is no longer enough for many factory floor jobs."

Does the Union City Class of 2017 hear?

Minton knows and cares. The article author opines that last year's election "turned up the volume on the concerns of rural Americans who voted their discontent over lost jobs and economic disparities.

"Higher education is now talking about how to reach the hard-to-get-to," she wrote.

Minton said "getting them to college is hard." Despite bus trips to nearby community colleges, she says "the last one we attended was worthless - my students walked around and were ready to go."

An old saw claims: "You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink. You can send a kid to school but you can't make him think."

The Times quotes one high schooler explaining "the belief that college is for other people, not coun-

try folks, is hard to break."

A more stark published statistic is that 25- to 32-year-old college graduates in 2013 were earning \$45,500 versus \$28,000 for their high school classmates who declined high education.

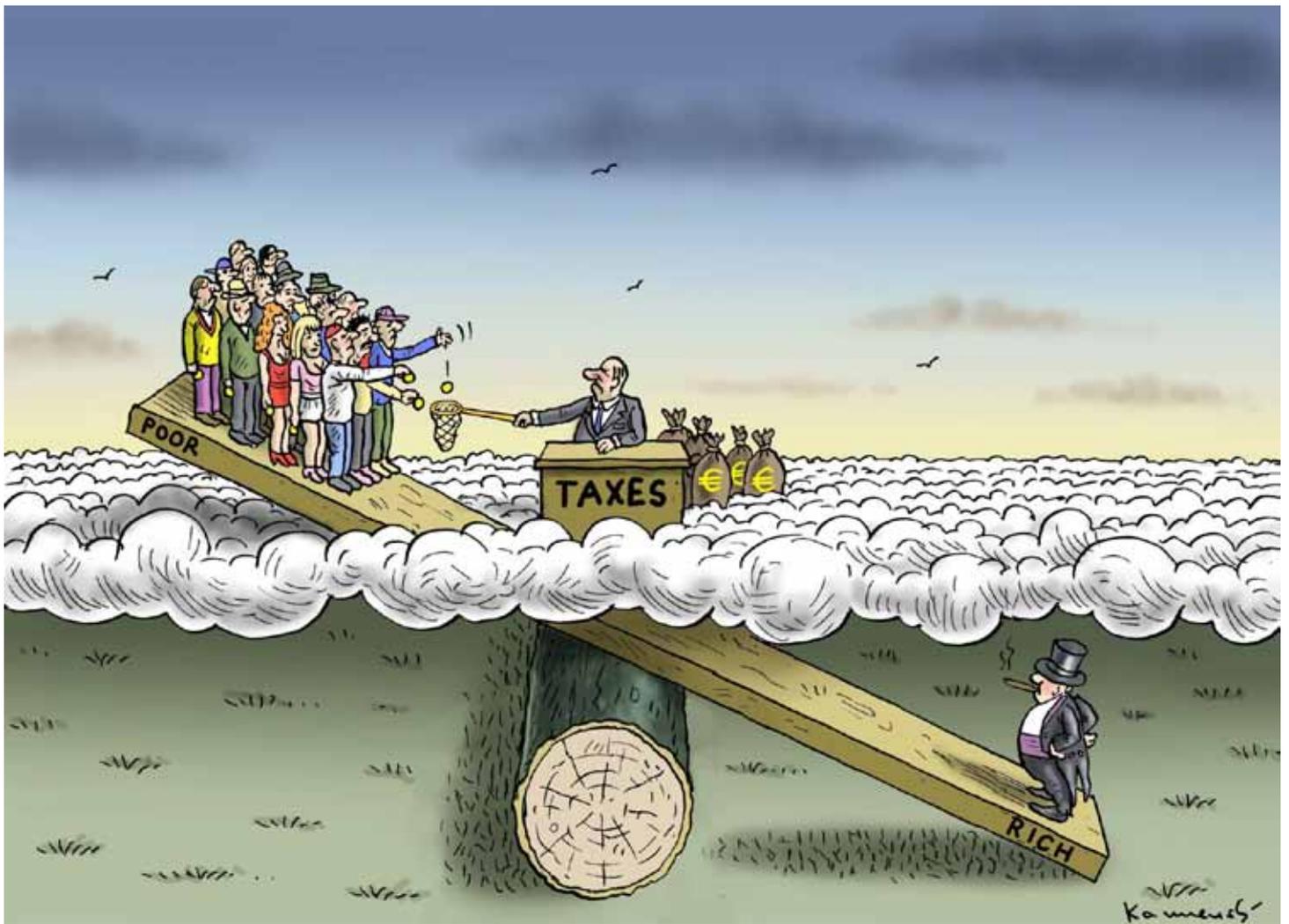
Voting angrily won't solve the disparity.

Norman resident Joseph H. Carter Sr. is author of Never Met A Man I Didn't Like: The Life and Writings of Will Rogers [HarperCollins] and The Quotable Will Rogers [Gibbs Smith Publishers].



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Shedding Light On Who Pays Taxes

BY DAVID BLATT

In her 2017 State of the State address, Gov. Mary Fallin called for the elimination of the state sales tax on groceries, saying that “this plan eliminates the most regressive tax on the books today.”

It’s widely accepted that taxing groceries is regressive, since grocery bills are a bigger part of the budget for low-income households than for wealthier households. But where’s the data that actually shows how much Oklahomans at different income levels pay in sales tax on groceries?

And what about plans to raise the tax on cigarettes and motor fuels that the governor also proposed as part of her FY 2018 budget? What would be the impact on Oklahoma households across the income spectrum if those taxes were raised?

This kind of information about who pays taxes is critical for making well-informed decisions on tax policy, but it’s largely unavailable to most legislators.

A bill filed this session by freshman Rep. Marcus

McEntire, R-Duncan, would fill in that information gap. HB 2209 would ensure that lawmakers and the public have crucial information about the impact of tax proposals on real households.

The bill directs the Oklahoma Tax Commission to prepare a biannual report that determines the overall distribution of the state’s income, sales, and excise taxes by income classes. In addition, the Tax Commission would be directed to prepare a similar report on any bill that increases, decreases, or redistributes income by more than \$20 million, upon the request of the chair of the committee to which the bill is assigned.

The type of tax incidence study called for in HB 2209 is already conducted in other states, including Minnesota and Texas, where the Comptroller’s Office publishes a biannual report on tax exemptions and tax incidence.

From the most recent Texas report, for example,

one can learn that households with the lowest incomes pay 6.9% of their income in sales and excise taxes, compared to 1.6% for those with the highest incomes, but that the highest income taxpayers pay 29.6% of all sales and excise taxes, compared to 6.8% for those with the lowest incomes.

Although nobody in Oklahoma currently produces official tax incidence reports, the DC-based Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy [ITEP] operates a computer model that can generate distributional analyses of each state's overall tax system and of specific tax proposals.

Over the years, ITEP has worked closely with OK Policy to provide distributional analyses of various tax proposals, such as the 2014 cut to the top income tax rate that provided just \$31 to the median Oklahoma household.

Although ITEP's model is highly-respected, they don't analyze all major proposals being considered in Oklahoma.

Oklahoma already requires that legislation include a fiscal impact statement estimating how total tax collections will be affected. Knowing who would be the winners and losers under different tax proposals is equally valuable information that should be readily and regularly available to policymakers and engaged citizens alike.

David Blatt is executive director of Oklahoma Policy Institute, www.okpolicy.org.

Need For New State Revenue Is Critical

BY JOE DORMAN

In the last several weeks, a lot of eyes have been focused on Oklahoma's \$900 million budget shortfall and the effect it may have on our state. We have heard a lot of talk about revolving funds, off-the-top spending, structural imbalances and dozens of other terms capitol insiders use to describe the current budget crunch.

All of that sounds complicated, but if you break down its major components, the state budget is not unlike the personal budgets that families manage. Simply put, you need your income to be greater than your expenses. If it isn't, you are in trouble.

I like to think of the state's total revenue as the income that someone might receive from two jobs. The state earns income from collections in the form of several major tax categories, including income, sales, motor vehicle and gross production taxes.

Those are permanent sources of revenue, like a full-time job. Cigarette, franchise and other smaller taxes are like a second, part-time job.

Combined, those two "jobs" account for the money coming into the state. The money going out in the form of expenditures is mostly accounted for by various state agencies.

Each state agency is like a bill that needs to be paid each month. You pay a mortgage, car payment, and insurance bills. The state pays the Department of Transportation, Department of Education, Oklahoma Health Care Authority and other agencies to perform core government services.

In a good year, a working Oklahoman might get a bonus on their full-time job, which could allow them to cut hours on their part-time job. They don't need the extra money to pay the bills, so why work the extra hours?

Similarly, the state has experienced some good times over the years because of economic development or oil and gas booms. That has occasionally produced excess revenue, which in some cases has gone into the Rainy Day Savings Account.

Many times, however, that money has been returned to taxpayers in the form of tax cuts, fee reductions, or other reforms that reduce state revenue in future years.

Now here's where things get tricky. Let's say a family is going through an economic rough patch, and they need to increase their hours at their part time job by working a few extra shifts.

That may not be ideal, but it is one way to balance their budget.

The state, however, can't do that. Because of the Oklahoma Constitution, cuts made to state revenue in the form of tax cuts are permanent unless the Legislature votes by three-fourths of the membership to increase taxes.

With revenue being difficult to raise, the Legislature often turns to cuts. Some lawmakers say that's a good thing. Oklahoma families must control their spending; why shouldn't the state?

That's a fair point, but here is the truth of the matter: our state government is not like a family that has bought a Ferrari and now must return it. We are like a family living in a house with a leaky roof and no heat, driving our kids around in a car that is about to break down.

The solution to that problem is not less spending; it is investment with proper revenue.

Legislators this year must decide whether to make cuts to the budget or bring in the additional revenue to provide services by raising certain taxes.

I hope supporters of OICA and a functional government will take the time to contact their legislators and voice support for reasonable policies that raise revenue and help our state agencies stay afloat.

Former state Rep. Joe Dorman is CEO of the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy. More of his columns can be read at okobserver.net.



NEVER MIND

Town Hall Blowback Prompts Shortey To Back Off Bills Usurping Criminal Justice Reform

Above, left: Sen. Ralph Shortey addresses crowd at his Feb. 13 Town Hall at Oklahoma City Community College. Below, right: Nurse Amanda Holmes, voices her opposition to Shortey's proposal to roll back portions of State Questions 780 and 781. Photos: Aaron J. Cardenas.

BY SAVANNAH MELHER

State Sen. Ralph Shortey went toe-to-toe recently with his constituents who were angered by bills the Oklahoma City Republican authored that would roll back portions of State Questions 780 and 781.

The measures, SBs 512 and 503, aimed to repeal most of the sections of both state questions Oklahomans approved last November.

Shortey said voters were not given the correct information on the ballot when they cast their votes in November. He said people confronted him about the bills after the election, saying, "we've got some concerns with 780."

Many of these concerns toward the bills were aimed

at "lowering [penalties for] possession of schedule one and two drugs to misdemeanors," Shortey said. Shortey said the possession of some of the drugs for "personal use" included several drugs used in date rape cases such as vicodin, adderall, and ecstasy.

Despite his attempts to sway them, most of the 200-plus in attendance at Oklahoma City Community College pushed back.

Daryl Gandy, a local civics teacher, said he thinks "it's ridiculous that a man without a college degree is telling me what I do, and do not know."

Former Oklahoma House Speaker Kris Steele said Shortey was being disrespectful to voters when Shortey claimed they didn't know what they were vot-

ing on.

“To say that these forms are flawed or that the people didn’t know what they’re doing when they voted in favor of these reforms – I think it’s disrespectful,” Steele, a Republican, said. “I think it’s dangerous for any elected official to ignore the wishes of his or her constituents.”

Anne Saunders, a nurse who attended the meeting, said she was concerned if the rollback provisions were approved it could affect her personally. Saunders said the rollback could mean prison time due to her neurological disorder.

“I could go to jail under what Shortey is proposing right now just because I fall asleep behind the wheel,” she said.

Later in the meeting Shortey told the crowd he would not seek full legislative approval of his measures, even though they were portions of the new law he wants to modify.

Many Town Hall attendees indicated they were skeptical an elected official could be counted on to stick to his word.

Saunders nurse, said she takes a schedule two drug everyday for her narcolepsy, a sleeping disorder. She said Shortey’s SB 512 could cause her to be jailed for five years if she were found to be in possession of a loose pill during a routine traffic stop.

Records show that more than 57% of Oklahomans voted for SQs 780 and 781, the justice reform initiatives.

While most of those who attended Monday’s meeting opposed the senator’s proposal, at least one member of the crowd worried that lowering current felony possession charges to misdemeanors could result in an increase in drug abuse cases.

Lorrie Poole said Oklahoma already has a three-strikes rule in which a person can commit a crime three times before they are sentenced to prison.

David Hall, who also attended the meeting, said the Geo Group, a private prison corporation, is the reason behind Shortey’s efforts against both state questions.

Hall told OCCC’s student newspaper, The Pioneer, that Shortey had received contributions from Geo Group. Records from the Oklahoma Ethics Commission support Hall’s claim. Those records show that Shortey received \$4,000 in campaign contributions from the Geo Group in November 2015.

The debate over the new laws comes as Oklahoma continues to incarcerate an increasing number of residents. Department of Corrections records show the number of inmates rose from 25,434 inmates in 2010 to 27,482 in 2014.

Supporters say that if SQs 780 and 781

are given “a chance to be implemented” then the prison population will decrease, costing taxpayers less. Savannah Melher is a reporter for the Oklahoma City Community College Pioneer.



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Cherokee Nation, State Seek To Halt Burial Of Radioactive Waste

BY BILL JOHN BAKER

Cherokee Nation and the state of Oklahoma recently teamed up to file a restraining order to stop the disposal of radioactive material near the Arkansas and Illinois rivers.

Sequoyah Fuels Corp. operated a uranium processing plant near Gore from 1970 through the early '90s. The plant converted yellowcake uranium into fuel for nuclear reactors.

