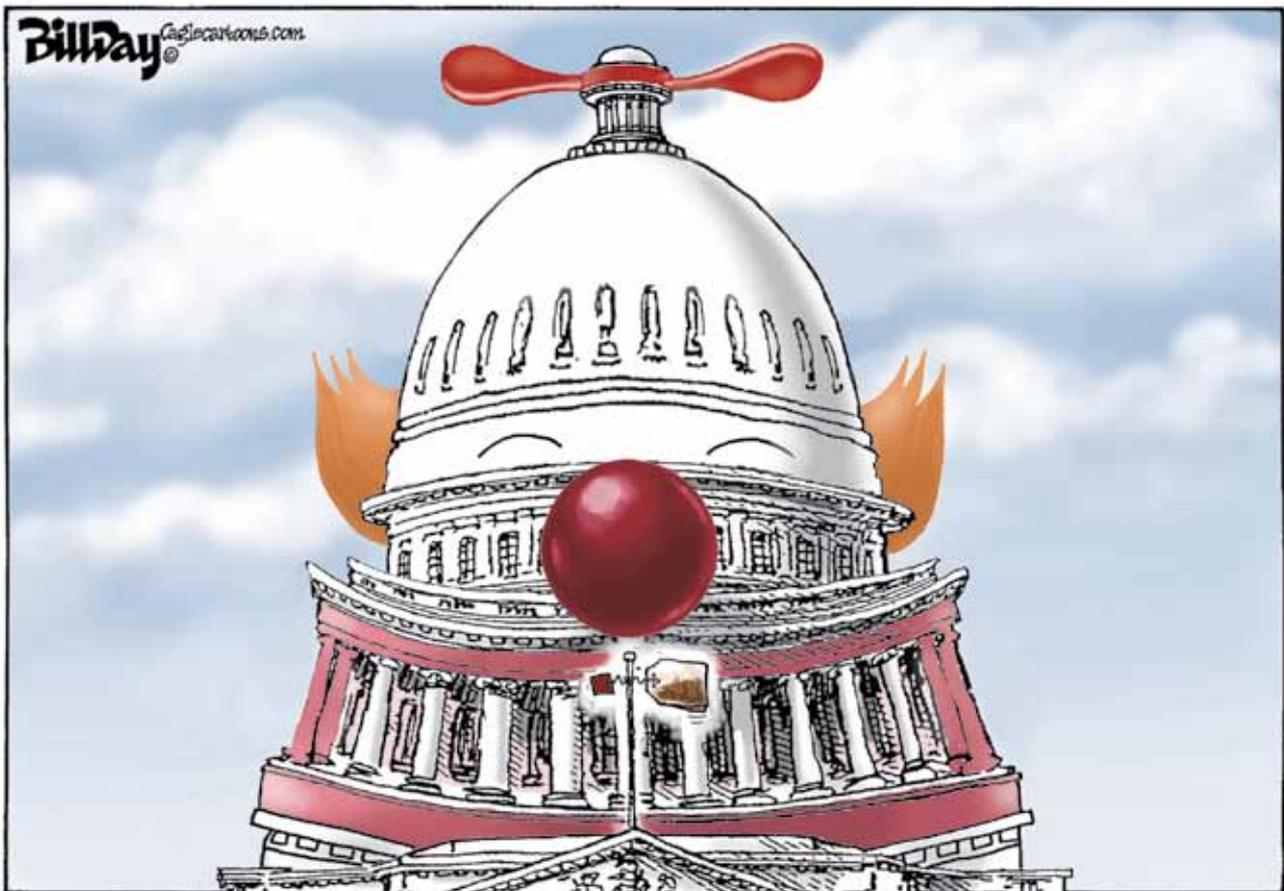


THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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Seven Year Ditch



In Control Since 2010, Republicans Now Own State's Fiscal Mess. There Are No Good Options For The Anti-Tax Party.

– Special Report begins on Page 6



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OUR MOTTO

To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

OUR CREDO

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

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Observations

Elections, Consequences

Typically, we are not in the told-you-so business. Since our readers are among Oklahoma's savviest politically, there is little need for finger wagging.

Seventy days-plus into our Trumpian nightmare, however, we beg your indulgence.

Donald J. Trump was elected president in no small part because good-hearted liberals and progressives stayed home, voted for a third party candidate or – *gasp!* – for Trump himself.

Nationally, most reputable research shows about 20% of Sen. Bernie Sanders' primary voters marked their general election ballots for Trump, Libertarian Gary Johnson or Green Party nominee Jill Stein.

That was likely the difference between a sane Hillary Clinton presidency and an insane Trump presidency.

Yes, the Russians meddled. Yes, Trump's campaign was in cahoots. Yes, James Comey put his thumb on the scale. Yes, too many voters swallowed fake news hook, line and sinker. Yes, Clinton screwed up by trying to sit on her lead.

But we wouldn't be in the mess we're in today if 20% of our brothers and sisters – many angered and disheartened by Sanders' defeat – hadn't taken leave of their senses.

Was Clinton a perfect candidate? No. Was she ideologically pure enough for some on the left? No. But it was clear then – and even clearer now – that Clinton was the only responsible, reasonable choice ... especially to keep Trump away from the nuclear codes.

We mention this now because it is never too early to begin working to ensure this does not happen again.

Seventy days-plus of White House chaos affords a golden opportunity in an otherwise ideologically polarized world to engage friends and relatives in conversation:

First, elections have consequences. Second, being a good voter [and

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THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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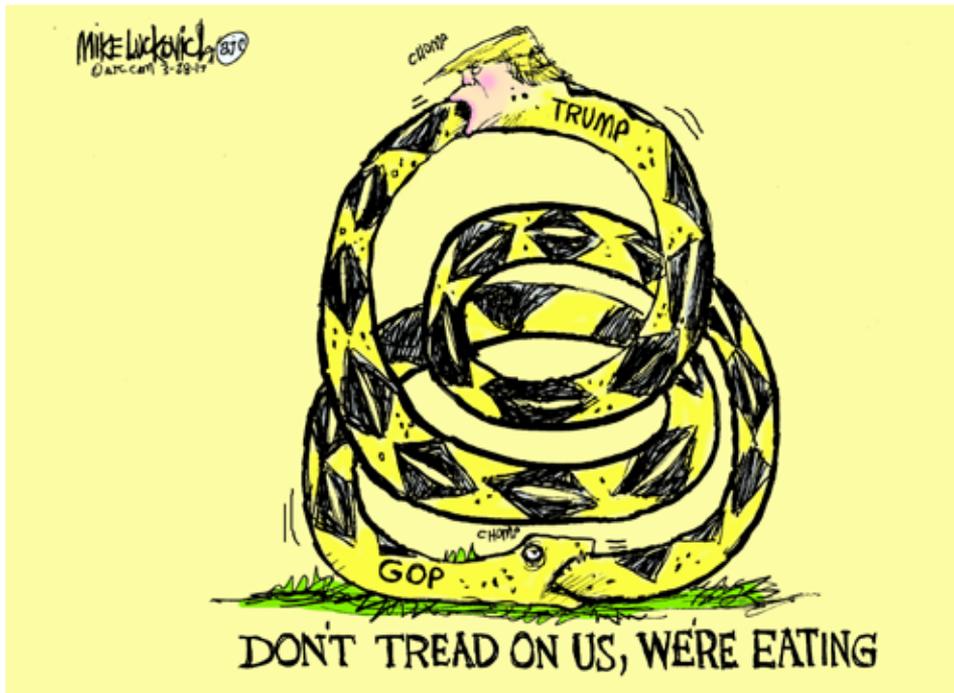
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It's past time for Republicans to drop the "family values" lie. The rogues' gallery of GOP miscreants grows: Sen. Ralph Shortey, Rep. Dan Kirby, Rep. Gus Blackwell, Speaker Lance Cargill ...

Dart: To Gov. Mary Fallin, appointing anti-public education ex-Gov. Frank Keating to University of Oklahoma regents. Will he do for OU what he did for Chesapeake Energy?

Without any prompting from us, the Lege is tackling one of our pet peeves –motorists cruising in the left lane, oblivious to those wanting to pass. Of course, with more highway patrol cuts looming, who'll be around to enforce it?

Laurel: To House Appropriations Chair Leslie Osborn, R-Mustang, refusing to play the speaker's emphasis-on-efficiencies game. She accepts the reality Oklahoma has a revenue, not spending problem.

As of mid-February, a Cole Hargraves Snodgrass poll found 57% of Oklahomans held a favorable view of Donald Trump – new meaning to the "Dumb Okie" slam.

Dart: To Speaker Charles McCall, blocking Oklahomans from being able to email their legislators en masse. If you look up hubris in the dictionary, you'll find McCall's photo.

Need more proof that abstinence-only is a failure? The number of syphilis cases in Oklahoma nearly doubled between 2011-15 to 514, a rate of 13.1 per 100,000. It's past time to trust kids with sex ed facts.

Laurel: To House Democrats, detailing \$1.4 billion in new revenue-raisers to help stabilize the budget and give teachers a pay raise. Sadly, House speaker and Senate president lack the courage to buck the 1% and the wingnuts.

What was Gov. Mary Fallin thinking, appointing ex-Sen. Clark Jolley to Tax Commission? He was a chief architect of state's ongoing budget crisis. Incomprehensible.

Unacceptable: Innocent blacks are about seven times more likely than innocent whites to be convicted of murder or sexual assault. – National Registry of Exonerations

Suck up: U.S. Rep. Jim Bridenstine, R-Tulsa, would have been a "yes" vote for TrumpCare, throwing 24 million off insurance rolls. Of course, he's hoping the president will give him a NASA appointment.

Dart: To GOP activist Steve Fair, whining in Tulsa World op-ed that not one Democrat would support ObamaCare repeal and replace. That's rich after Republicans spent eight years opposing any Obama proposal.

Oklahoma Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty's 26th annual awards dinner May 4 features Nobel nominee Father John Dear, who led fight to abolish capital punishment in New Mexico. Visit www.okcadp.org for details.

Dart: To Wildlife Conservation Director J.D. Strong, penning an Oklahoman op-ed praising climate-denier Scott Pruitt's "vision for protecting" the environment. Strong's deployed bipartisan ass-kissing to keep a series of high-profile taxpayer funded jobs.

We note the passing of former Oklahoman arts editor Rick Rogers, lost to cancer at way-too-young age of 64. Our prayers are with his family, including brother Bob, The Observer's tech guru.

Liar-in-Chief Trump repeatedly tweets the New York Times is "failing." Actually, the Times' stock price is up 30% since election. Trump's popularity is down seven points since inauguration.

The statehouse may be a wholly owned subsidiary of the carbon barons, but Oklahomans like clean energy. As a percentage of state's electricity generation, wind [25.12%] last year eclipsed coal [24.65%] for the first time. Natural gas remains No. 1 at 46.8%.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 44

Letters



Editor, The Observer:

I just noticed this subscription is a lot, lot less than the, the, Oklahoman dribble.

And without the ads!

Bill Bynum
Norman

Editor, The Observer:

[Former OSU basketball coach] Brad Underwood teaches 15 adults how to play a game and is worth \$3 million a year. An elementary school teacher teaches 25 kids how to read and write and is worth less than \$50,000 a year. Brad is worth 60 times more than a teacher? This B.S. keeps me up at night.

Harlan Hentges
Edmond

Editor, The Observer:

Oklahomans voted by a significant margin to approve SQ's 780 and 781. We want a new approach to criminal justice that focuses on treatment for addiction and substance abuse. HB 1482, recently approved by the House, contravenes the will of the voters. Senators should not support it, and if

passed, the governor should not sign it.

If we think we can legislate perfect safety for our children by setting up an artificial perimeter of any distance instead of teaching children how to avoid, respond, and help protect themselves while we also address community mental health issues, we're deluding ourselves and wasting legislative time.

Oklahoma voters align with both the research and the experience of other states and countries – showing felony charges and incarceration ineffective for addressing health issues of drug abuse and addiction. Kris Steele and the Oklahoma Justice Reform Task Force are knowledgeable and experienced spokesmen for reform. They understand the implications of failure to change and the devastating economic impacts on families and the state budget.

Encouraging your senators to vote "No" on HB 1482 is a positive and optimistic vote for reform, better mental health services, and healthier families – all of which

benefit Oklahoma and its challenged budget.

Why not give reform a chance – just as approved by Oklahoma voters. Let's fully support it, and see if we can experience better outcomes. We certainly haven't made any progress with what we're doing.

Jan New
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Republicans say government doesn't work; we elect them and they prove it!

Always thought there was truth in that observation.

Jeff Hamilton
Midwest City

Editor's Note: Jeff Hamilton served in the Oklahoma House from 1986-1994.

Editor, The Observer:

The right-wing extremist Tea Party and left-wing righteous Green Party are aligned in abhorring the Democratic Party.

The Tea Party organizes inside the Republican Party to insure unity in defeating Democrats. The Green Party organizes outside the Democratic Party to protect their distinction from Democrats.

To Trump's victory, the Greens and Tea Party both say, "Hillary deserved to lose."

One-million, four-hundred thousand votes went to the Green's candidate Jill Stein, who recently called the Democratic Party "Irredeemable."

Hmmm.

Nathaniel Batchelder
Oklahoma City

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

Editor, The Observer: It's encouraging to hear John McCain, et al, starting to use the D word [dictator] publically when referring to our esteemed leader, Don-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 45



A Family Values Approach To State Employee Leave

Sen. David Holt's plan to give state workers the option of taking eight additional weeks of unpaid – repeat: unpaid – leave when transitioning into parenthood barely escaped the state Senate and faces an uncertain future in the House.

Pathetic, isn't it, that too many "family values" lawmakers are indifferent to the plight of new moms and dads, scrambling to get their sea legs after the birth of a child or adoption.

If you truly wanted to help families succeed, wouldn't you encourage them to take extra time to bond? Wouldn't you offer ways to relieve work-family stress, especially when it's not costing the taxpayers anything?

Not if you're an Oklahoma lawmaker that dismisses state employees as dime-a-dozen hired hands – expendable, replaceable, forgettable.

This indifference to the people on the front lines of state government service – child welfare workers, highway patrol troopers, correctional officers – is the result of an anti-government pandemic unleashed four decades ago.

Remember Ronald Reagan's line: "The nine most terrifying words in the English language are, 'I'm from the government and I'm here to help.'"

An effective punch line, but incredibly myopic.

The fact is, far too many state workers are overworked and underpaid. Years of state budget cuts have slashed the workforce, leaving fewer to do more – Oklahoma's increasing population translates into greater demand for state services. In addition, only about one-quarter of state workers have received a pay hike this decade, despite \$100-a-barrel oil in the not-too-distant past.

And yet, anti-government stereotyping persists in the legislative halls – public workers often disrespected as lazy, incompetent "takers."

Frankly, I don't know anyone who entered public service thinking they'd earn a fat paycheck. Most I know like the work. They want to make a difference. They know they won't get rich, but hope to be rewarded in other ways – by keeping the streets safe, protecting and teaching children, helping the mentally ill cope.

Still, as in all walks of life, you get what you pay for.

To attract and keep the best state workers – to get the most bang for the taxpayers' buck from its workforce – lawmakers must consider the big picture.

With a \$900 million budget hole, it's a near-certainty state employers will go another year without an across-the-board raise. But the state, as an employer, can offer quality of life-type incentives – such as more generous unpaid parental leave – that give workers more flexibility, something already happening in the private sector.

Holt, for one, gets it. "As an employer," the Oklahoma City Republican says, "the state of Oklahoma is competing with all the other employers in the state. If standards are changing, we have to change with them if we expect to have people want to go into a life of public service."

Four years ago, a study commissioned by Gov. Mary Fallin and the Legislature determined state workers' salaries here were 6% less than in comparable states and 21% less than those in similar private sector jobs. However, the study also found Oklahoma's benefits were 24% higher than in comparable states.

We know other states are not standing still when it comes to teacher pay, meaning Oklahoma falls further behind. Is the same true for state workers? Probably.

Interestingly, Republican lawmakers in other states aren't as hard-hearted or short-sighted as Oklahoma. In Missouri, for example, legislators are working to expand paid parental leave to all state workers after GOP Gov. Eric Greitens gave the benefit to some executive branch employees.

In addition, California, Rhode Island and New Jersey mandate paid family and medical leave for all private and public employees. New York will, too, starting in 2018.

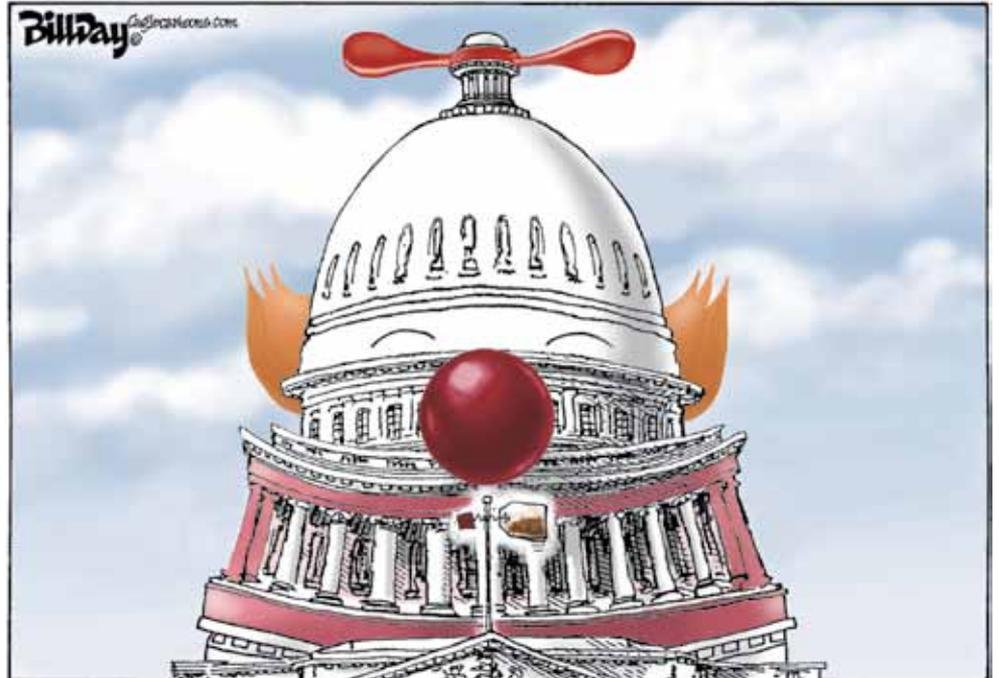
Federal law sets pregnancy- and adoption-related leave at 12 weeks. Holt's plan would expand it to 20 weeks for Oklahoma workers – again, unpaid.

It wouldn't cost the state anything. It would be a nice benefit for beleaguered state workers. And for a GOP legislative supermajority that preaches "family values," it actually helps state employees transition into parenthood.

What's not to like?

Failed Experiment

*Like Kansas,
Oklahoma GOP
Left With Little
Choice But To
Raise Taxes, If It
Is To Avoid Voters'
Wrath And Keep
Political Power*



BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

As Gov. Mary Fallin tells it, she inherited a fiscal quagmire when sworn in seven years ago: A \$500 million budget hole and only \$2.02 in the Rainy Day Fund.

