

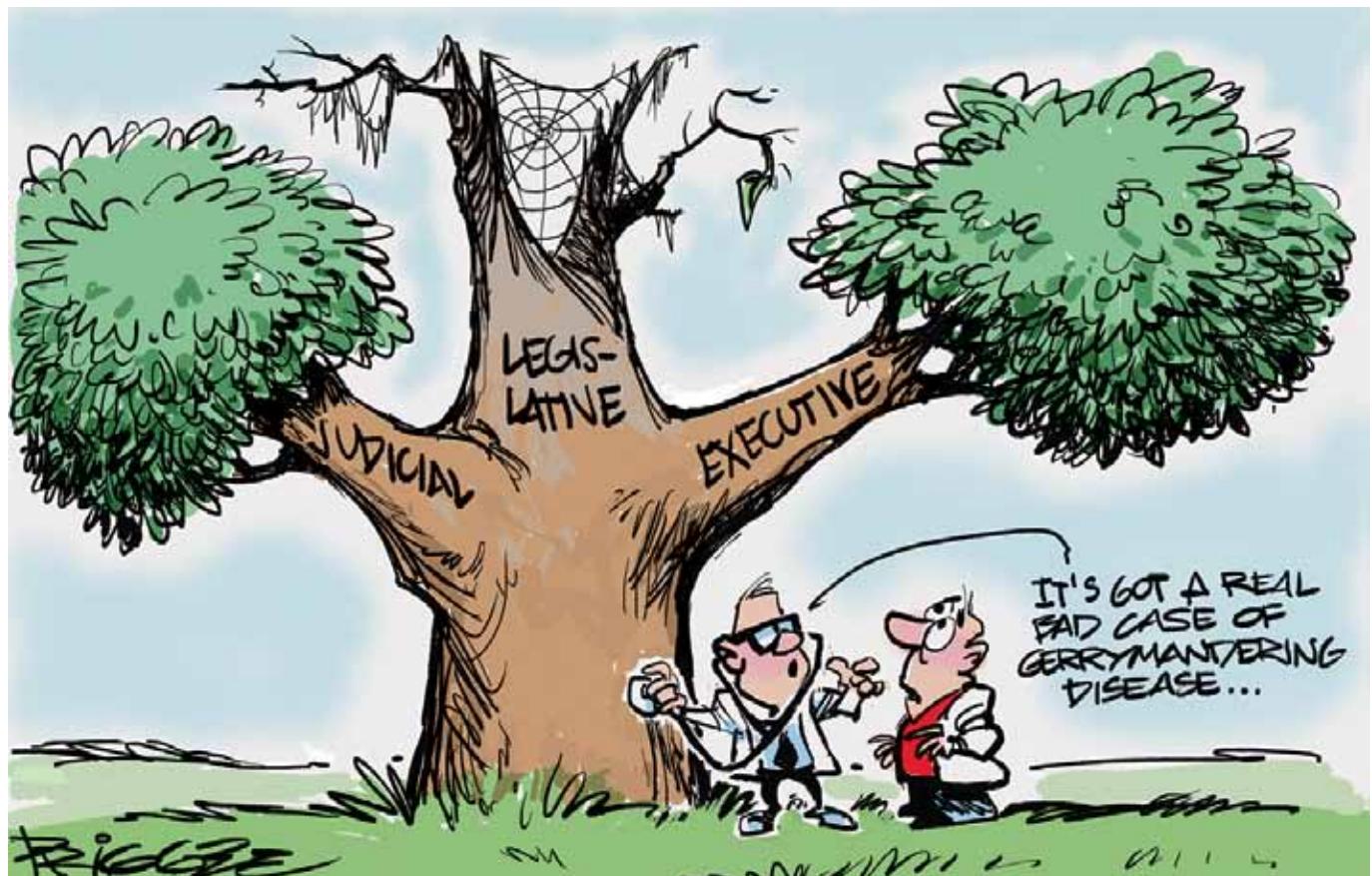
# THE OKLAHOMA Observer

• AN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL OF COMMENTARY •

JULY 2017 • VOLUME 49 NUMBER 7 • \$5.00

## 20/20 On 2018

*All Eyes On A Governor's Race  
With Huge Implications For Redistricting*



- Cover Story Begins On Page 24



# THE OKLAHOMA Observer

[www.okobserver.org](http://www.okobserver.org)

VOLUME 49, NO. 7

PUBLISHER Beverly Hamilton

EDITOR Arnold Hamilton

DIGITAL EDITOR MaryAnn Martin

#### ADVISORY BOARD

Marvin Chiles, Andrew Hamilton, Matthew Hamilton, Scott J. Hamilton, Trevor James, Ryan Kiesel, George Krumme, Gayla Machell, Bruce Prescott, Robyn Lemon Sellers, Kyle Williams

#### OUR MOTTO

To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

#### OUR CREDO

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

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

#### FOUNDING PUBLISHER

Helen B. Troy [1932-2007]

#### FOUNDING EDITOR

Frosty Troy [1933-2017]

#### [ISSN 0030-1795]

The Oklahoma Observer [USPS 865-720] is published on the first Wednesday of each month by AHB Enterprises LLC, 13912 Plymouth Crossing, P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275. Periodicals postage paid at Edmond, OK and additional entry office. Phone: 405.478.8700.

#### POSTMASTER

Send address changes to The Oklahoma Observer, P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275.

#### SUBSCRIPTIONS

1-Year [12 issues] \$50. Send check to The Oklahoma Observer, P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275. Online: Visit [www.okobserver.org](http://www.okobserver.org) to use a credit card.

#### UPDATE ADDRESSES

Please notify us at least two weeks before your move to ensure uninterrupted service. E-mail address changes to [subscriptions@okobserver.net](mailto:subscriptions@okobserver.net) or mail to P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275.

#### LETTERS TO EDITOR

E-mail to [letters@okobserver.net](mailto:letters@okobserver.net) or mail to P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275.

# Observations

## Big Dreams

The between legislative session's period known as the "interim" should be a time to think big thoughts and dream big dreams.

There aren't thousands of pages of proposed legislation demanding immediate review. There aren't daily committee meetings or floor sessions beckoning. There aren't hordes of special interest lobbyists and agency representatives pitching a tax break here or a budget boost there.

What there is, is time. Time to study issues in-depth. Time to hear from experts at length. Time to craft a blueprint for Oklahoma that extends beyond the next election.

Alas, the "interim studies" lawmakers annually propose are all-too-often mundane and narrowly focused, yielding dog-and-pony show public hearings that are more political theater than problem solving or visionary.

It's unclear what this year's between-sessions work will attempt to tackle because House and Senate leaders haven't yet given their blessing to study proposals – 136 in the House alone. But it is clear what should be on the legislative radar: comprehensive tax reform, public school funding and the future of higher education.

Oklahoma's tax system – which benefits the state's wealthiest at the expense of the working class and poor – must be revamped and made fairer, lest the state never escape the revenue crisis carousel.

Moreover, Oklahoma won't have the money to invest in its future – specifically in common and higher education – unless the tax burden is more broadly and fairly shared, a transformation that undoubtedly would require more than one interim to accomplish.

Legislators, of course, routinely pay lip service to education, oft-declaring it to be their No. 1 priority. But actions speak louder than words. Lawmakers crowded that K-12 schools were held "harmless" fiscally in next year's budget. Not exactly.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 43

# THE OKLAHOMA Observer

Yes! Please send me a one-year subscription for only \$50. This special offer includes my certificate for a free book courtesy of Full Circle Bookstore [a \$20 value]. See page 41 for details.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

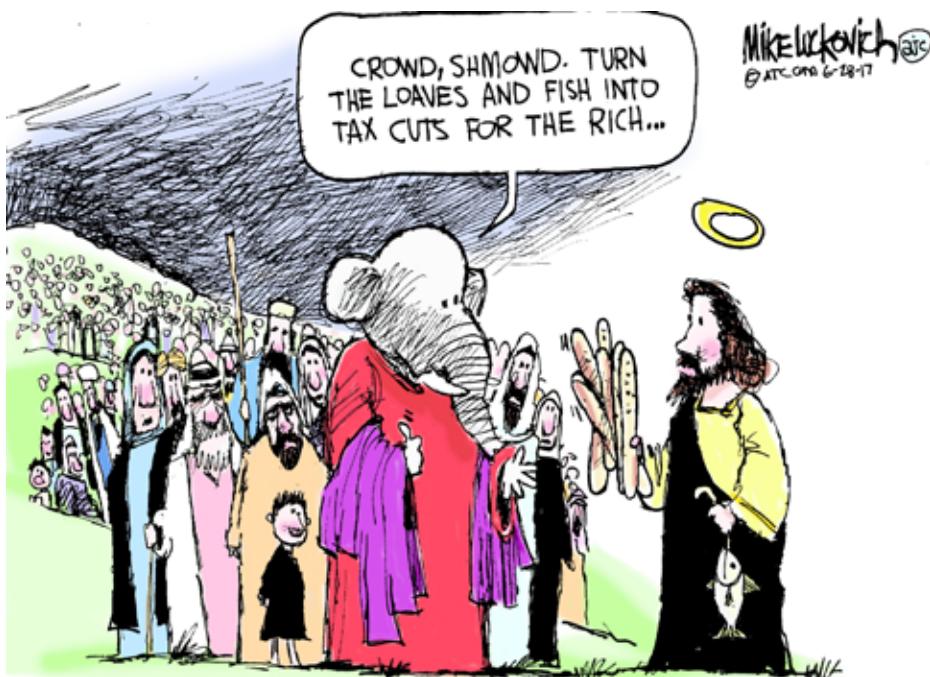
Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to: "The Oklahoma Observer" Clip and mail to: The Oklahoma Observer, P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275. If you prefer to pay using a credit card, visit us online at [www.okobserver.net](http://www.okobserver.net).