After it closed in 1993, more than 11,000 tons of uranium-contaminated waste was left at the site. In 2004, Sequoyah Fuels agreed to spend millions relocating the waste off-site. The radioactive waste has been stored in large bags on top of concrete pads at the site ever since.

Many Cherokees worked at this facility over the years, and many of us know men and women who were employed at the facility, and though memories of Sequoyah Fuels may have faded, sadly the threat of radiation has not. We know the radioactive waste can't stay where it currently sits, but the Cherokee Nation was informed last month by Sequoyah Fuels that it could not find a suitable place to relocate the waste. The company said it would begin burying the waste in underground cells at the current site.

That's when our attorney general's office, secretary of Natural Resources and the state of Oklahoma stepped in. We will not stand idly by and let a private company unilaterally determine the future of two important rivers and the safety of the Cherokee com-

munity of Gore. The Cherokee Nation is a staunch defender and protector of our natural resources.

The Arkansas riverbed is no place for radioactive waste. According to scientists, uranium is highly toxic and has a half-life of 4.5 billion years. Our goal is to work with the company, along with the state, to minimize the threat by finding and securing a proper storage solution.

Protecting the lands and the natural environment is a priority for us today and for future generations who call the Cherokee Nation home. Cherokee Nation established the office of the secretary of Natural Resources last year to address these very specific kinds of issues, because as a tribal government, we have a responsibility to protect the land, water and air. We will unequivocally fight for the rights of our people to live safely in their communities. Our children, our grandchildren and their children deserve to inherit a natural world free of hazardous pollution.

We will do what is best for the Cherokee Nation, Sequoyah County and Oklahoma so we will pursue an expert review of disposal options for the materials and examine the impact to the community and the environment. We need to sit down and negotiate a solution that everyone can agree on. I believe we have the ability to find an answer and an agreement that will be palatable to all parties.

Bill John Baker is principal chief of the Cherokee Nation.

Time To Reform Excessive Fines, Fees In Oklahoma's Justice System

BY RYAN GENTZLER

All Oklahomans should be treated equally in the justice system, no matter what's in their bank account. Unfortunately, that's not how it works today.

Tens of thousands of Oklahomans enter the justice system each year and come out with thousands of dollars in debt. For poor Oklahomans, this debt can swallow up most of their family's income, and it often leads to a cycle of incarceration and poverty.

The system does nothing to improve public safety but does bring high costs to law enforcement, jails,

and the courts.

A new report from Oklahoma Policy Institute, titled "The Cost Trap: How Excessive Fees Lock Oklahomans into the Criminal Justice System without Boosting Revenue," shows why lawmakers need to reduce the financial burdens of the criminal justice system for poor defendants, and how they can do that without jeopardizing critical sources of revenue for state agencies.

The report finds that lawmakers have added fees to criminal cases to pay for so many different functions

of government that the costs for a single case have more than doubled in the past two decades.

For example, a speeding ticket for driving 20 mph over the speed limit has increased almost 150% since 1992, from \$107 to \$250. Felony and misdemeanor costs multiply with each charge, often totaling in the thousands of dollars for a single case.

When defendants can't afford to pay these fees, they're often arrested and taken to jail. Spending time in jail away from their jobs and family only makes it harder to pay off their debt, and counties often spend more to incarcerate people for failure to pay than they end up collecting from them.

For example, a woman in Tulsa County was arrested and charged with a series of minor theft and drug crimes over the course of about 20 years. She's spent nearly 18 months in jail, still owes more than \$11,000 to the court, and can't hold a job because she's repeatedly picked up for failure to pay. So the county has spent over \$20,000 to incarcerate her in the attempt to collect about half of that. This is a terrible waste of taxpayer money.

Because most defendants are poor, very little criminal court debt is ever collected. About 80% of criminal defendants are indigent and eligible for a public defender, and jail inmates typically make less than

half the income of their peers even before their arrest.

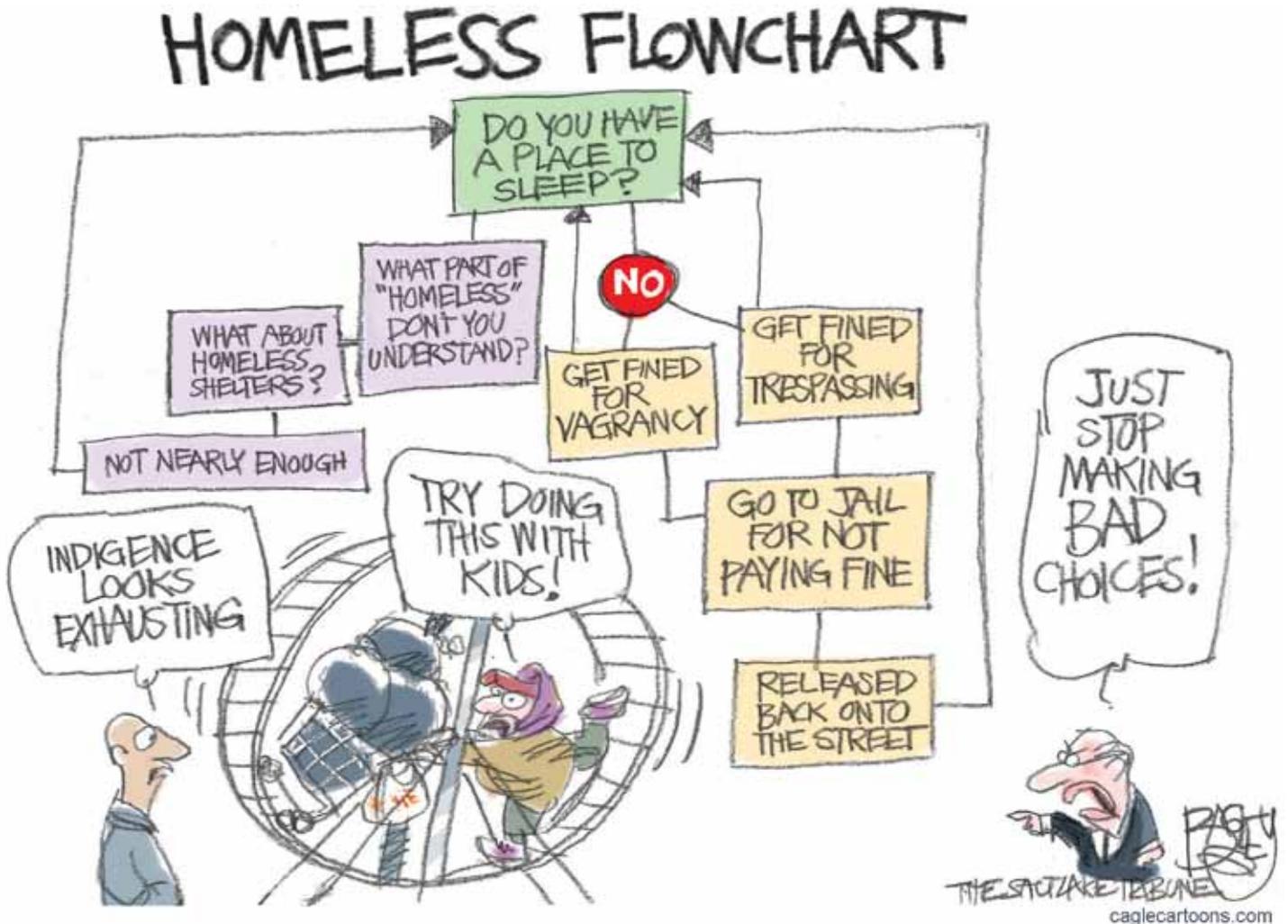
A judge in Oklahoma County estimates that only 5% to 11% of criminal court debt is collected. Despite this fact, those who can't pay are repeatedly arrested, jailed, and brought before a judge, at great expense to the state.

Courts have long ago squeezed as much as they could out of people involved in the justice system. The revenue from criminal fees hasn't increased in over a decade, even though we've dramatically increased fees and the number of people being charged over that time.

The lesson is that when people can't pay, they can't pay, no matter how much we punish them. It also means that we can reduce these financial burdens without reducing the amount we collect for critical government functions.

There are strong, bipartisan proposals in the Legislature this year to reform these practices, including HB 1476, SB 689, and SB 342. As lawmakers want to fulfill their pledges to save taxpayer money and take a smarter approach to criminal justice, these reforms should be a top priority.

Ryan Gentzler is a policy analyst with Oklahoma Policy Institute, www.okpolicy.org.



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The Year Of The Teacher

BY JENNIFER SEAL

I was sitting at our local coffee shop Higher Grounds the other day and overheard two women discussing education.

My ears first perked up when one woman said to the other something about how teachers only work nine months out of the year. I turned around in my seat to see who was spreading such disinformation.

A few minutes later though, she dropped the bombshell: “teachers are the biggest bunch of whiners. All they do is complain about their pay.”

I had to turn around in my seat again so I could shoot her my Look of Incredulity.

I came close to getting up and talking with her about how long teachers really do work and why they might have just cause to complain about their pay. Then I thought better of it, and wondered what the deeper problem is here.

People must not have a clue what our teachers are

doing with their time. They don't have a clear picture of the daily issues that teachers deal with, nor the sheer amount of time put in to preparing to be in front of a class.

So I thought I would try to correct some of that fake news we're all hearing these days.

First of all, the teachers I know do not work their contract hours. They are coming in early to prepare for the day and staying late to grade. Others are going directly to coach a sport, and then maybe home to do some grading.

The teachers I know are in trainings in the summer, or attending competitions with their students. They are working second jobs in the summer – and yes they do work more than nine months of the year.

I'm flabbergasted that people choose not to believe the statistics that are in their faces!

Oklahoma teachers have the lowest rate of pay in

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this region, and are 48th in the nation for teacher pay, according to the National Center for Education Statistics! How can we continue to make excuses for that instead of owning it and making our teachers a priority?

We are dealing with a serious teacher shortage in our state, and Putnam City is no different. Our leaders are constantly looking for ways we can retain the great teachers we have in the face of declining revenue from the state. When are we going to make education a priority?

Surely people can see the connection between a strong classroom teacher, his or her pay, and the learning that takes place in that classroom. Just like in the private sector, you have to pay for quality people or they are more likely to leave for better paying

jobs with fewer responsibilities.

When are we going to make our children a priority?

I say *now!* Let 2017 be the Year of the Teacher in Oklahoma. Let it be the year we finally own up to our responsibilities as a state, not to mention the constitution of this state, and provide a fair salary for the women and men who dedicate their lives to our children.

And they are our children – every last one of them has the chance to impact the lives of other Oklahomans for better or worse.

Let 2017 be the year we give our teachers, and therefore our children, the chance to be a positive impact on Oklahoma. They deserve no less.

Jennifer Seal is president of the Putnam City Schools Foundation.

Trying To Understand

BY SHARON MARTIN

I follow politics like some people follow sports teams. And I thought I had learned a thing or two about why people vote the way they do. But I must say, I'm at a loss right now.

I realized as much when this post from a friend showed up in my News Feed: "I am absolutely sick to death of people constantly running down the president. FYI friends ... I feel about Obama as you do about President Trump [or rather I dislike him much more than you could ever dislike President Trump]."

She had dozens of likes and positive responses to her remark. And as I've been doing since the election, I'm pondering what it is about our current president that anybody finds likeable.

He lies. He cheats. He isn't kind. He doesn't care what damage his actions inflict on other people. He is totally self-absorbed.

Now, President Obama is not perfect. Neither is Secretary Clinton, Sen. Sanders, or any of the other humans I hold in high esteem. But if any of these people were in charge of the White House, I wouldn't be this scared.

Is that what a good leader does, make people afraid?

Why does anyone think that President Trump is going to be good for the country? Hate and rancor don't make jobs and they don't make us safe.

Is it about party?

I make most of my political choices based on party platform. And, yes, there are bad apples in both baskets, people who go into politics for personal gain. But Democrats, for the most part, try to spread opportunity to as many people as possible.

I believe that Earth belongs to all of us, that there is more than one way to worship, and that we all de-

serve certain basic rights. Cooperation is good for the human race.

Is it that Trump voters just don't agree that all humans have rights? Do they think that some people are more deserving of justice than others, that only Christians have a right to the planet?

What makes some people hate President Obama? What did they fear about him? Why do they mistrust Secretary Clinton? Is it a matter of where one gets ones news?

I want to understand. How have some of my friends and I come to such radically different conclusions? *Sharon Martin lives in Oilton, OK and is a regular contributor to The Oklahoma Observer.*





To Be A Fascist Or Not To Be A Fascist

BY MARK Y.A. DAVIES

For decades in the United States we have experienced a kind of national political neurosis in which millions of people have continued to vote against their own interests based on their perception of how the Republican Party was protecting their religious and cultural values. This did not just happen. It was the result of an extremely well-funded and well-organized strategy that focused on reshaping government, the media, higher education, public education, religious institutions, and the courts to be more supportive of corporate interests.

Now we have seen our country enter into a state of national political psychosis that is rightly called fascism – with all of the fascist trimmings of authoritari-

anism, nationalism, racial and religious scapegoating, attacking the free press, and xenophobia.

In a democratic country of our size, it takes tens of million of people who either knowingly vote for or who are duped into voting for a fascist for fascism to come into being. As our current president continues to govern on the fascist principles upon which he campaigned, the millions of people who may have knowingly voted for this are extremely pleased, and the millions of supporters who may have been duped no longer can use the excuse that they do not know what is happening now that “this” is actually happening.

In other words, if you keep on supporting a fascist

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even after he makes his fascism explicit, not only in word but also in deed, then you might very well be and probably are a fascist, and history eventually will not look kindly on you. Your continued support of a fascist will contribute to horrific suffering of both people and the planet. This will be something that your children and grandchildren will eventually want to forget about you, and for those who become even more complicit in this evil by acting out the worst of what this president wants to achieve, your children and grandchildren may not want to remember you at all.

Many of you who for some reason are still supporting this fascist president are not bad or evil people, but the longer you hold on to your support for him, the more difficult it is to describe you in that way. He is making it crystal clear who he is and what he will do as long as he is in power, and at some point you become a part of the evil, not just an innocent bystander. Everyone who is paying attention now has a clear choice: to be a fascist, or not to be fascist.