Seeking re-election in 2014, she crowed that she'd not only erased the revenue shortfall, but also stashed more than \$500 million in the state's savings account and – *drum roll, please* – cut taxes.

Mercury, come to life? Not exactly. It was primarily a matter of right place, right time – \$100-a-barrel oil healing all fiscal wounds, most self-inflicted.

Now, with only seven weeks left in a mostly unproductive legislative session, Fallin and her party's statehouse supermajorities look more like the proverbial lottery winner who took millions in a lump-sum payoff and was broke three short years later.

In fact, the GOP powers-that-be at NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd. have proven repeatedly they were vastly superior as an opposition party than they are as a governing party, locked in behind-the-scenes, internecine warfare over everything from taxes and spending to social issues and religion.

The giant elephant in the room – pun intended – is an \$878 million budget hole that actually is closer to \$1.2 billion. With the state Constitution requiring a balanced budget, lawmakers have three options: Cut agency budgets deeper, raise taxes or a combination

of both. Welcome to Baja Kansas!

There is scant tangible evidence that legislative leaders have the courage to buck their anti-government Tea Party wing when it comes to doing the right thing: raising taxes. Instead, they prattle on about “efficiencies” in state agencies already cut to the bone.

And the Rainy Day Fund? Not available as a life-preserver this year.

Fallin's Finance Secretary Preston Doerflinger recently liquidated the account in response to a cash-flow crisis. Making a tough fiscal situation tougher: The \$240 million borrowed without legislative knowledge must be repaid to help cover mid-year supplemental funding lawmakers just approved.

More bad news: It was learned recently that legislators illegally supplanted \$10 million in lottery proceeds required constitutionally to go to education. That, too, must be repaid – *cha-ching!*

New House Speaker Charles McCall evidently has a super-secret plan to resolve the crisis, but he hasn't shared it outside a few pooh-bahs, leaving many at the Capitol to think no such blueprint exists.

So, how will this play out? What is likely to happen to real people as lawmakers cut state funding deeper?

House Appropriations Chair Leslie Osborn, R-Mustang, insisted recently that as many as 80 of her colleagues are pragmatic enough “to invest” in vi-

tal state services. “To invest” is legislativespeak for “raising taxes.”

But just in case, she asked agencies to provide information on what a 14.5% budget cut would look like. Imagine having to drive 100 miles to reach the nearest driver’s license exam center. Or the closure of regional universities. Or long waiting lists for vital services for the disabled.

As Rep. Emily Virgin, D-Norman, put it, “We simply do not bring in enough money to fund government ... We have a fundamental and systemic problem with budgeting, and in my opinion, the only way to fix it is by broadening and strengthening revenue – increasing the gross production tax, rolling back income tax cuts for those at the top, and eliminating unnecessary credits and incentives.”

Fallin seems to understand the reality: Oklahoma has a revenue, not a spending problem. But her revenue-generating solutions – primarily expanding sales taxes to services not currently taxed – hit hardest those who could least afford it.

McCall and Senate President Pro Tem Mike Schulz get pushed around by uber-right caucus members that share tax-hater Grover Norquist’s dream of starving government to the point that the rest can be drowned in a bathtub.

Neither can even hope to secure passage of a revenue-raising bill without engaging Democratic lawmakers – something neither leader has proven willing to do. And even that might not be enough in a Senate replete with hardliners.

Still, GOP state Treasurer Ken Miller is cautiously optimistic lawmakers can come to grips with the gravity of the budget crisis and embrace generating new revenue. At recent breakfast meetings, he said, House and Senate leaders actually discussed “which ones they could or could not support.”

“I found that encouraging because the first step in recovery is recognizing that you have a problem,” Miller told reporters. “I think there is now a recognition that we have a revenue problem.”

Both houses claim to support teacher pay raises – first this decade – and both passed bills to implement them. But none of the proposals included a way to pay for the salary hikes – because no consensus plan yet exists.

The Senate suggested raising fuel taxes – diesel from 14 to 21 cents a gallon and gasoline from 17 to 23 cents – to fund the raise. But revenue-raising bills are required constitutionally to begin in the House, where there doesn’t seem much appetite for the proposal, even though its been decades since Oklahoma increased fuel taxes and even though fuel prices are among the lowest in a decade. Of course, then there’s the bizarre notion of spending fuel taxes on teacher salaries rather than roads and bridges ...

If lawmakers do nothing to raise revenue, Schulz said, some state agencies could face draconian 25% to 30% budget cuts next fiscal year.

To get Oklahoma government and vital state servic-

es – including public education – on firm long-term footing, the Republican supermajority is going to have to make tough decisions, including an about-face on the party’s longtime no-way, no-how stance on taxes.

Otherwise, they could face the wrath of voters who – despite last November’s election results – seem closer-than-ever to an across-the-board, throw-the-bums-out moment. In today’s faster-paced world, the notion of one party controlling all the levers of state government power for a century – as Democrats did in the 1900s – no longer seems plausible.

There are at least five steps lawmakers can take to address the funding crisis, protect vital state services and bolster public education, including teacher pay raises – if only they are willing.

First, revive SB 805 or something similar to get Oklahoma involved in Medicaid expansion. ObamaCare isn’t going away any time soon. Other states with Republican governors participate in the federal program – and they rebelled when it looked like Congress might jettison it. It would reduce uncompensated costs borne by the state and health care providers – even save some rural hospitals on the financial brink.

Second, restore gross production taxes to the original 7% levy. It was dropped to 2% when oil was \$100 a barrel, a sop to the state’s carbon barons. Now it’s crippling the state – so much so that some small independent operators are urging the tax be returned to 7%.

The big boys still say no, but they are willing to deal: If legislators will authorize longer lateral drilling – which larger operators think could be a boon to their bottom lines – then they’ll accept a hike the drilling taxes to 4% or 5%. Whether 4%, 5% or 7%, it would mean hundreds of millions in additional annual revenues to fund key services.

Third, raise the gasoline tax to fund transportation improvements, including asphalt and passenger rail. The proposed hike promoted by senators would generate an estimated \$178 million a year.

Fourth, revive HJR 1003 or some variation that would give voters the opportunity to fix the mistake they made 25 years ago when they embraced SQ 640 requiring a legislative supermajority or statewide voter approval to raise taxes.

Republicans thought it was a grand idea at the time, using it as a political weapon to portray anyone who opposed it – particularly Democrats who dominated the Legislature – as a “tax and spend liberal.” Now that Republicans are in control and in a fiscal jam, it’s a noose around their necks.

Fifth, isolate the hard-right Tea Party types and work with legislative Democrats. Yes, it risks breathing new life into a Democratic Party reeling much of this century. But few things are worse than simultaneously having total control and no control – the untenable position in which a splintered GOP finds itself.

State, Fed Budget Cuts Weaken Environmental Protections

BY MIKE W. RAY

You don't have to be a "flaming liberal tree-hugger" to be concerned about the funding cutbacks in state and federal environmental programs.

President Donald Trump and his hatchet man, Scott Pruitt, want to slash the budget of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency [EPA] by 31%. Doing so would, by default, shift responsibility for many environmental programs and services to the states.

But in Oklahoma, the Republican-controlled Legislature and the Republican governor have cut the budget of the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality [DEQ] by 38.5% over the past three years.

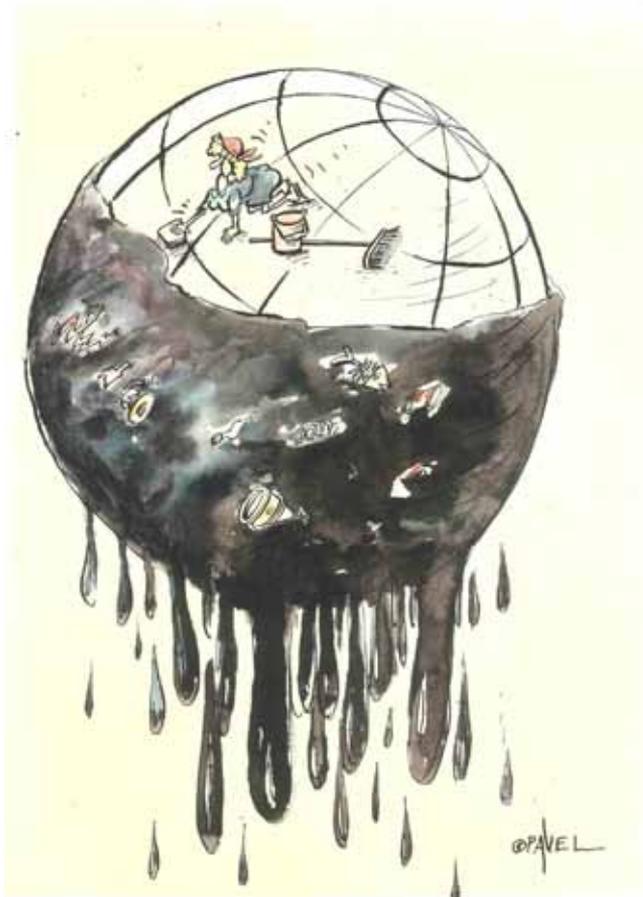
As an example, DEQ had 39 field offices when the agency was established in 1993. That number has gradually declined to 22 now; two of those field offices closed in the last three years.

If the DEQ's budget is cut again this year, virtually every Oklahoman could be at risk from various environmental hazards.

The Republican chair of the House Appropriations and Budget Committee recently advised state agencies to be prepared for budget reductions of 14.5%. And that was before GOP State Finance Secretary Preston Doerflinger revealed that he "borrowed" \$240 million from the Constitutional Reserve – aka Rainy Day Fund – to pay bills; that money is supposed to be replaced by July 1, the start of Fiscal Year 2018.

However, the state of Oklahoma already faced a budget deficit of \$878 million this year; if the executive branch raid on the state's Rainy Day Fund is included, along with \$10 million in lottery proceeds diverted from public schools that have to be repaid, the budget shortfall is approaching \$1.3 billion. And that comes on the heels of a \$1.3 billion shortfall last year, a \$611 million deficit in 2015, and a \$188 million deficit in 2014.

Last month House Speaker Charles McCall, R-Atoka, said members of his caucus told him they don't even want to start looking at tax increases – such as the proposed \$1.50 a pack cigarette tax hike, repealing the latest income-tax cut, raising oil and gas



gross production taxes from 2% back up to 4% or 5%, and the governor's plan to increase the motor fuels tax and expand the sales tax base – until after state expenses are examined thoroughly. [I thought that's what the Legislature was supposed to do every year ...]

So, Oklahomans of all ages can expect various environmental protections to be curtailed or eliminated entirely. Following are illustrations of what's in store.

WATER QUALITY ISSUES

Both the DEQ and the Oklahoma Water Resources Board [OWRB] have fewer resources to devote to water quality protection from maladies such as lead contamination and amoebic dysentery, a disease that can be spread via polluted water.

The OWRB's Rural Economic Action Plan [REAP] allocation, from which grants are issued to local utility managers to help finance expensive repairs to or replacement of crumbling water and wastewater systems, has been trimmed in recent years.

The REAP was created by the Legislature in 1996 to help finance capital improvements in small communities. Initially the program was seeded with \$15 million annually; however, the legislative appropriation to REAP has since been scaled down by 35.6%, to \$9.65 million this fiscal year. The water board's share of the REAP has been reduced by 26.7% in the last four years: from \$1.62 million in 2014 to \$1.19 million in 2017.

DEQ Executive Director Scott Thompson previous-

ly expressed concern about the state's drinking water program.

His agency used to have 81 environmental specialists in field offices to monitor community water and wastewater systems, but now has approximately 55. DEQ has 11 engineers on staff [interviews are under way to hire another] to oversee and lend assistance to 253 drinking water treatment plants and nearly 1,700 public water supply systems. DEQ engineers also provide emergency response, technical assistance, investigate complaints, respond to violations and threats to public health, etc.

Twenty-eight public water supplies that serve more than 64,000 Oklahomans have registered exceedances in lead since 2013, DEQ records show. Almost all of the public water systems that surpassed the maximum lead limit are in rural areas, the state agency reported. Many of the water systems flagged for excessive lead have fewer than 100 customers, including several mobile home parks, the Oklahoman reported in February.

Typically the problem is caused not by lead in the water supply, but by outdated pipes and plumbing fixtures that leach lead if the water is too corrosive.

Last fall the DEQ cited scores of public water systems throughout the state for being out of compliance with a water quality standard established by the EPA. All of the citations arose from a problem associated with the use of chlorine to disinfect water.

A byproduct of chlorine treatment of water when it mixes with some organic materials is trihalomethanes [THMs], which have been linked to bladder and colorectal cancer. The EPA has lowered the acceptable level of THMs from 100 parts per billion to 80 ppb.

In a related matter, the city of Stillwater notified the EPA recently after the municipality modified its water disinfection process, which resulted in a river of complaints about the taste and smell of the water pouring from faucets.

One Stillwater Facebook user's 4-year-old son said his bath "smells like the YMCA pool ... " City Water Resources Director Bill Millis said the elevated levels of chlorine are within levels authorized by the EPA and the DEQ.

Maybe so, but state Rep. Cory Williams, D-Stillwater, said, "... the reality is it smells like I'm drinking bleach."

Millis said the more highly chlorinated water has to work its way through the entire municipal network, which means the taste and odor problems will persist for a few more weeks.

In another case, the Oklahoman reported last November that a solvent used by a now-closed aerospace plant at Wiley Post Airport threatened to contaminate Bethany's municipal water supply with groundwater pollutants detected in concentrations as high as eight times the federal limit, according to DEQ records.

In 2015 the water in Hugo made national headlines because of its turbidity. The DEQ had cited a litany of

violations of the town's water system in recent years, including malfunctioning disinfection equipment at the water treatment plant.

TAR CREEK SUPERFUND SITE

The area known as Tar Creek is part of the Tri-State Mining District, an area of 1,188 square miles located in Ottawa County [Picher and Cardin], southwestern Missouri and southeastern Kansas.

During World War I, the region supplied 45% of the lead and 50% of the zinc used by the U.S. Advances in technology resulted in increases in production, and thus Ottawa County became the world's largest source of lead and zinc.

"Between 65% and 85% of the lead fired by the Allies in World War II came from that mine field," said Rep. Ben Loring, D-Miami. "It saved our country; it saved the world. But now we don't seem to care that it is still killing people."

"If you want to see how Oklahoma handles the environment, look up Picher, Okla.," wrote Zachary Austin Pearson of Oklahoma City.

Mining ceased in the 1970s, and chat piles – mountains of scrap, actually – that were left behind by the mining companies contain lead dust that has blown around the area.

The Oklahoma portion of the Tri-State Mining District encompasses more than 40 square miles, five towns and an entire watershed, and more than 100 million tons of chat remain on the Tar Creek site, the DEQ reports.

Elevated lead levels in Picher children led to learning disabilities and other problems. The lead and zinc also seeped into groundwater, ponds, and Tar Creek, which flows into the Neosho River, a tributary that feeds Grand Lake. The EPA declared Picher to be one of the most toxic areas in the United States, and eventually the federal government bought out the landowners in Picher and Cardin, leaving both communities ghost towns.

The Quapaw Tribe has acquired large portions of that land in Ottawa County and is continuing efforts to clean it up, although a project of that magnitude will take years and billions of dollars to achieve. The tribe is making a dent in the chat piles by selling it to customers in other states for use as an aggregate substitute in hot mix asphalt.

DEQ's activities at Tar Creek have included:

- managing the remedial design and remedial action of residential yard cleanups in Ottawa County;
- hiring a consultant to take samples and create site-specific remediation designs for all residential yards that required cleanup;
- starting the bidding process to hire a contractor to clean up residential yards in Tar Creek;
- managing the cleanup of mine-waste contaminated properties that are non-tribal land within the Tar Creek Superfund site;
- remediating seven properties along the Beaver Creek watershed that contain mine waste;
- working with EPA to secure funding to start the

cleanup of multiple contaminated properties in the Elm Creek watershed;

The agency claims on its website that DEQ also studied concentrations of heavy metals in fish from waters polluted by the Tri-State Mining District, including Tar Creek.

EXPERIMENTAL PAVING PROJECT SUSPENDED

One of the state environmental casualties of the cut in DEQ funding and legislative raids on its bank accounts was an experimental road paving project.

Wagoner County Commissioner Tim Kelley said that in 2014 his staff helped the DEQ clear a dump in his district that contained more than 5,000 tires.

The next year the DEQ asked Kelley whether he'd be interested in participating in an experimental project in which used tires would be ground up and mixed with asphalt for paving roads. Tentatively the plan called for one section to be paved with a 5% mixture of rubber; another section, 10%; another section, 20%; and a control section paved just with pure asphalt, Kelley said.

The state Transportation Department, the University of Oklahoma and the DEQ planned to study the performance and durability of the alternative pavements. If successful, the project would create a new market for old tires and stretch the amount of asphalt available for paving.

Kelley said his road crews milled the old asphalt, built new driveways and replaced almost all of the drainage culverts along four miles of county roads – two miles on 257th between 131st and 111th, and two miles on 111th between 257th and 225th – and prepared an eight-inch aggregate base on the two sections. “We spent a lot of time and probably \$200,000 just on getting the roads ready,” he said.

The project was let out for bids and came in, under budget, at \$833,000, Kelley recalled; the expense was to be borne by the DEQ. A contract was awarded, he said, but on May 26, 2016 – one day prior to a pre-construction meeting scheduled on the project, and the day before the Legislature adjourned last year – “we were called and told by the DEQ that they couldn't do the project because the Legislature had taken their money.”

The Legislature siphoned \$1 million from the used-tire disposal fund last year to help plug the state's \$1.3 billion budget hole, and diverted \$2 million from the same fund the year before, ledgers reflect.

The experimental paving contract was canceled, Kelley said, because, “I couldn't afford an expense like that.” Instead, he diverted \$325,000 from “other projects I had planned” and put down a two-inch asphalt overlay rather than the four-inch asphalt/rubber mixed surface initially planned. Coupled with the preparation expenses, Wagoner County was out half a million dollars that otherwise would have been spent to pave other segments of the 400 miles of roads in Kelley's district, about half of which are unpaved.

The one thing DEQ did do was reimburse Wagoner County for expenses incurred in removing the 5,000

tires from a creekbank, Kelley said.

Fenton Rood of the DEQ said Oklahomans discard approximately one tire per person per year.

The agency recycled 3,791,170 tires in Fiscal Year 2016, according to Ferrella March, manager of the DEQ's Tire Recycling Program. The vast majority of those were tires that processors collected from dealers, from dismantlers [such as vehicle salvage yards], and from communities that conducted clean-up campaigns.

It also included 84,241 tires removed from dumpsites, March said. She estimated that Oklahoma has fewer than 40 illegal dumpsites remaining today, compared to “at least a couple of hundred” that existed when she was hired at the DEQ in 2006.

The tire recycling program is financed with fees that are collected on each new tire purchased. The tires are shred or ground down to various sizes that are further processed into products such as artificial turf, playground mulch or molded rubber products, or are burned as an alternative fuel source.

Qualified applicants for collection and transportation of waste tires in this state include Oklahoma Tire Recyclers of Bristow, Four-D Corp. of Duncan and RTR Environmental of Noble, all of which grind tires into crumb rubber; Lone Star Industries cement kiln of Pryor and Holcim Cement Kiln of Ada, both of which burn used tires as a fuel; and Geocycle, also of Ada, which shreds tires. All of those companies collect and transport used tires.