# Observerscope



**Sleeping with the enemy:** Are we the only ones appalled that recently resigned anti-public ed Sen. Dan Newberry is an exec at Tulsa Teachers Credit Union?

**Dart:** To new AG Mike Hunter, attacking a California regulator for urging insurance companies to divest of fossil fuel investments – Hunter's way of signaling he's a carbon baron toady, just like predecessor Scott Pruitt.

Our friend David Glover, genius behind BadVoter.org, asks if it's a coincidence Russell Westbrook was named NBA MVP exactly eight months after he registered to vote. We think not.

**Laurel:** To Sen. Kay Floyd, honored with 2017 Guardian Award by Oklahoma Commission on Status of Women for her efforts to protect and preserve the rights of women and families. Well deserved!

State Rep. George Young won't run for OKC mayor, after all, but instead will seek to replace term-limited Sen. Anastasia Pittman. Great news for SD 48 and Oklahoma!

**Dart:** To Gov. Mary Fallin, vetoing HB 1210 designed to ensure state is compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act and to create a five-year plan for delivering services to people with disabilities. Sad.

Special birthday wishes to former Gov. George Nigh – 90 and still doin' fine!

**Laurel:** To GOP Sen. James Lankford and Rep. Steve Russell, proposing legislation to end federal subsidies of sports stadiums. We rarely agree with them on anything, but they deserve thumbs up for this.

OKC Public Schools reported 5,400 homeless students last year – about 12% of its total enrollment. The Legislature, meanwhile, serves the rich, refusing to hike gross production taxes and ignoring poverty.

**Dart:** To Speaker Charles McCall, insisting criminal justice reform is a legislative "priority" even though he helped derail it last session. Now he wants an interim study. Why? Voters approved a fix last year. Just do it!

It's appropriate Rep. Bobby Cleveland, R-Slaughterville, would be honored with the Oklahoma 2nd Amendment Association's Minuteman Legislative Award. After all, he's a loose cannon.

**Laurel:** To OKC Thunder's Enes Kanter, speaking truth to his homeland's autocratic president despite consequences. Contrast that to Donald Trump who kisses the Turkish strongman's ass.

Christian nation? In 2014 there were three million fewer Catholics [51 million] and 19 million more religiously unaffiliated adults [56 million] than in 2007, according to Pew Research.

**Don't think Gov. Mary Fallin is going all bipartisan with appointment of ex-Shawnee Sen. Charlie Laster to replace term-limited Jo Pettigrew on state Ethics Commission. State Constitution mandated she select a Democrat.**

**Dart:** To Rep. Bobby Cleveland, asserting in a kindergarten-esque rant that Democrats were "drunk on the House floor" last session. It's more accurate to say leaders of the GOP supermajority were drunk ... on power.

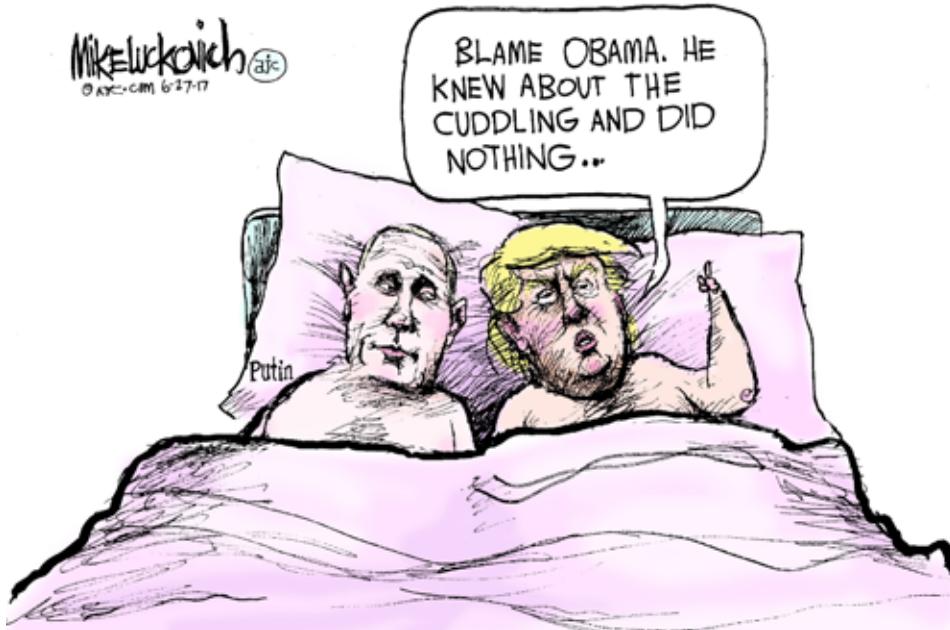
**Tragic:** OU senior and ex-state Democratic Party intern Daniel Holland drowned while traveling in Europe. Our condolences to his family and friends.

Keeping you up at night: 79,000 tons of non-Defense Department high-level nuclear waste is temporarily stored at 121 sites around the nation. – High Country News

**Laurel:** To first-year Morrison Rep. Dennis Casey, breaking with GOP orthodoxy to urge oil and gas contribute "their fair share of the state's tax burden." Another sign the state revenue debate is shifting.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 44

# Letters



Editor, The Observer:

Trump assembled his cabinet in a ring

Expounding his thoughts like a ding-a-ling

The group were like parrots  
Overstating his merits  
With a phony gutless sing.

Tom Birbilis  
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

The mayor of London, Shadiq Khan, was really angry because Trump didn't think he was upset enough at the London Bridge attack. On NPR, a reporter said that Donald Trump would not have attacked the mayor if he were white.

Au contraire, Donald Trump is ready, willing and able to be disgustingly disrespectful to all creeds, colors and ethnicity and does it regularly.

He bullied his way to the front of a photo-op at NATO headquarters and they were all white and then proceeded to tell them all that they are not sufficiently upset at Muslims, Hispanics or whoever he is whining about at that moment. He has attacked every political or religious leader who has disagreed with him, including the Pope.

The London Bridge attackers were dead in eight minutes and authorities have arrested a lot of people since then. Trump is upset because he would have sent a tomahawk missile into the heart of the Muslim area. Next he will be telling the British to kick the mayor out of the country because he is the wrong religion.

I choose to blame Donald Trump for the recent stabbings in Portland because the guy was white and at times claimed to be a Christian. I refuse to let the guy off because all white guys who do this sort of thing have to be mentally ill, but any person of color can't be mentally ill because it is just the DNA of all people of color.

Karen Webb  
Portland, OR

Editor, The Observer:

[A letter sent to the Oklahoman]: Paid my Oklahoman subscription today for three months. In three months the rate has gone from \$85 to \$94 without prior notice! Hefty increase for a questionable product.

The Observer lets the subscriber know when there is a rate increase; and the product is vastly superior!

I never question that increase.

As for the Oklahoman, I do like Berry Trammel on the Sports page; Richard Mize, the Real Estate Editor; and Carla Hinton, Religion Editor. The Editorial page still goes in bottom of the birdcage.

So I who love the paper with my breakfast must ponder the price of breakfast!

Jeff Hamilton  
Midwest City

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

Editor, The Observer:

Oil and cattle remain the top two economic mainstays of Oklahoma industry. They are, at the same time, the top two contributors of greenhouse gases to the earth's atmosphere.

Global warming, by most accounts, is causing melting of the ice caps at a quicker pace than scientific models predicted. NASA is revealing that warmer ocean temperatures are causing a shift in the jet stream. The resulting weather patterns will leave much of the southern United States, including Oklahoma, in a continual severe drought condition, "within a few decades" in the words of one NASA scientist.

The whole world seems intent on reducing carbon output by going to renewable energy sources, with the exception of Donald Trump and the other paid shills of the petrochemical industry calling themselves Republicans. Today, Germany derives 100% of its domestic [household] energy from solar rooftop panels. Excess energy from these panels is sold back to the grid for industrial use. Sweden now burns no coal and is aggressively pushing for total independence from fossil fuels. Simply put, oil is a dying industry.