Oh, and if you think that you cannot be a fascist because so many of your Christian friends support this president, and you think that it is not possible that so many Christians would support a fascist, I direct your attention to the image below. The fascist they are hailing did well with the “Christian” vote, too.

Fascist leaders cannot accomplish what they want to do alone. They need true believer propagandists like Bannon and Miller. They need those who will simply do what they say like Priebus, Conway, and Spicer. They need opportunists like Pence, Ryan, McConnell, and Chaffetz who think they or their agenda can benefit from the situation. They need the backing of powerful corporations and industry who see an opportunity for profit. They need millions of people who will believe their alternative facts and be willing to act to defend them, millions of persons who are too scared to resist, courts that will rubber stamp their directives, a press that will acquiesce to authoritarianism, and millions of persons who just don't care enough to resist.

Our fascist president has almost all of these things going for him. It is up to the courts, the press, and the millions of people who do care enough to resist and stop him. The longer he is in power, the more he will weaken the free press and the courts, and it will be very difficult for the people to stop this fall into the fascist abyss.

Mark Y.A. Davies is the Wimberly Professor of Social and Ecological Ethics and director of the World House Institute for Social and Ecological Responsibility at Oklahoma City University. More of his essays can be found at okobserver.net.

Re-Framing With The Gospels

BY VERN TURNER

Yes, those Gospels, or at least the books in the Bible named after the disciples of Jesus Christ.

I am not a religious person, but sometimes it becomes necessary to venture into the land of religious teachings to make a point in the modern world. The point today is from George Lakoff's very interesting book, *Don't Think of an Elephant*. In it, he describes the two basic models for American politics: The authoritarian model and the nurturant model. Ironically, both are founded on many of the same passages from the books of Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Lakoff defines the nature of the so-called conservative philosophy beginning with the premise that God is all-powerful and all good. OK. Most religious people accept that up front. Conservatives think that God wants good people in charge of things. They see a God-driven hierarchy [God above man, man above nature, adults above children] where virtue is rewarded with power and those who manage the moral codes should be obeyed.

They believe, as most religious people believe, that God made the laws and that it takes personal disci-

pline to follow those laws. If someone is disciplined enough to obey God's laws, he or she should be rewarded with power and wealth.

God is, therefore, the “original strict father.” Obey the laws and get rewards. Break the laws and receive punishment.

It gets a little more complicated when God's son, Jesus, enters the picture. Jesus gives sinners a second chance to obey God's laws; to be born again. This philosophy gives conservative-thinking Christians an additional shot of hierarchy with Christians above non-Christians, men above women, whites above non-whites and straights above gays. This structure allows conservatives license to launch their political application of hierarchy and discipline on their societies at large and the masses in particular.

Included in this structure is their own brand of morality, economics, education and government.

The discipline-oriented model assumes that social services are immoral in that everyone should earn what they get through hard work and discipline. This carries over into economics and government as well as education. Education, for example, should be rig-

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idly controlled, uniform in curriculum and authoritarian in directing student behavior.

Economics must follow the oft-failed free market model [Supply Side or Trickle Down economics] where no regulations or organized labor are allowed to limit profits for those who produce goods and services.

Within this hierarchy, the poorer classes are necessary to serve the upper classes and to provide the sweat equity to make them rich. After all, as the model goes, the owners and the upper class are the most righteous because they receive all these material and comfort rewards; they simply deserve them.

Of course, this begs the question about why equally religious and righteous people don't share the same amount of comfort and luxury. Is there a scale of religious righteousness that matches up comfort and wealth with how much an individual loves God? I couldn't find that anywhere in the Bible.

Now, how about the other side? What is the value meme for progressives/liberals?

Lakoff describes them as the nurturant model of humanity – you know, those people who see the big picture of their society and want to share, or at least distribute, wealth and prosperity to everyone willing to try. Why, they even create charities for those who can't participate directly or are in such a state that

success and happiness are out of reach.

Indeed, many of these people liberals care about are homeless, or indigent, or starving. Nurturers don't possess all of the authoritarian model attributes found in the strict father model of conservatives.

Liberals, like their original hero, Thomas Jefferson, believe that education should be a right for everyone. They also believe that if everyone who can pay a little, then there is enough for the few who are very needy.

Yes, this is utopian and total idealism has yet to be approached. Also, not all conservatives and not all liberals practice their major philosophy totally. That's certainly understandable given the enormous complexity of the human condition everywhere. Our complex society in the United States allows barely over half of each "competing" philosophy to operate that society. Yet, we do quite well ... other than for the 15% of chronic poverty that not even the most generous of liberals can get to.

Conservatives actually blame the poor for being poor, irrespective of their lack of opportunities in their environments. Liberals, to their shame, only offer the chronic poor lip service, not real opportunity.

Casting our veterans aside, however, is everyone's fault. Shame on us for allowing half of our homeless people to be veterans of wars fought nobly even when

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our employees in public office lie through their teeth about going to war.

It's been done before, and all too often, but the reference to New Testament Gospels in the context of this essay is germane to our country's current situation and its future. Everything I've gleaned from the red print in my Bible talks about rich people giving up their wealth to help "the least of us."

The principle character in this most-read book in history keeps saying things like feed the hungry, clothe the naked, house the indigent, etc. He even advocates for educating the children.

Maybe that's why the Romans had him killed. He was pro-life, pro-socialism and pro-dignity of mankind. He led a movement that resisted the pain of the Roman boot on the necks of the people being subjugated. But the Romans saw him as a political liability and did what they did to his kind of dissidents.

Are we seeing a repeat of tyrannical oppression with the advent of Donald Trump?

Franklin Roosevelt, in his final State of the Union address, mentioned six rights that all Americans should enjoy. Among those were the same things Jesus Christ requested for humanity as it tried to govern itself: equality under the law, food, gainful employment, a place to live, a good education, available health care.

So, I ask, why do so-called conservatives, who base their lives and philosophies on Christianity, keep trying to undo the things that FDR brought forth as the Second Bill of Rights?

Is it the selfish motive? Is it the money meme that takes over the hearts and minds of conservatives? Is it all of these? Why, I ask, have conservatives forsaken the best words from their Lord and Savior in order to foist upon the American people a harsher life with no social safety nets, no affordable health care for all and no affordable education?

Did Jesus' words of compassion piss them off somewhere along the way? What happened to create such glaring hypocrisy among the most self-righteous, self-absorbed, self-serving and selfish people among us?

The current conflicts between so-called conservatives and liberals/progressives are exacerbated by those who make a handsome living off the conflicts: the lobbyists. The argument for cutting FDR's New Deal programs means more money for them and their clients' employees in government, you know, the folks the people elect every year to do them harm.

This begs another question that Lakoff asks at the beginning of his book: Why do people keep voting against their own best interests?

The best answer seems to be that the people who do this are emotionally invested in who and what they vote for. It has little to do with truth and logic, the key framework for liberal/progressive agendas. The con-

servative framework, truthful or not, lies with how to stir the emotions, fears and anxieties of voters in order to gain their confidence.

Donald Trump, for example, is the confidence man [aka Con Man] that did it. The Trump voters didn't really want him to do all these things with walls, wars and woman degrading. They just heard the roar of their own testosterone in their ears and voted for him. Pure emotion. Not a fragment of logic here at all.

As my mentor keeps saying, "We have to change the framework of our political discourse." We, the liberal/progressive majority must regain the high ground of producing candidates, and campaigns that capture the mind and imagination and emotions of the American voter.

We have to do this without condescension, but with a way of introducing a positive set of ideas that will not only fulfill the ideals of FDR, but also of the guy speaking in red in the Gospels we Americans hold so dear.

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

Payback Time

BY BOB BEARDEN

Payback can be a bitch. All over America, Town Halls by the droves are being cancelled and ducked out on by the Party of No.

Cowardly. Those in charge of our government are beginning to show their true colors. They worked long and hard to deny the Obama Administration everything they could. And now that they have assumed the mantle of governance they are starting to feel the heat of denial for what they have created.

Of course, they deny that people showing up to their Town Halls are actual constituents. Why would they not? They are ready, willing and able to take a page from their leader Herr le Orange le petite who is in total denial even as his poll numbers tank to a level never before seen in the annuals of first-term presidency.

As Mark Twain once noted, "Denial ain't just a river in Egypt!" Denial is rampant in the hard-hearted minds and souls of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Co.

Like so many lemmings rushing to chase each other over the cliff of denial, they rush away from the truth. They have created this situation by enabling the most lying, corrupt, white-bread government in our history, and now they are all trying to get out of the kitchen because they just can't abide the intense heat of anger they have created.

caglecartoons.com



As some wise sage once said, “Be careful what you ask for, lest you receive it!”

Facing up to the responsibilities of governance hasn't been in their playbooks for the past eight years so why would we believe they will – when confronted by angry constituents – step up to the plate and accept the responsibility for what they have created?

They have elected the most divisive president our history. How can they now believe that pushing the policies of hate, bigotry and fear will somehow make them great again?

You can't unite a nation nor its people by playing to their prejudices and fears. As Dr. King said, “Hate can't drive out hate, only love can do that!” And there is no love of our nation in these people's mean-spirited hearts, souls and minds.

Their embrace of the most fear-mongering candidate in our history proves they have no clue as to how to govern or how to heal the deep chasm he has created.

As I used to type 40 times in my high school typing class, “Now is the time for all good men and women to come to the aid of their country!” Where are those people? Like the Marines we need a few good ones, the truth be told, but like Jack Nicholson said in a Few Good Men, “They can't handle the truth!”

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

Facts, Nuance And Truth

BY HARRY T. COOK

While attending a funeral recently, I listened as the priest intoned the *Requiescat in pace*. The Latin has stuck with me as the events of the last weeks have reminded me generally of death – death of meaningful civil discourse, death of clear thinking and reason and the nation's sickness unto death.

Such deaths will not come in sudden apocalyptic violence. They will creep up on us bit by bit as we discover that we have lost what we had pretty much taken for granted.

For example, the day of the print newspaper is pretty much gone, and what is called news is at best often incomplete, even misleading and from time to time simply wrong. Much of the content to be found in the average newspaper is a mishmash of inconsequence. Never mind the nervous news proclaimed via television by preening anchors, apparently unaware that the ship has joined them at the bottom of the sea.

Civil discourse is almost a distant memory. We tend to yell at each other now like beery fans taunting opposing teams. We choose up sides without knowing

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enough of what either side stands for and proposes to do – if anything more than disrupt. Way too often, we go off half-cocked on half-baked ideas. They are quickly marketed as unquestionable “truth” while all-important nuances whirling around them are swatted away like so many flies.

Facts that are mined from thorough and objective analysis of data represent the truth of a thing insofar as knowledge permits at a given time. Facts are not partisan banners. They speak for themselves, and they are there to take or leave. Taking them and working with them is always and ever the best way to go. One leaves them to one’s own peril. The national debacle that occurred on Nov. 8, 2016, was in large part due to unwillingness to struggle with nuance and basic fact-finding.

What the election revealed was the abandonment of truth in favor of patent falsehoods claiming to be truth – “truth” that fit the prejudices and willed ignorance of millions of Americans. Those who cater to such people peddle so-called “alternative facts.” Those who don’t know any better stick by them in the way true believers stick to the revealed doctrines of

their religions, however fanciful they may be.

About a week before the election, I was sitting in my barber’s chair getting a haircut. In the chair next to me was a fellow I’d seen in the shop many times. On the TV, a professor of environmental science was trying to explain global warming and climate change in the three minutes allotted him.

The program’s host was openly dubious and finally said that he thought it was a socialist plot against industry. The professor, somewhat nonplussed, suggested that, like listening to one’s physician about what ails you, it was a pretty good idea to listen to the experts in such matters as global warming. The man in the chair next to mine grumped, “We don’t need no f---ing experts.” There was a case of stubborn ignorance lined up against careful reason, research and its results.

Ours is a culture of the sound bite, a quick five seconds’ worth of fake news. We tend to fall for one-liners as the ancient Greeks fell for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, as Elizabethan audiences devoured Shakespeare’s plays, as crowds sat in Wagner’s Bayreuth opera house for hour upon hour to take in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, albeit with plenty of *wurst und bier* during intermissions. The Greeks, the English and the Bayreuthers got the real thing.

Charles Darwin in 1859 could have written: “Human beings are descended from earthworms. The End,” and he would have been laughed off the island. Instead, he wrote one of the classics of the English language and took 480-some pages to do so in a way that nonscientists could understand what he had observed and concluded from it. The observer of many life forms could not, of course, tweet his Theory of Natural Selection. Even if it had been possible to do so 156 years ago, it could not have been boiled down to 140 characters or twisted into a one-line teaser to lure you into staying tuned for the 6 o’clock news.