Mike W. Ray is media director for the House Democratic Caucus. This first appeared on his Facebook page.

Protecting Big Oil, Gas From Protesters

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

The Oklahoma Legislature overflows with re-incarnated Patrick Henrys.

Wrapping themselves in Old Glory. Brandishing the Constitution like a sword. Embracing the motto “give me liberty or give me death.”

Few icons or slogans have proven as powerful electorally in the last 30 years. Yet, for all the rhetorical flourishes and chest pounding, the statehouse's self-styled Liberty Caucus far too often works to restrict individual liberty, not protect it.

Case in point: The brazen legislative campaign to neuter the First Amendment right of free assembly.

Chickasha Rep. Scott Biggs' HB 1123 would punish pipeline protesters – his bill calls it “critical infrastructure” but his target is clear – with up to \$100,000 in fines and 10 years in prison.

More astonishing, it would create fines of up to \$1



million for groups identified to be “a conspirator” in protests that result in damage or inhibit business operations.

Moore Rep. Mark McBride joined the anti-individual liberty scheming with HB 2128 that would – among other things – hold liable anyone simply “arrested” for trespassing.

Free speech? Individual liberty? Who cares about the Constitution when you’re carrying water for the big oil and gas checkbooks?

The state’s carbon barons are no doubt aware that many Oklahomans traveled to North Dakota to join the Standing Rock Sioux in opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline. It is not hard to imagine similar standoffs developing here, especially with a plethora of injections wells fire-hosing who-knows-what into the earth.

Oklahomans already are grappling with the fallout, particularly earthquakes and the damages they wrought. What is less known are the dangers posed to land and water? Further, Oklahoma serves as a pipeline crossroads, raising concerns about an earthquake-triggered cataclysm or leaks fouling water supplies.

In response to the North Dakota standoff, the fossil fuels crowd elicited help from friendly lawmakers in at least 18 states to help carry legislation that would have a chilling effect on almost any such protests.

Biggs, McBride and Co. contend, of course, that they’re not working to stifle free speech or protesting – they simply want to protect the rights of those whose property could be endangered by such trespassing.

Nonsense. There already are plenty of laws on the books that deal with trespassing, damages and violence. Biggs’ and McBride’s proposals are the equivalent of dropping a nuclear bomb on a fly.

Plus, these measures could create the opportunity for hardball-playing oil and gas operators to use faux protesters to infiltrate legitimate, peaceful assemblies for the express purpose of inciting violence and/or destroying property.

In the aftermath, groups like the Sierra Club could be held liable for sanctioning such an event – and be bankrupted. Can you spell i-n-s-i-d-i-o-u-s?

I didn’t peruse the campaign contribution reports of all House members who voted for these bills, both of which garnered 68 to 70 floor votes along the way. But I did look at Biggs’ filings. Not surprisingly, he accepted thousands last year from oil and gas companies, including \$1,000 from Texas-based Energy Transfer Partners, the outfit behind the Dakota Access Pipeline.

If Senate leaders have a lick of sense, they’ll let this attack on the First Amendment die a quiet death. You cannot claim an unwavering commitment to the Constitution and its protections of individual liberty and support the stifling of dissent. That would be Hypocrisy 101.

Civil disobedience is as American as apple pie [think: lunch counter sit-ins]. Sometimes it’s inconvenient. Sometimes it’s messy.

But when your checkbook isn’t as big as an oil and gas baron’s, it’s often the only way an average citizen can force the powers-that-be to take notice and do the right thing.



New, Old Lawmakers Stay Busy Making Your Life Miserable

BY CAL HOBSON

Being a gullible and trusting soul, I very much hoped that with the November 2016 election of 52 freshman legislators a modicum of common sense and informed judgment would finally echo through the halls, offices, committee rooms and rotunda of the state Capitol.

Such a welcome infusion of new blood, ideas and energy could therefore accompany the long-awaited physical rehabilitation of the stolid but aging “people’s building” completed on the plains of our fair city 100 years ago.

As the 2017 session passes the halfway mark, there indeed is much evidence of vitality in the old marble mansion because modern, safe electrical wiring is finally surging in the walls and ceilings. However, based on votes cast so far, their individual cranial-encased circuit boards still seem disconnected and dysfunctional. As one of their own, Sen./Dr. Ervin Yen, R-OKC, recently decreed that most of his colleagues are still just emitting “silly” synapses.

For example, barely five months go, voters over-

whelmingly approved State Questions 780 and 781 that, in modest but important ways, began the reform of our criminal justice system. In the clearest terms, these ballot issues re-classified a number of non-violent crimes, from felonies to misdemeanors.

By casting “aye” votes the rank-and-file declared that the time had come in Oklahoma to quit warehousing thousands of low-level drug and property offenders. In doing so, citizens placed their trust in lawmakers to implement the statutory mandates contained in the two ballot initiatives.

But, no. Mommy and Daddy at the state Capitol know better and now there are multiple efforts underway to negate the progressive directives received from their constituents. Predictably, always-controversial but now-infamous former Sen. Ralph Shortey, R-OKC, declared before resigning in disgrace that “folks just didn’t understand what they were voting on.”

Cynics would say that the same alleged ignorance must also have applied in the selection of him and

perhaps other elected officials. How else to explain a Republican-dominated Legislature that has knowingly and recklessly created the following crazy eight train wrecks?

1. Two consecutive record billion-dollar budget failures and an empty Rainy Day Fund are facts – not alternative facts. These financial disasters are unprecedented in state history and have been dumped on taxpayers' doorsteps, courtesy of our self-identified fiscal conservatives.

2. The annual comedy show, featuring an endless parade of unconstitutional and delusional legislative proposals, drones on, necessitating the Oklahoma Supreme Court to regularly strike them down – often by unanimous decision. Like spoiled brats, rather than reining in their illegal impulses, lawmakers are doubling down by proposing unenforceable restrictions on the Supremes themselves. Good luck with that.

3. In the cattin' around category, one House member was forced to resign due to unprofessional conduct, a second is curiously barred from bringing any pages to the Capitol, and the aforementioned Sen. Shortey faces three felony counts in Cleveland County alleging despicable behavior with a minor.

4. Of even more destructive and widespread consequences, a health, education and public safety wasteland characterizes our once-proud communities. Their clueless creators are mindless minions of Washington, DC lobbyist and anti-tax guru Grover Norquist, who only knows this state is somewhere north of Texas and to the right of Barry Goldwater. To that know-nothing propagandist and others of his ilk, Oklahoma just means land of the red man, the reddest of red states, the repository of more red ink than any other of the 50 and home to a Legislature that endlessly created red faces on even many of its redneck constituents – and that ain't easy.

5. Four-day school weeks are now accepted as acceptable, as are class sizes about 30 students, even in the earliest grades. To make sure the deplorable situation continues, our Senate Education Committee overwhelmingly killed a bill designed to reverse this tragedy.

6. Annual promises to “do something” about abysmally low teacher compensation and then do nothing are like perennials in your garden. This time-honored game is, of course, to pass proposals guaranteeing higher salaries but not identify any money to pay for them. However, fear not. Newly-minted House Speaker Charles McCall, R-Atoka, a banker by profession – which means he should be able to add and subtract – has an as-yet un-

disclosed plan to fund the promised hikes. Perhaps it's patterned after President Richard Nixon's secret scheme to end the Vietnam War, which turned out to be cleverly simple: declare victory in the midst of defeat and leave. By the last Friday in May, Mr. Speaker will do much the same when he gavel to a close this year's version of a Barnum and Bailey performance.

7. With deadly consequences, far too many of our uncompassionate conservatives place a higher priority on legislating a location for a stone monument than finding a safe place to live for thousands of homeless mentally ill citizens.

8. We are saddled with a perverse tax code that is corrupt and reflective of a 19th Century economy. Therefore, many would think surely it must be very hard to make it worse.

Think again, naïve neophyte. Another unholy hand-out has just been discovered, thanks to my ace research staff – me – by simply reading a bill authored by the floor leaders of both bodies. Additional plundering of our revenue collection system is guaranteed if their HB 2131 becomes law. This new corporate welfare scheme will shove \$25 million of future sales tax remittances into the pockets of two downtown OKC



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First National Bank building insiders when they convert that historic structure into a tourist destination! Must mean the curious will actually pay money to see up-close a real white elephant eating their green!

Sadly, this parade of pernicious performances could actually be much longer but Observer honcho Arnold Hamilton lectured me I've already used up more than my share of his ink. He pointed out that for me to continue would be like flogging dead horses, shooting pigs from helicopters, slaughtering equine to satiate some Chinese culinary palates and, worst of all, beating up on brain dead pachyderms.

Being an animal lover myself, I get that. For punishment, I think I'll go have a platter of calf fries at Cattlemen's Café, where they're on sale just for today.

By contrast, similar deals are available at the Capitol everyday – but only for full price.

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

'Small Loan' Bill Would Mean Big Debts For Oklahoma Families

BY DAVID BLATT

For many Oklahomans in financial trouble, payday loans can seem like a quick and easy fix. Borrowers can take out a payday loan for up to \$500, secured by a post-dated check, usually for a period of 12 to 14 days. Under Oklahoma's deferred deposit lending act, payday lenders can charge \$45 in fees for a \$300 loan, which amounts to an APR [annual percentage rate] of 391%.

While some borrowers turn to payday loans for an emergency car repair or other one-time needs, the industry's successful business model is built on repeated borrowing by customers facing chronic financial difficulties. Data from Oklahoma's payday loan database revealed that a majority of all loans went to borrowers who took out 12 or more loans over the course of a year – or an average of more than one loan a month.

This dependence on repeat borrowing creates a debt trap, which can be extremely difficult to escape.

The industry especially targets struggling households and communities. A 2015 study found that most of the payday loan outlets [199 out of 324] in Oklahoma were located within a 10-mile radius of military installations and bases. The same study found that census tracts with economically vulnerable populations [elderly, young adults, immigrants, and lower income] are more likely to be targeted by

payday lending stores.

This legislative session seemed to offer hope for much-needed reform to curb industry practices that lead to chronic borrowing and growing indebtedness.

Several reform bills were introduced, but these bills were not allowed a hearing in legislative committees. This was not surprising, as the payday loan industry and its lobbyists have stifled reform measures for the past 15 years.

What was more of a surprise was that three days before the deadline for hearing bills in committee, a new bill was introduced by Rep. Chris Kannaday, R-OKC, that looks to create a brand new form of high-cost loan.

HB 1913 creates a new loan product, known as a Small Loan, which could be made for up to \$1,500 for a 12-month term. Lenders could charge 17% monthly interest, which amounts to an APR of 204%. On a \$1,500 loan over 12 months, borrowers would be charged cumulative interest of \$2,108.

After a strong push by payday lending industry lobbyists, this bill was narrowly approved by the House and now awaits a hearing in the state Senate.

The high-cost loans proposed in HB 1913 are an entirely unnecessary alternative. In addition to payday loans, Oklahoma law already allows "A" loans for over \$1,470 with a maximum APR of 30%, one-eighth the interest on HB 1913's "small loan." On a \$1,000 loan, existing law allows "B" lenders to charge interest and fees of \$394, which is less than one-third of what could be charged under HB 1913.

Furthermore, even hard-pressed consumers have better options than high-cost loans. A 2012 survey found that if payday loans were unavailable, consumers said they would cut back on expenses, delay paying some bills, borrow from family and friends, or sell or pawn personal possessions. These may all be difficult choices, but none creates the high risk of a debt trap.

Far too many Oklahomans are already falling prey to loans with exorbitant costs. The question that lawmakers must ask themselves is whether allowing much higher interest charges on struggling Oklahomans is going to solve anyone's problems or simply create new ones?

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

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Vulnerable Seniors, Disabled Threatened By State Fiscal Crisis

BY CARLY PUTNAM

There are honest arguments and discussions to be had about the place and role of government. Yet we generally agree that the government has an important role in protecting the lives and health of Americans who aren't able to protect themselves, including those who are elderly or have significant disabilities.

In Oklahoma, however, years of budget cuts have now compromised our Department of Human Services' ability to fulfill this core function of government. As a result, thousands of Oklahomans who are elderly or have disabilities could lose access to vital services in just a few months. Without a supplemental appropriation, DHS doesn't have the funds to pay providers for the care of more than 25,000 Oklahomans after April.

This situation is the result of years of inadequate funding combined with a diversion of resources to make court-ordered child welfare reforms. These reforms, known as the Pinnacle Plan, have consumed what funding increases DHS has seen and then some. Divisions other than child welfare are down to two-thirds the workforce they had in 2011.

With DHS running out of administrative expenses to trim, cuts are now directly affecting clients and client services: lower staffing levels mean less oversight of child care facilities, less investigation of allegations of abuse and neglect of vulnerable adults, closed meal sites for food-insecure seniors, a temporary freeze on child care subsidy enrollment, and possibly longer processing times for SNAP and energy bill assistance. In total, DHS has cut its budget by some \$200 million the past two years.

Five specific programs operated by the state Department of Human Services are under threat now. The Medicaid ADvantage waiver helps more than 21,000 Oklahomans in need of nursing home-level care to receive that care less expensively in their homes and communities. Four other waiver programs cover in-home and community-based care for Oklahomans with significant disabilities, including physical and occupational therapy, and assistance with bathing and dressing.

In order to continue to pay providers for these programs after April, DHS needs a midyear supplemental appropriation. The agency is requesting \$42.6 million in supplemental funds, of which \$34 million would go to paying waiver providers for the last two months of the state fiscal year, while the remainder would address an adoption subsidy payments shortfall [\$4.8 million] and the Pinnacle Plan [\$3.8 million].

[Editor's note: Early this month, lawmakers approved \$34 million for DHS, but part of the mid-year infusion – \$4.2 million for the developmentally disabled – is supposed to be paid out of the state's Rainy Day Fund. The problem, of course, is the fund recently was drained by the state finance director – in what amounted to an emergency short-term loan for cash-flow purposes. No one can be 100% certain, given the state's fiscal crisis, that the borrowed money will be replaced by June, when it is scheduled to be sent to DHS.]

What could happen if the supplemental doesn't happen or is underfunded is unclear. In order to qualify for these waiver programs to begin with, recipients have to be low-income, so it is highly unlikely that they could pay for these services out of pocket.

Some elderly Oklahomans may be forced to move to nursing homes, which will only multiply the cost to the state. Providers, many of which are small, locally-owned businesses, may shut down.

More than 25,000 Oklahomans who are elderly or have disabilities – as well as their families, friends, caregivers, and communities – would bear the brunt of the state's failure to fund core functions of government.

Even with its other budget challenges, the Legislature has a responsibility to ensure the most vulnerable members of our community can access the care they need. Otherwise, Oklahoma could leave our elders and those most in need of our protection in serious peril.

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

Special Elections Set

Four special elections are on tap to fill legislative vacancies.

On May 9, HD 28 voters will pick a replacement for former Seminole Rep. Tom Newell. Nominees are Democrat Steve Barnes, Republican Zack Taylor and Libertarian Cody Presley.

Also May 9, primary voters in HD 75 will choose party nominees to succeed ex-Rep. Dan Kirby. Four Republicans and two Democrats are in the race. Special general election is July 11.

The filing period for SD 44 [ex-Sen. Ralph Shortey] and HD 46 [soon-to-depart Rep. Scott Martin] is May 1-3. Special primary election is July 11 and general Sept. 12.

How Much Longer Until A Raise?



While A Former Teacher Of The Year Weighs Moving To Texas, Another Educator Moonlights To Make Ends Meet

BY SHAWN SHEEHAN

Should I stay or should I go now? Should I stay or should I go now?" The Clash's song plays in my head. Then the music switches to Anna Kendrick's *Cups*. "You're gonna miss me when I'm gone."

These are the tunes that accompany my thought processes on whether or not I should continue to teach in the state of Oklahoma. Such is the soundtrack for hundreds of other educators in our state, too.

The news is grim. We're now in our third consecutive year of enduring cuts to education funding. I saw a story on the news this morning about Dallas Independent School District holding a job fair in Okla-

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BY CAP KAYLOR

He is the night clerk at a liquor store in Norman. While sacking my purchases of cabernet and pinot noir we fell into one of those easy conversations that grease the wheels of social intercourse in a small town. The talk meandered to the economy.

It turned out that he has a day job. He is a math teacher at a local high school. Not able to support his family doing the thing he loves, the thing he feels "called" to do, he spends his evenings stacking bottles of merlot and ringing up six packs.

When, I wondered, does he have the time to grade papers and plan lessons?

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Texas-Bound?

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

homa City. They're in OKC because they know two things: Oklahoma educators are some of the best in the country and Oklahoma educators are among the lowest paid in the country.

School districts in Texas and surrounding states seeking to fill positions don't fuss with semantics or details about whether or not Oklahoma is last or second-to-last in teacher pay. They don't have to. They have figured out how to properly fund education and how to retain and reward excellent educators. Some school districts in Texas are offering starting salaries at numbers higher than I will ever see.

Let me say that another way: there are college grads with zero teaching experience who will be making more than 30-year veteran educators in our state.

How do we compete with that? How do we keep our teachers who have dedicated their lives to this profession and are committed to helping students, but are struggling to make ends meet?

I have asked this question multiple times. My last blog post in December caught a lot of attention when I asked Santa for a reason to keep teaching in Oklahoma. I told him about how I made \$1,860 per month and how after rent, daycare, and half of a car payment, my check was gone. My wife's paycheck covered the remaining car payment, student loans, credit card, utilities, cell phone, and Internet bills. The thing is, she's a teacher, too, and there's little left afterwards to pay for groceries and diapers for our family of three.

Unfortunately, Santa never answered. And neither did the Oklahoma Legislature.

So, my wife and I did the logical thing. We went and got certified to teach in the state of Texas and have been certified for the last few months. We love our school, our district, our city, our students, and their families, but what's happening to education in the state of Oklahoma is criminal. And the thing is, it's not just education. The recurring budget deficits have reduced all core state services to scraps.

How can I ask for a raise when we don't have the money to fund police and firefighters, DHS, and our prison systems, let alone education? You don't have to be a math teacher to know that our budget simply doesn't work. And yet, as a state, we've continued to elect the same folks who create the same problems and approach them with the same ineffective solutions.

My wife and I went to a career fair in Texas recently and were overwhelmed with the options available to educators. I received quite the response when I introduced myself by saying, "My name is Shawn Sheehan and I'm the 2016 Oklahoma Teacher of the Year and I'm considering relocating here."

The Sheehans and many other educators in Oklahoma have been waiting a long time, hoping and praying that the state would do what's right and find a

way to fund education and other core services. We've asked for some sign of hope that things will get better and it seems unlikely. In fact, it seems quite the opposite – that things will worsen.

So the ball is in your court, Oklahoma. It has been for a long time. The Sheehans haven't accepted any job offers yet, as of this blog post on March 30, 2017. We want to stay and serve our students, but what choice do we have?

I know this much – I will not be made to feel guilty anymore for wanting to provide for my family. And for the potential ill-informed comments this blog post may receive, here are my responses:

"You should have known going into this profession you wouldn't make much money."