The cattle industry will wither on the vine if NASA's predictions come to pass, because millions of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 45

# Arnold Hamilton

## *Constitution? What Constitution?*



If the Oklahoma Supreme Court does not declare the Legislature's \$1.50 per pack cigarette "fee" unconstitutional, State Question 640 is dead.

You remember SQ 640, of course. It's the draconian constitutional amendment requiring a three-fourths legislative majority or statewide voter approval to increase taxes.

When pitched to voters 25 years ago, it was a mechanism for Republican uber-conservatives to shackle a Democratic-controlled Legislature. Now, it's a noose tightening around a GOP statehouse supermajority struggling to fund vital state services crippled by foolish cut taxes embraced when oil and gas revenues flowed freely.

After squeezing the life out of every state agency [except the Legislature itself] and playing every conceivable fiscal shell game the last three years, legislative leaders finally took steps in 2017 to raise taxes – yet couldn't come up with SQ 640's required supermajorities.

So they deployed a different strategy: Ignore the Constitution.

Not enough votes to slap a \$1.50 per pack "tax" on cigarettes? Call it a cessation "fee" and – voila! – only 51 votes needed for passage.

Moreover, by approving the "fee" in the session's final hours, lawmakers thumbed their noses at another SQ 640 restriction – no revenue-raising measures may be enacted in a legislative session's final five days.

Of course, it took all of 12 days after sine die for two cigarette companies, two retailers, a wholesaler and three residents to legally challenge the revenue-generating creativity.

The Supreme Court has set oral arguments for Aug. 8.

If the high court rejects the shenanigans, it would blow at least a \$215 million hole in the budget that takes effect July 1 and likely force a special session to stem the hemorrhaging – all of which could have been avoided if lawmakers had funded state services honestly or if Gov. Mary Fallin had the courage to veto the budget and order them to return and do it

right.

If, however, the court allows the Legislature to get by with the funny business, it might just as well torch the state Constitution. From that point on, the Constitution will be whatever the hell the Legislature deems it to be. This has far greater implications than just taxes.

Look, I'm no fan of SQ 640 or supermajorities generally, especially the 60% requirement for school bond measures.

These are artificial barriers that too often give rabid ideological minorities outsize power.

There is no doubt Republican leaders opted to fudge on SQ 640 because they could not strike a deal with Democrats, who held out for an increase in the nation's lowest gross production taxes. But the real problem for GOP powers-that-be was that so many members of their legislative team are Grover Norquist automatons that never met a tax hike they would support.

It's as if their homes were engulfed in flames and they still could not see the need for taxes to operate the fire department.

While Fallin and other GOP leaders made a compelling case that Oklahoma has a revenue, not a spending, problem, these anti-tax ideologues will never be convinced.

All the evidence you need is House leadership recently unveiling plans for Republican-only, between-session "policy working groups" whose aims would include "developing conservative policy proposals that reduce government waste and increase inefficiencies in spending ... "

Earth to Speaker Charles McCall and Co.: The fat-cutting gave way to muscle-cutting long ago. Just ask the governor. Or state Treasurer Ken Miller. Or your Appropriations and Budget Committee Chair Leslie Osborn.

It's time to fix this problem, to get state government on firm financial footing. That includes repealing SQ 640 the right way – the honorable way – by a vote of the people, not by legislative fiat affirmed by a judicial wink and nod.



# *“Power Corrupts And Absolute Power Corrupts Absolutely.”*

*– Lord Acton [1834-1902]*

**BY CAL HOBSON**

I know what you are thinking because I’m thinking the same thing: Cal, that crazy liberal from Lexington, is overstating, over-dramatizing, over-exaggerating what is transpiring in the People’s Building, also known as the state Capitol.

Perhaps ... but let me report and then you decide.

Many observers as well as numerous lawmakers themselves describe the 2017 legislative session as the worst in history, a doozy, the hardest ever, just nutty, etc., etc.

I don’t know about all that but it was the most corrupt I’ve seen – not in the usual influence of powerful interest groups doling out their large monetary contributions – but something far more sinister, ruinous and destructive.

In the simplest terms, two legislative leaders – newbie Speaker Charles McCall, R-Atoka, and his main henchman, Majority Floor Dictator Jon Echols, R-OKC – systematically, thoroughly and methodically re-arranged the political deck chairs at the state Cap-

itol in such a way that the semblance of a fragile democracy has been replaced with an unquestionable, and unquestioned, oligarchy.

Or put another way: a hunt of two.

Evidence abounds. The only new rule adopted this year for the conduct of legislative business gave total and exclusive power solely to Rep. Echols to decide what a revenue-raising measure is ... or is not. The written words authorizing this sham are found in the directive that controls the legislative process – specifically, page 56, rule 61.1 and I invite you to read it yourself.

It could have been penned by Kim Jong Un himself.

Echols, time after time, cited this abomination for his actions and consequently his absolute power grab has led directly to a hearing before the Oklahoma Supreme Court at 10 a.m. on Aug. 8. The question? Is SB 845, which authorized the new \$1.50 per pack tax increase on cigarettes, really a tax or is it a fee, assessment, cessation incentive, diversion from reality, joke or some other moniker?

Only first graders could be remotely confused as to the answer. If it walks like a duck, talks like a duck, etc. Therefore, the nine Supremes will agree, probably unanimously, with what everybody else already knows and declare the egregious Echols enterprise in violation of the Oklahoma Constitution.

Why does that matter? Besides being an expensive [for you] waste of the court's time, the hoped-for new revenue raised from smokes – some \$235 million – is the centerpiece of our entire state's budget for FY 2018 which, after the jurists rule, won't be worth the paper it took to print.

Therefore, either our incompetent Legislature, led by the same derelict duo, will be back in special session this fall or, alternatively, more debilitating budget cuts will be imposed upon your schools, health care systems, our already incredibly dangerous and deficient highways and every other function of government still barely standing in our falling down state.

A second insidious abuse of power, more complex but just as corrosive to democracy, relates to the deadlines on when bills can or cannot be considered for votes. I know that sounds boring, and it usually is, but read on. Such requirements dictate the flow of business from Day One of the session to adjournment. They are, in a political world, as important as the Ten Commandments are in the Bible for guiding the parameters of human behavior ... or at least they used to be.

Speaker McCall unilaterally ordered during the last two weeks of this year's session that they simply be ignored. The minions, lemmings and spineless sheep – with my apologies to lemmings and sheep – that make up most of the huge Republican caucus saluted smartly, complied without question or challenge, and then went back to their own important scheduling agenda by accepting golf outings and other fun distractions courtesy of well-heeled lobbyists.

Of course, the tiny Democratic caucus complained, objected and otherwise criticized McCall's usurpation of power but their protestations were met with less respect than the silent portraits adorning the chamber's walls.

Another truism, found most often in children, now comes to my not yet addled mind. Bad behavior, when unpunished, encourages only one thing: More bad behavior. So what gives? Why are adults McCall and Echols, a banker and lawyer by trade, allowed to be oppressive oligarchs rather than the "public servants" they profess to be?

For the answer I recently spoke to a number of lobbyists, agency heads and senior House staff who are all familiar with the drivel playing out daily along NE 23rd Street in OKC. Surprisingly – actually, amazingly to at least me – the unanimous answer to my question posed above is as simple, disturbing and dangerous as any could be: power brokers McCall and Echols do not care. That's right. They do not give a rip – or a word that rhymes with it – about schools for our kids, health care for all, infrastructure critical for economic development or even the public safety in our communities and counties.

What bandits McCall and Echols covet, and are accumulating at an accelerating rate, is power – unabridged, unchallenged and unchecked.

That is the truth, not fake truth, not fake news, not make believe, not even just maybe. It is the truth in how your House of Representatives, allegedly the People's House, operates currently and will into the foreseeable future. It is a disaster dressed up like a democracy beholden to only those who make the

---

Deborah Astley

Summersgaze  
Cdastley@aol.com

surface designs for  
fabric, wallpaper & gift wrap  
over 2500 designs in my Spoonflower shop

Visit my shop on line at:  
[www.spoonflower.com/profiles/anniedeb](http://www.spoonflower.com/profiles/anniedeb)

---

## BadVoter.org

Check any Oklahoma voting record

Sign up for "Vote by Mail" reminder

See your current registration info or register

Any questions or need help?  
[info@badvoter.org](mailto:info@badvoter.org) - Call/Text: (405) 463-9731

rules, then break them, in order to get their way, keep their corner offices and trample on the rights of those who get in their paths.

In closing, readers may wonder why there has been no mention in this column of Gov. Mary Fallin or Senate President Pro Tem Mike Schulz.

Just one reason: They don't care, either. Both are term-limited in 2018 and, therefore, are busy job searching.