If Darwin could spend nearly a third of his adult

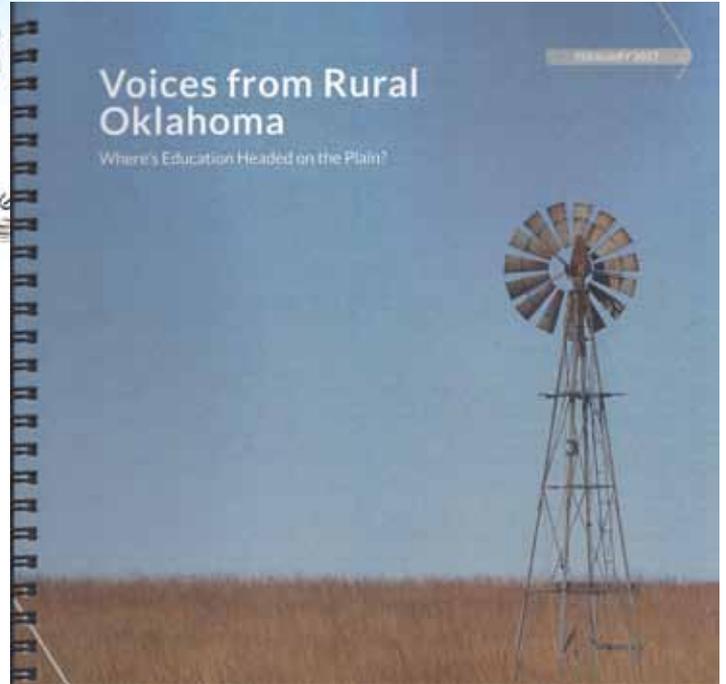
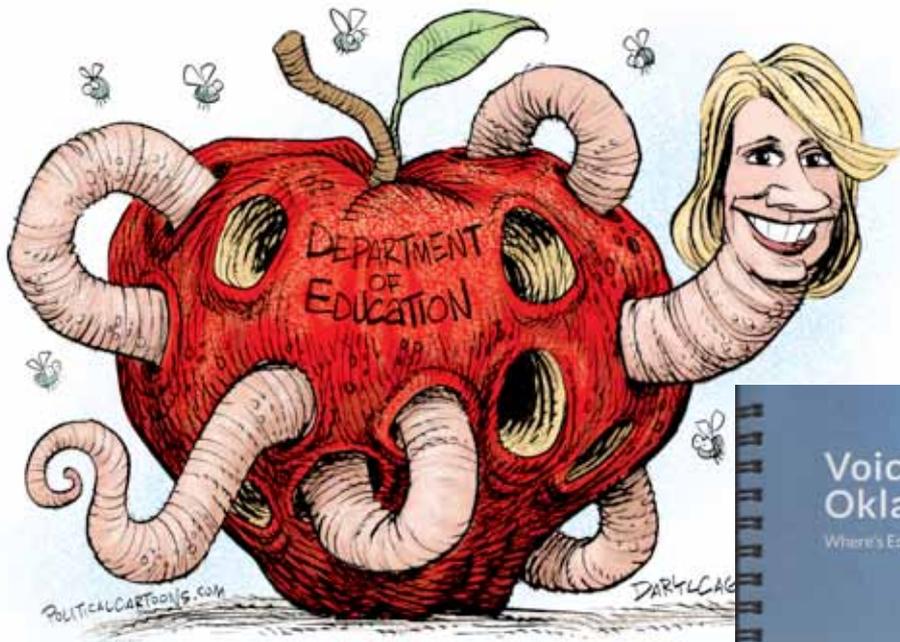


life working out his theory, you and I can give two or three days of careful reading to his magnum opus. If anyone can find data through research and reason -- as opposed to the assertion of a theology based on religious certitude -- and subsequently test them in a way that would call Darwin’s theory into serious question, he or she should only write a 480-page book to tell the world.

I’m not saying that we’re all Galileos or Darwins or should be. I am saying that both of those intellectual giants helped set the standards for discovering truth of the kind that helps us understand our world and ourselves. Their methodology of gathering, marshaling and fitting together data into hypotheses produced the best explanations of the phenomenon each was studying.

Those processes can work in any endeavor to learn the truth about things. Of course, one has to accept the reality that it is never five-minute job. Patience is required. Also discovery doesn’t necessarily require a laboratory or philosopher’s study. It can happen anywhere in which honest inquiry is made – including barbershops.

Harry T. Cook is a Michigan-based Episcopal priest, journalist and author whose essays appear regularly in The Oklahoma Observer.



BAD APPLES

School Choice Crowd Weaves Faux Case For Rural Charters

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

In late February, about 20 legislators gathered in a first-floor Capitol room for lunch and a presentation about the state of public education in rural Oklahoma.

What they heard was less research and analysis than advocacy – a carefully worded presentation aimed at expanding charter schools outside the state's metro areas.

The lawmakers – members of the self-styled Rural Caucus – were handed a slick, spiral-bound, 50-page report titled *Voices from Rural Oklahoma: Where's Education Headed on the Plain?*

It was the handiwork of Bellwether Education Partners, a Massachusetts-based non-profit supported by rightwing groups and individuals promoting so-called school choice: vouchers, charter schools, and privatization.

And it was carried out at the behest of the Oklahoma Youth Expo, the group that sponsors the annual spring livestock and ag fair at the state Fairgrounds

in Oklahoma City.

The timing of the report's release to state lawmakers was no accident.

Earlier in the week, the Senate Education Committee narrowly approved SB 560, Republican Sen. Rob Standridge's bill that would allow students in Oklahoma City and Tulsa to divert part of their state share of education funding for use at private schools. [Facing stiff opposition from the full Senate, Standridge pulled his bill on Mar. 1, killing it for the session.]

Moreover, it was less than a month after the State Board of Education – filled with Gov. Mary Fallin's pro-school choice appointees – ignored the opposition of the locally elected Seminole School Board and authorized creation of a charter school, even agreeing to sponsor the proposed Seminole Academy.

Make no mistake: The national campaign to undermine and privatize America's egalitarian system of public education is intensifying, despite assurances from legislative leaders that expanded school choice would take a back seat this session to increased teacher pay and education funding.

The double-talk should not surprise anyone who's been paying attention to a decades-long effort by wealthy rightwingers to turn public schools into prof-

it centers. After all, one of the leaders of the movement – Amway co-founder Betsy DeVos – now heads the U.S. Department of Education.

In completing its research, Bellwether said it quizzed more than 80 rural Oklahomans through a dozen focus groups and nine individual interviews in an attempt to determine the efficacy of rural schools – which educate nearly one in three Oklahoma students.

Participants were chosen with the help of Oklahoma Youth Expo – not by random sample – which helps explain why it skewed wealthier than the general population. [You can read the full report at <http://bellwethereducation.org/publication/voices-rural-oklahoma-where-education-headed-plain>]

What Bellwether found primarily is that – like many Oklahomans – rural residents are worried about the future of the state’s public schools, victims of the nation’s deepest budget cuts the last decade.

Those interviewed also decried the lack of academic and extracurricular opportunities and higher education counseling – which sadly become lower priorities when school districts are scrambling to come up with enough money to keep teachers in every classroom.

In addition, Bellwether found many participants knew little about charters, but expressed fear their proliferation could further jeopardize local schools financially.

Predictably, many of the business leaders chosen to participate knew about charters – and had a favorable impression of them.

Conspicuously absent from those surveyed: teachers, administrators, education groups.

This is the way you do things when your goal is to build a case – not to give people the tools to make informed decisions.

That Oklahoma Youth Expo would become the vehicle for such advocacy is hardly surprising.

Its chairman and financial sugar daddy, Express Personnel’s Bob Funk, has penned newspaper op-eds promoting vouchers and performance pay for teachers – two of school choice movements Holy Grails.

In addition, Blue and Gold Sausage Co. – a Youth Expo “platinum sponsor” that built its business selling through schools – used its packaging last fall to oppose SQ 779, the proposed penny sales tax hike to fund public education and teacher pay raises.

And corporations and organizations like Oklahoma Farm Bureau and Devon Energy that underwrite the Youth Expo are big players in and water carriers for pro-business interests that often promote school choice.

Two years ago, Oklahoma lawmakers authorized charter schools to be located outside the state’s two major urban centers. What wasn’t widely anticipated is that the State Board would begin overriding local school board decisions as it did in the Seminole case.

What makes the Seminole Academy even more questionable is that former state Rep. Lee Denney, R-Cushing, author of the legislation allowing rural

charter schools, will be serving on the new school’s board.

As Seminole resident Marilyn Rainwater, a retired social worker and Democratic House candidate, put it, the “very critical issue at the heart of this ... [is] whether we have local control of our public schools and our tax dollars that support them.

“In our rural communities, [school boards] are at ground level to know the students, teachers, support staff, and administrators on a personal basis. They know best the needs of all of them as well as how those specific needs should be met. Having said that, why should anyone dispute their unanimous recommendation much less overturn it?”

Sadly, embattled state Superintendent Joy Hofmeister rolled over on the Seminole case, blowing her street cred with public school teachers and advocates who regarded her as the one statewide elected Republican that had their backs on education policy.

“This is a well-thought-through plan that came from the local community to be able to provide immediate opportunities for students to have their needs met,” she said, presumably with a straight face.

The State Board’s action came after the Farm Bureau distributed a “brief outlining the problems with education in Oklahoma,” state Rep. Brian Renegar, D-McAlester, wrote in a recent newspaper op-ed. “It was labeled ‘failing schools in Oklahoma.’ I thought, ‘wow, now Farm Bureau lobbyists are experts on education.’”

Then, he said, came the Bellwether report: “... they say the reason funding has decreased to education is the reduced oil and gas prices since 2007. However, in 2010 oil prices were \$100 per barrel, yet the Legislature in Oklahoma led the nation in cuts to education. They did not mention that income tax cuts to wealthy cost our budget about \$1 billion per year.”

And that corporate welfare – especially in the form of the nation’s lowest gross production taxes – made the fiscal crisis even worse.

But supporters of school choice – whether charters or vouchers or both – are nothing if not persistent. They will continue to attempt to build a case that charters are a good fit for rural Oklahoma, even though most Sooners are perfectly happy with their current schools – they just want them funded better.

Additionally, those who know anything about charters know that students, on average, don’t perform any better than students in traditional public schools – and in many cases, perform worse.

Even so, the pro-school choice crowd – funded like Bellwether by individuals and their organizations ranging from the Kochs, Scaifes and Waltons – isn’t going to go quietly into the good night.

It’s important to remind rural legislators that these folks mean real harm to the crown jewels of their communities: their public schools. Listening to the school-choice propaganda, much less taking it to heart, can be fatal for elected officials – and for their towns.

Issa's Scheme To Leave America Holding The Nuclear Waste Bag

BY ACE HOFFMAN

U.S. Rep. Darrell Issa, who has supported nuclear power for years, wants to screw the American public by forcing them [us] to take legal possession of all the nuclear waste the nuclear industry has ever produced – with no safe place to put it.

The first paragraph of Issa's bill [known as the Interim Storage Act of 2017] says it all: He wants the citizens of the United States to “take title to certain high-level radioactive waste and spent nuclear fuel.” That means the federal government [“we the people”] would be responsible for *all* of the most nasty property any private company has ever held title to

[known in the industry as “Greater than Class C” nuclear waste].

And Issa wants to take money away from the Nuclear Waste Fund – which was set up to create a permanent geologic repository somewhere in America – to bribe local officials at proposed interim storage sites, and enrich sleazy corporations that want to build large facilities to hold thousands of school-bus-sized, thin-walled canisters, each containing enough nuclear waste to devastate an entire state.

Currently, this waste – about 80,000 tons altogether – is being stored on site at more than 70 active and former nuclear power stations. Nuclear waste is still being generated at nearly 100 nuclear power plants around the country – about 10 tons of new nuclear waste per day in America [about 50 tons globally, per day].

Nuclear waste contains short-lived and long-lived “fission” isotopes. Most fission products – the result of splitting fissile atoms [mainly Uranium-235 and Plutonium-239] have half-lives of less than about 30 years, so they'll require about 600 years to fully decay [20 half-lives leaves about one millionth of the original amount]. [A few fission isotopes will take millions of years to decay to stable elements.]

Nuclear waste also contains “fissile” material: Unsplit Uranium-235 and Plutonium-239 atoms. These are present because the fuel was removed when it was no longer profitable to the utility to continue using it – the heat yield had dropped too much – not because all the fissile isotopes had been split.

These fissile isotopes can be used by a rogue government headed by a rogue leader to make nu-



clear weapons. They can be stolen by terrorists [not easy, but not impossible]. Perhaps worst of all is that the fissile isotopes can still achieve criticality.

A criticality event can occur when the fissile materials accumulate together too closely. There are various shields and other separators within the storage casks that keep the material sufficiently far apart to prevent this from happening under “normal” circumstances. But all these protections can be overridden – by an airplane strike, for instance.

Issa’s proposal is a result of America not building a permanent repository. At the time Yucca Mountain was cancelled, California alone had submitted dozens of technical issues that needed to be dealt with, and Nevada had submitted nearly 300 more. It is inaccurate to think that Yucca Mountain was stopped because of “political” pressure from Nevada. Yucca Mountain was stopped because of volcanic concerns, water seepage problems, cave-in concerns, climate change issues, earthquakes possibilities, and many problems with the containers themselves.

The nuclear industry is pushing Issa’s “Interim Storage” solution because it completely solves *their* problem: Ownership of the waste. By giving the spent fuel and other high-level waste to the taxpayers and citizens of America, the utilities can “wash their hands” of the problem they created.

They could have closed their nuclear plants decades ago and switched to renewables but they didn’t, in part because of the 1982 Nuclear Waste Policy Act [NWPA], which promised to take the waste off their hands when a permanent repository was supposed to open a few years later. That never happened, and so the utilities have successfully sued the federal government to recover hundreds of millions of dollars each that they have been spending to store nuclear waste on site.

Darrell Issa wants to rob the fund created by the 1982 NWPA of the interest it is accruing in order to pay for his interim storage proposal. In other words, he won’t even charge the utilities for this massive criminal enterprise, and he specifically intends to let the utilities continue to sue for the cost of continuing to store the waste on site in the meantime.

Issa’s concept is currently illegal, hence the need for his new bill. He tried for several years to get similar bills passed with no success.

The waste canisters cannot be inspected. The ceramic fuel pellets – hundreds of thousands of finger-bone sized pellets in each canister – are already degraded from years of heat, vibration, radiation, and migration of fission products through the fuel.

The possibility of a criticality event exists even without an airplane strike. However, if an airplane did strike the pad, chances of a criticality event are very significant. The force of the impact could push the fuel together, and an airplane strike could also cause a fire which would destroy the containers within about 20 minutes. Either way,

a criticality event becomes almost inevitable after a large airplane strike.

Issa’s bill specifically rejects the intent of the 1982 Act by stating that “nothing” in his bill will “require the disposal of Greater than Class C waste in a repository.” In other words, the “Interim” storage site could become the “permanent” repository for many centuries!

However, unless the Uranium-235 and Plutonium-239 isotopes are neutralized [which can be done through the use of lasers], nuclear waste will remain in danger of a criticality event for millions of years. But no utility wants to invest in neutralization, mainly because destroying the U-235 and Pu-239 would eliminate the possibility of reprocessing the fuel – but that’s actually another huge advantage of laser neutralization.