Correct. But I expect to be able to pay the bills and have a livable wage. All 49 other states have it down. What I do is not mission work. I earned my Master's in education and I believe my work and my talents are worth more than what I receive.

"But cost of living ... "

My wife and I went down to the DFW area over Spring Break and did some searching, shopping, and dining and the difference isn't significant. With the potential increase in pay, it'll balance out with money left for savings.

"It's all about the students. We don't need you if you've forgotten that."

I agree that it's all about the students and I've been saying that for years. But which students? Because students everywhere need talented teachers. If I choose to help students in DFW, I'll make \$20,000-plus [more]. And if it's all about the students, tell me why our state has schools closing and an increasing amount of districts going to four-day school weeks?

"Stay and fight!"

I want to. I really do. I've done everything I know how to do to make things better, but it's not working. And I'm not going to subject my daughter to this perpetual struggle. I'm also concerned about what the schools will look like when she's school-age and the quality of services available to us. Unless my wife and I find a way to earn more money, we're going to have to make the financially responsible decision for the sake of our daughter.

"You're being greedy. Stop whining. You have summers off. What you do isn't technical like an engineer or doctor, etc."

Yeah, this article wasn't for you. Thanks for reading, though!

I look forward to seeing what the final education budget will be and hear what plans our legislators have for generating revenue for our state. I hope they know the stakes are high.

Shawn Sheehan is a special education and Algebra teacher at Norman High School and was Oklahoma's 2016 Teacher of the Year. He holds a bachelor's degree in journalism from Arizona State University and a master's in special education from the University of Oklahoma.

For years Oklahoma has ranked near the bottom in teacher salaries. Beginning teachers are routinely expected to be the bus driver and coach two or three sports teams in addition to teaching class. It is clear that teaching is not a highly valued profession in our state, although it should be.

In what other profession would you find a professional spending up to \$1,800 a year out of his or her pocket just to buy school supplies for students? In what other profession would you find people incurring decades worth of college debt and working two jobs just for the privilege of spending 10 hours a day in the classroom and another three or four at home preparing for the next day?

When we hear that one third of students graduating from rural schools are functionally illiterate, when we hear of falling test scores, and are informed that only one in seven Americans can find Iraq on a map, when we learn that most students can't identify FDR in a photo or name a single Supreme Court justice, the public has a right to ask some questions.

One that is seldom asked is, "How much time are parents spending helping their children with their homework?"

Teachers and the public school system become an easy target. But diverting resources from the public school system to commercial enterprises such as charter schools and private academies is really cynicism disguised as "choice." It represents a further unraveling of the fabric of American democracy which is already dangerously frayed and pulling apart at the seams.

Historically, there are precious few unifying forces in American society. We don't believe in the same religion, we don't have a common ethnic or racial background, and we don't celebrate the same cultural traditions. We certainly don't have the same politics.

What we do have is a shared language and the universal experience of the American public school system. The common curriculum of reading, writing, math, science, art, and civics transcends the diversity of Catholic, Protestant, Jew, Muslim, black, white, brown, male, female, or even class.

The schoolyard is the first place where we all learn that E-pluribus Unum is not simply a motto on a coin but a living, breathing reality that each of us encounters every day.

We have little else to hold us together as a nation. Our schools have always provided a kind of social glue binding us together with in a common experience, language, and even identity.

Slogans like "parental choice," "school competition," "secular humanism," and "governmental monopoly" are little more than slight-of-hand that has less to do with the quality of education than some perceived culture war that seeks to redefine America along racial, ideological, economic, and even theological lines.

Recently, a state legislator told me in confidence that he was dismayed when an acquaintance told him that he couldn't support a school bond because the "government schools don't teach Jesus as Lord." And not long ago, my barber expressed her dissatisfaction

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Six Inducted Into Women's Hall Of Fame

The Oklahoma Commission on the Status of Women welcomed six new members to the Oklahoma Women's Hall of Fame in an early April ceremony at the Oklahoma History Center in OKC. The honorees:

- Linda Cavanaugh, KFOR-TV's first female co-anchor of an evening newscast, also is a member of the Oklahoma Broadcasting Hall of Fame and the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame.

- Edith Kinney Gaylord, who died in 2001, founded the Inasmuch Foundation, which has contributed more than \$200 million to Oklahoma charities that help women, children and families. A journalism pioneer, she helped launch the Women's National Press Club in the 1940s after she and other women were denied the right to join the Washington Press Club.

- Glenda Love has been the executive director of the Ronald McDonald House in Tulsa for 17 years. She also serves on the board of trustees of OSU-Tulsa and the McDonald Corporation Global Advisory Council.

- Pat Potts, MBA, co-founded the Community Re-

source Development Foundation and serves as president of its successor, the Potts Family Foundation. She also founded the Oklahoma Center for Nonprofits and served as president and CEO for more than 20 years. Potts was a founder of the Oklahoma Women's Coalition.

- Meg Salyer has served as the only woman on the Oklahoma City Council for Ward 6 for more than eight years, serving Ward 6. In 2003, Salyer was elected the first woman president of the Rotary Club of Oklahoma City.

- Rhonda Walters is the president of Oklahoma Property Investors and serves as a broker of record for five sales associates. As Oklahoma's First Lady, the longtime children's advocate helped organize the highly successful Healthy Futures Immunization Campaign.

The Oklahoma Women's Hall of Fame is one of several events sponsored by the OCSW to support its mission to improve the quality of life for women, children and families in Oklahoma.

Don't Hold Your Breath On Tax Hike

BY MARION HILL

The State of Oklahoma has gotten itself into a mess financially. And I don't mean just the fact that oil prices have been down recently, or even that Gov. Mary Fallin has pushed through income-tax cuts that mostly benefit the richest taxpayers. Both those factors have worsened the state's financial woes, but there's also a persistent continuing problem that goes back 25 years.

The voters bear a big chunk of responsibility for it.

In 1992, State Question 640 was approved by voters. The measure forces any tax increase to go before a vote of the people if it doesn't win a *three-fourths* vote in *both* houses of the Legislature.

In practice, that means that if a tax is reduced at some point it probably can never be increased again.

If you're holding your breath until the Oklahoma Legislature – a super-majority of both the Senate and the House, mind you – votes to increase the state income tax, well, it's been nice knowing you. Hope your kids enjoy whatever inheritance you can manage to leave them. Same deal if you're waiting for the voters to pass a tax increase.

The income tax in Oklahoma isn't the lowest of all states, but not among the highest, either. It's smack in the middle, ranked as 25th among the 50 states and the District of Columbia, according to the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. ITEP's analysis of income and tax data appears on a page titled "Best States to be Rich or Poor from a Tax Perspective" on the wallethub.com website.

But that's only part of the picture. Some states don't have an income tax but make up that revenue, and then some, with other levies. Our neighbor, Texas, doesn't have an income tax but in many locations pummels its residents with property tax. In fact, Texans pay the fifth highest property tax in the nation.

WalletHub puts the average total tax burden in Texas [including sales taxes, property tax, and income taxes] at 10.57% for low-income taxpayers, 7.55% for middle-income taxpayers, and 6.53% for high-income taxpayers.

In Oklahoma by comparison, the burden is 9.90% for low-income taxpayers, 9.34% for middle-income taxpayers, and 7.77% for high-income taxpayers.

Notice anything about fairness in these percentages? People with the lowest incomes pay the highest percentage of their money in taxes. And this inequal-

ity generally exists in other states as well.

That's not new information to anyone who has been paying attention over the last several decades. That's why it's madness for Oklahoma to keep increasing the sales tax on goods and services, as clueless Gov. Fallin proposes as the way out of the state's budget hole.

Sales taxes are regressive, meaning they fall hardest on those with the least ability to pay. In Oklahoma, sales tax even applies to food, which takes a bigger bite out of a poor family's budget than that of richer families.

Income tax is a much fairer method of raising revenue, because it collects more from those who can better afford to pay. But apparently this Legislature isn't about to ask Fallin and her rich cronies to pay their fair share with a higher income tax.

Nor do state legislators show any inclination to change the sweet deal that oil and gas companies get here. Theoretically, Oklahoma taxes oil production at 7%, but with rebates and exemptions the effective tax rate is under 3.5%, according to the Oklahoma Policy Institute's website.

By comparison, North Dakota's tax rate for oil production is 10%. And North Dakota is doing great economically, much better than Oklahoma. A March 3 article on the www.usnews.com website ranks North Dakota's economy as the second best in the nation. That same article places Oklahoma's at No. 34.

So if the oil companies insist that higher taxes on them would curtail production and thus depress the state's economy, we can point to our neighbor to the north and say, "It ain't necessarily so, Jack."

House Minority Leader Scott Inman, D-Del City, has dared Republican legislators to increase taxes on oil and gas production and on annual incomes of more than \$400,000 to pay for the raises for teachers that the Legislature recently voted [but provided no funding mechanism to pay for them]. His Democratic caucus would back such increases, he stressed.

Unfortunately, that ain't gonna happen. The R's aren't about to offend the rich donors that they're beholden to.

But it's what should happen. Even some Republicans admit how difficult it is to find enough revenue to fund state services when they can't vote changes in the taxes that would put real money in state coffers. Former House Speaker Jeff Hickman, R-Fairview, has said, "We are not only out of rabbits, we are out of hats."

Yes, it often takes courage to do the right thing. Both voters and legislators need it now. Voters need to be brave enough to actually demand tax increases from legislators, and legislators need to be brave enough to vote them.

I'm not holding my breath 'til either one happens.
Marion Hill lives in Durant.

On Education

BY KURT HARRINGTON

When listening to the hue and cry about education, defunding versus vouchers, my thoughts drift back to Jefferson County, CO. This was about Common Core, and opponents of that effort have claimed that it had a number of flaws, even though they couldn't name a precise instance of these supposed flaws. In that regard, I've read many hypothetical mathematic problems, none of which could be taken seriously.

Finally, one brave soul told me that the history curriculum was anti-Constitutional, so I dug into the examples outlined in the Common Core online texts and found what the real cause of this alarm was.

The example curricula pointed out how expansion into this part of the continent, soon to be called the United States, was often white "exceptionalism," an often neglected cause of problems with our country.

Small wonder that the people undermining our public school systems are complaining about it and deliberately presenting academic curriculum that seeks to ignore the treatment of our Native American relatives. We can see this with the recent example of calling African slaves "immigrants" seeking a new path to freedom, though history doesn't refer to these people as "imported human capital" as yet.

This is the culmination of a concerted effort to "politicize" our local school boards and educational administrations with an agenda to assert "creation science" and related dogma.

Do not confuse this with a conspiracy as it seems more likely to be a confederacy of dunces.

It more nearly is the result of improving academic standards that pits the sub-culture of "non-learners" against the "learners," which has had a sort of "blowback" that can be exploited by a political movement.

The contempt for education by these non-learners is exhibited in various tomes that mischaracterize education professionals as "lazy," and "clinging to tenure." Often as not, these complaints are the loudest from those who would benefit the most from better funding of education, from inner-city to rural areas. And ironically, it's the athletic departments that have no difficulties getting funding, as opposed to the arts and musical programs.

This isn't a conspiracy of mammoth proportions, so much as it's a confederacy of dunces that deliberately infiltrated our school systems with their own political agenda in mind, forgetting what would be best for our state's youth participating in our public education.

Recalling for a moment how lotteries and pari-mutuel wagering were touted as supplemental funding

for our public schools, there should be doubts as to when and where those funds were actually spent.

Our state is facing yet another budget shortfall, owing to some imaginary "spending problem" that was actually a revenue problem directly caused by tax cutting measures intended to help interests other than public education.

To that end, I must commend efforts to participate in our local school board and city council elections, as it appears to be the most direct means available to us, as concerned parents and voters, to remedy the "mathorexia" now present in Oklahoma's legislative and executive offices.

Kurt Harrington lives in Edmond.

Founding Fathers

BY BOB DARCY

Some political columnists bemoan our present ways, reverentially calling us to return to what the Founders wrote and intended back in the Declaration of Independence, Constitution and Bill of Rights.

Recall the words?

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

"We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

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

"The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people."

Our Founders, all of them from colonies where slaveholding was legal at the time of the Declaration of Independence, most of them from the eight slave states at the time of the Constitution, many slave owners themselves, had no trouble reconciling slavery with their words in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution or the Bill of Rights.

Historian James Oliver Horton noted "in the 72 years between the election of George Washington and the election of Abraham Lincoln, 50 of those years

[had] a slaveholder as president of the United States.”

Of the first 12 presidents, only John and John Quincy Adams never owned slaves.

John Adams wrote, “I have, through my whole life, held the practice of slavery in such abhorrence, that I have never owned a negro or any other slave, though I have lived for many years in times, when the practice was not disgraceful, when the best men in my vicinity thought it not inconsistent with their character, and when it has cost me thousands of dollars for the labor and subsistence of free men, which I might have saved by the purchase of negroes at times when they were very cheap.”

Adams’ words show it possible, then, as we do now, to see the clear conflict between the words of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and the protection for slaveholders our Founding Fathers constitutionally embedded.

Because slaves counted as three-fifths of a person for apportioning the House of Representatives but could not vote, the slaveholders’ ability to elect a president by popular vote was diminished. Thus, the Constitution provided an electoral college where slaves count toward a state’s electors.

It was not just slavery at which our Founders fell short. There were states’ rights. Their Constitution made clear the limited nature of the federal government and states’ almost unlimited sovereignty.

Their Bill of Rights did not recognize fundamental rights of persons. Rather, it was only a limitation on the federal government. States were free to, and did, establish religion, coerce confessions, conduct warrantless searches, restrict the press, limit gun ownership, utilize cruel and unusual punishments, kick persons from their homes to quarter soldiers, and, of course, protect the rights of slaveholders.

Struggle over states’ rights versus the rights of persons, including slaves, resulted in civil war.

Victorious Northern Republicans re-shaped the Constitution with the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments. Slavery ended. Federal authority increased and state sovereignty decreased. Congress was empowered to legislate protection of individual rights against state abuse.

Today we have states whining because the federal courts will not let them do what they can to make life horrible for those with non-Biblical sexual orientations, declare any method of execution a legislature comes up with not cruel or unusual, restrict voting rights, deny benefits of citizenship to those born here of “foreigners,” limit the ability of non-English speakers to navigate bureaucracy or bedeck public property with reminders ours is a Christian nation.

All that stands in the way are the Civil War Amendments.

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

Trump’s ‘Empire Lite’ Bound To Generate Blowback

BY JEREMY KUZMAROV

Donald Trump is a con man, and one of his cons during the 2016 election was to present himself in the campaign as an isolationist.

Since taking over the presidency, Mr. Trump has proposed raising military spending by \$54 billion, or nearly 10% of an already gargantuan \$600 billion budget.

Mr. Trump has also vowed to continue the Obama strategy of training, equipping and supporting indigenous armies and security forces around the globe, appointing men with extensive Special Forces operations experience like Gen. James Matthis and H.R. McMaster to key foreign policy positions.

Gen. Tony Thomas, head of the military special operations command, was quoted in *The New York Times* on Tuesday [3.21.17] as saying that “more troops on the ground may mean you own the problem when you’re done with it.” The implication being that a light footprint approach relying on Special Forces and drone strikes could accomplish American policy objectives smoothly – and without much public scrutiny or protest.

The botched Special Forces raid on Yemen, however, which resulted in the killing of the eight-year-old daughter of radical cleric Anwar-Awlaki, a U.S. citizen killed previously along with his son in drone strikes, exemplifies how clandestine operations can backfire, as does the U.S.-NATO debacle in Libya which resulted in the strengthening of jihadist elements following the overthrow of Muammar Qaddafi.

The Trump-Obama infatuation with Special Forces fits a long historical pattern that should raise further alarm bells about the course of American foreign policy.

During the Cold War, the U.S. provided grants amounting to over \$90 billion in military equipment and training to some 120 countries, many of them ruled by dictatorships.

Linguist Noam Chomsky and economist Edward S. Herman found in a study published in 1979 that military aid was “positively related to investment climate for U.S. multinational corporations and inversely [negatively] related to the maintenance of democratic

PUBLIC FORUM

I'M SURE BEING A
CANDIDATE WILL
TEMPER TRUMP



I'M SURE BEING
THE REPUBLICAN
NOMINEE WILL
TEMPER
TRUMP



I'M SURE BEING
PRESIDENT ELECT
WILL TEMPER
TRUMP



I'M SURE BEING
SWORN IN WILL
TEMPER TRUMP



I'M SURE BEING HANDED THE
NUCLEAR LAUNCH CODES
WILL TEMPER TRUMP



I'M SURE BEING
THE MUTANT TRIBAL
LEADER OF HALF OF
HUMANKIND'S DISEASED
REMNANT...



order and human rights," with other studies also emphasizing the connection to torture and death squad activity.

In an exchange with Gen. Lyman Lemnitzer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Wayne Hays, D-OH, said in 1961 that the "experience in Cuba with Batista [dictator] should have taught you that you can't build an armed force on a base of quicksand. It was the same in Korea where you built a monster and a 32-year-old captain proclaimed himself a lieutenant general and took over the government."

The Kennedy Administration was particularly infatuated with counterinsurgency, establishing the Green Berets whom Newsweek described as "hard muscled wielders of knife and garrote teaching their back alley arts to fighters for freedom in the jungles of Southeast Asia, the savannas of Central Africa, wherever revolt and terror encroach."

In opposing leftist-socialists and "wars of national liberation," the Green Berets tended, however, to bolster conservative military regimes that came to power in CIA-supported coups such as those in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Bolivia, and Brazil.

These regimes and others like them were valued for providing military bases and access to precious

resources like uranium, and for creating a favorable investment climate through maintenance of cheap labor standards and low tax rates, which resulted from the repression of trade union activists and leftists promoting the nationalization of industry and resources.

Though packaged as key to the War on Terror, a similar agenda underlays many military assistance programs today including in Africa, where the Pentagon has allocated \$250 million over two years to train local security forces. A lot of the training is now carried out by private military contractors [PMCs], who often lack the professionalism of military officers and have a vested interest in perpetuating endless war.

Like his predecessor, Mr. Trump would like us to believe that an "empire light" approach backed now by macho rhetoric will enable the defeat of terrorism with minor hassles.

History, however, tells us that more blowback, dictatorships and a deteriorating world security situation will be the likely outcome.

Tulsan Jeremy Kuzmarov is author of Modernizing Repression: Police Training and Nation Building in the American Century [Massachusetts, 2012] and author of an article on the history of American military assistance with Oxford encyclopedia.

Rural Electric Coops Harnessing Oklahoma Sun

BY BOB D. ROUNSAVELL

Many of us know that based on 2016 data, Oklahoma has jumped over California becoming No. 3 in wind power production. What most do not know is that Oklahoma is now ranked No. 45 in installed solar capacity in the U.S.

According to the Solar Energy Industries Association [SEIA], 3.7 MW of solar capacity were installed in 2015, representing a 526% increase over 2014. As of April 2016, our state had 5.2 MW of solar energy installed.

Note that one megawatt [or MW] equals 1,000 kilowatts KW and one kilowatt equals 1,000 watts. Oklahoma's significant rise in solar power capacity is thanks largely to its rural electric cooperatives.