Fallin, perhaps more marketable than the nice but inept solon Schulz, spends much time on your dime in Washington with her pal the Prez as well as in Europe from which she just returned ... again. You know, there's always something new to see at the Paris Air Show.

As for farmer Mike, native of faraway Altus, he and his 40-strong Republican caucus are worse than compliant. In fact, the gargoyles adorning the Capitol had more to say about public policy this past session

than the not-so-mighty Mike.

Not satisfied with just being voiceless, our malleable Mike also missed over 35% of the recorded votes, thereby making him unseen as well as unheard. His excuse for so many absences? He was working on the budget. My response? OMG, LOL and unprintable expletives.

Speaking of curse words, Observer Editor Arnold Hamilton is uttering many at this moment due to the length of this missive from me, so until my return next month, I gotta temporarily go ... just like hundreds of our best classroom teachers who are also on the go ... but, in their cases, permanently.

And that's too bad, makes me sad and downright mad, but for czars McCall and Echols, who don't care, they probably are just glad.

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

## 'Non-Partisan' Scorecard Reeks Of Hypocrisy

BY MIKE W. RAY

A right-wing group that purports to be "non-partisan" and performs an analysis each year of how legislators vote on business issues should receive the blue ribbon prize this year for political fiction.

The Research Institute for Economic Development, which was founded in 1997, recently announced its latest report card on "how Oklahoma legislators score on business, jobs and economic growth."

To plagiarize Bill O'Reilly, formerly of Fox, the perennial RIED report claims to be fair and balanced. But the proof is in the scores.

- A dozen Republican members of the state House of Representatives, or 16.66% of the GOP Caucus, received perfect scores of 100. No Democrats even came close.

- Of the 72 House Republicans [three GOP seats were vacant for most or all of this year's legislative session], 10 flunked the RIED "test;" those 10 constituted 13.88% of the Republican membership.

- Among the House Republicans, 86.11% of them received passing scores from RIED.

- Of the 26 House Democrats, 23 of them, or 88.46%, received failing grades from RIED.

- Only three House Democrats, 11.53% of the Democratic Caucus, received passing scores this year. All three [Donnie Condit of McAlester, Ed Cannaday of Purum, and Johnny Tadlock of Idabel] got grades of 74.

- In contrast, 11 House Republicans achieved scores of 95, one was graded at 92, and 13 were scored at 90.

- House Speaker Charles McCall, R-Atoka, and Senate President Pro Tempore Mike Schulz, R-Altus, received perfect scores of 100. [I know, you and I both were shocked – shocked, I say! – to learn this.]

- House Minority Leader Scott Inman, D-Del City, scored a 69, and Senate Minority Leader John Sparks, D-Norman, was relegated to the legislative basement with a score of 41. [Hard to believe, huh?]

- Nevertheless, Sparks did better than Sen. Joseph Silk, R-Broken Bow, whose score of 31 was the lowest in the Legislature.

- Among the Democrats who received "F" grades from RIED were Rep. Brian Renegar, who owns/operators a thriving veterinary practice in McAlester; Rep. Meloyde Blancett, owner/operator of a successful small business in Tulsa; Reps. David Perryman of Chickasha and Collin Walke of Oklahoma City are members of successful law firms; and Reps. Jason Lowe of Oklahoma City and Cory Williams of Stillwater both manage their own law firms.

- But the clincher which demonstrates without question that the RIED "analysis" is rigged is the score achieved by Rep. Leslie Osborn, R-Mustang. Ms. Osborn – who chaired the House Appropriations and Budget Committee, which played a key role in development of the state budget this year – received a RIED score of 85 even though she missed 25% of all

# SQ 780 Should Save State Millions Next Year

BY RYAN GENTZLER

Last November, Oklahoma voters passed two significant criminal justice reform measures by wide margins. SQ 780 reclassified simple drug possession and low-level property crimes from felonies to misdemeanors, taking away the possibility of prison time for these less serious offenses. SQ 781 directs state officials to calculate the savings from keeping those people out of prison and send it to counties to invest in rehabilitative programs like mental health and substance abuse services.

Analysis of Department of Corrections [DOC] data suggests that the savings will be millions of dollars the first year, growing substantially in the years following.

The first consideration when estimating savings is to decide what to use for the daily cost of incarceration per prisoner and the number of prison days averted by SQ 780. The Oklahoma Department of Correction's overall average daily cost is about \$52 per prisoner, but reducing a prisoner count by one would not save that whole amount due to built-in overhead costs of facilities and staff.

Instead we could use the marginal cost for inmates to state prisons – a figure that only takes into account costs like food and health care for one additional inmate. Community Resources for Justice [CRJ], the organization that provided technical assistance to the Governor's Justice Reform Task Force last year, calculates that marginal cost at \$12.21 per day.

The other factor is the number of people who avoid prison next year as a result of SQ 780. About 3,200 people in DOC custody were serving sentences for possession in FY '15.

The data shows that the number of receptions for possession has spiked in recent years. For the fiscal years 2005-15, possession of a controlled

dangerous substance was the most common reason for people entering Oklahoma prisons, accounting for nearly 18% of receptions, and those people served about 19 months in prison on average.

A complicating factor is that some of the people who would have gone to prison for SQ 780's covered offenses could instead be charged with other felonies, like Possession with Intent to Distribute, that could come with a prison sentence. For that reason, CRJ estimates the full impact of SQ 780 at only about 1,700 fewer inmates.

The problem is that prosecutors – in Oklahoma and across the country – have broad discretion to decide what charges to pursue. This results in vastly different outcomes for similar cases depending on the attitude of the local District Attorney's office.

Based on marginal prisoner costs and historical possession sentencing, SQ 780 would save nearly \$45 million over first six years. Reinvesting those savings could pay off for Oklahoma over the long-term, because providing the treatment needed to avert a mental health or addiction crisis brings savings for families, businesses, communities, and government alike.

Lawmakers should view this as an opportunity to make up some of the ground that Oklahoma has lost in funding mental health in recent years. For a state with the second highest rate of mental illness, we must do much better than 44th in per capita spending on mental health services.

While lawmakers failed to restore mental health funding or pass more significant smart on crime reforms this year, Oklahoma can't wait much longer, when the alternative is adding hundreds of millions in costs to build more prisons.

*Ryan Gentzler is a policy analyst with Oklahoma Policy Institute; [www.okpolicy.org](http://www.okpolicy.org).*

*committee and floor votes this year.*

When you were in school, could you miss one-fourth of all class assignments and still get a "B" grade? I couldn't at Andrew Jackson Elementary School in Lawton. Nor at Tomlinson Junior High School in Lawton. Nor at Yale High School. Nor at Oklahoma State University. Nor at the University of Central Oklahoma.

In case you're wondering: The president of the

"non-partisan" RIED is Susan Winchester, a Republican former House member from Chickasha.

And RIED's board of directors includes former state House member Fred Morgan, an Oklahoma City Republican who is president of The State Chamber of Oklahoma.

*Mike W. Ray, a veteran Oklahoma journalist, lives in Oklahoma City. He recently retired after four years as media director for state House Democrats.*

# Willfully Ignoring The State Motto

BY DAVID PERRYMAN

**M**ost every Oklahoman is familiar with the state's motto, *Labor Omnia Vincit*, and many are able to translate the Latin to English, *Labor Conquers All*. Few however know the significance of those words and how the state came to claim that motto.

The phrase can be traced to the Roman poet Virgil, who first used a similar phrase in 29 B.C. to promote Caesar Augustus' encouragement for laborers to "return to the land." Through the centuries, the phrase has been used to recognize the virtue, pride and power of reaping the rewards of one's own labor.

In 1893, Frank Greer, a civic-minded Guthrie newspaperman, undertook to promote a Grand Seal for the newly-formed Oklahoma Territory. His design was described in the Second Territorial Legislature's HB 66, as recounted by a 1957 article in the *Chronicles of Oklahoma*.

On March 10, 1893, the seal became official and Oklahoma Territory proudly proclaimed the value of labor. A 1907 State Seal Committee, commissioned by the Constitutional Convention and headed up by Native American Gabe Parker, combined the Grand Seal of Oklahoma Territory with the Official Seal of the proposed State of Sequoyah and thus the Great Seal of the State of Oklahoma's proudly proclaimed that **LABOR CONQUERS ALL**.

The Oklahoma Constitution's preamble provided a similar theme in that the state's premier law would be to "promote our general welfare." In fact, recognizing the dangers and pitfalls of forces that are hostile to labor, Article 2, Section 32 of the Oklahoma Constitution was included to make it clear that, "Perpetuities and monopolies are contrary to the genius of a free government, and shall never be allowed."

For more than 90 years, Oklahoma and the people of Oklahoma emphasized the importance of labor. Oklahoma's labor statutes, Title 40, came to include a couple of statutes clearly outlining the importance of Oklahoma's employees.