Issa’s bill is so generous to the nuclear industry, they don’t even have to sign a contract with anyone – the liability for the waste will be automatically transferred to the federal government as soon as the waste is transferred to the interim storage site – which will be run by a company that isn’t liable for it at all.

The real purpose of Issa’s bill is *not* to get the waste moved from closed reactors such as California’s San Onofre, although it’s being pushed for that. It’s really designed to allow operating reactors to empty their spent fuel pools [which are dangerously overcrowded with decades of spent nuclear fuel] and keep operating for 60 to 80 years – well beyond their original design basis of 20 to 40 years.

Eventually “stranded” nuclear waste from closed sites might be moved to the Consolidated Interim Storage sites, but not before operating sites have off-loaded as much fuel as they can get rid of so they can keep operating.

Ace Hoffman is a software developer and programmer in Carlsbad, CA.



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THE MEDIA ARE THE ENEMY
OF THE PEOPLE! ALWAYS WITH
FAKE NEWS BY REPORTING
WHAT I SAY!



Time To Dump Trump Briefings, Turn To Investigative Journalism

BY JUAN COLE

Donald Trump was unhappy recently that the major media had neglected to report a point made by Herman Cain in an interview on Fox. Cain alleged that in Barack Obama's first month, the Federal budget deficit rose \$200 billion, but in Trump's first month it fell to only \$12 billion.

Obviously, Obama had nothing to do with the deficit in his first month – that was a result of the 2008 collapse, which had something to do with Republican

policies of deregulating the banks and other mortgage lenders and declining to exercise any oversight over sketchy practices. And Trump had nothing to do with the deficit during his first month in office. That was a result of Obama's eight years of pulling the economy back out of the toilet to which the Republican Party had consigned it.

Trump's petty attacks on journalists as enemies of America, as the worst people, and as irrationally denying him the credit for his four weeks of economic

turnaround, are deeply worrisome to many Americans sensitive to the danger of a spiral down into authoritarian rule.

William H. McRaven, the retired four-star admiral and former Navy Seal who led the raid against Usama Bin Laden, called Trump's remark on the press as an enemy of the people "the greatest threat to democracy" he has ever seen.

Trump's immature sidelining of reporters on his enemy's list kept rolling on. White House spokesman Sean Spicer was set to do an on-camera press briefing, and then Donald Trump spoke at the conservative gathering CPAC. It is a custom that the spokesman doesn't do an on-camera event the same day the president gives a substantial address. So Spicer switched to doing what is called a "gaggle," a smaller briefing in his office attended only by a few reporters in a pool who then would convey his remarks to others.

Spicer pared down the invitee list to the bare bones. He excluded the BBC, CNN, the New York Times, the Guardian, the Los Angeles Times, BuzzFeed, the Daily Mail and Politico, among others. He allowed ABC, Fox News, Breitbart News, Reuters and the Washington Times. Breitbart is not a news outlet, but a propaganda arm of elements of the Ku Klux Klan who wear suits rather than white robes.

The exclusions were so egregious and petty that the Associated Press, USA Today and Time magazine declined to be present. The Washington Post and McClatchy did not know about the disinvitees, and said that if they had been aware of what was going on, they would not have attended, either.

Since Spicer often conveys fake news [the Atlanta Attack] or pro-Trump propaganda at his briefings, it isn't clear that the excluded media were exactly missing anything.

Then Trump announced that he would be the first president since Tricky Dick Nixon voluntarily to skip the annual dinner of the White House correspondents, where in recent decades the president and the press engaged in some good-natured ribbing. Trump appears to have felt humiliated at one of these events by remarks of then President Barack Obama, pushing back against Trump's outrageous lies about Obama's birthplace.

But Spicer's and Trump's attempts to exclude so many journalists from a briefing may be all to the good.

Something is broken in American journalism. Maybe it is the "inverted pyramid" whereby U.S. reporters put the "most important thing" first in the article. It has been pointed out that this way of organizing the article gives an unfair advantage to a duplicitous administration, since anything the president says goes first in the article.

Bush and his people used this principle to game the press all the time. [When the scandal about U.S. personnel torturing prisoners at Abu Ghraib in Iraq broke on a Thursday evening, Bush quickly came out and condemned the practice. The Friday headlines

were "President condemns torture at Abu Ghraib."]

Or maybe it is access journalism, whereby an administration adopts a few favored writers and feeds them scoops that it suits the administration to go on the front page.

Or maybe it is the news conference. Why privilege an administration's narrative about itself by doing articles based on nothing more than hot air coming from the general direction of the West Wing?

Most major newspapers in the U.S., when there were major print newspapers, used to have an investigative journalism team. With the decline of ad revenue and the hard times on which journalism has fallen, investigative journalism has often been abandoned.

Administrations and the Washington bureaucracy don't like a young journalist nosing around. ProPublica, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, and some other independent organizations [often with limited resources] have been left to try to fill the gap left when big media cut back on investigative reporting.

But we need that back, big time, in this administration. Everywhere you dig in Trump's cabinet, you find bodies.

So instead of sitting in a room being fed falsehoods by Spicer or Trump, best for the journalists to be working contacts in the White House or at NSC or the Pentagon to get the real story.

Enough people in Washington are appalled by the Trump-Bannon attempt to fascize America that they seem willing to leak damaging information all on their own. How much better if a trained journalist got those stories through initiative.

So here's to Trump excluding virtually all the newspapers and cable channels. Let him. Go get the scoops he doesn't want you to have.

Someone [probably not George Orwell] once said, "News is something somebody doesn't want printed; all else is advertising." Whoever said it, truer words were never spoken.

We need less advertising [or "public relations" in some versions], and a helluva lot more journalism these days.

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

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"WHAT DID THE PRESIDENT KNOW, AND WHEN DID PUTIN KNOW IT?"

Why That Russian Dossier Can't Be Ignored

BY JOE CONASON

To see Michael Flynn depart his White House post in a miasma of misconduct – amid memories of his “lock her up” speech about Hillary Clinton at the Republican convention last summer – was satisfying. To hear that he might be replaced as national security adviser by someone saner is reassuring.

But Flynn’s ouster is only the first chapter in a potentially historic scandal that has begun to unfold. The contradictory accounts and explanations offered by presidential counselor Kellyanne Conway, press secretary Sean Spicer and others around Donald Trump left crucial questions unanswered.

According to the most plausible version, Sally Q. Yates, then the acting attorney general, informed the White House counsel’s office in late January about NSA intercepts of conversations between Flynn and Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak. Transcripts showed that contrary to public assertions by Flynn –

bolstered by Vice President Mike Pence – the retired general and Trump campaign adviser had discussed with the ambassador the possibility of lifting sanctions imposed on Russia by President Obama. Accompanied by a Justice Department national security official, Yates told White House counsel Don McGahn that they feared Flynn might be vulnerable to Russian blackmail.

The same day, McGahn informed Trump and senior aides about Yates’ concerns. But the president did nothing to contain or curtail Flynn for more than two weeks – until he requested the national security adviser’s resignation on Feb. 13. At a press briefing the following day, Spicer said that the “erosion of trust,” rather than any actual wrongdoing, had forced Flynn’s removal.

What Flynn did exactly, and under whose auspices, are important questions that must be answered pub-

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Trump's Atrocious Choice For French Ambassador

BY JEREMY KUZMAROV

As a former Montreal Expo baseball fan, I was greatly dismayed to hear that Jeffrey Loria has been appointed as ambassador to France as a reward for his six-figure donation to the Trump campaign.

Montrealers consider Loria a snake responsible for destroying the Expo franchise, which in its heyday featured all-star caliber players like Tim Lincecum, Larry Walker, Pedro Martinez and Vladimir Guerrero and captured the hearts of the city's English and French residents.

In 1999, Loria, a wealthy New York art dealer who once owned Oklahoma City's minor league baseball team, bought over a 24% share of the Expos for \$12 million after a failed bid to buy the Baltimore Orioles, and then increased his ownership to 90% over the next few years.

Following the 1994 players strike which cost the team a chance for its first World Series, the Expos had been forced to sell off their top players. Rather than reviving the franchise, Loria with the help of his stepson David Samson sowed its demise.

Thinking only about short-term profit, he demanded broadcaster rights fees so great that no English speaking radio or television station would carry the games. Then, when the city of Montreal agreed to raise money for a new stadium, Loria demanded it pay an excessively high portion of the building costs, leading to the project's cancelations.

In the personnel department, Loria brought in overpriced free agents like first baseman Lee Stevens and aging pitchers Hideki Irabu and Graeme Lloyd who proved to be busts and fired beloved manager Felipe Alou, who had refused an offer to become manager of the Los Angeles Dodgers out of loyalty.

Loria replaced Alou with his friend, Jeff Torborg, forgetting how Alou had turned the Expos into a powerhouse by recruiting and harnessing Latin American talent, including his son Moises, and star outfielder Vladimir Guerrero, who left via free agency for the Anaheim Angels.

In 2002, Loria sold the Montreal Expos to a consortium of major league baseball investors for \$120 million, ten times his initial investment. He used the money and an interest-free loan from major league baseball to purchase the Florida Marlins, whose owner John Henry was allowed to purchase the Boston Red Sox in a kind of owner free agent swap.

The Expos franchise soon thereafter became the Washington Nationals.

Stephen Bronfman, son of the Expos founding owner, sued Loria under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act ["RICO"], for conspiring to eliminate the Expos in a fraudulent scheme that included wire and mail fraud.

Attorney Sam Minzberg said Loria "wanted to create a financial crisis for this team," so he could receive a bailout from major league baseball that would make him money and enable him to achieve his dream of owning a more lucrative franchise.

Loria's activity is a clear example of what journalist Naomi Klein calls the shock doctrine, in which business elites who shape government policy manufacture political and economic crises which they themselves can profit off of.

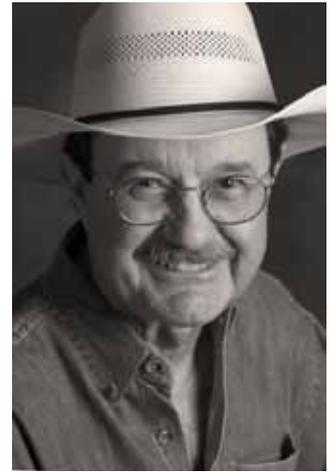
After the Miami Marlins won the World Series in 2003, Loria got Florida taxpayers to divvy up over \$639 million dollars for a fancy new stadium that was described by the Miami New Times after it was built as "a festering, silver-plated pustule, a grotesquely huge can opener, or just an obscene ode to wasted cash."

Instead of rewarding South Florida's residents for financing the project, Loria dropped the team's payroll by 80%, trading star shortstop Jose Reyes and pitchers Josh Johnson and Mark Buehrle to the Toronto Blue Jays in November 2012 for the equivalent of "a Lloyd Moseby rookie card and Dave Steib's mustache trimmer," as The Nation's sport columnist David Zirin put it.

The Marlins went on to compile among the worst records in baseball, though Loria – the "ebola virus of major league owners," as Zirin calls him – made off with record profits. Just last month, he was negotiating to sell the Marlins for \$1.6 billion – over a billion-dollar profit from when he purchased the team – to Jared Kushner's younger brother, though the deal was canceled because of his new job.

Mr. Loria is a mirror image of Mr. Trump in his pursuit of profit without concern for the human cost, and he will fit in well in an administration dominated by unscrupulous millionaires and climate-change denying creeps. French citizens should be alerted, though, to the shark soon to be landing in their midst, whose appointment embodies everything wrong with politics in our new Gilded Age.

Tulsan Jeremy Kuzmarov is author of Modernizing Repression: Police Training and Nation Building in the American Century [Massachusetts, 2012] and recalls fondly attending Expo games and reading columns by Jack Todd in the Montreal Gazette.



Wall Street Plowboys

John Steinbeck's novel *Grapes of Wrath*. Woody Guthrie's ballad *Deportee*. Edward R. Murrow's documentary *Harvest of Shame*. Every decade or so, the public is shocked by yet another discovery that migrant farmworkers are being horribly abused by the wealthy masters of the corporate food system. And here we go again.

Last November, the New York Times reported that the workers who grow and harvest the cornucopia of fruit and veggies in the rich fields of California's Salinas Valley live in a constant crisis of poverty, malnutrition and homelessness. Toiling in "America's salad bowl," they literally cannot afford to eat the fresh, nutritious edibles they produce.

The Valley is a gold mine of groceries, generating billions of dollars in sales that have enriched landowners and corporate executives and turned Salinas Valley into farm country with Silicon Valley prices.

Unable to afford good food, the workers eat poorly – 85% are overweight or obese, and nearly six out of 10 have been diagnosed with diabetes [while many more, uninsured and unable to afford testing, go undiagnosed].

Especially appalling, about a third of elementary schoolchildren in the Salinas City district are homeless. They sleep with their families in tents, abandoned buildings, tool sheds, chicken coops, or on the ground, next to the rows of crops they tend.

Allowing such abject poverty in our fields of abundance is more than shameful – it's an oozing sore on our national soul, made even more immoral by the fact that our society throws 40% of our food into the garbage. But outrageous treatment of farmworkers is not limited to Salinas – you can likely find it down some rural road near you.

When we find it, let's act on it. Yes, donate money and time to food banks, but it's even more important for us to join with farmworkers in local, state, and national political actions to *stop* this gross, un-American inequity.

Adding to the inequality that has affected so many farm workers is the fact that Wall Street has our nation's farmland.

Our nation's farms conjure up Americana, the old

homeplace, and our rich, rural culture.

Less bucolic, however, is the assortment of financial trusts and hedge fund hucksters that are buying up these farms and converting them into fast-buck investment packages for super-rich global speculators.

One of these Wall Street investment schemes is called Farmland Partners Inc. It's run by a couple of slicks trained in mergers and acquisitions as executives at the investment powerhouse, Merrill Lynch. Rather than sobbusters, Farmland Partners are tax-busters, using a legalistic plow called Real Estate Investment Trust [REIT] to get enormous tax breaks to subsidize their scheme.

With this special subsidy, the Partners have attracted hundreds of millions of dollars from investors to buy up farms and ranches – they now own 295 ag properties covering 144,000 acres in 16 states including California's Salinas Valley.