At the beginning of 2017, these co-ops will increase the state's national ranking by adding over 20 MW of solar power capacity. This addition will add diversity of fuel sources for power generation.

The 2017 addition of 20 MW is being spearheaded by Western Farmers Electric Cooperative [WFEC], a generation and transmission cooperative based in Anadarko. WFEC supplies the electrical needs of 17 member cooperatives, four in New Mexico, along with Altus Air Force Base.

"The efforts put forth by WFEC in substantially increasing the installed solar capacity as a state showcase how the market for solar technology has improved and is better able to harness the resource in Oklahoma," comments Michael Teague, Oklahoma Secretary of Energy and Environment. "It is an effort harnessing the next piece of Oklahoma's all-of-the-above energy strategy."

According to SEIA, Oklahoma's existing solar power could power 570 homes. WFEC's John Toland, principal resource planning engineer, states that the 20-plus MWs added potentially powers nearly 7,000 homes.

Solar energy used with renewable technologies to replace fossil fuels, helps reduce harmful emissions into the atmosphere and the greenhouse gas effect that results in global warming/climate change.

Oklahoma's WFEC has chosen to use utility-scale sites which differ from community solar sites in several ways, most notably their size. Utility-scale solar typically is one MW or larger and most importantly use installations that allow the solar panels to move

and track the sun, as in a Kansas sunflower. Community solar sites, however, are smaller and often use fixed installations with immobile solar panels.

WFEC has completed utility-scale sites in Cyril, which has five MW with 20,000 panels; Tuttle, four MW with 16,000 panels; and Hinton, Marietta and Pine Ridge with three MW and 12,000 panels each. These locations combined produce 18 MW of electricity. Significantly, these sites are on land purchased by WFEC and have a substation adjacent to each project site.

According to WFEC vice president Brian Hobbs, seven acres is required to accommodate panels for producing one MW and one MW of solar output is estimated to power 330 homes. Thus the 18 MW WFEC will be producing will power 5,940 homes with the ever-important decrease of toxic emissions.

SOLAR SUBSCRIPTIONS

A community solar project is also known as a solar farm or solar garden referring to the arrangement of PV panels that collectively work a single unit that creates an array. Traditionally individuals have purchased and installed on their homes PV panels which can be pricey and need maintenance by the owner. With economies of scale, the per-panel cost of a community array is more affordable than individually installed panels.

Rural electric coops can accomplish what individuals cannot achieve on their own.

This is how it works: 1] output of community solar panels are available for members to subscribe with a one-time fee; 2] these members receive credit on their electric bill based on the energy production of the panel or panels subscribed. Credit varies depending on the going rate for electricity. The credit is designed to return the value of the subscription plus other value, such as no-fuel cost associated with the solar energy produced; 3] members sign an agreement with their co-op for a subscription. If members move but stay within the electric cooperative area, they are allowed to take their subscription with them. However, if they choose to cancel their agreement with the co-op, they are allowed to sell back the subscription at a depreciated value determined by the number of years remaining. This system significantly reduces the cost of solar generated electricity for individuals.

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Ideological Absolutism Puts America On Dangerous Path

BY HAROLD V. SARE

A major political leader in the U.S. House of Representatives recently commented that he would not waste time reading anything that was not “conservative.” I later heard him say in an interview that he did not want President Trump working with the Democrats on the recently defeated health bill. He feared that results would be a bill that was not conservative enough.

Also, I have heard committed liberals argue that the liberal approach was the only approach that public policy development should take. Sometime back in my career I was told by a senior faculty member that his goal in the classroom was to make a liberal out of every student – a terrible teaching objective.

My question is whether or not these absolute types of policy approaches are realistic

and whether they actually damage the constitutional democratic system that our founding fathers and other later political leaders over a period of time have developed. Our political culture has become ideological in orientation, and too often it puts emphasis on some form of absolute thinking that is imposed on the citizen.

Personally, I am committed to a fully functioning constitutional democratic system that enables differing political groups to discuss issues in a constructive way and to work out compromises in order to keep the political order working for the majority of voters. Right now destructive deadlocks seriously threaten our system of government – and politics. These deadlocks are destructive of democratic dialogue, and they impose an insidious form of authori-



tarian control.

President Trump’s tirades against the press which take issue with him, provoke him to respond that what they are writing is “fake news.” His denying some of the major news reporters the right to attend his press conferences is a dangerous example of authoritarianism.

It is very interesting to me that the strong ideology of communism that was imposed by Lenin and Stalin in Russia and Mao in China failed. Both systems are now simply autocratic, though China still uses many of the communist forms. Both systems were harsh and, to a great extent, still are harsh. Ideology in these states was imposed absolutely based on the edicts of the leader – Lenin, Stalin, Mao or others who followed.

Do we want our system of government in the United States of America to change to this kind of ideological absolutism?

It appears that Speaker Ryan and his close associates along with others are inclined to enjoy an absolutism that would give them almost total control over the economic and political system of the U.S. Financially they can control considerable wealth and enjoy the feeling of great power. I fear that is the trend. But can that trend be good for “we the people”?

There seems to be an absolutism imposed by strong ideologists in the top levels of our politics. That is the danger to any political system in which the individual citizen adheres to the rigid ideology of the top leaders and fails to keep up with issues and fails to get involved in politics and does not vote, or perhaps even worse, does vote without adequate information or with misinformation.

Unfortunately, in the United States we are seeing strong currents of ideology, failure to take issues seriously, and failure to vote. Under these circumstances absolutism takes advantage, and absolutist ideologies rise to the top. That is why we are having so many crippling deadlocks. This problem will continue as long as political figures insist on their absolutist “ideals,” and the body politic does not take firm action. Is there an answer?

Of course there is an answer. The history of the U.S. – starting with our Founding Fathers who set the system in motion and historic changes such as allowing women to vote – reflects the responses to a viable constitutional democracy. Today’s problems have remedies, if only we are not too stubborn to work together.

Let’s make a critical distinction between “ideology” and “basic human values” in view of what we observe today in the use of the term ideology. The American Heritage Dictionary [1969, 48 years ago] defines ideology as “the body of ideas reflecting the social needs and aspirations of an individual, group, class, or culture.” There were various bodies of ideas prior to 1969 that were absolutist – Communism, Fascism, Nazism and other less known groups. Also, there were not so many authoritarian or democratic systems such as the Socialists and the Constitutional Democrats.

I am arguing that changes in emphasis have taken place in the public mind of today. Numerous conservatives and liberals tend to take an absolutist orientation toward their political views. I hear congressmen say they are conservative or liberal and they stubbornly vote that way. Now, I must admit I do not hear the liberal express his or her rigid views as frequently as I hear it from the conservative.

Today, we are debating the appointment of a Supreme Court justice. The man nominated is an experienced jurist, but the issue he confronts in the Senate confirmation hearing is ideological. A Supreme Court appointee is in office for life. This is the reason that the Senate rules require 60 votes for confirmation.

However, the Republicans are threatening to change the rules for confirmation to the “nuclear option” requiring only a simple majority. This to me would be a critical mistake for either party to confirm a Supreme Court justice by simple majority since it is a lifetime appointment which will affect our people for generations.

My argument in summary: Why can we not simply focus on the pragmatic aspects of a problem, have a discussion between the reasonable conservative and liberal, and work out a compromise that relates to the majority of the voters? Let’s have reasonable debates between the persons who are inclined toward one orientation or another, make some compromises and stabilize our country.

Let’s talk to one another, be reasonable, work out policies that are pragmatic and serve the best interests of our country!

We used to do that and some of that continues today, but not enough to deal with some of the most important problems. I hate to say it, but we are facing the demise of

a very powerful state – our own country. If we do not change, and work together as one nation, we could see brutal dictators dominating the world. It is happening right now!

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



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Why Bernie Is America's Most Popular Politician



BY LES LEOPOLD

Bernie Sanders has the highest approval rating of any politician in the country with 61% approving, with only 32% disapproving, according to a March 15 Fox News poll. The Sanders 29-plus percent favorable/unfavorable gap was far superior to Trump's negative 8%.

What accounts for Sanders' popularity and how can progressives build on it?

Bernie Sanders has been saying the same things for nearly a half-century. He's been a consistent democratic-socialist fighting on behalf of working people and against financial/corporate power. While his straightforward commitment to his ideals is refreshingly genuine, he did not make his mark on the national scene until last year at age 74.

Sanders didn't change, but the world did.

His message about the ravages and unfairness of runaway inequality hit home because it is true. He and his campaign became the next phase of the revolt against the 1% initiated by the remarkable, yet short-lived, Occupy Wall Street.

Sanders took this discontent many steps forward by clearly articulating a social-democratic agenda for working people. He turned "We are the 99%" into a clear policy agenda. That agenda, not just his enormous integrity, is why he remains so popular.

He stands for something and so should we.

Here's a rough draft of such an agenda:

- The right to a job at living wage: Everyone who is willing and able to work should be entitled to a job that today would pay at least \$15 an hour. If the private sector is unable to produce such jobs, then government should serve as the employer of last resort. There's more than enough work to be done to rebuild our infrastructure and protect our environment.

- The right to universal health care: It is time to expand Medicare – our efficiently run single-payer system for the elderly – to anyone who wishes to join.

- The right to free public education from Pre-K to graduate school: Each child deserves access free of charge to as much education as he or she qualifies for through our public educational systems. Nearly

every economically advanced country provides free higher education. So should we.

- The right to a sustainable environment, free from chemical, radioactive and carbon pollution: We need to protect working people and communities from harmful exposures while rapidly reducing the emission of greenhouse gases – the cause of global warming. The climate crisis is real and must be addressed now. In doing so we also should have a policy of buying goods as locally as possible to limit the carbon footprint of transportation, and we should make sure industries do not flee to countries with weaker health, safety and environmental standards.

gains, according to Rutgers University professor Michael Merrill. From World War II to 1980, as productivity rose, so did real wages. Since 1980 real worker wages [after inflation] have stalled while productivity has soared. The productivity gains that once went to worker wages have been siphoned away to the top 1%. The average wage today would be double what it is, had we received our fair share of productivity.

Why?

Our economy is being financially strip-mined by Wall Street and their corporate partners. [Financial strip-mining refers to the full set of financial maneuvers that extract money from non-financial corpo-

Who really believed that Bernie Sanders, an avowed socialist, could come so near the Democratic nomination and become the most popular politician in America?

- The right to an impartial criminal justice system that does not harm anyone based on their ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, racial category or religion. In particular, we need to dramatically reduce the differential impact of enforcement, prosecution and sentencing on young people of color.

- The right to vote, free of voter suppression activities and billionaire influence: For our democracy to endure we need to halt any and all efforts to deny voting rights, and we need to curtail the influence of money in all areas of the political system.

- The right to citizenship for all residents: We are a nation of immigrants, documented and undocumented. There should be a straightforward pathway to citizenship for the more than 11 million undocumented immigrants here today.

- The right to organize unions without employer threats or harassment: We need to reform the current laws and processes which allow employers to intimidate workers from joining labor unions. Congress should pass the Free Choice Act which will level the playing field.

- The right to control our money through public state banks and a national postal bank: We need an alternative to the predatory financing provided by Wall Street. Modeled on the public Bank of North Dakota, every state should charter a public bank whose first and only goal is to serve its people. Like many other nations, we also need a national postal bank to provide financial services in all our communities.

But can America really afford these basic human rights?

We are the richest nation in world history. The resources are here, but our prosperity has been hijacked by financial and corporate elites. In 1970 the CEO pay/worker pay ratio was \$45 to one. Today it is more than \$840 to one.

The average worker who entered the workforce 40 years ago has lost more than \$500,000 in productivity

rations and moves wealth to large investors, hedge funds, private equity companies, investment banks and insurance companies. Just as mineral strip-mining harms the natural environment, the financial kind damages the corporate environment and can leave behind hollowed-out facilities.]

This social-democratic agenda is possible if, and only if, financial strip-mining is halted. Billions of dollars of ill-gotten gains must be transferred from Wall Street to Main Street. Here are basic policies that can achieve that goal:

- A Financial Speculation Tax on All Wall Street Transactions: We should advocate a small sales tax on stocks [.05%], bonds [.01%] and derivatives [.005%]. Wall Street must finally pay their fair share and repay us for all the bailouts.

- An End to Stock Manipulation: This refers to stock buybacks that allow corporate and financial elites to strip-mine the economy. CEOs and their Wall Street partners should not be permitted to enrich themselves by using corporate funds to buy back their own shares in order to jack up stock prices. This was illegal before 1982 and should be again.

- A Wealth Tax of 1% on All Those Whose Net Worth Is More Than \$10 Million: Those who have grown super-rich by strip-mining our economy have a myriad of ways to avoid taxes. This tax, used by Spain, France, Switzerland and Norway, is an excellent way to recoup those losses.

[Even Donald Trump once advocated a 14.25% wealth tax to eliminate the national debt. In 1999 he said: “By my calculations, 1% of Americans, who control 90% of the wealth in this country, would be affected by my plan.”]

PIE IN THE SKY?

Clearly, Donald Trump has long forgotten his wealth tax. Instead, he is hell bent on further increasing rather than reversing runaway inequality. So where is the political space for a Sanders-like agenda?

For a moment, think again about what has happened over this past year.

Who would have thought this pathological liar would become president?

Who really believed that Bernie Sanders, an avowed socialist, could come so near the Democratic nomination and become the most popular politician in America?

Who believed that millions of people would come into the streets so quickly and could organize thousands of Indivisible groups almost overnight?

There is a real opening for a visionary politics that protects and enhances the common good. But much more needs to be done to connect us together.

PETITION EVERY POLITICIAN?

To keep the Sanders agenda alive, we should further refine it, turn it into a petition, get 25 million people to sign it and shove it under the noses of every politician in the country.

Hard? Yes, but not impossible.

We can start right now by building a mass educational network that reaches millions of Americans with the facts about runaway inequality, financial strip-mining and why a powerful common agenda is both needed and possible.

In the 1880s the Populists, who then were engaged in an all out war with the moneyed interests, fielded 6,000 educators to build their movement among small farmers. We need 30,000 today, a number well within our reach.

This educational effort can help us see that the many issues we care about are deeply connected by runaway inequality. It will help us see why we need a common movement that goes beyond our issue silos, interest groups and identities. It does not ask people to give up their issues and identities. Rather, it asks that we make issue silos more porous and interconnected.

It asks that we add one more identity to each of us – the identity of movement builder. For more information about this educational effort, please join us at runawayinequality.org.

Les Leopold, the director of the Labor Institute, is currently working with unions and community organizations to build the educational infrastructure for a new anti-Wall Street movement. His new book Runaway Inequality: An Activist's Guide to Economic Justice serves as a text for this campaign. All proceeds go to support these educational efforts.

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Russians Hit Democracy Already Damaged By Republicans

BY WILLIAM BOARDMAN

The FBI, as part of our counterintelligence effort, is investigating the Russian government's efforts to interfere in the 2016 president [sic] election ... – FBI Director James Comey, Congressional testimony, March 20

FBI Director Comey let loose the mechanical rabbit of Russian interference and now all the political greyhounds are chasing it around a circular track as if it were a real quarry worth catching. That gives them all deniability for ignoring the bigger, fatter elephants in the room that actually need to be addressed.

The dominant narrative for the March 20 open hearing of the U.S. House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence was set in the committee's naming of "its investigation into Russian active measures during the 2016 election campaign."

Committee chairman Devin Nunes, a California Republican who has resisted any investigation into Russian ties with the Trump campaign or administration, set a sharp anti-Russian tone with his opening statement that blames the Obama Administration for ignoring the committee's warnings.

Nunes framed the hearing with his limited exoneration of the Trump operation: "Former director of Na-

tional Intelligence James Clapper said publicly he's seen no evidence of collusion between the Russians and the Trump campaign, and I can say that the committee, too, has seen no evidence to date that officials from any campaign conspired with Russian agents."

Ohio Republican Mike Turner had a darker view, saying, "There is now a cloud over our [election] system ... The goal of the Russians is to put a cloud on our system."

Mike Rogers, director of the National Security Agency, agreed that 2016 campaign activities were "calling into question our democratic process." And Comey said Russian efforts "introduced chaos and discord and sowed doubt" and have worked to undermine and threaten our "wonderful free and fair election system."

These sentiments, echoed over and over like a conventional wisdom mantra, are really ridiculous. Yes, the Russians interfered with the 2016 election, and maybe even influenced it. Yes, Trump operatives had contact with Russian operatives, and they may even have colluded. Yes, these are real problems, but it's a groupthink deception, and self-deception, to treat them as if they comprise the entire problem with the

American election system.

American elections went off the rails more than two decades ago and they're been getting worse ever since. Everyone knows this, the government knows this, Congress knows this – and they do nothing to make it better, they work only to make it seem better. The history is in plain sight for anyone who wants to see it, starting well before the 2000 election.

MONEY IN POLITICS

Corrupt fundraising from corporations and individuals was one of the major elements in Nixon's 1972 Watergate scandal, in spite of reform attempted through the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971.

The greater threats to American democracy by far have been the Republican Party and the Supreme Court, with little resistance from Democrats.

Post-Watergate reforms that passed Congress were inadequate, leading to the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 [informally known as the McCain-Feingold Act], that also failed to control campaign spending in a rational, democratic way.

VOTER CAGING

Florida's efforts to take Democratic voters off the rolls and to intimidate them at the polls were state policy under Gov. Jeb Bush, carried out by his secretary of state, Katherine Harris, both beneficiaries of great inherited wealth. Without that corrupt preparation of the state, George Bush likely would have lost it outright. The closeness of the vote led to the chaotic recount, also abetted by Bush and Harris, setting up the opportunity to win the presidency in the courts.

BUSH v. GORE

The 2000 Supreme Court's 5-4 partisan decision awarded the presidency to the loser of the popular vote. Al Gore, another beneficiary of great inherited wealth, and the wealthy leadership of the Democratic Party chose not to contest this all-American effort to undermine the American electoral system. The Supreme Court ruled, in effect, that elections could be fairly decided without counting all the votes. That continues to be a cloud over the election system.

CITIZENS UNITED

In January 2010, another partisan 5-4 decision by the Supreme Court upheld the notion that somehow money is speech, and those who have the most money are entitled to the most speech, allowing an already corrupted system to spin out of control. Despite their control of both houses of Congress, Democrats responded impotently and went on to lose the House in the fall.

VOTER SUPPRESSION

What Jeb Bush oversaw in Florida in 2000 looks almost benign when compared to more recent Republican voter-suppression efforts, and they continue to expand almost unchecked. Even when courts rule

them illegal, Republican state legislatures bring them back in modified form. Republican election success depends on reducing the number of voters.

GERRYMANDERING

Already out of control in places like Texas, where Rep. Tom DeLay stage-managed the Texas Legislature's efforts to re-draw districts that increased Republican election winners. As early as 1998, DeLay was the beneficiary of contributions from Russian oil oligarchs. In 2011, DeLay was convicted [and acquitted on appeal] of conspiracy to violate election law in 2002. Gerrymandering has historically been a bipartisan corrupt activity, but the ruthlessness of re-

cent gerrymandering across the country is a largely Republican phenomenon to which Democrats have responded limply if at all.