Section 197.1 says that, "The welfare of the State of Oklahoma demands that the working people of Oklahoma be protected from conditions of labor which have a pernicious effect on their health or morals. The State of Oklahoma, therefore, exercising herein its police and sovereign power, declares that inadequate wages and insanitary conditions of labor exert such pernicious effect."

Section 197.2 provides, "It shall be unlawful to employ workers in any industry or occupation within the State of Oklahoma under conditions of labor detrimental to their health or morals and it shall be unlawful to employ workers in any industry within the



State of Oklahoma at wages which are not adequate for their maintenance."

So where along the way did Oklahoma lose its emphasis on the value of labor? Why are Oklahomans no longer concerned about the "pernicious effect" that inadequate wages have on the health and morals of Oklahoma's families?

A number of things have changed to shift the power from employees to "perpetuities and monopolies" and the effect is devastating. The sole policy goal of the state Legislature over the past decade has been to make Oklahoma more "business friendly."

Gov. Mary Fallin's June 22 press release touted Oklahoma's continued efforts to "position itself well for business." It cited a Chief Executive magazine article where Oklahoma had moved from 18th to 17th as the "Best State for Business." What Gov. Fallin did not tout was the finding by the magazine that all is not well in Oklahoma and as a state is one of the most depressed visited.

Perhaps a return to our roots would improve our state. A goal of making Oklahoma better for its citizens would be welcomed. Maybe doing *anything* for its citizens would be welcomed.

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



You shop. Amazon gives.

When you shop on smile.amazon.com,  
they'll donate to the  
Oklahoma Observer Democracy Foundation.

# Congress Works To Strip Away Predatory Lending Protections



BY COURTNEY CULLISON

This year, Gov. Mary Fallin made the right choice when she vetoed HB 1913 – a bill that would have expanded predatory lending in Oklahoma. In her veto message, Fallin pointed out that Oklahomans frequently take out high-interest loans at a high cost to them and their families. She wisely chose not to add another predatory product to the market that could trap Oklahoma families in even more debt.

Predatory lending is not just an Oklahoma problem. Only 15 states and the District of Columbia prohibit payday lending with interest rate caps. Interest rates in the remaining states range from an average of 154% in Oregon to an astronomical 677% in Ohio. The average rate in Oklahoma on a payday loan is nearly 400%.

Payday borrowers often end up paying more in interest than what they get through the loan, and repeat borrowing is common. Payday loans, auto title loans, and small installment loans are a debt trap for working families in America, and most states have not taken action to protect them.

That's why the federal Consumer Financial Protection Bureau [established in 2011] was tasked with protecting borrowers from predatory or unfair lending practices.

Last summer, the CFPB proposed new rules for payday and installment loans that, if enacted, would require lenders to verify that the borrower can afford to repay a loan before lending. But hidden deep in the so-called Financial CHOICE Act [H.R. 10] is language that would take away the CFPB's authority to regulate consumer lending – meaning that, in many states, no one will be protecting consumers from predatory lending practices.

This dangerous bill passed the U.S. House early in June and next goes to the Senate.

Predatory lending is especially harmful at a time when wage stagnation and cuts to the social safety net

over the last few decades mean that low-wage workers are struggling to make ends meet each month. The minimum wage has not kept pace with inflation and the rising cost of living – the federal minimum of \$7.25 an hour has lost about 9.6% of its purchasing power due to inflation alone.

Overall wages have stagnated in recent decades, and the safety net programs that people once would turn to are also losing value. Since Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF] was converted to a block grant in 1996, the program has lost about one-third of its value.

Now when families in difficult situations need help, payday and other high-interest loan products can seem very attractive because they are so easy to get. In states where it's allowed, many neighborhoods have a loan shop on almost every corner – especially in low-income zip codes or near military bases.

But these loans often result in a debt trap – borrowers cannot pay off the original loan, and so they take out a second loan to pay it off, then a third loan, and then another. The loans become a permanent financial fixture in the lives of many low-income families and significantly hinder their ability to improve their financial situation.

If most states are not regulating these predatory practices, and the CHOICE Act makes it impossible for the CFPB to regulate them, then who will protect families?

Banning common-sense regulation of payday loans is a step backward that would make it even harder to build financial security.

*Courtney Cullison is a policy analyst with Oklahoma Policy Institute; [www.okpolicy.org](http://www.okpolicy.org).*

---

**Read The Observer On-Line**  
**[www.okobserver.org](http://www.okobserver.org)**

# THE WRECK-ETTES



## *Healthcare Or Groceries? An Unacceptable Choice*

BY SARAH BAKER

I've been lucky. For almost my entire 32 years of life I have had health insurance; as a child I was covered under my parents' plan and after I turned 18 I was covered through either my employer or spouse's plan.

Two months ago I lost my job and I now find myself self-employed once again. However, this time there is no spouse who can add me to their insurance plan.

I've been uninsured before. When I was 18, no longer covered under my parent's plan and still in the waiting period for my employer's plan to become effective, I broke my toe. This may not sound terrible but I had broken it so badly that it was at a 45-degree angle and my foot swelled up so much that I couldn't

---

*Single-Payer Animates Democratic, Progressive Politics.  
– Page 30*

---

wear any shoes except flip-flops.

I was so terrified of going to the emergency room, and the resulting bill that would follow, that I waited three days before I finally couldn't take it anymore. By that point, what they had to do to set my toe was worse than breaking it in the first place.

Now as an adult, and parent to three children, I need to be able to take care of myself. For me that

requires medications which I cannot afford without insurance.

I've had a couple of serious car accidents which have left me with debilitating migraines. I also have celiac disease [gluten intolerance] which can cause migraines and other problems.

In 10 years of migraines, my doctors and I have only found one medication that I can tolerate; a medication that I recently found out is \$270 without insurance coverage. For me that means I can either pay my utility bills or buy my medication. Or it means I can get groceries or medication, but not both.

Having to choose between my health and putting food on the table should not be a situation anyone has to face.

Most importantly, at least for me, is mental health. Before writing this, only about 10 people knew that I have bi-polar disorder. But I am once again lucky as I am considered high-functioning. That means I don't experience many of the dramatic symptoms most people associate with bi-polar.

Like any proper care for mental health, I need to see doctors regularly and stay on medication. Proper care ensures that I can continue to be a productive, valuable member of society and the best parent I can be to my children. Without insurance that is not possible.

Sadly, my situation is not unusual for many Americans – just four years ago more than 41 million Americans under the age of 65 were without health insurance and at the end of 2015, while the number had dropped significantly due to the Affordable Care Act, 28.5 million were still without coverage. States like Oklahoma, which have refused the Medicaid Expansion, have higher than average percentages of un- and under-insured people.

So where do I go from here? Currently, I am eligible for coverage under the Affordable Care Act and can enroll until July 31. One of my biggest fears is that if Congress manages to pass the American Health Care Act, aka TrumpCare, I will no longer be eligible for any coverage as I have not one, but at least three pre-existing conditions.

While the ACA was not perfect, it was certainly progress.

Now our lawmakers want to roll back coverage and eligibility for people like me. The Congressional Budget Office recently released data showing that under TrumpCare 22 million Americans will lose their health insurance.

What happens if I, like millions of others, cannot get health insurance again? It means more days off work, which makes holding a steady job or being successfully self-employed difficult. It means less time with my kids because I'm too sick or in too

much pain to get out of bed. It means less or no preventative care.

It means a lower quality of life for my family. It means the fun things we do get cut out because either I am too sick to get out or cannot afford activities. It means groceries on the cheap, fewer fresh foods, and more pre-packaged, low-nutrient meals.

We can do better. We must do better. We have to fight for each other. We have to ensure that preventative care, pre- and postnatal care, and mental health care is available. We are stronger when we work together to ensure that everyone has access to the care that they need, no matter how much or how little.

I will continue fighting because that's the only option for me and my family. I do not have the luxury of sitting by, watching and waiting on others to make the right decision. So every day, I will get up and fight for what is right.

Taking care of others, not just myself, is what is right and that means holding decision-makers and legislators accountable and making sure they know just how their choices affect the rest of us.

*Sarah Baker is former executive director of the Oklahoma Democratic Party.*



## Ofi House Family Lodging and Rental

The Ofi House is nestled on 12 idyllic acres on the shores of beautiful Lake Tenkiller, offering family friendly, spacious and comfortable lodging. The ideal place for your next family reunion, vacation, corporate event, church group retreat or weekend getaway.

### FEATURES

- Sleeps 22 people
- 2 living areas: 70-inch and 60-inch plasma TVs, Direct TV, DVD players
- 2 fully equipped kitchens, large patio with grill for outdoor cooking and dining
- Game room with pool table, 65 game video arcade, ping-pong table
- 10 Person Hot Tub
- 2 laundry rooms
- Yoga Studio and Massage Room
- Fire Pit

### FOR RATES & AVAILABILITY

[www.theofihouse.com](http://www.theofihouse.com)  
918.457.5886  
[kalyn@theofihouse.com](mailto:kalyn@theofihouse.com)

Find us on



# OK Passenger Rail Expansion Nears?

BY BOB D. ROUNSAVELL

If you're as old as I, you've probably taken a train ride sometime in your life. If you haven't, hop on one and have a great ride. Then you'll be asking yourself why you have waited so long.