Of course, the Wall Street plowboys don't soil their own soft hands by actually farming, they've figured out how to "work" the land without touching it – and how to harvest a sweet profit.

The syndicate hires tenant farmers to do the sweaty work of plowing, planting, and nurturing the crops. This tenant system produces a double-line cash flow for the faraway owners – Farmland Partners charges the tenants rent for tilling the corporate soil, then the Partners harvest a sweet share of any profits from the sale of crops the tenants produce.

"It's like gold," says the founder of one such scheme, "but better, because there's cash flow."

Meanwhile, the young farmers America desperately needs – those who actually want to, you know, farm – are having a hard time finding affordable land to get started. These new generation farmers can easily be out-bid for good land by Wall Street speculators who have the cash flow from tenants and the subsidy from taxpayers to underwrite their financial contrivance.

To prevent the money schemers from literally walling off young farmers, and to fight this insidious Wall Street takeover of agriculture, connect with www.YoungFarmers.org.

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Hallelujah, Trump Rushes To Aid The Needy!

Of all the economic pain in America that Washington ought to be relieving, what group would you choose as the top priority?

Public opinion surveys consistently reveal that the great majority of us say that people on the lower rungs of the economic ladder – the poor and the failing middle class – are the ones Congress should focus on. But, then, regular people don't run Congress – or Donald Trump's White House.

On Feb. 3, Trump and a blue-ribbon panel of working-class champions announced a bold new initiative to create millions of new American jobs. The panel members were genuinely thrilled that the president was acting so swiftly and decisively. Indeed, a spokesman for the group, Steve Schwarzman, praised Trump as a leader who wants to “do things a lot better in our country, for all Americans.”

Wait a minute ... Steve Schwarzman? Isn't he the billionaire honcho of Blackstone, a group of Wall Street hucksters? Yes, and holy moneybags, there's Jamie Dimon, who's presided over a mess of investment frauds and financial scandals as head of JPMorgan Chase. This “jobs” panel is filled with Wall Street banksters and chieftains of such corporate powers as Walmart, GE and Boeing – outfits notorious for laying off and ripping off workers.

You might remember Trump-the-candidate fulminating against those very elites as being “responsible for the economic decisions that have robbed our working class.” But now, in a spectacular flip-flop, he's brought them directly inside his presidency, asking them to be architects of his economic strategy. Worse, he's doing this in the name of helping workers.

Hello – to develop policies beneficial to working stiffs, bring in some working stiffs! But not a single labor advocate is on his policy council, in his cabinet or anywhere near his White House.

Thus, the so-called “job-creation plan” announced by Trump and his corporate cohorts doesn't create any jobs, but calls instead for – voila – deregulating Wall Street. These flimflammers actually want us rubes to believe that “freeing” banksters to return to casino-style speculation and consumer scams will give them more money, which they “can” invest in American jobs.

Do they think we have sucker wrappers around our heads? Trump's scheme will let banks make a killing, but it doesn't require them to invest in jobs, so they won't. There's a name for this: fraud.

Many of Trump's working class voters must've been a bit stunned to see that his top economic priority was not them, but a tiny group dwelling in luxury at the very tippy-top of the ladder: The very Wall Street bankers he campaigned against. Cheered on by House Speaker Paul Ryan and the other corporate-owned GOP congressional leaders, Trump rushed out a “reform” proposal to undo essential financial restrictions that help keep the banksters of the street from defrauding and gouging workaday people.

For example, “Trump & Co.” want to save the poor financial giants from a consumer protection called the “fiduciary rule.” If you've got a 401[k] retirement plan, chances are it's invested on your behalf by a firm of financial advisors, so this rule simply requires them to act in your best interest, rather than shifting your money into risky investments that pay them bigger commissions. Prior to the enactment of this ethics provision in 2015, many advisors were serving themselves, gleefully ripping off their customers [mostly ordinary working families] to the tune of \$17 billion a year!

That's real money, even if immorally gained, and the industry has lobbied hard [but unsuccessfully] to kill the legal requirement that money advisors deal honestly with their clients. Then, hallelujah, along comes a president who's known for dishonest business dealings. So – voila – suddenly Wall Street is being liberated from the shackles of ethics, shouting: “Free at last, free at last! Thank Donald Almighty, we are free at last” ... to gouge again. – *Jim Hightower*

It's Time To Put Food Policy Back On The Table

During the farm crisis of the 1980s, an Iowa farmer asked if I knew the difference between a family farmer and a pigeon. When I said no, he delighted in explaining: “A pigeon can still make a deposit on a new John Deere.”

That's funny – except, it really wasn't. Worse, the bitter reality of the tractor joke is still true: The farm crisis has not gone away, though hundreds of thousands of farm families have. The economic devastation in farm country continues unabated as agribusiness profiteers, Wall Street speculators, urban sprawlers and corrupted political elites squeeze the life out of farmers and rural America.

Remember last year's presidential debates? Trump and Clinton talked about the needs of hard-hit working-class families, veterans and coal miners among others. But, hellloooo, where were farmers? Indeed, where was the multitude of producers who toil on the lands and waters of this country to bring food to our

tables?

All went unmentioned, even though economic and emotional depression is spreading through their communities, thanks to bankruptcy-level prices paid by corporate middlemen. In the past three years, farm income has declined steadily, plummeting 12% in just the last year. But these crucial-but-endangered food producers were totally disappeared by the political cognoscenti.

Actually, the farmer has long been forgotten in America's presidential discussion. In a New York Times op-ed, Professor A. Hope Jahren reported on the discovery she made when reading through transcripts of past debates: "Farm policy hasn't come up even once in a presidential debate for the past 16 years."

That's Bush-Kerry, Obama-McCain, Obama-Romney, and Trump-Clinton! Not one of them mentioned the people who produce our food. Jahren notes that the monetary value of farm production alone is nearly eight times greater than coal mining, a declining industry whose voters Clinton and Trump avidly courted.

This disregard for farmers and food policy is not only irresponsible, but also politically inexplicable when you consider that food is far more than economics to people. Purchasing food has become a political act that takes into account cultural, ethical, environmental, and community values.

This was confirmed last March in a national survey published by Consumer Reports showing that huge percentages of shoppers consider production issues important:

- Supporting local farmers: 91%
- Reducing exposure to pesticides in food: 89%
- Protecting the environment from chemicals: 88%
- Providing better living conditions for farm animals: 84%

Unfortunately, no matter what We the People want, most of the political class willingly surrenders farmers, and food itself, to industrial agribusiness. That

would be that ... except for one thing: You! Far from surrendering to the "inevitability" of a corporatized food future, the great majority of Americans continue to push forward with the alternative future of a local, sustainable, humane – and tasty – food system that benefits all.

The ongoing battle for our food future pits the agri-industrial model of huge-scale, corporate-run operations against the agri-cultural model of sustainable, community-based family farming. The big money is with the global goliaths of corporate ag, but the grip the giants once had on the marketplace has been slipping as consumers and farmers [especially younger producers] are making clear that they prefer non-industrial food. One measure of this is the contrasting fortunes of biotech vs. organic production.

The promised "miracle" of genetically altered crops, introduced in 1994 by Monsanto, turns out to have been ephemeral. The prices of corporate-altered seeds have skyrocketed, yields from those seeds have not met expectations, planting GMO crops has forced farmers to buy more pesticides, and consumers overwhelmingly oppose GMO Frankenfoods. Thus, fewer farmers are using the biotech industry's product: US farmers cut their plantings of GMO crops by 5.4 million acres in 2015, and sales of GMO seeds fell by \$400 million.

Not only does consumer demand for organically produced food keep going up, but such major producers as General Mills and Kellogg are switching to greater use of organic ingredients. As of last June, the number of America's certified organic farms was 14,979 [up by more than 6% from a year earlier], and sales of organic products zoomed up by 11% to \$43.3 billion in 2015, about four times more than the growth in conventional food sales. This rise would have gone even higher, but the demand for organic is now outstripping the supply!

Consumers clearly want to buy more, thus creating good opportunities for new organic farmers – and a bright future for agri-culture. – *Jim Hightower*

Enough About Ivanka's Shoes

BY SUSAN ESTRICH

That the two most prominent women in the Trump Administration should be caught up in a controversy about shoes tells you [if not our new leader] how far we have to go.

In a world threatened by ISIS, in a nation of immigrants wondering who will next be deported, is Kellyanne Conway's endorsement of Ivanka Trump's shoes really worthy of a federal investigation, really enough to hold up her security clearance, really deserving of the millions of words that have been written about it, most of them fairly vicious?

In case you're not a follower, Nordstrom, the de-

partment-store chain known for its great shoe department, announced that it would no longer be carrying Ivanka Trump's line of shoes because of slow sales. Some people questioned whether it was poor sales or partisan politics that led to the decision. One of them was her father, who took Nordstrom to task in a tweet [what else]. And the top woman in the administration, who reportedly was brought on to manage the campaign at Ivanka Trump's urging, defended her sponsor and her shoes on Fox News.

Asked about the shoes, Conway said that she thought the shoes were stylish and comfortable, that



she sometimes wore them herself, and that women should buy them online.

Of this, a federal case is being made. Seriously.

I understand, as every story finds a present or former Hill staffer to point out, that one of the first things you learn when you jump in the so-called swamp is that you are not supposed to use your official position to endorse private interests. What makes this rule so amusing, of course, is that there is nothing wrong with accepting millions of dollars [through the proper committees] from private interests and then doing their bidding in legislation worth far more. We call that "fundraising." It is actually the first thing you learn when you go to work for an elected official. You can return favors every day of the week when doing official business, so long as you don't flaunt the fig leaf that one thing has nothing to do with the other. But speaking up for Ivanka Trump's shoes? Stop the security-clearance process for that woman!

The White House is always a trap for those who enter it for the first time. Remember Hillary Clinton's dust-up with the travel office, when as first lady she dared to suggest reorganization of the office, which catered to the every need of the press corps. And poor Vince Foster, may he rest in peace, who I think virtually everyone can finally agree was not the victim of

some inside conspiracy but of the humiliation that can be heaped on newcomers who do not know how the game is played. Of course, Conway may be new to the White House, but she is an experienced political player: if she could get this man into the White House, she is not going to be stopped in the shoe aisle. Nor should she be. Not over shoes.

Of all the things that people in this administration have said and done, Kellyanne Conway's endorsement of Ivanka Trump's shoes has got to be among the least important and the least deserving of attention, let alone investigation.

I remember the day that we found out that our boss, Geraldine Ferraro, was going to be the Democratic nominee for vice president. One of the first things she asked was that Pam go to a particular shoe store in Georgetown to buy her a few pairs of her favorite, most comfortable pumps. Off went Pam. Later, I was repeatedly quizzed by reporters about those first hours, and I always left out the part about the shoes. We were already dealing with so many questions about lipstick and the rest. We knew these types of questions were sexist, but it was 1984, and we thought we were doing pretty well. Thirty years later, and we're still talking shoes.

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Back in 1776 a whole new nation was formed. Thirteen british colonies tried unsuccessfully to have the concerns of their citizens heard or taken seriously by the empire across the Atlantic. So the colonists formed themselves into a union.

The preamble to the constitution begins with these words "We the people of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union...". A more perfect union was the very first reason for the founding of the United States of America.

America IS a union. You can't be anti-union and pro-America at the same time. Period.

-Arlo Guthrie



As Unions Decline, Construction Workers Dying At Alarming Rates

BY SAM PIZZIGATI

Try this the next time you find yourself standing on a Wall Street corner. Ask the first power suit you see why Wall Street's finest deserve to be making \$25 billion in bonuses a year.

Wall Streeters actually have a ready response for impertinent questions like this: We deserve the big bucks, they'll tell you, because we take risks.

Truth be told, risk-takers do abound in the canyons of Manhattan. But to see them, you have to lift your line of sight off street level – and beyond the corner offices of Wall Street's high-finance movers and shakers.

You have to look skyward, up into the "high steel" world of construction workers continually adding new towers to the city's skyline.

These workers risk life and limb every day – and don't get anywhere near the reward that those "risk-

taking" power suits are grabbing.

How risky has construction work in New York become? Over the past two years, 31 construction workers in the city have died. Between 2011 and 2015, the city's Department of Buildings reports, instances of on-the-job construction injuries climbed 250 percent.

But New York hardly counts as an isolated example. In 2014, the latest year with full stats, 899 construction workers nationwide died from fatal work injuries, a 9% increase over the year before.

Why so much carnage in construction? Some of the same factors that make Wall Streeters fabulously rich are making construction work tragically unsafe.

Start with the steady erosion of America's unions. Fewer construction workers today carry union cards, and this declining union presence has severe consequences for safety. Construction unions have

traditionally run well-regarded safety training programs, and they give individual workers the clout they need to challenge hazardous working conditions.

Without unions, workers in construction regularly find themselves both inadequately trained and forced to labor in situations that could – and do – kill them. Of the 31 New York construction workers who've perished on the job over the last two years, 29 have died working on nonunion job sites.

Unfortunately, even union sites have become more dangerous, as huge national construction companies have come to dominate what used to be a small-business sector.

In years past, local unions could bargain with modest-sized construction contractors and not feel overmatched. Not anymore. Unions know that if they challenge today's construction giants too strenuously on safety, construction work will flow even faster to nonunion operations.

And what about OSHA, the federal agency that's supposed to protect the job safety of America's work-

ing people?

The anti-government and anti-regulation hysteria of recent decades has left OSHA woefully understaffed. Chronic budget squeezes have trimmed the ranks of OSHA job-site inspectors down to about 2,200 – or approximately one compliance officer for every 59,000 American workers.

What could turn this situation around? We need stronger safety regulations, for starters, and a stronger OSHA to enforce them. We need public policies that give all workers a shot at gaining effective union representation.

We need, in other words, everything that the new Trump Administration isn't planning to deliver. Trump has already put the kibosh on any new hires at OSHA and announced plans to cut existing federal regulations – on workplace safety and everything else – by 75%.

More carnage is coming – unless we start making attacks on job safety politically unsafe.