VOTING MACHINES

Partisan-controlled, privately-owned voting machines is a blatantly corrupt concept that we have lived with for a generation with little response. Why *any* government, from local to federal, ever tolerated election machines controlled by third parties is one of the abiding mysteries of American life. The impact of these machines cannot be good, although how bad they've been is disputed. They seem to be on the decline. At first Diebold and other voting machines were seen as right-wing conspiracies. In 2016, George Soros was accused of owning voting machines in 16 states. Not that it mattered: Trump won eight of them, including Florida, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

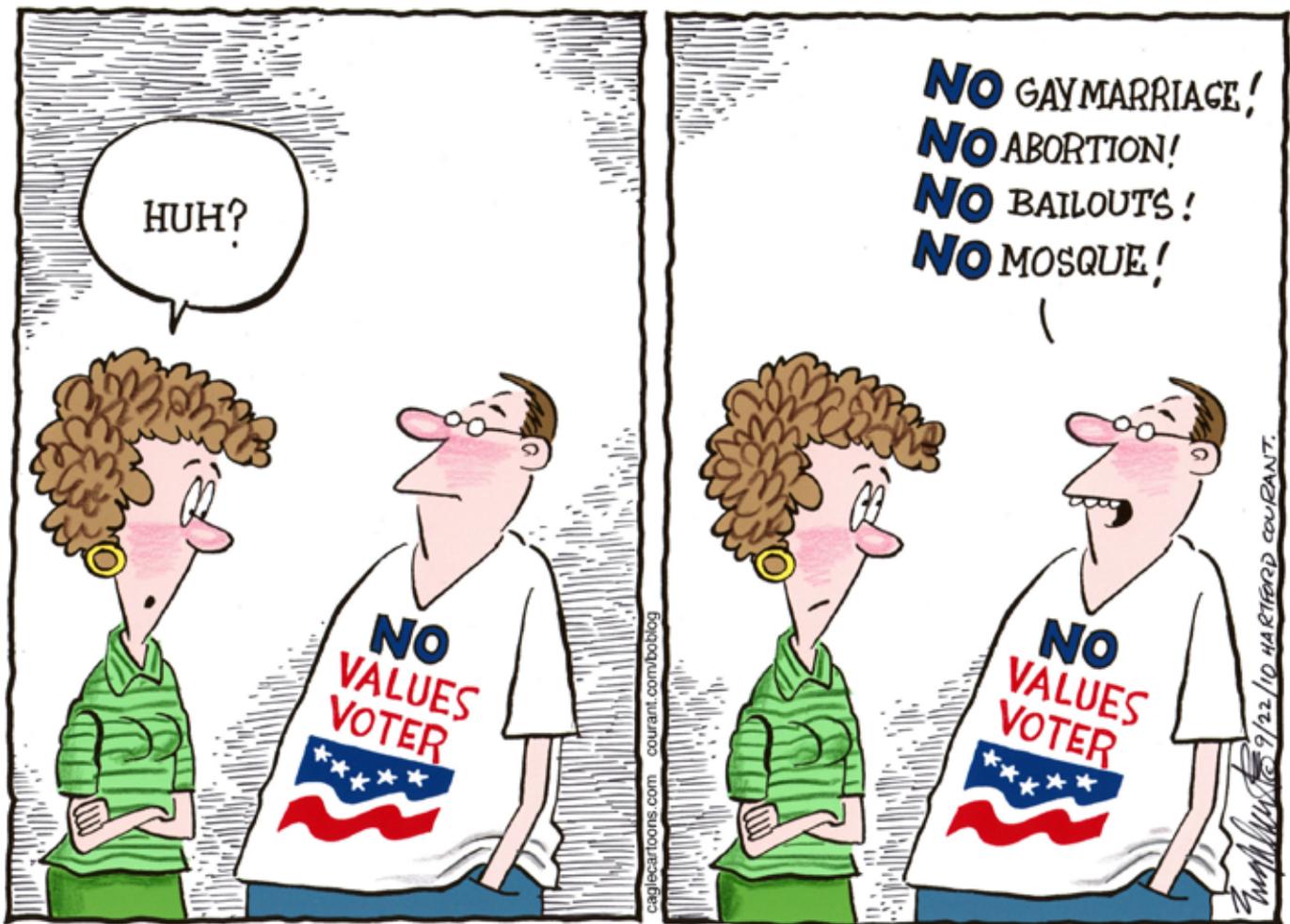
VOTER REGISTRATION ROLLS

Voter registration is another constant target of Republican voter suppression efforts, which aim at keeping minorities, poor people, and others off the rolls and ineligible to vote. Ruthless voter-roll purging is a common recent Republican technique. The vulnerability of voter rolls to cyber-attacks [by the Russians, for example] is uncertain and came up only briefly at the Intelligence Committee hearing.

VOTING RIGHTS ACT

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was a landmark of democratic expansion of the franchise to previously suppressed voting groups, especially black voters. According to legend, when President Johnson signed the act into law, he said that would lose the south for Democrats for a generation. That was optimistic. In 2013, the Supreme Court, in another 5-4 partisan vote, effectively declared that racism was over and gutted the Voting Rights Act. As Chief Justice John Roberts myopically stated: "Our country has

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It's Time To Call Evangelicals What They Are: The American Taliban

BY J.C. WEATHERBY

The Council for National Policy is a conservative think tank made up of a Who's Who of prominent conservatives: Rick Santorum, Mike Huckabee, Reince Priebus, Tim LaHaye, Bobby Jindal, John McCain ... the list goes on ...

A Feb. 15 article published by the Washington Post, but reported elsewhere, lays out the group's plan to "restore education in America," by bringing god into classrooms.

I have said for years and years the Christian Right is really seeking to establish a theocracy in the United States – at least regionally, throughout the deep South. And this latest effort by the Council for National Policy lays further proof to that claim.

This is an effort which – in spite of what many Christian leaders say – is NOT supported by the Constitution. The Constitution strictly prohibits the es-

tablishment of Religion, as part of the First Amendment, which also guarantees Freedom of Speech and Freedom of the Press.

The purpose of this "Separation of Church and State" is intended to do two things:

1. It protects religious freedom for everyone.
2. It prevents the tyranny of any one religion.

But this fact won't stop many southern Christians, who feel it is their duty – as Christians – to make the United States "a Godly nation" in their eyes. And they will cite the numerous biblical passages in which God exhorts all nations to be faithful to him and condemns those nations who are not, as the basis for this duty – which they feel is their right.

I grew up in this world, so I know what I'm talking about. As a kid, during the 1970s, I attended churches in Atlanta with my devout grandmother. I heard

Jerry Falwell speak numerous times at First Baptist on Peachtree.

I was indoctrinated into the evangelical way of thinking by a fiery minister in Smyrna. I studied my King James' Bible. I feverishly read Ernest Angley's book about the "end times" that depicted Christians being boiled alive by the anti-Christ. I loved The Omen movies, wholly believing they portended something real.

Trust me. I've been there. Fortunately, I had the sense to give it up. By age 15, at the peak of my adolescent sexual curiosity, I realized that any religion that demanded giving up my basic humanity was nuts.

Of course, not all Christian evangelicals share this extreme view. Nevertheless, the extremists always give themselves away with their trademark refrain, "I'll pray for you," as if you are possessed by demons and in need of an exorcism.

They seem completely unaware of how this statement makes them appear; that they alone understand "truth," that everyone else is "ungodly" and in need of "redemption," as they see it, by being "born again," and baptized, and accepting their world view.

This self-righteous arrogant presumption is at the root of all religious extremism.

Evangelicals in churches and state houses across the country support laws and political systems that brutalize and imprison *millions* of African Americans, that deny equal rights and protections to LGBT people and tacitly support violence toward them, and seek to deny women the right to govern their own bodies, often with threats or outright acts of physical violence.

They seem hell-bent on ejecting science from education and replacing it with their own creationist ideas.

In doing these things, evangelicals are advocating a religious extremism that is no different from Muslim extremism, which projects religious authority over all people in their domain, which limits the rights of women, controls and limits education, and enforces strict adherence to a moral code, which naturally rejects and punishes all forms of "decadence," including "deviant sexuality," science, reason, and any questioning of authority.

Christian fundamentalists, if given the power, will do the same things.

Evangelical Christians in the United States condemn Muslim extremism as a threat to the country and their way of life, while clearly endorsing their own form of extreme religious authoritarianism. This form of religion establishes a tribally divisive "us" versus "them" mentality, which places "our" rights and prerogatives above the needs of any other group. And it's used repeatedly as the basis for denying other people's rights – particularly their freedom to choose and even their right to exist.

It's worth pointing out that in the south religion buttressed this tribal mentality to force a separation between whites and blacks, who were/are seen as

inferior. This tribalism is deeply embedded in white suburban Christian thinking, and accepted without question. I shouldn't have to point out that, in the end, this is not Christian at all.

Religious extremism is religious extremism. Using words like "righteousness" or "faith" or "Christ-given mission," and hiding behind ideas like "tradition" and "heritage" and "family values" won't cover up this fact. And it is up to every freedom-loving person, who prefers freedom of choice, freedom of worship, who cares about protecting women's rights and equality for all, and advancing reason and scientific knowledge, to be aware and oppose it.

I do not suggest that evangelicals should give up their faith. But I strongly suggest they should not trample on other people's religious beliefs, or insist that people should conform themselves with the evangelical worldview.

If evangelicals hate tyranny, they should be very wary of becoming tyrants. But evangelicals will never see themselves as tyrants, because they are commanded by their faith to be "missionaries for Christ." This mandate engages them in a zero-sum game to convert the country, indeed the whole world, to their faith. And over the decades they have increasingly reached for more and more political power to achieve this goal.

This is exactly what ISIS proposes, by trying to establish a global Muslim caliphate. The goal of religious extremists, regardless of faith, is always the same: Dominion.

"And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." – Genesis 1:28

Evangelicals are The American Taliban. To many, that will seem a garish and inconceivable statement. The entire purpose of this article is to point out that religious extremism also exists in America as it does in other parts of the world, and that it is not just radical Muslims who are extreme, it's also radical Christians ... and that religious extremism can start with something as simple as, "I'll pray for you."

J.C. Weatherby is a multi-media creator, novelist and filmmaker. He is the creator of Evocronik, a cyberpunk animated series.

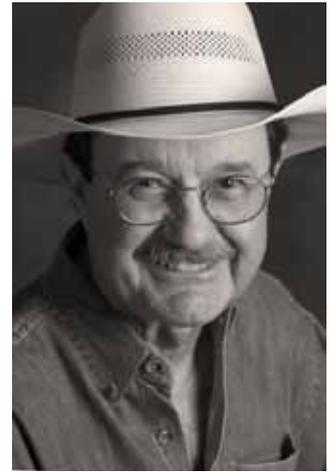
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Clueless Dealmaker's Deal Goes Down

Question: What do you get when you mix together a barrel of fables, a sack of mendacity, a gross of hyperboles, a bucket of spite and a jar of venomous vituperation – all covered with a thick layer of subterfuge? Answer: the fiasco called TrumpCare.

Why? That's the big question the mass media is asking about the sudden failure of the Republican leaders' relentless seven-year push to demonize and kill ObamaCare.

After all, with the GOP now in control of the whole national government, they'd bragged that they'd quickly knock Obama's trademark reform out of the park. And their star slugger was on deck – Donald Trump, the self-proclaimed dealmaker extraordinaire! Flexing his biceps, The Donald assured his fawning political cronies that selling his “repeal and replace” Trumpcare plan to Congress was no different than selling \$200,000 memberships in his luxury golf resorts.

So, why did The Boss and his congressional minions fail to seal the deal? Most media speculation has focused on Trump's inability to see that being a real estate mogul who can act autocratically and unilaterally is, in fact, very different from being president. True, but the fundamental cause of the embarrassing public collapse of the Trumpcare plan was not about process, but substance.

As a master, lifelong huckster, Trump could probably sell BS to a feedlot – but this bill was far more repugnant than the stinkiest load of bologna. It gutted health care coverage for millions, while also sneaking in nearly a trillion-dollar tax cut for health care corporations and wealthy Wall Street speculators.

Even some Republican lawmakers gagged on the stench. But the real story of the bill's defeat is that the American people themselves – including many working-class voters who had believed Trump was actually going to help them – got a whiff of the nasty stuff he was peddling. Alerted by grassroots groups like Our Revolution and Indivisible, a mass rebellion erupted in the home districts of Republican congress critters who were selling out the health of

America's workaday majority.

As the protests spread and dozens of GOP lawmakers washed their hands of his bill, Trump was exposed as a clueless dealmaker.

“We're going to do something that's great,” The Donald trumpeted with this trademark modesty when he endorsed House Speaker Paul Ryan's bill to displace ObamaCare. But TrumpCare was “great” only in the sense that it was a great-big bloated concoction of lies.

Start with the original lie that right-wing Republicans have harped on for nearly a decade: ObamaCare is a total failure and the public hates it, so we'll “repeal and replace” it as soon as we get control of the national government. Sure enough, Trump happened, and he branded Obama's Affordable Care Act “a disaster,” declaring that killing it was his top priority. Ryan chimed in with a perfect imitation of Chicken Little, squawking that the ACA is in a “death spiral.”

In fact, the president and the speaker were lying. While ObamaCare does have flaws that require fixing, overall, it's been a tremendous success. It has reduced by almost half the number of Americans who had no health coverage [benefitting many white working-class people who had supported Trump]. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of the millions who gained coverage from the ACA are satisfied and glad to have it.

Then, as ObamaCare's popularity began to rise, the Trumpsters tried another Chicken Little tale. The health law is doomed, they squawked, because it's been unprofitable for the insurance giants, so they're withdrawing. Bogus! In fact, the profits of Aetna, Cigna, Humana, UnitedHealth and other managed care corporations have soared under ObamaCare. The biggest one, UnitedHealth, has seen the value of its shares skyrocket by a spectacular 480% since the ACA expansion of Medicaid.

Now we know why Trump & Company are so hostile to truth-based news – actual facts expose their lies, and ultimately sunk their health bill.

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Real News

A decade ago, some barons of the media establishment designated themselves America's official arbiters of political truth. One of their tools is PolitiFact, a project of the Tampa Bay Times and several other major newspapers, which issues an award for the year's most outrageous falsehood. Last year's election was infested with so much disinformation and dishonesty, however, that PolitiFact's 2016 Lie of the Year was not a single prevarication, but that cluster bomb of whoppers collectively branded "Fake News."

Just as troubling as fake news is the media's systematic omission of grassroots news that people could really use. What's missing is real news of the ordinary Americans in practically every zip code, who are finding innovative solutions to big problems that the elites do nothing about. Uplifting local actions are blooming throughout our land, yet most people are unaware of them or the results: that people and communities everywhere are breaking the corporate chains that shackle them. Here are a few examples:

INEQUALITY

In 2014, American CEOs earned 350 times more than the average worker, creating the world's greatest income gap. Washington's response to the grotesque inequity has been to blow political hot air at it and hope it drifts away. It hasn't.

So, in December, the mayor and city council of Portland, OR, decided to stop talking about the ever-widening gap and actually try to shrink it. They added a surcharge to the local tax bill of any corporation that gives its top exec more than 100 times the median pay of its rank-and-file employees, providing a financial incentive for corporate boards to seek some balance and at least to consider pay fairness. The main sponsor of the provision called it, "The closest thing I'd seen to a tax on inequality itself."

The mayor called Portlanders problem solvers willing to tackle big issues and test new ideas that can be adapted and refined by others: "Local action replicated around the country can start to make a difference."

"[A] single-payer system would make a clear statement that health care is a human right. This framework recognizes health care as a universal necessity, not a commodity reserved for those lucky enough to have won the economic lottery, and most definitely not a scheme for denial and discrimination. While implementing a single-payer insurance program will not solve all of our nation's health, racial or social inequities, it is clearly a step in that direction."

– Harvard Public Health Review, July 2015. Visit <http://harvardpublichealthreview.org/single-payer-health-reform-a-step-toward-reducing-structural-racism-in-health-care/> to read entire article.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

With Betsy DeVos, the right-wing ideologue and billionaire Amway heiress, now leading an all-out Trumpster charge to destroy America's public schools and privatize educational opportunity, what chance is there for school kids from low- and middle-income families? Don't despair, for there is hope in local people's common sense commitment to the common good, as presently being demonstrated in San Antonio, TX.

A few years ago, Mayor Julian Castro launched a democratic process for ordinary citizens to decide the best way for the city to invest in its future. After weeks of city-wide conversations, San Antonians chose a single priority: Invest in our children's future by expanding quality, full-day, pre-kindergarten education for more of the city's children.

This was no small task, for the government of this extremely rich state is run by boneheaded Tea Party Republicans who constantly shortchange our public-school system and refuse to fund more than half-daily pre-K programs.

So where to get the money? The people did what the anti-public-school halfwits said would never happen – they taxed themselves, voting for a one-eighth of a cent sales tax hike that put \$31 million a year into the successful experiment called Pre-K 4 SA.

San Antonians recognize the wisdom of the old bumper sticker: "If you think educations is expensive, try ignorance."

CORPORATE POWER

Trump and his like-minded congress critters are gearing up to unleash corporate profiteers from practically all restraints that protect us ordinary people, our natural resources, and even our core values from their greed. But they might want to ponder how North Dakota voters reacted to a similar power play last year.

At issue was a monumental 1932 state law that bans nonfamily corporate farm ownership, reflecting the people's desire to maintain family farms, healthy rural communities, and sustainable agriculture practices. Nostalgic hogwash, growled Big Ag lobbyists, who got obsequious legislators and the corporate-funded governor to overturn the eight-decade-old ban on industrial ag.

In turn, progressive forces, led by the North Dakota Farmers Union, plowed the grassroots, recruiting volunteers to put on last June's ballot a referendum giving common voters the final say. And speak they did, loud and clear: 76% of North Dakotans rejected the corporate powers and the politicians who served them, restoring the outright ban on corporate-controlled farming.

These "real news" stories show that it is possible to build progressive power in cities and the states. The Institute for Local Self-Reliance is a tremendous resource for communities that want to build their economies in ways that nurture people instead of giant, far-removed corporations. – *Jim Hightower*

DEATHS OF DESPAIR



Overdose, Alcoholism And Suicide Decimating America's White Working Class

BY SARAH LAZARE

In 2015, Princeton economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton released a bombshell study that revealed a dramatic rise in mortality among non-Hispanic, middle-aged white people in the United States.

Published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, their paper found that the increase in deaths among middle-aged white Americans between 1999 and 2013 is "comparable to lives lost in the U.S. AIDS epidemic through mid-2015."

Their latest report, published in Brookings Papers on Economic Activity, explores the forces behind this spike in deaths, which they say most severely impacts middle-aged white people with a high-school education or less. By contrast, mortality rates are falling for white Americans with college degrees.

The authors note that this trend contrasts with

developments in Europe, where mortality rates are "falling for those with low levels of educational attainment, and are doing so more rapidly than mortality rates for those with higher levels of education."

Instead of identifying a single culprit, the scholars point to a number of reinforcing factors, including a rise in "deaths of despair," such as drug overdoses, suicide and alcoholism, as well as an overall decline in the working class.

These lethal conditions are decades in the making and cannot easily or immediately be undone, they conclude.

The husband-and-wife team of economists observes that the epidemic of "deaths of despair ... spread from the Southwest, where it was centered in 2000, first to Appalachia, Florida and the west coast by the mid-2000s, and is now country-wide."