An 18-year-old recent graduate, a recent arrival from across the Pacific, secure in the midst of Frisco cousins and aunts [even a former grade school teacher], is excited about the prospect of graduate school and ready to board the train for Ithaca, NY. It was an uneventful journey due to kindness of a lady who helped her change trains in Chicago and of Cornell professor who steered this wide-eyed anxious Filipina to an overnight stay at the Student Union.

Fast forward to 1972 in Indianapolis Union Station. She's a mother with two children, a six-year-old girl and three-year-old boy; father in San Francisco attending diversity training at Multi Cultural Institute. A rambunctious son exploring the train and meeting fascinating strangers and making friends.

For my wife, who does not drive, that's travel across the country: no congested highways, road rage, ozone alert. Just looking across aisles, forward or backward at sitting/sleeping tourists or businessmen/professionals and a son's new friends.

Fast forward to 2012. Excited passengers board the Heartland Flyer at the Santa Fe Station in OKC and leave it about 14 hours later after a round-trip that included a ride on the Trinity Express to Dallas and a tour of the multimodal station in Fort Worth.

The Heartland Flyer earns our state \$14 million every year for an Amtrak fee of \$3.7 million, according



If we want to see this train ride next year, then we will have to spend some time at the state Capitol talking to legislators and convincing them that the \$3.7 million ODOT contribution will continue to produce revenue and increase. This will not be an easy sell especially during tight budget constraints but needs to occur if we want a multimodal transportation system.

And then there's the Eastern Flyer possibility. Folks along the proposed route will need to step up now. Residents of Tulsa, Sapulpa, Bristow, Stroud, and Chandler as well as OKC will need to convince legislators that expansion of passenger rail to Tulsa from OKC will increase revenue to state coffers annually. All these towns and cities between the two cities need to tell our state officials to provide passenger rail service to approximately 67% of the state population.

Oklahoma is on the brink of establishing it from Tulsa to Fort Worth via the Eastern Flyer and the Heartland Flyer. Other connections can be made to locations all the way west to California and east. If we can, later we will also create passenger service north from OKC to Wichita and Newton, KS where Southwest Chief will access both Los Angeles and Chicago.

Access west and east will be great and so will connecting our region by providing passenger train service from Tulsa to Fort Worth and from OKC to Wichita and then on to Kansas City.

Train service between the state's two largest metro areas will provide much needed traffic reduction on its busiest interstate highway. Also, a train ride is more productive and comfortable than either bus or car.

Oklahoma City is at least taking some steps to provide more and better public transit to its citizens. They are renovating the old Santa Fe train depot and building a new transportation hub to serve its metro area. A streetcar loop is under construction to serve downtown. It's considering a study on a four-mile stretch of train track that would allow the train from Tulsa to access downtown OKC.

In the meantime Tulsa has made few if any plans to get the Eastern Flyer into downtown. However, there is still hope. Contact needs to be established between



CENTRAL OKLAHOMA  
COMMUNITY  
ACUPUNCTURE

An Affordable Good Health Practice

Karen Wilson, M.Ac.

2525 Northwest Expressway  
Suite 201  
Oklahoma City, OK 73112  
405.255.3193

to the Texas Transportation Institute. No I-35 congested with cars and trucks, little carbon footprint, hence little air pollution in our scenic landscape from Oklahoma City to Norman, Purcell, Pauls Valley, on to Ardmore, and maybe soon to Thackerville. Then it's on to Fort Worth after a stop in Gainesville.

Tulsa officials and the BNSF to discuss access into downtown Tulsa. The two downtowns must be connected for rail service to be successful.

Tulsans have to contact their legislators for success in establishing these train connections. Let's hope those who stand to gain a great deal from having passenger rail service available again will step up and lend a helping hand now. Tulsa needs to act to establish commuter rail service to OKC and beyond.

BNSF Railway and Amtrak have just conducted a special inspection trip between OKC and Kansas City that went through Wichita on June 9. Let's hope this was also the step to restore passenger rail service between our two big cities.

Many hurdles exist, the largest being financial, but there's hope this trip solidified the relationships between BNSF, Amtrak and the state. Last spring peo-

ple were told by Amtrak officials the Heartland Flyer must increase ridership in order to survive. Both ODOT and TxDOT continue to encourage Amtrak to incentivize state investment.

Talks with the Chickasaw Nation have increased the possibility of adding Thackerville as a Heartland Flyer stop. Its WinStar Casino and Resort attracts many visitors from both Oklahoma and Texas.

Our state is in a great position to become part of a regional railway system and Tulsa would be in the center of a passenger rail system. A multimodal transportation system undoubtedly will support Tulsa's current growth and make it one of America's success stories of this century.

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

## EPA Grant Helps Support Cherokee Nation Environmental Efforts

BY BILL JOHN BAKER

Protecting the environment and practicing conservation principles have always been important to the Cherokee people. Our close relationship to the land, and our traditional knowledge about our natural surroundings, has always been a part of who we are. Cherokee values and knowledge about ecological preservation, acquired over multiple generations, can benefit all of northeast Oklahoma.

Today, the Cherokee Nation Office of Environmental Services oversees the programs and services related to preservation and conservation of our air, land, water, and animal and plant life.

Recently, the tribe earned a \$75,000 grant from the Environmental Protection Agency that will help support the critical environmental work that we do at the local level. The partnership between Cherokee Nation and the EPA benefits our people, our environmental endeavors, and the health and beauty of northeast Oklahoma.

Together with the EPA's federal dollars, we can sustain the environmental protection efforts that preserve our clean air, healthy land and fresh water. The Cherokee Nation's five-person Environmental Protection Commission, with the leadership of Secretary of Natural Resources Sara Hill, administers the Nation's environmental programs and develops community and education programs.

The Cherokee Nation is also a founding member of the Inter-Tribal Environmental Council, an organization that helps protect the health of Native Americans, tribal natural resources and the environment. This intertribal organization was created to provide

support, technical assistance, program development and training to member tribes nationwide. Today, almost 50 tribal governments are members and share best practices.

An excellent example of our renewed conservation efforts was a recent federal court decision naming Cherokee Nation the court-appointed steward of restoration efforts of Saline Creek in Mayes County.

David Benham, a Cherokee Nation citizen originally from the Kenwood area and a property owner along the creek bank, personally sued Ozark Materials River Rock for the extreme damage done to the water. The company, which will pay for the restoration effort, mined at the foot of the creek, removing the gravel at the lower reaches. Erosion upstream redirected the creek and eroded vegetation, which in turn increased stream temperature and algae growth.

It is fitting and appropriate that the court appointed Cherokee Nation to manage the recovery of these damaged areas. Saline Creek has spiritual as well as historical significance to Cherokee Nation citizens, and it is one of the most beautiful creeks in northeast Oklahoma.

Cherokee Nation is always willing to serve as stewards of our lands and waters so they will be protected for generations to come.

Our tribal government strives to build a better future for our people. Protecting the environment through Cherokee Nation's active and progressive conservation programs is one of the most important things we can do to ensure we achieve that goal.

*Bill John Baker is principal chief of the Cherokee Nation.*



# *Spirit Of McCarthyism Alive In Attacks On Stone's 'Putin Interviews'*

BY JEREMY KUZMAROV

**R**ight after the Showtime broadcast of a series of interviews by Oliver Stone with Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin, media pundits began attacking Stone in bitter terms that say quite a lot about the incivility and anti-intellectualism prevalent in our political culture today.

Rather than providing balanced analysis or assessment that weighs the documentary's strengths or weaknesses, reviewers branded Stone, a distinguished filmmaker and military veteran, as an "admirer of dictators" [Joel Sucher, *The Observer*], "abettor of Putin's lies" [Emily Tamkin, *Foreign Policy*] and "conspiracy theorist" and "deranged boot-licker" [Alexander Nazaryan, *Newsweek*].

Equally disgraceful was an article in America's "newspaper of record," the New York Times on June 25 by Masha Gessen entitled "How Putin Seduced Oliver Stone – and Trump." The language invokes the charge directed against leftists in the 1930s and 1940s that were seduced by Stalin and the ideal of a workers utopian paradise under communism.

Gessen's critique of Stone's film though is completely and utterly vapid. She says the exchanges between Putin and Stone are dull and she refers to Stone in mocking terms as an "inept interviewer" which is not at all true – Stone is a likeable man who endears himself to his subject and makes them feel comfortable, which leads them to be candid.