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More GOP Handouts To The Rich

BY DEAN BAKER

We all know how hard it is to be rich. After all, it takes a lot of money to keep up multiple homes, pay for first class air travel, expensive cars and the like.

For this reason, most people would naturally support a Republican plan to make workers pay higher fees on their retirement accounts so that the Wall Street crew is better able to maintain their standard of living.

Unfortunately, this is not a joke. One of the major problems facing workers today is the inability to save for retirement. Traditional defined benefit pensions are rapidly disappearing. Roughly half the workforce now has access to a 401[k] defined contribution plan at their workplace, but we know that these generally are not providing much support in retirement.

Most workers manage to accumulate little money in these accounts over the span of their working career. Part of this is due to the fact that they often change jobs. They may go several years without being able to contribute to a 401[k] plan at their workplace. And they often cash out the money that they saved in a plan when they leave a job.

In addition, many of these plans charge high fees. This is often overlooked by workers since the financial companies operating the plans usually don't like to advertise their fees. The average fee is close to 1% of the money saved, with many charging fees of 1.5% or higher.

If this sounds like a small matter, imagine that you were able to save \$100,000 in a 401[k]. That would put you way ahead of most workers, since the median

accumulation among the 60% of the workforce who have 401[k]s was just \$26,000 in 2015, but \$100,000 is certainly a plausible amount for a worker earning \$60,000 a year.

A fee of 1% means that this worker is giving \$1,000 a year to the financial industry. If they are paying 1.5%, then they are giving the financial industry \$1,500 a year. But this is not a single year story. Suppose you average \$100,000 in your account over a 20-year period. You might have handed over \$30,000 to a bank, brokerage house or insurance company for basically nothing. Feel good now?

Several states, most notably Illinois and California, are in the process of opening up their public retirement plans to workers in the private sector to allow people to save without giving so much money to the financial industry. Under this plan, workers in private firms would have the option to contribute to a state managed system.

This would have the advantage of keeping the same plan even as someone changed jobs and the fees would be far lower. Instead of fees of 1% to 1.5%, workers would likely be seeing fees in the range of .2% to .3% percent. Did I mention this was voluntary?

OK, so we're talking about giving workers the option to save for their own retirement in individual accounts. If the Republican Party stood for anything other than giving money to rich people, this would be it.

But the Republicans are up in arms against making it easier for workers to save. Paul Ryan and his gang are planning to deny states the right to offer such

plans. The trick they are using is in a ruling by the Labor Department which gives the individual employers exemptions from the Employee Retirement Income Security Act [ERISA] requirements when their workers contribute to the state sponsored plan. The ERISA requirements are designed to ensure that an employer operating a pension plan for their workers is doing proper bookkeeping and is handling the money appropriately.

In this case, it doesn't make sense for the ERISA rules to apply to individual employers since all they are doing is sending a check for their workers' contributions to the state-operated system. The individual employer plays zero role in what happens to the money.

This is the reason the Labor Department ruled last year that ERISA did not apply to individual employers who had workers taking part in the state-sponsored system. It is this ruling that Paul Ryan's gang wants to reverse.

They argue, incredibly, that workers need safeguards with their savings and that the government must have oversight over employers sending checks to the state system.

This one is too ridiculous even for Washington politics. Everyone knows that there is nothing the Republicans in Congress hate more than government regulations that protect workers.

This is why they were so anxious to repeal the fiduciary rule requiring financial advisers to act in the interest of their clients. This is why they want to gut the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

The story here is about as simple as it gets. Republicans' buddies in the financial industry will lose a lot of money if workers can put their money in these state-sponsored retirement systems instead of having to rely on their rip-off outfits. The Republicans are rigging the system to transfer tens of billions of dollars a year from ordinary workers to their rich friends.

The only principle here is giving more money to the rich.

Dean Baker is a macroeconomist and co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington, DC. He previously worked as a senior economist at the Economic Policy Institute and an assistant professor at Bucknell University.

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Why Trumponomics Fails

BY ROBERT REICH

When Donald Trump gave a speech recently at Boeing's factory in North Charleston, SC – unveiling Boeing's new 787 "Dreamliner" – he congratulated Boeing for building the plane "right here" in South Carolina.

It's pure fantasy. I'll let you know why in a moment.

Trump also used the occasion to tout his "America First" economics, stating "our goal as a nation must be to rely less on imports and more on products made here in the U.S.A." and "we want products made by our workers in our factories stamped by those four magnificent words, 'Made in the U.S.A.'"

To achieve this goal Trump would impose "a very substantial penalty" on companies that fired their workers and moved to another country to make a product, and then tried to sell it back to America.

The carrot would be lower taxes and fewer regulations "that send our jobs to those other countries."

Trump seems utterly ignorant about global competition – and about what's really holding back American workers.

Start with Boeing's Dreamliner itself. It's not "made in the U.S.A." It's assembled in the United States. But most of its parts come from overseas. Those foreign parts total almost a third of the cost of the entire plane.

For example:

The Italian firm Alenia Aeronautica makes the center fuselage and horizontal stabilizers.

The French firm Messier-Dowty makes the aircraft's landing gears and doors.

The German firm Diehl Luftfahrt Elektronik sup-

plies the main cabin lighting.

The Swedish firm Saab Aerostructures makes the cargo access doors.

The Japanese company Jamco makes parts for the lavatories, flight deck interiors and galleys.

The French firm Thales makes its electrical power conversion system.

Thales selected GS Yuasa, a Japanese firm, in 2005 to supply it with the system's lithium-ion batteries.

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

MEETING FOR WORSHIP SCHEDULE AND CONTACTS

OKLAHOMA CITY: 333 SE 46th St, 73129. Worship Sunday evening at 7pm. FMI 405.632.7574
<http://www.rsof-okc.com>

STILLWATER: Sunday morning. Call 405.372.4839

TULSA: Sunday afternoon. Call 918.743.6827

NORMAN: Sunday morning. Call 405.321.7971

KAIAMICHI WORSHIP GROUP (SE OK): Monthly. Call 918.569.4803.

The British company Rolls Royce makes many of the engines.

A Canadian firm makes the moveable trailing edge of the wings.

Notably, these companies don't pay their workers low wages. In fact, when you add in the value of health and pension benefits – either directly from these companies to their workers, or in the form of public benefits to which the companies contribute – most of these foreign workers get a better deal than do Boeing's workers. [The average wage for Boeing production and maintenance workers in South Carolina is \$20.59 per hour, or \$42,827 a year.] They also get more paid vacation days.

These nations also provide most young people with excellent educations and technical training. They continuously upgrade the skills of their workers. And they offer universally-available health care.

To pay for all this, these countries also impose higher tax rates on their corporations and wealthy

individuals than does the United States. And their health, safety, environmental, and labor regulations are stricter.

Not incidentally, they have stronger unions.

So why is so much of Boeing's Dreamliner coming from these high-wage, high-tax, high-cost places?

Because the parts made by workers in these countries are better, last longer, and are more reliable than parts made anywhere else.

There's a lesson here.

The way to make the American workforce more competitive isn't to put economic walls around America. It's to invest more and invest better in the education and skills of Americans, in on-the-job training, in a healthcare system that reaches more of us and makes sure we stay healthy. And to give workers a say in their companies through strong unions.

In other words, we get a first-class workforce by investing in the productive capacities of Americans –

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Dossier

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ly. While he may not have incurred criminal liability by lying to the vice president, he's in trouble if he lied to the FBI – which is investigating the Russian entanglements of Flynn and others. Eventually, he may have to testify under a grant of immunity. In the meantime, Trump could easily declassify transcripts of Flynn's "perfectly normal" conversations with Kislyak – both before and after Election Day.

Yet instead of acting to reassure the public, Trump is complaining about "leaks" from U.S. intelligence services. Such whining ill befits a man who urged the Russians to hack Hillary Clinton's emails and then celebrated the WikiLeaks exposure of stolen Democratic email files. Besides, it is now obvious that Trump would have done nothing about Flynn, the "kompromat" national security adviser, had the leaks not exposed this dangerous situation.

Beyond Flynn's dubious conduct, however, and the Trump White House attempt to cover it up, an even deeper problem is festering. The allegations in the controversial dossier compiled by former British intelligence agent Christopher Steele are increasingly plausible, even if still "unconfirmed" – supported by independent reporting and circumstantial evidence. Steele's investigation allegedly uncovered a web of clandestine and illicit connections between Trump, his associates and campaign staff, and Russian government and corporate entities close to President Vladimir Putin – and the dossier included copious details, including specific plans, conversations and relationships.

Now, as politicians of both parties recognize the imperative to investigate the Russia connection, the Steele dossier will provide a roadmap – not to perverse romps with Moscow prostitutes, but to the Rus-

sian subversion of American democracy.

Just last week, CNN reported that U.S. intelligence officials have confirmed – based on American communications intercepts – that some conversations among Russian officials and others occurred exactly as described in the dossier. Those findings have given U.S. "intelligence and law enforcement 'greater confidence' in the credibility of some aspects of the dossier."

The Steele dossier also described an enormous proposed payoff by the Russians to Trump and his associates, who were to receive 19% of Rosneft, the state-owned Russian energy firm, in exchange for guaranteeing the end of U.S. sanctions under a Trump presidency. Then at the end of last year, an unprecedented deal involving Rosneft shares actually occurred – when Russia privatized 19.5% of Rosneft under mysterious circumstances.

The supposed buyers were Qatar's sovereign wealth fund and Glencore, a huge resources company [founded, ironically enough, Marc Rich, the late trader whose pardon by President Bill Clinton in 2001 provoked a furor]. According to Reuters, the true buyers of the Rosneft shares remain unknown, hidden behind a series of shell companies in the Cayman Islands. Such a hidden selloff of public property is mind-boggling – and deeply suspicious.

Nothing has been proved yet except that Flynn is a liar, and that Trump's crazed and chaotic White House failed to discipline him until they had no choice. Now the Republicans who knew Trump was unfit to serve will have to rein in this perilous presidency. Had they only put country above party last year, they – and we – would not be facing this crisis.

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Getting To Know Trump's Voters

STRANGERS IN THEIR OWN LAND

Anger And Mourning On The American Right

By Arlie Russell Hochschild

The New Press

288 pages, \$27.95

BY JOHN WOOD

Since Donald Trump won the presidency, many people have been scrambling to understand what happened. Who voted for “The Donald”? Who could have? How do they think the way they do?

Likewise, Arlie Russell Hochschild, an emeritus University of California-Berkeley sociology professor, said, “We need to understand those who see government more as a problem than solution. And so it was that I began my journey to the heart of the American right.”

Strangers in Their Own Land is an interesting journey into the Louisiana bayou country where Hochschild decided to study its people and get to know them. Not surprisingly, the bayou was not very accepting of her liberal “ivory tower” sensibilities. And yet, over many trips, she finds some sense of common ground.

She confronts many Tea Party adherents, but works hard to listen. In her book, she finds that we all share an embrace of our family and children’s future, as well as the health of our community. But she also finds this community’s fears of economic instability, government duplicity, and cultural collapse.

Through these fears, she finds the popularity of a candidate like Donald Trump. And why those on the blue-collar right hate the government even when they, more than any other demographic, benefit from its largess.

Hochschild finds stories of heartbreaking damage to the environment and to the health of workers. At the same time, she finds corporate abuse of the legal system to avoid paying meaningful damages for emission of toxic chemicals into the environment. While Hochschild says we need more regulations, those who she interviews seem to just want government out of their lives.

She meets Mike Schaff at an environmental rally

in Baton Rouge, for example, where he nervously tells the story of how a sinkhole ruined his property. Instead of pointing to a largely deregulated drilling company for its lack of checks on what it did, Mike instead pointed to the need for further rolling back of the administrative state.

This exploration also led the Berkeley emeritus to try to understand “Empathy Walls,” which she describes as “an obstacle of deep understanding of another person, one that can make us feel indifferent or even hostile to those who hold different beliefs or whose childhood is rooted in different circumstances.” She notes that in 1960, a survey found that 5% would be “disturbed” if their child married someone of another political party, but by 2010 that shot up to 33% for Democrats and 40% for Republicans – a figure, amazingly enough, that beats race as a factor.

Unfortunately, we are self-sorting ourselves to like-minded communities and the more this sorting is done, it exacerbates extremism. She says this is the case because the Right has moved further right, but this is not necessarily the case for the Left.

Consequences of this shift are most felt in the South where she finds that “people in red states die five years earlier than people in blue states.” She notes that Louisiana itself is 49th in overall health rankings, according to the U.S. “human development” index. Not surprisingly, I find that Oklahoma is in the bottom five as the 45th worst.

Hochschild finds an alternative to the progressive narrative that regulations can keep big corporations at bay: conservatives tend to believe that more money and less regulation would result in cleaner water and air. This is part of the “deep story” she depicts – that people of color, immigrants and women get what they get only because they are “cutting ahead of you in line,” violating fairness and the “American way.”

This is evidenced through the fact that their fa-

thers and their fathers' fathers did not have to compete for scarce, well paying jobs, especially those in the public sector. For the Tea Party, the narrative is that they are who made America great. This feeling is reinforced by Fox News and right wing radio.

Who is to blame? Barack Obama and everyone who supports him. The recession made things worse as it stepped up the competition for these jobs.

Hochschild states: "You are a stranger in your own land. You do not recognize yourself in how others see you. It's a struggle to feel seen and honored. And to feel honored you have to feel – seen as – moving forward. But through no fault of your own, and in ways that are hidden, you are slipping backward."

She goes further to say that these Tea Partiers look to the workplace for respect, but find jobs are scarcer and wages are flat. "You get no extra points for your race. You look to gender, but if you're a man, you get not extra points for that either." And so on.

If you appeal to being a minority as well, you are chastised for it, but you can get recognition. Instead, they join likeminded people who share the same "deep story" – the Tea Party. And then Trump stands on stage, speaking about this "deep story."

For these people, redistribution of "their" money, cultural marginalization – gays, race, guns, marriage, etc. – and the perceived demographic decline of "white Christians" have fueled this movement.

One would think this group would identify with other marginalized groups, such as people of color, but they identify "up" the social ladder instead.