Today, such deaths cannot be dismissed as a condition of rural America. The professors write, "Although we do not see the supply of opioids as the fundamental factor, the prescription of opioids for chronic pain added fuel to the flames, making the epidemic much worse than it otherwise would have been."

The paper also notes a prevalence of deaths from chronic diseases, as well as declining progress in combating heart disease and cancer. Ultimately, the scholars point to underlying socio-economic factors, emphasizing that these trends cannot be reduced solely to income.

"These deaths of despair have been accompanied by reduced labor force participation, reduced marriage rates, increases in reports of poor health and poor mental health," Anne Case explained in an interview with NPR. "So we are beginning to thread a story that it's possible [the trend is] consistent with the labor market collapsing for people with less than a college degree. Those people are less [likely] to form stable marriages, and that in turn has effects on the kind of economic and social supports that people need in order to thrive."

"The rates of suicide are much higher among men [than women]," Case continued. "And drug overdoses and alcohol-related liver death are higher among men, too. But the [mortality] trends are identical for men and women with a high school degree or less. So we think of this as people, either quickly with a gun or slowly with drugs and alcohol, killing themselves. Under that body count, there's a lot of social dysfunction that we think ultimately we may be able to pin to poor job prospects over the life course."

The paper also notes that "[m]ortality rates of black non-Hispanics have been and remain higher than those of white non-Hispanics as a whole, but have fallen rapidly, by around 25% from 1999 to 2015."

So the issue is not that the white working-class is dying at a greater rate, but that the mortality gap is narrowing for a subset of the population. The mortality rates for middle-aged, white Americans converged with their middle-aged black counterparts roughly a decade ago.

Sophie Bjork-James, a researcher at Vanderbilt University with expertise in conservative social movements and critical race theory, told AlterNet that standards have been plummeting across the working class, and communities of color remain hardest hit.

"If we look at economic trends over the past 30 or 40 years, it's clear that for the majority of Americans, quality of life and income have gone down, regardless of racial group," she said. "For most Americans, their economic position is less positive than it was for their parents."

While Deaton told NPR he sees their findings as "part of the decline of the white working-class," black and Latino people remain most adversely impacted by plummeting socio-economic standards. The Pew Research Center determined in 2014 that the current

wealth gap between white and black people in the United States is at its highest point since 1989, with white homes possessing 13 times the median wealth of their black counterparts in 2013. White households possess more than 10 times the wealth of their Hispanic counterparts, Pew notes.

According to a report released in August 2016 by the Institute for Policy Studies, "If average black family wealth continues to grow at the same pace it has over the past three decades, it would take black families 228 years to amass the same amount of wealth white families have today."

Poor black and Latino immigrants are also more likely to attend lower-performing schools than their poor white counterparts.

"If you look at developments since the housing crisis in 2008, most of the wealth that disappeared was from people of color – African Americans and Latinos – as opposed to whites," said Bjork James. "If you look at other measures of overall quality of life, it's still very much stratified by race."

© *Alternet*

A 'Post Tortoise' Presidency



While stitching a cut on the hand of a 75-year-old farmer, the doctor struck up a conversation with the elderly man. Eventually the topic got around to Donald Trump and his presidency.

"Well, as I see it, Donald Trump is like a 'Post Tortoise,'" the old farmer said.

Not being familiar with the term, the doctor asked what a "Post Tortoise" is.

The old farmer said, "When you're driving down a country road and you come across a fence post with a tortoise balanced on top, that's a Post Tortoise."

The old farmer saw the puzzled look on the doctor's face so he continued to explain.

"You know he didn't get up there by himself, he doesn't belong up there, he doesn't know what to do while he's up there, he's elevated beyond his ability to function, and you just wonder what kind of dumb asses put him up there to begin with."

– *Thanks to Fran Morris for sharing*



Politicalcartoons.com

Illustration by Taylor Jones

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More Judges Ordering Insurers To Cover Medical Marijuana

BY APRIL M. SHORT

Recent court rulings in Canada and the U.S. could set a new precedent for insurance companies to pay for doctor-prescribed medical marijuana. In the last few months, in consideration of the addictive potential of opiates and relatively few safety concerns over marijuana, judges in both the U.S. and Canada have ruled in favor of insurance companies covering medical marijuana for pain patients.

In January, a judge in New Jersey made a historic ruling that workers' compensation must cover the

costs of medical marijuana. After hearing testimony from Andrew Watson, a lumber worker who used marijuana for a work-related injury, New Jersey administrative law judge Ingrid L. French ruled that workers' comp must cover the costs of Watson's medical marijuana. As the Philadelphia Inquirer reports in a detailed article on the case, this could set a new precedent for medical marijuana patients.

In 2014, Watson used cannabis obtained legally through the state's medical marijuana program to treat intractable neuropathic pain in his left hand. He

testified that it was the best treatment available for his injury and that it did not have the negative side effects of opiate painkillers.

Psychiatrist and neurologist Edward H. Tobe also testified about the well-known risks of taking opiates and the benefits cannabis medicine provided Watson. He said marijuana helped Watson reduce his opiate use, and was also likely to help him, “achieve better function.”

“Opiates can shut down breathing [whereas] marijuana cannabinoids won’t ... Marijuana does not affect the mid-brain. The mid-brain is critical in controlling respiration, heart rate, many of the life-preserving elements,” Tobe said, according to an excerpt of his testimony included in the opinion Judge French issued in February.

French’s opinion states that the evidence from the court proceedings “show that the petitioner’s ‘trial’ use of medicinal marijuana has been successful. While the court is sensitive to the controversy surrounding the medicinal use of marijuana, whether or not it should be prescribed for a patient in a state where it is legal to prescribe it is a medical decision that is within the boundaries of the laws in the state.”

Watson’s lawyer, Philip Faccenda, said Watson stopped using cannabis in 2014 because of its cost. Meanwhile, the insurance carrier continued to pay for his use of opiates to treat his pain. Faccenda argued that Watson should be reimbursed for his past medical marijuana purchases, and that the insurance company should continue paying for his medicinal marijuana.

French’s decision ultimately ruled in Watson’s favor, stating that the evidence convinced the court it was “reasonable and necessary” for Watson to relieve his pain using marijuana. The judge explained that she found Watson’s pain management approach “mature” and “cautious.”

“He testified that the effects of the marijuana, in many ways, is not as debilitating as the effects of the Percocet [which is how he refers to his prescriptions for Endocet or Oxycodone] ... Ultimately, the petitioner was able to reduce his use of oral narcotic medication.”

As the Philadelphia Inquirer reports, “John Gearney, a Mount Laurel lawyer who writes a weekly blog on workers’ compensation cases, says the written ruling may be the first in New Jersey to address whether an insurer should pay for marijuana.”

Gearney reportedly told the Inquirer, “It’s not binding, but it’s really an important decision. There are about 50 workers’ compensation judges in the state, and they will read it and see what the judge thought when a case like it comes before them.”

A similar case took place in Nova Scotia, Canada in February, when a judge ruled that medical marijuana patient Gordon Skinner’s cannabis must be paid for by his employee insurance plan.

Skinner suffered chronic pain following an on-the-job vehicle accident. When he was denied coverage of

OK Supreme Court Clears Way For Medical Marijuana Vote

The Oklahoma Supreme Court last month gave ex-Attorney General Scott Pruitt another legal spanking by rejecting his misleading rewrite of the SQ 788 ballot title.

The decision clears the way for a statewide vote that could make Oklahoma the 29th state [plus the District of Columbia] to approve medical marijuana.

Oklahomans For Health secured 67,761 signatures on an initiative petition last year, more than enough to force a statewide vote on the issue. But Pruitt’s monkeying with ballot title sparked a legal battle that prevented the measure from appearing on the November 2016 ballot.

Gov. Mary Fallin could place SQ 788 on a special election ballot, but that seems unlikely given the cost and the state’s budget crisis. More likely, it will appear on the 2018 general election ballot.

Either way, its prospects for approval look good. Not only was last year’s petition drive successful – after previous misfires – but a statewide Sooner Poll in 2013 found 71% favored medical marijuana and 57% total decriminalization. Nationally, a February Quinnipiac Poll found 93% of Americans support medical marijuana and 59% favor legalizing it for recreational use.

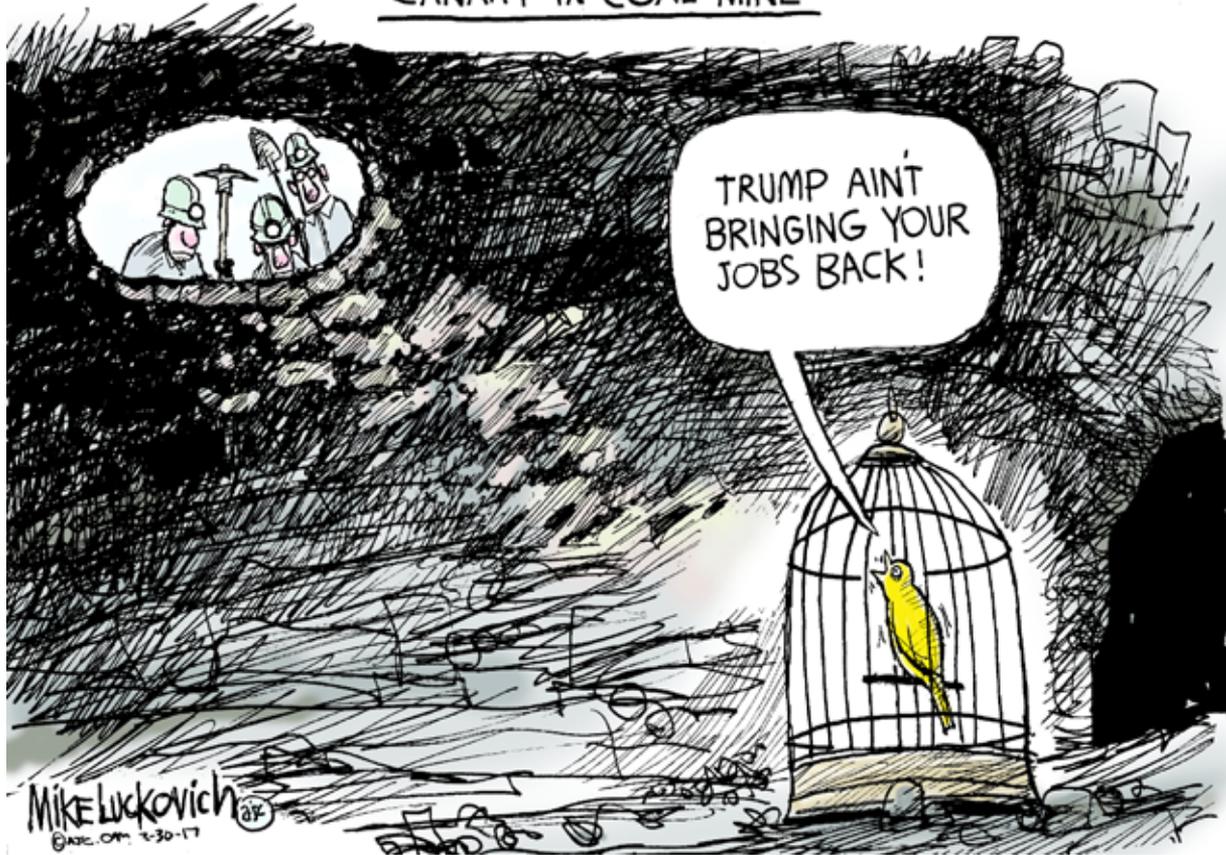
his medical marijuana, he claimed discrimination. A human rights board ultimately determined that his prescribed medical marijuana must be covered by his insurance plan, as Keith Doucette reported for the Canadian Press. Benjamin Perryman, the chairman of the inquiry board, made his decision based on the fact that the marijuana Skinner used was prescribed by a doctor for pain management.

“[I]t seems there is prima facie support for its medical necessity, owing to the fact that conventional prescription pain management drugs are normally eligible for coverage,” he said, according to the Canadian Press. The article notes that Deepak Anand, the executive director of the Canadian National Medical Marijuana Association, thinks the ruling is likely to encourage more people to apply for coverage through their provincial human rights commissions.

Opiate over-prescription and a lack of alternative options for pain patients contributes to an epidemic of addiction and overdose in the U.S. and globally, according to the CDC. Numerous pain patients in the 28 states with legal medical marijuana programs report that the federally illegal herb helps reduce their pain while causing few or no negative side effects.

© *Alternet*

CANARY IN COAL MINE



There's Little Dignity Left In Coal

BY FROMA HARROP

It was a pathetic scene, coal miners flanking President Donald Trump as he signed an order to dismantle the Clean Power Plan. Trump's imagineers have turned coal miners into a Madison Avenue version of the besieged American working man, the pretty wrapping on a toxic package of environmental delinquency.

This event, held tragically at the Environmental Protection Agency, was almost as celebratory as the one in which Trump called for ditching a rule that would have stopped coal companies from dumping waste in streams. Some waters in coal country are so polluted they run orange.

One forgets that there are only about 80,000 coal mining jobs left in America, and nearly 40% of them don't involve the dangerous work of going underground. The solar power industry employs twice as many people.

Anyhow, Trump insists that his rollback of Barack Obama's Clean Power Plan will do two things – make the U.S. energy-independent and “put our miners back to work” – to which informed observers respond, “Has already happened” and “Won't happen.”

Thanks to shale oil and natural gas production, U.S. imports of oil have shrunk from 65% in 2005 to

around 25% today. Add in the rapid growth in wind and solar power and America has already approached energy independence, and that occurred under Obama.

As for mining jobs, they're not coming back, certainly not in numbers that would remotely merit what America and its mining regions give up in pursuit of coal. The demand for coal has plummeted as cleaner, cheaper natural gas replaces it.

Weakened regulations may cause some utilities to delay switching out of coal. Certainly, none is going back. Even companies that did not support the Clean Power Plan are staying the course.

One was Entergy, a large supplier of power in the South. CEO Leo Denault told the media that thought he objected to the Obama agenda, “The potential of it rolling back does not change our commitment to being environmentally responsible.”

Many states have their own mandates for increasing use of renewable energy. They're not backing down, either.

Automation, meanwhile, continues as a major threat to coal jobs. Even mountaintop removal – the environmental obscenity of shearing off mountains to get at coal – provides little employment. Explosives

CONTINUED ON PAGE 42

East Central Oklahoma Electric Cooperative [OCOEC] is based in Okmulgee. OCOEC surveyed their membership before making the decision to pursue a community solar power project. With 65% of members surveyed showing interest, the ECOEC board of trustees moved forward.

The community solar array placed adjacent to the coop headquarters is maintained by WFEC. The subscription price based on one solar panel is \$350. This model utilized by ECOEC provides a very affordable rate to members who want to use solar power without having to install equipment on their property.

According to ECOEC general manager Tim Smith, "It's a no-risk program. There are members who prefer we provide the project because they trust what we do as opposed to them dealing with third-party companies. It's about being trusted by our membership."

Smith credits WFEC for creating a buying power in the marketplace and providing savings to all member systems. To him, it could not have been accomplished on an individual basis.

Similarly, Southwest Rural Electric Association [SWREA] offers two community solar project sites for their members in Frederick, OK and one in Vernon, TX. SWREA CEO Mike Hagy offers community solar as a vital component of its strategic plan. "Whether that is in the form of solar, wind, geothermal or generators, we want our members to come to us for any energy question they have."

SOLARY ENERGY PROS, CONS

Solar is very similar to other renewable sources like wind and hydro. It's not constantly generated because the sun is out only at daytime and is sometimes covered by clouds. Thus solar power needs backup by fossil fuels. There is a load shape or curve to be met everyday; behind the load is some type of generator powered either by natural gas or coal. Renewable sources deliver energy when they can but they must be backed up by fossil fuels.

WFEC anticipates solar projects will annually produce 20% to 30% of their capacity. Currently there is no affordable available technology for storing renewable energy in the state.

The holy grail of the renewable energy sector is a cheap, efficient, reliable battery system for storing energy generated by renewables like solar. Solar depends on daily sunshine and wind energy on strong wind. Thus far the storage problem has not been solved.

However, Harvard University is one step closer to developing long-lasting battery storage system. Researchers at its John A. Paulson School of Engineering and Applied Sciences developed a long-lasting flow battery for storing renewable energy for up to 10 years with minimum maintenance required, according to an article published in ACS Energy Letters.

A flow battery is a cross between a conventional and a fuel cell battery. It stores energy in liquid solutions in external tanks and is regarded as one primary way of storing renewable energy. The bigger the tanks, the more energy can be stored.

However flow batteries are costly. Most use expensive polymers that can cope with potent chemicals inside a battery. Battery components and materials such as membranes and electrolytes have to be frequently replaced to retain capacity. Harvard's research team modified molecules used in the electrolyte solutions to make them soluble in water and so vastly increased the battery ability to retain power.

"Because we were able to dissolve the electrolytes in neutral water, this is a long-lasting battery that you could put in your basement," said Roy Gordon, a professor of chemistry and materials science and a leading member of the Harvard team.

"If it spilled on the floor, it wouldn't eat the concrete and, since the medium is non-corrosive, you can use cheaper materials to build components of the batteries, like the tanks and pumps," Gordon added.

Reducing the battery cost is vital. The U.S. Energy Department said that in order to make stored energy from solar and wind competitive with fossil fuels, a battery needs to be able to store energy for less than \$100 per kilowatt hour.

"If you can get anywhere near the cost target you can change the world," said Michael Aziz, another lead researcher and professor of materials and energy technologies. "It becomes cost effective to put batteries in so many places – the research puts us one step closer to reaching that target."

OKLAHOMA'S ENERGY FUTURE

The current attitude in Oklahoma certainly favors continued primary reliance on fossil fuels to provide for our energy needs. It is not truly one that can produce a plan with much potential. Why?

Although gas and oil in the ground remains ample, we are having to utilize drastic measures like fracking to capture it. Such methods confront Oklahoma's citizens with serious problems, including contaminated water and multiple earthquakes due to wastewater disposal. Oklahomans are being forced to live in fear of a serious quake that might cause them to loose their homes or suffer severe damage. There's also the risk of a big quake hitting Cushing's tank farms comprising the oil crossroads of the country.

These days fewer and fewer persons have serious doubts about the potential of renewables, except diehards on the extreme of the fossil fuel industry. For some unknown reason, these diehards cannot see the writing on the wall. Therefore, they fail to realize the potential wealth in today's renewable energy picture and are closing themselves to the future and

Race, Resentment Help Explain 'Hillbilly' Support For Trump

HILLBILLY ELEGY

A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis

By J.D. Vance

HarperCollins Publishers

272 pages, \$27.99

BY JOHN WOOD

Not unlike *Hillbilly Elegy*, I picked up *Strangers in Their Own Land* [which I reviewed in the February Observer] to understand the bizarre odyssey of the ascendancy of Trump. The books are very different.

Strangers is authored by a liberal Berkley professor, Arlie Hochschild, who visits Louisiana, while an ardent Trump supporter's firsthand experience crafts *Hillbilly Elegy*.