Gessen goes on to suggest that Stone, like Donald Trump allegedly, has a "breathless admiration" for Putin, a claim that is nowhere substantiated. Trump for example, agreed that Putin was a killer in a famous exchange on Fox News, though said that the U.S. was itself not so innocent. This kind of remark does not to me convey "breathless admiration."

Neither does Stone's efforts to allow Putin the opportunity to explain his views in a style reminiscent of Erroll Morris' interviews with Robert S. McNamara in *The Fog of War* where judgment is left to the viewer.

Furthermore, Stone at times asks critical questions, for example, with regards to the contradiction of Putin's expressing admiration for Edward Snowden while initiating his own "Big Brother laws."

Gessen suggests footage of Putin in his offices and playing ice hockey is part of Stone's sycophancy; however, the main intention appears to be to show the life of a Russian president and counteract the stereotypes of Putin in Western media. Since Putin's hockey skills are rather lousy, if Stone was intent on creating a cult of a superman, those scenes failed dismally.

Gessen claims that Putin and Stone share a mutual hostility to Muslims. However, Stone in the interviews merely pointed out the double standards of U.S. foreign policy in supporting Islamists in Chechnya while fighting a war on Islamists in Afghanistan and Iraq. At another point, Stone agreed with Putin about the folly of the Reagan Administration's policy in supporting Osama bin Laden and other extremist funda-

mentalists during the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan. Nowhere does Stone show any Islamophobia.

Finally, Gessen depicts both Stone and Putin as Stalin apologists, when Putin's answer to the question about Stalin reflects a certain admiration in nationalist circles because of Stalin's role in presiding over the defeat of Nazism, his role in fueling Russia's industrial development and asserting Russia's role as a superpower. This is not entirely an irrational position if we consider Putin's recognition of the dark side of Stalin's reign and importance of remembering the Gulag and Show Trial victims.

It should be noted that America's founding fathers and nationalist heroes have their hands red with blood too, from Indian massacres and slavery to the waging of illegal wars, but many Americans still admire them. Stone also points out the absence of Leon Trotsky's body on the Kremlin grounds and discusses Stalin's role in Trotsky's murder, showing he does in fact know the history of the Soviet Union, and is himself no apologist for "Uncle Joe's" crimes.

Personally, I found Stone's film enlightening, and a good follow-up to both his *Untold History of the United States* and *Snowden*. It provided a portrait of Putin I hadn't seen before and humanized a man who has been vilified in the Western media. Putin comes across as well informed about U.S. politics and pragmatic in his efforts to solve some of Russia's pressing problems he inherited from his predecessor.

It also is valuable in showing how the expansion of NATO on Russia's borders [in violation of a pledge made to Mikhail Gorbachev by the George H.W. Bush Administration], U.S. interference in Georgia, Ukraine and Chechnya and support for a military buildup and exercises near Russia's border is helping create a dangerous new arms race and Cold War.

Most of the great military theorists from Karl Von Clausewitz to Sun Tsu have emphasized the importance of "knowing your enemy." This is what makes the attacks of people like Gessen in the New York Times and Nazaryan in *Newsweek* so juvenile and ultimately harmful even from a strict U.S. national security perspective.

Stone's film is important precisely because it offers an opportunity to better understand the Russian perspective on U.S. foreign policy and conflicts like Ukraine and Syria – whether we agree with it or not.

By forging a better understanding, we can in turn develop a smarter foreign policy that lessens the prospects for antagonism and furthers the prospect for cooperation, something Putin says he wants.

However, judging by the reaction to Stone's film, we instead appear doomed to repeat the history of the first Cold War and McCarthy era, whose spirit remains alive and well in our liberal intellectual journals.

*Jeremy Kuzmarov teaches history at the University of Tulsa and is author, with John Marciano, of the forthcoming book The Russians are Coming, Again: What We Did Not Learn About the First Cold War [Monthly Review Press, 2018].*



# *Now More Than Ever We Need A Free Press*

BY MARION HILL

**P**eople love to hate journalists and the press. I'm often critical of "the media," too, especially the current obsession of both TV networks and cable news outlets to cover 24/7 the latest sensational trial, or the current salacious tidbit about a celebrity – especially someone like the Kardashians who are famous just for being famous – or even the recent earthquake, hurricane, or other natural disaster.

Yes, I want the media to inform me about such calamitous happenings, but not to keep reporting the same thing over and over when there's nothing new to say. Tell me about the event, update me periodically about new developments, but then cover *other* news. There are things happening elsewhere in the

world while all media attention is focused on the sensation of the day.

And I do believe the media helped the Orange One get the Republican nomination and then win the Electoral College race for president, because he got lots of free coverage and other candidates were largely shut out. So I'm not letting the press off the hook for its behavior during the campaign.

All that said, though, I'm reminded nearly every day how much we need a free press. DJT hates journalists, and well he should. It's because of dogged digging by investigative reporters such as Michael Isikoff, various Washington Post writers, and some broadcast journalists that the public knows about the skullduggery of Michael Flynn, Steve Bannon,

## PUBLIC FORUM

Jeff Sessions, Carter Page, Jared Kushner and others. Many others.

Reporters keep us apprised of suspicious meetings with foreign powers that happened before DJT was even sworn in, and financial transactions that possibly violate the emoluments clause of the U.S. Constitution. I felt as outraged as any working reporter when someone from Tass [Russia's state-controlled wire service] was allowed into an Oval Office meeting between DJT and Russian leaders while the American press was excluded.

We can never accept such goings-on as "normal," no matter what Kellyanne Conway and Sean Spicer tell us.

Thomas Jefferson had his own problems with the press, as many other American presidents have had. But Jefferson also said, "... were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter. But I should mean that every man should receive those papers and be capable of reading them."

Capable of reading them? Our education system fails far too many people, largely because of budget cuts pushed by Republican lawmakers. And far too

many citizens are uninterested or unwilling to stay informed about politics. But those are other issues.

Warts and all, muckraking journalists are vital in a free country. We need them. And they need us, to defend their right to report on all who need to be held accountable to the public. Sometimes we may feel we "can't live with 'em" [journalists], but we surely "can't live without 'em."

DJT said during the campaign that, if he became president, he would change the libel laws, to make it easier for politicians to sue journalists. Not today, you won't, buster. There's the little detail of the First Amendment to the Constitution that stands in your way.

And we the public must make sure that the Constitution we all revere will remain the bulwark standing in this president's way – or in the way of anyone who tries to use public office for his own enrichment or for nefarious purposes. We have to remain vigilant that rights granted under the Constitution don't get eroded by people in the legislative, judicial, OR executive branches.

We're all in this together. We have to have journalists' backs – as, ultimately, they have ours.

*Marion Hill lives in Durant.*

## *Watching Rome Burn*

BY SHARON MARTIN

Is the distance between the left and the right unbridgeable?

The president and his family are enriching themselves at the expense of the American people. Do Republicans just not care or do they get their news from sources that don't make this clear?

Paul Ryan's economic plans and GOP legislation will hurt almost everyone in this country. Insurance will become more expensive, if you can get it. Protections for investors and anyone with a bank account are being eliminated along with coverage for pre-existing conditions. Special needs students no longer have an advocate in charge of education.

Republicans, do you even know what bills your legislators have pushed through in the dead of night?

The president lies as a matter of course. He denies things that he said on camera just days or weeks before. And according to psychologists, his supporters don't care because he's lying for them. Don't you believe it! Anything President Trump does, he does for President Trump.

Reaction from my conservative relatives about last week's testimony reveals a lot about the divide. One posted a video of a manic cat at a computer. The caption read, "This is Democrats deleting accusations

against President Trump after Comey's testimony." Another sent a lengthy article from the National Review blasting Comey for making the people believe that the president was under investigation. This wasn't the type of article he sent when Secretary Clinton was blindsided in 2016.

Did they even hear the testimony?

There's disquiet in this household that no amount of hope or medication can dispel. Did ordinary citizens feel this in the run-up to the Civil War? What were their news sources? Did they know the war was coming?

Minorities, women, taxpayers, investors, immigrants, the LGBTQ Community, journalists, students, and those who don't fit the mold that the current leadership prefers watch and wait as protections, respect, and rights slip away, the Bill of Rights be damned. What can frightened people do? How can we open eyes and hearts to the danger of the times?

How do we convince our conservative family members and friends that we have their interests at heart and not just our own, that it's also their lives, their children, and their country at stake?

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



MATSON  
caglecartoons.com

### THE NATIONAL PASTIME

# *An Extinction Event*

BY VERN TURNER

**A**n extinction event occurs when several factors combine to alter the environment in which an organism can survive. It prevents the organism, or organisms, from reproducing by eliminating what it needs to flourish and reproduce enough viable offspring to overcome some or all of the factors that threaten the organisms' existence. Sometimes the "event" can take centuries, and sometimes it is triggered by a catastrophic event. In either case, the extinction is permanent; the gene pool no longer exists.