Through Hochschild's many interviews and time spent with those in the bayou, she was able to tap into this "deep story" and create some sense of coherence as to why such a precedent-breaking figure like Donald Trump could identify with those so unlike him.

And until progressives also fig-

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ure out how to identify with this working class, it will not be the end of Trump or others like him who will turn the presidency and the country upside down.

Hochschild's book is a smooth and enlightening narrative filled with interviews and data placed in

proper context. If you ever want to understand why people support Trump without question, read this book. You will never look at the Tea Party the same way again.

John Wood is an associate professor of political science at the University of Central Oklahoma.

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Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

the fantasy that more cuts can patch the budget hole without further crippling state services.

Here's what needs to happen: Republican powers-that-be must isolate their caucus' noisy fringe and work with legislative Democrats to forge a compromise on taxes, including income and gross production.

Otherwise, the early session teacher pay promises will be just so much lip service. Pitchforks will be sharpened. Torches lit. And legislative seats will heat to unprecedented levels.

Publicity Stunt

Lt. Gov. Todd Lamb's break with Gov. Mary Fallin over taxes was hardly a profile in courage. Oh, sure, he asserted it was a decision born of principle. But let there be no doubt: it was primarily a political calculus, part of the early jockeying in the 2018 governor's race.

How do we know? Because Fallin's plan to generate \$934 million by broadening sales taxes was DOA the minute she unveiled it in her Feb. 6 State of the State.

Her party's legislative supermajority was never going to embrace it – especially with every currently untaxed special interest dispatching lobbyists to the Capitol.

Actually, there was no need for Lamb to showboat that he disagrees with the governor – unless he's feeling the heat from Tulsa attorney Gary Richardson's possible gubernatorial bid.

The deep-pocketed Richardson, who sank \$2 million-plus of his own money into an unsuccessful independent campaign for governor in 2002, would run this time as a Republican.

And he's pushing all the buttons that appeal to hard-core, uber-right GOP primary voters – his Facebook page is full of Bible verses and anti-tax screeds.

Oh, something else you show know: He helped build Facebook followers – up to nearly 2,000 as of late morning Feb. 17 – by giving away an AR-15 rifle.

Lamb's effort to distance himself from an unpopular governor might prove to be less than clever.

You see, it's doubtful many Oklahomans even knew the lieutenant governor was a member of Fallin's cabinet. By making a production of his exit, he actually alerted voters to the fact he's been a member of the executive team that helped drive the state off a fiscal cliff.

Fallin clearly did not find the maneuver amusing, pointing out in a written statement that she was "disappointed and surprised to learn from a press release

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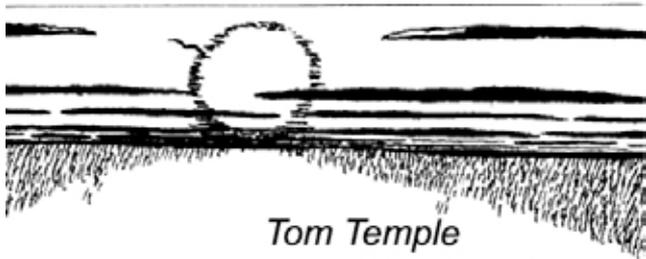


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Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Sen. Ervin Yen, OK's first Asian-American lawmaker, was target of racist fliers assailing his plan to tighten vaccination requirements for public school students. #StopTheHate

Fact I: 161,000 Floridians wrote in names like Mickey Mouse on their presidential ballots. Fact II: Donald Trump received nearly 113,000 more votes in the state than Hillary Clinton. Fact III: Dimwits elect dimwits.

Laurel: To the horde that turned out for Sen. Ralph Shortey's Town Hall, demanding he not to derail voter-approved criminal justice reform measures. Shortey wisely backed off SBs 512 and 503.

Incumbent state Democratic Chair Mark Hammons, an OKC lawyer and former state rep, is being challenged for re-election by well-known capital attorney Mark Henricksen. State convention is May 20 in OKC.

Dart: To House Business, Commerce and Tourism Chair Elise Hall, refusing to hear Rep. Jason Dunnington's pay transparency bill aimed at promoting equal pay for women. Hall was the only female rep not to sign on as co-author.

So it only took 128 years for the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce to select a woman chair? Jordan Advertising's Rhonda Hooper finally shattered the glass ceiling.

As new U.S. AG Jeff Sessions rolls back transgender rights, breaking Trump campaign pledge to protect LGBT rights, Boy Scouts of America adopt a new policy allowing transgender children identifying as boys to enroll in boys-only programs.

It took 12 years but lawmakers finally fixed Oklahoma's Real ID problem. Still, you can expect the black-helicopter-fearing "Freedom Caucus" to latch onto other conspiracies to gum up the legislative process.

In reporting Sen. James Lankford's claim he'd seen no evidence of Trump-Russia link, the Oklahoman neglected to tell its readers the White House enlisted Congress members and intelligence insiders to call media and debunk such ties.

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Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

lism is about showing people through our lives that Jesus is important and not thumping the Bible claiming we are followers.

Tom Newman
Harrah

Editor, The Observer:

Preachers sometimes warn against what they call “cafeteria Christians.” Well, I believe our current political leaders in Washington, DC and in Oklahoma City, who proclaim their Christian status to anyone who will listen and wear their Christian symbols when they have their pictures made, are “cafeteria Christians,” picking and choosing what pleases their palate and what they think will serve their careers.

They line up at the banquet of God’s grace and take a heaping helping of their own personal salvation, but go light on the admonition to “love your neighbor as yourself,” as evidenced by their votes to cut education, DHS, SNAP, and health care for all. I guess they consider these programs “dessert.”

They skip altogether the dictate to “turn the other cheek,” as they punitively refuse to legislate and fund sensible prison reform. They use the command to protect “the widow and the orphan” as a pretext for a huge food fight over abortion and paying for birth control. They seem to care more about unborn kids than those living below the poverty level right here in Oklahoma. [And one-fourth of Oklahoma kids are living in poverty, according to recent statistics.]

They trample under foot the food they let slip from their trays: “remember the stranger within your gates because you are *all* immigrants.” Obviously the ban on refugees fleeing danger and immigrants looking for a better life for their families is akin to not eating a vegetable that is truly good for U.S. but requires some “chewing.”

For some voters and many elected officials, these programs are just a line item, another way government is too big. Some even disparagingly label them the “food trough,” as if people who need help are pigs. But for me, these programs are a way for this “Christian” nation to pool our resources and do more good for more people than any one of us can finance personally through our churches and favorite charities.

I’m a Democrat because I’m a Christian, not in spite of that fact.

Jesus was pretty clear when he said, “Depart from



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me ... for I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat.” He was crystal clear when he continued, “what you *did not do* for the least of these, you *did not do* for me.”

He asked the religious and political leaders of his time – and I can hear Him asking this question of we Christians in 2017 – “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?” [I think we can assume he included the rest of the week in that query.] The Bible says “they remained silent.” I guess they couldn’t think of a good answer. Neither can I when I see hungry kids. Whether they are lining up for free breakfast in Latimer County or in a refugee camp in Syria.

Jesus welcomed all to the table and ate with publicans and sinners.

He didn’t say one word about bathrooms or right to carry or Sharia law or the EPA, but he did say, “Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” I don’t think he mentioned what color or religion or nationality those children had to be.

Ruth Brelsford
Red Oak

Editor, The Observer:

A friend of mine had a succinct observation of Oklahoma’s junior Sen. James Lankford’s recent filing of a bill that if passed would “restore” religious freedom of speech and continue the “freedom” from taxes.

What the bill would do is allow religious corporations to escape the strictures of the IRS and allow them to sponsor and contribute to candidates and political parties and *still* allow them to escape the payment of taxes on their profits and properties.

A Washington Post story of 2013 estimated that more than \$82 billion a year is retained by the followers of the eastern Mediterranean deity.

It seems to me that many doctrinaire churches want to be absolved of civic and moral responsibilities regardless of the harm this dispensation causes to the fabric of our country. Perhaps this is why independent reports show that church attendance in America is falling.

If religion works for some people, that’s fine – have your fill of it. But don’t expect the taxpayers to pick up the tab. *All* religious institutions, regardless of origin, are exempt from the payment of property and even sales taxes for no other reason that they won the argument that to do so was mixing their dogma with politics.

My dogma is one of non-belief. Why is it not seen that when I pay *my* taxes I’m forced to mix *my* religious belief with politics? Freedoms are two-ways streets in the sense that when one can exercise a benefit there’s always a corresponding duty to use it wisely. *That’s* what will make America great *now*. We don’t need a trip to some imaginary decade two generations ago. The only thing great about America’s storied past is that rich white men had no competi-

tion for self-aggrandizing.

As the Washington Post reported: *The share of U.S. adults who say they believe in God, while still remarkably high by comparison with other advanced industrial countries, has declined modestly, from approximately 92% to 89%, since Pew Research Center conducted its first Landscape Study in 2007. The share of Americans who say they are “absolutely certain” God exists has dropped more sharply, from 71% in 2007 to 63% in 2014. And the percentages who say they pray every day, attend religious services regularly and consider religion to be very important in their lives also have ticked down by small but statistically significant margins.*

James Nimmo
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

The Oklahoma State Board of Education unanimously approved a new charter school in Seminole even though the local school board said no. State bureaucrats were apparently unconcerned that charter schools are exempt from many rules that traditional public schools must follow or that they perform worse or no better than other schools.

Shockingly, charter school students represent only 2.8% of total enrollment in the state, but charter schools get disproportionately more in state funding. In 2016, traditional public schools were paid an average of \$1,560.87 per pupil in state aid compared to an average of \$3,034.60 per pupil for the average charter school – twice as much.

When mid-year money was released in December 2015, charter schools got 69% or \$17.7 million, leaving public school with 97.2% of Oklahoma students to split up the remaining 31%. Reports show that one virtual charter school got 25% of that money, \$17.7 million, in spite of an ongoing investigation by the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation.

Charter schools are supposed to be more, not less accountable in exchange for greater flexibility in operations.

Public schools must continue to be the great common denominator that allows American students who work hard enough to get ahead, which ultimately helps their families.

It’s time to level the playing field, rather than stacking the deck. I do not want my tax dollars siphoned off at a disproportion level to fund elitist schools at the expense of critically needed funding for traditional public school students.

Phyllis Bryant
Bethany

Editor, The Observer:

Memo to the Oklahoman news staff: The years you spent learning your craft were wasted. The skills you developed – finding the truth, the reporting it accurately, clearly and concisely, against deadlines – these skills are now obsolete. That’s because there’s

a new Truth, written with an upper-case T, for Trump. Reporting Truth doesn't require a J-School BA, but rather an MFA in fiction.

Case in point: Trump's slander that "the Media" under-report terrorist attacks. When challenged to name the attacks the media under-reported, his staff produced a piece of paper that included, along with spelling errors, such well-covered events as the Nice truck attack and the San Bernardino shootings. The massacre of black ladies at Charleston's Emmanuel AME Church didn't make the list, perhaps because it was carried out by a white supremacist and presumptive Trump supporter.

Where's the pushback from so-called conservatives? From ordinarily sane, moderate Republicans? If you don't listen for it, you'll miss it. None of them want to be seen standing against Truth; i.e. any lie, no matter how blatant, that destroys belief in facts and common sense, and disarms those who oppose the Grand Cracker.

Roger Rensvold
Midwest City

Editor, The Observer:

Why can't Oklahoma give up making bombs for the dogs of war?

Because it produces 1,800 well-paid federal jobs

Observations

CONTINUED ON PAGE 47

[our emphasis] that Lt. Gov. Lamb had decided to quit serving as a member of my Cabinet."

Lamb also has put himself in a position where he now must explain how he would solve the state's long-term budget woes, born of ill-advised income tax cuts and all-too-generous corporate welfare.

Fallin had the courage to propose tax increases, albeit the most regressive imaginable. She clearly accepts the reality that Oklahoma has a revenue problem, not a spending problem.

Lamb is against expanding sales taxes. Fine. How would he bolster funding for long-starved essential state services – public education, mental health, transportation, corrections, law enforcement?

Parroting the Supply Side rhetoric won't cut it. The vast majority of state taxpayers suffer because trickle-down economics repeatedly has been proven a spectacular failure – yet Oklahoma tried it again, but it disproportionately benefits the wealthy few who write big campaign checks.

This is probably sooner than Lamb wanted, and perhaps even sooner than would be preferable politically, but he has left himself with no choice except to produce a budget plan with funding specifics.

Otherwise, it confirms his resignation from Fallin's cabinet is more about his political future than the state's.

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Every bomb dropped in Iraq and Afghanistan was made in McAlester.

How many more bombs does Donald Trump's war machine require?

I hope Trump will heed the advice of our 39th president, Jimmy Carter, who said, "Everyone of my successors has been in gratuitous wars. I think we could have resolved most of these conflicts in a peaceful way."

Congress needs to convert the bomb plant into a factory to make solar-powered roofs and establish a U.S. Department of Peace headed by a Secretary of Peace in the president's cabinet.

Trump should put Will Rogers' commandment on the wall of his oval office: "People talk peace but men devote their life's work to war. It won't stop till as much brains and scientific study are put to aid peace as there is to promote war."

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner
Wagoner

Trumponomics

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 39

and rewarding them with high wages.

It's the exact opposite of what Trump is proposing.

By the way, the first delivery of the Dreamliner is scheduled to take place next year – to Singapore Airlines. Current orders for it include Air France, British Airways, and Mexico's flag carrier, Aeromexico.

Boeing is also looking to China to buy as much as \$1 trillion worth of its commercial airplanes over the next two decades, including wide-body jets like the 787 Dreamliner. China already accounts for a fifth of Boeing's sales.

But if Trump succeeds in putting an economic wall around America, these other nation's airlines may have second thoughts about buying from Boeing. They might choose an airplane from a country more open to their own exports – say, Europe's Airbus.

Trump's "America First" economics is pure demagoguery. Xenophobic grandstanding doesn't boost the competitiveness of American workers. Nor does it boost American-based companies.

At most, it boosts Trump.

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