From Hochschild's perspective, bayou dwellers bayou are convinced immigrants and women get what they get only because they are "cutting ahead of you in line," violating fairness and the "American Way." They view their problems are social ills bigger than themselves, what Hochschild sees as a structural issue – and that public policy can help.

By contrast, Vance goes into minute detail about his drunk "Papaw" and his violent "Mamaw" who spent more time in rehab dealing with her prescription narcotic addiction. He only survived this terrible childhood because his grandparents took him in.

Instead of blaming the external cultural forces like those on the bayou, Vance blames hillbillies themselves. In fact, he concludes the book with this: "we hillbillies must wake the hell up."

"We" explains that the answers to deal with issues holding his family and others like them back is that they need to be able to control their "own destiny" lest they "take refuge in resentment at forces beyond his control." More specifically, they should try to "access a church" that teaches "lessons of Christian love, family, and purpose."

He says further, "Public policy can help, but there is no government that can fix these problems for us." He provides the example of Section 8 housing in which he says: "You just can't lump them together, because then you have bigger pool of hopelessness."

Of course, Vance is above it all. He spent four years in the Marines. "If I had learned helplessness

at home, the Marines were teaching learned willfulness." He also escaped his lifestyle in small towns of Kentucky and Ohio through attending Ohio State University and Yale Law School. He escapes!

As a political scientist myself, I found his explanation of the partisan sea change by the Hillbilly populace to be interesting.

"Political scientists have spent millions of words trying to explain how Appalachia and the South went from staunchly Democratic to staunchly Republican in less than a generation." He explains: "A big part of the explanation lies in the fact that many in the white working class saw precisely what I did, working at Dillman's." Vance says he heard a man at Dillman's complain "government was payin' people who are on welfare today doin' nothin'! They're laughin' at our society! And we're all hardworkin' people and we're getting' laughed at for workin' every day!"

He further cites Nixon, but fails to explain the deeper history of the Southern Strategy in appealing to the racism against African Americans. As Tim Wise exclaims in *Racism 2.0*, Southerners code their racism in talking not about race itself, but about government programs that benefit "them," such as busing. Or, in Vance's case, denigrating the poor for living in Section 8 housing, owning iPads and televisions, buying the wrong foods on food stamps or how they "regularly go through the checkout line speaking on their cell phones."

He further lamented: "I could never understand why our lives felt like a struggle while those living off government largesse enjoyed trinkets that I only dreamed about."

From Vance's experience working at Dillman's, he exclaims that the "'party of the working man' – the Democrats – weren't all they were cracked up to be."

After the book was published, House Oversight Committee Chairman Jason Chaffetz echoed this sentiment when he explained to a CNN correspondent why we need to get rid of ObamaCare and replace it with TrumpCare. "Americans have choices, and they've got to make a choice. So rather than getting that new iPhone that they just love and want to go spend hundreds of dollars on that, maybe they should invest in their own health care."

The problem with this logic is that Chaffetz had to walk back those remarks because a Twitter storm quickly responded that an iPhone bill is a heck of a

lot cheaper than thousands of dollars in health care costs.

Vance, of course, doesn't back down on his remarks. However, Branon Kiser in the Lexington Herald Leader, in a column entitled "Author too removed from culture he criticizes," said that Vance is no Hillbilly and just negatively stereotypes. And yet conservatives rally to his side.

I liked Hillbilly Elegy for Vance's description of his tough life growing up. In many ways, people growing up in small town Oklahoma would relate to his life story. I particularly connected to his story of the Marine Corps and the transformation it can have on you. Also, I can connect to his description of broken marriages and hybrid families.

However, Vance's book is a polemic, one that has launched his career in the news media. From my background I have found that when the system worked for you yet you see people still stuck in their poverty, it's easier to assume they are poor because they either want to be or deserve it. It's also easier from a policy standpoint. Just ignore them. Blame them — it's their choice. It's totally their fault and it's our place to focus on ourselves. That's often the conservative point of view.

On the other hand, Hochschild's *Strangers in Their Own Land* is a tougher route. From a more structural analysis, it's our job to create policy. To help those who can't help themselves. It's we who have to change, it's the taxpayer who has to ante up to pay for food stamps, Section 8 housing, health care, etc. This is often the liberal point of view.

Of course, it makes me think of a third way, one that melds both structure and choice. We need policies that are not unlike those found in books like *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness* by Richard Thaler. He contends that instead of forcing people with policy, while not leaving them to behave in self-defeating ways, the state can nudge them into behaving sensi-

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bly. In other words, it is a "gentle push" or "nudge," favoring offers to change behaviors, over constraints and sanctions. However, this perspective is not perfect, either, as it ignores the undergirding of structural class, race, and sex

bias that pervades today's world.

I recommend you read *Hillbilly Elegy*. I hope, however, you just place it in perspective.

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

Moonlighting

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18

with the school's "time out" approach to discipline problems as "unbiblical."

My sense is that the various "faith based" academies of today intend a very different purpose than the old parochial schools of my youth which had as their purpose the integration of immigrants into American society. Today's private academies seem pretty explicit about insulating and fostering a sense of separateness from the larger community.

Indoctrination is not the same thing as education. Having a deeply held view is fine. But I don't believe

that the state should hijack my tax dollars to subsidize someone else's religious worldview.

Free public education is one of the greatest gifts this country has to offer. A gift only dreamed of in many parts of the world.

If there are problems, fix them.

And remember that the value of America's public schools reaches far beyond simply "Reading, Writing, and 'rithmetic."

Noble resident Cap Kaylor is clerk of the University Quakers Meeting in Norman.

Oklahoma Solar

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 39

continuing budget deficits ad infinitum.

According to the International Energy Agency [IEA], the main body monitoring developments in the global energy sector, renewables are surging ahead. Both solar and wind are cheaper than fossil fuels. In the five years to the end of 2015, the price of solar energy dropped by an astounding 80% and wind power by a third.

China and India are investing millions of dollars in renewable energy. Oklahoma has an abundance of re-

newable energy waiting to be tapped.

What are our energy moguls of the 21st Century waiting on?

Thanks to the forethought of rural electric management officials, our state does glimmer with hope. The next few years will see a dramatic rise in the use of both solar and wind.

Oologah resident Bob D. Rounsavell is president of the Carrie Dickerson Foundation. His wife, Paz Maria Rounsavell, serves as his editor.

Coal

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 38

do the blasting. Earth-moving machines remove the coal and debris.

Mountaintop removal has leveled majestic landscapes in West Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee. One can clean up a polluted river, but these mountains are gone forever.

Tossing environmental protections into a giant dumpster is both a lazy and a counterproductive way to spur economic development. Note that some of our fiercest competitors in manufacturing, such as Germany, have environmental laws that match or exceed

ours.

Earlier in American history, coal powered the nation. To provide this energy, coal country gave and gave. There was a nobility to the grueling work of digging for coal – and to the people who performed it.

But America has moved on. Coal mining employment has plummeted, and the decline in demand for coal is irreversible. Even industry leaders concede that. Thus, the tiny Trump base of coal workers finds itself in the undignified position of trying to push a product on a nation that no longer wants it.

At the same time, the Trump Administration pursues plans to strip them of coverage for black lung disease. And his budget would defund a program to spur economic development in Appalachia – a program that could open opportunities for 21st Century employment.

Despite all this, Trump remains coal country's guy. Let others explain. Most of America looks on the sad scene, scratching its head and wondering what's in it for the miners.

Oklahoma Friends Meetings (Quakers)

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

- Author unknown

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Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

citizen] doesn't just mean showing up at the polls; it also demands investing time and energy in becoming well informed. Third, savvy citizens understand that pique voting is rarely wise. Our favorite often doesn't become the nominee. It's important then to select the best from the remaining options.

This advice is particularly salient when encouraging millennials to engage more deeply in the public square. We found many in this cohort who adored Barack Obama and Sanders, but were less than enthusiastic about Clinton. Some stayed home, others voted for Trump, Johnson or Stein to signal their disappointment. Anger then, regret now?

We don't have to wait until the end of Trump's term [if he makes it that far] to ask the question: are we better off today than we were four years ago? We already know the answer: Not only no, but hell no.

Logrolling

Eight years ago, Oklahoma lawmakers wanted to limit pain-and-suffering judgments that juries and judges could impose against doctors and corporations that screw up. But capping awards at \$400,000 wasn't an easy sell because it permanently tilted the courthouse scales against injured individuals.

So those promoting the cap began cutting deals, sweetening the proposal with enough goodies – including an income tax cut and Capitol repairs – to secure the necessary votes for passage.

Major problem: you can't do that in Oklahoma.

The state Supreme Court tossed the legislation, ruling it violated Article V, Section 57's requirement that "every act of the Legislature shall embrace but one subject ..."

The anti-logrolling clause is an unambiguous declaration that Oklahomans oppose the kind of cronyism and back-scratching that encourages pork-barrel politics and discourages legislative transparency.

Sadly, lawmakers won't take no for an answer.irate that justices last fall rejected yet another anti-abortion measure because it violated the single-subject rule, senators recently endorsed Sen. Greg Treat's SJR 40 that would give voters the opportunity to loosen the constitutional restriction. The proposal now awaits House action.

Treat, an OKC Republican, contends the Supreme Court too often applies the anti-logrolling, single-subject rule arbitrarily – in effect using it as a weapon to derail legislation it doesn't like.

Baloney. Some legislators simply refuse to accept the Constitution's straightforward language. Even the high court itself declared in 2010 it was "growing weary of admonishing the Legislature for so flagrant-

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TOM AND SHERRI GOODWIN

Cheyenne, OK

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ly violating the terms of the Oklahoma Constitution."

It's hardly surprising that Treat and Co. would seek a statewide referendum on the matter – a political strategy Republicans have deployed to great effect to build a legislative supermajority, energizing their base on everything from social issues to term limits.

There are signs, however, its effectiveness may be waning. Last fall voters rejected proposals that would have eliminated the Constitution's strict church-state separation and given big agriculture carte blanche to run roughshod over land, air and water.

Further, voters overwhelmingly approved two criminal justice reform measures that clearly signaled an end to the Legislature's costly, hardline approach to crime and punishment, particularly when it comes to simple drug possession.

Of course, lawmakers are attempting this session to reverse the will of the electorate on SQs 780 and 781 – a sure sign their "trust the voters" mantra is just so much political sloganeering.

Efforts to undermine the single-subject rule reflect a similar disregard for the voters.



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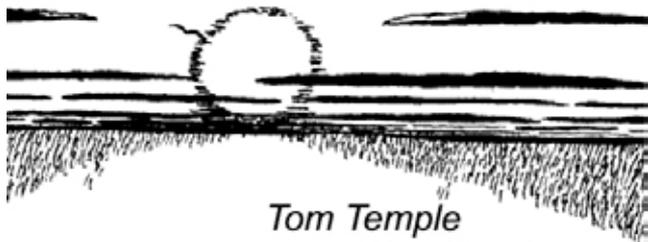
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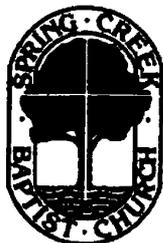
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Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

It's not your imagination: millennials are losing financial ground to their parents. Today's \$40,581 average household income for 24- to 34-year-olds is 20% less [inflation adjusted] than cohorts in 1989. – AARP Bulletin.

Word of the week at Edmond's Cimarron Middle School recently was "forbearance." Already educating students on useful terms for managing mountains of student loan debt?

Amazing all the government-loathing ex-legislators that latch onto the taxpayer teat. Latest is ex-Tulsa Sen. Jim Williamson, appointed as governor's general counsel.

Busier than ever, ACLU of Oklahoma has expanded its staff: Danielle Williams in a fundraising and communications role, Candace Liger working with volunteer base and engaging ACLU members.

The Black Caucus' 21st biennial A.C. Hamlin scholarship fundraising banquet is May 2 at OKC's National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Contact Reps. George Young Sr., Regina Goodwin, Monroe Nichols or Jason Lowe or Sens. Kevin Matthews or Anastasia Pittman for tickets.

About 10 million Californians were born outside the U.S. – 27% of 39 million overall population. In Oklahoma, 5.8% of state's 3.9 million residents are foreign born – about 206,000. – U.S. Census Bureau

It's true two SE Oklahoma residents didn't have standing to challenge Patrick Wyrick's appointment to the state Supreme Court. It's also true Wyrick gave conflicting answers to residency questions on his application. Perjury, anyone?

Toxic Trump: 4.3 million fewer tourists are expected to visit U.S. this year than in 2016, thanks to president's xenophobic rhetoric and travel bans. – Oxford Economics/Tourism Economics

GOP lawmakers again ignored law requiring they fund education by April 1. How many teachers now sweating whether they'll have a job next year voted for these jokers?

Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

ald J. Trump, in the same sentence. It has seemed for a long time that our government was so broken that there was probably no way to fix it without demolishing it and starting all over again. Lo and behold, along comes Donnie Boy and starts the process, appointing people to head up agencies, bureaus, and departments, who are diametrically opposed to whatever agency, bureau, or department they were appointed – major example: Pruitt and EPA.

Is Trump so jealous and envious of Putin that he wants to install himself as dictator of the US of A? Trying to eliminate the mainline press and scapegoat some group of people [in this case Muslims] are the first steps to that goal. Both of these are already in progress.

Now he wants to enlarge the military to even greater heights. We already spend more on the military than most of the rest of the world combined. We have enough weapons to blow any other country off the face of the globe; why do we need more, particularly at the expense of needed, useful domestic services?

The next few years should be very interesting – if we survive them.

Tom Ellis
Okeene

Editor, The Observer:

The Trump budget includes \$57 billion more for defense even though the U.S. already spends much more than other countries on defense. Get ready for a new war[s] so Trump's buddies can collect.

Meanwhile, we endure cuts to Meals on Wheels, PBS, EPA, assistance with heating costs for poor seniors, after-school programs and many of the other programs my family cares about most – plus the economic impact when people working for those programs lose their jobs, their homes and their ability to spend money in their communities.

Trump voters, your thoughts?

Jackie Gaston
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

If you're not "scared shitless," you have not been paying attention!

Immature demagogues in charge of Armageddon, one ready to light the fuse and the other ready to be-



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gin to end all life on earth for eons. This is our reality and probably not anything any one of us can do about it.

This is much worse for me than what I experienced in October 1962 when the world was teetering on the rim of Armageddon. Then we had Krushchev and Kennedy, mature men who had experienced first hand the terrors of war. Now we have two leaders opposing each other who each have the maturity of an ignorant teenaged schoolyard bully.

Be afraid. Be very afraid. The “fuse” can be lit at any time!

Frank Silovsky
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

So wonderful to speak with you regarding my experience with Frosty and my intent to give a donation to the Foundation that honors him. Thank you for keeping on keeping his great work of the Observer alive and well, and for occasionally publishing my efforts. God bless.

Glad Frosty and Helen are now together again. Love his opening line, “Yes, I married Helen. Get over it” or something like that. What a great team they were.

Kay Ahaus
Trenton, IL

Editor's Note: Frosty's family requested memorials be made to the Oklahoma Observer Democracy Foundation, which supports efforts to create a better, more informed Oklahoma. Donations can be made online at okobserver.net or by sending checks to P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113.

Editor, The Observer:

In his editorial attack on the wind industry in The Oklahoman, wealthy rancher Frank Roberson demanded that the wind industry compete on its own merit without incentives. Yet, Mr. Roberson and elected officials in Oklahoma are strangely silent when it comes to cancelling or reducing tax subsidies to the oil and gas industry.

The zero emission tax credit for wind cost \$59.7 million in 2016, according to Oklahoma Policy Institute's analysis of Oklahoma Tax Commission reports. Wind credits can be carried forward 10 years so Gov. Mary Fallin's budget estimates \$60 million in annual cost through 2032.

Compare wind incentives totaling \$60 million to \$427 million in corporate giveaways to the oil and gas industry last year, which are expected to cost \$510 million in 2018 – not to mention the lowest gross production tax rate in the country which increases the tax burden on citizens.

We can't ignore corporate incentives to oil and gas industry if we are serious about finding real solutions to the budget shortfalls that are destroying quality of life and economic opportunity in our state.

Phyllis Bryant
Bethany

'Making America Great' At Americans' Expense

BY RALPH NADER

Donald J. Trump was a builder of casinos and high-priced hotels and golf courses. Now he is a builder of a tower of contradictions for the American people that is making “America Great” at their expense.

He made many conflicting promises throughout his presidential campaign. He was going to be the “voice of the people.” He was going to make their safety and their job expansion his No. 1 priority. He was going to make sure that everybody had health insurance under his then-unannounced plan. He was going to deregulate businesses, cut taxes, increase the military budget, build and repair the country's public infrastructure and not surge the deficit. He was going to scrap the trade agreements known as NAFTA and the WTO.

Now in the White House, he proceeds to push programs and policies that contradict many of his promises. He is ballooning an already massive, bloated military budget by cutting the health and safety budgets of consumer, environmental and labor regulatory agencies and housing and energy assistance. Reportedly he wants to cut \$1 billion out of the budget of the Centers for Disease Control that works to detect and prevent global epidemics!

The Congressional Budget Office announced that under the proposed Republican Health Plan, 24 million people would lose health care by 2026. Apparently he was oblivious to the perils of Avian Flu, SARS, Ebola and Zika threatening our national security and the health and lives of millions of people.

There is more to this emerging betrayal. Trump is supporting Republican House Speaker Paul Ryan's “you're on your own, folks” devastating health insurance plan. Slash and burn Ryan, comfortably fully insured by the taxpayers, publicly admits he doesn't know how many people will lose their health insurance. Imagine the impact of strip-mining Medicaid on the poor – nearly 70 million, including many children, are on that program. Runaway Ryan even fantasizes over going after Medicare next and corporatize it.

Republicans such as Mick Mulvaney, new director of Trump's Office of Management and Budget, argue these measures are necessary for “efficiency.” Yet neither Trump, Mulvaney, Ryan, nor Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell have ever gone after \$60 billion in business fraud on Medicare each year.

The Congressional Government Accountability Office's [GAO] reports 10% of all health care spending is drained away by computer billing fraud and abuse. That would be about \$340 billion this year alone – an estimate considered rock bottom by the nation's



Department of Education while corporatists and militarists run other major departments and agencies. Where are the people's voices in that plutocratic park?

As the opposition coalesces in their resistance to various measures pushed by Trump's tantrums, it is interesting to note the surprising diversity of those challenging President Trump. More than a few corporate leaders are appalled by extreme Trumpism and their opposition is not restricted to the destabilizing bill to replace ObamaCare or to Silicon Valley.

Sure, corporate CEOs are tempted by the tax cuts and jettisoning of some regulations. But they know they are making record after-tax profits, record corporate after-tax pay for themselves, and the stock market is soaring. As they watch the growing

rumble from the people in street demonstrations and at Congressional town meetings, there is building a little foreboding.

They're thinking – why rock the boats [or yachts] – Trump is taking away what people already have – their health insurance – and their health and safety protections while the Republicans plan to continue depressing their vote and rigging the electoral districts by gerrymandering. When a society, blocked from advancing justice, is unraveling what fair play there remains, the corporate bosses, who see beyond tomorrow, get worried, for good reason.

The tower of contradictions, being constructed by Trump and the most extreme Republican Party in its history, won't be camouflaged or distracted for long by provocative, prevaricating 3 a.m. tweets from the White House.

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