The recent shooting of Rep. Steven Scalise, R-LA, is merely another "brick in the wall" for the factors that are threatening humans with extinction, or at least the extinction of a democratic republic we call the United States of America. Why would I say that? Well, there are many extenuating circumstances, but chief among them is the free use of firearms. It's not just the occasional use of one gun by a lunatic driven

to violence by politics. That happens all the time in the rest of the world, but rarely in our country. Yet, it happens all too frequently for us to feel secure in how we go about managing ourselves and our behaviors.

The perversion of the meaning of the Second Amendment to justify the unfettered use of deadly firearms is just the first part of this discussion. It was nice to see both Republicans and Democrats having their baseball-fueled Kumbaya moment. After that, it was back to the rancor of secret deliberations over a deeply flawed and cruel health care insurance bill being rammed through the Senate bureaucracy by Mitch McConnell and his political animal brethren. The acting-out president told the world that Scalise took a bullet for all of us. No, he didn't. He was just in the wrong place at the wrong time when some deranged left-wing ideologue decided to commit suicide by cop. That's right, left-wing. Sorry to say, but there

## PUBLIC FORUM

are crazy people wielding deadly weapons across the entire political and non-political spectrum in the home of the brave.

Ironically, Rep. Scalise recently voted for the measure that allowed mentally disturbed people to more easily acquire a gun. Maybe this shooter already had his gun, despite his history as a wife abuser and violent nature. So, who has been promoting guns for everyone over the last few decades? Mostly, it's been the Republican caucus that has done little to promote the enforcement of existing gun control laws, while both parties are guilty of ignoring their responsibility by passing no new laws toward gun registration.

ence in killings/soldier statistics, back then, was the invention of the machine gun. Ironically, the machine gun was invented in the United States at the end of the Civil War.

After the war, the American military decided to not acquire these new weapons as they retained their shoulder-to-shoulder-charge-into-the-other-guy philosophy of combat. The European military strategists saw the machine gun as a whole new way to kill many people on the other side without wasting too many on your side. They bought the gun's plans and proceeded to improve it to the point that its extensive use on the battlefields of France, Belgium and the Netherlands

No, the guns alone won't cause human extinction, but the extension of unbridled violence around the world will. When the same kind of unbalanced and deluded people that we saw in Virginia get their hands on the ultimate tool of extinction, we are in big trouble as a species.

tion or measures designed to further impede the ability of any of us to acquire a gun. The logic follows: If these, our so-called representatives, don't consider it prudent to restrict weapons of death in the hands of those either not qualified to operate one or so mentally damaged that they shouldn't own one, who do they represent?

This seems to be the nub of the issue, politically speaking. The NRA and other gun-maker lobbies have provided a cash trough for our politicians by not only bribing them, but threatening to fund their opponents who will follow the rules set by the gun promoters. To me, it doesn't seem too great a stretch to see these lobbyists as accessories to the crime after someone gets shot and killed.

The statistics show that over 30,000 people per year are killed by guns in the United States. Heck, we only kill about 40,000 per year in cars and trucks, safety equipment included. There is one common factor between these two situations: alcohol. Seventy-five percent of traffic deaths are alcohol-related. More than half of the gun deaths are alcohol/drug related. Alcohol is legal. Most of the dangerous drugs are illegal. Again, logic is defied here by the cross-purposes of the regulations regarding gun possession and alcohol consumption. Both are legal and both, it seems, provide a significant reason for the amount of death and violence from those who partake in both.

World War I was mostly fought using battlefield tactics from the Roman times where masses of men marched against other masses of men brandishing and using weapons on one another. The main differ-

created a wholesale slaughter never before seen.

Eventually, the American military saw the error of its ways [ignoring progress]. This reality existed until the advent of nuclear weapons overtook the machine gun as the most "efficient" method of killing other humans in great numbers.

You can see where this is going. The gun lobbies and several prominent activists have been enormously successful at sowing the seeds of fear toward one another in our country to the point that we now possess [probably] more guns than there are people. I own guns for sport. Many of my peace-loving friends do also. This is a little different, in that this kind of ownership is an extension of hunting-for-food behavior that has existed in all of human history. It's the weapons specifically designed to kill people that are the issue we face today as a tool of our own extinction.

No, the guns alone won't cause human extinction, but the extension of unbridled violence around the world will. When the same kind of unbalanced and deluded people that we saw in Virginia get their hands on the ultimate tool of extinction, we are in big trouble as a species.

Our gun fetish has relatively humble, but dramatic origins on this continent. The gun allowed the European invaders to subdue and eventually cause genocides among indigenous peoples in all the Americas. The gun allowed the owners of them to successfully feed themselves on the bounty of wild game across the entire North American continent.

Sadly, as an adjunct to the near-extinction event

## PUBLIC FORUM

of our native Americans, “sport” using guns nearly killed all the bison, the main food and tool source of our plains natives. Yes, industrial hunters harvested vast numbers of bison for their hides and tongues as delicacies, but it was the wanton sport shooter that nearly wiped the bison out as they had the passenger pigeon. These three history lessons show us that irresponsible use of guns will indeed cause extinction events.

The “X” factor to our domestic situation in the United States is the political wrangling, divisiveness, rancor, outright hatred, and ideological absolutism that brings the extremists from all sides out of the closet with their guns, their anti-human guns. Those guns that will do our population the most harm are those that simulate battlefield automation. Killing, instead of just in moments of passion, will become battlefield America. What, for example, can someone with a deer rifle do against a magazine-fed automatic or semi-automatic machine gun or machine pistol? That’s the point, isn’t it? In our anger we assume that kill-or-be-killed stance where have to have the bigger and better weapon. Our gun manufacturers hire advertising geniuses to sell all those fears by way of the potential gun owner experiencing the glory of shooting someone or something to death. How does that attitude affect all humans on a global scale?

The entire world, it seems, is in great turmoil, turmoil centered around nationalism and its ancestor, tribalism. Religions are, as they’ve always been, at each others’ throats in pursuit of the unexplainable

and untestable God. We now have a president who seems utterly irrational, making him the parallel of Kim Jong Un in North Korea who equally rattles his war machinery and war mongers his people. Peace-making, it seems, is for sissies. Several annoying questions arise from this current state of affairs.

Will our own divisions cause another Civil War? Will the hostility that’s been fanned to a fever pitch ever since Donald Trump entered the national scene be further exploited by the profit-mad gunmakers and sellers? How many more people will be killed by gun before we snap out of it and realize that it is 2017, not 1817? Will our national leaders cool off the rhetoric that stimulated the Scalise shooting and the other politically/religiously motivated killings? Will Donald Trump take us into war when the investigations get too close to sending him to jail after impeachment? What will Trump do when Un finally launches a for-real attack on Japan or another of our allies? What will Trump do if India and Pakistan get into the nuclear exchange business? What will Trump do if Russian-backed middle eastern troops make Israel feel so insecure with their right-wing nationalist leader?

Taken from that famous, cryptic dispatch from CINCPAC in Hawaii to Admiral William F. Halsey during the Battle of Leyte Gulf in World War II: “The whole world wonders?”

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

## ‘Our Past Is Weighing Us Down’

BY BOB BEARDEN

Racism in America struck another blow for their cause when some dumb gob shite recently trashed LeBron James home in Los Angeles. Fortunately, neither LeBron nor none of his family were home at the time. But the incident points up that no matter who you are in America, if you are black, you are subject to racism.

And it proves once again we have not, despite all the efforts to change, reached a time that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. envisioned when he said, “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

We know the content of LeBron James’ character, who he is, and that he is a kind and caring person who happens also to be of African American descent. But the content of the character of whomever trashed his home we also know. They are bigoted and racist

in tone, mind and nature.

We also live in a society that is fast and inevitably becoming more homogenous by the day and that will soon be a society in which no one race or color will be a majority. We also know for some that is a scary prospect that they want to try and avoid. And no matter how hard we try we can’t seem to eradicate bigotry, racism and hatred from our society.

We can disagree on a lot of subjects but when it comes to race and color and who we are we should be of one accord.

We are all Americans no matter what our race, color, creed, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or what religion we practice. As Francis Wright once noted, “Equality is the soul of liberty, in fact there is no liberty without it.”

We must find a way to get past our hatred of people simply because of how they worship, their lifestyle

## PUBLIC FORUM



or the color of their skin. We are supposed to be the melting pot of the world and yet we cannot seem to address who we were and where we came from.

Our past hasn't been very nice and we need to acknowledge that and come to terms with that. The issue of slavery. The issue of what we have done to our indigenous peoples needs to be addressed. We cannot continue to live with a past that won't acknowledge the sins we committed as a nation and a people.

We can't cover our scabs over and pretend they didn't happen or that because they happened a long time ago that makes them irrelevant or meaningless. They happened and we need to address the root causes of why. We can't just ignore them. It isn't healthy for us as a people or as a nation to pretend all is well and fine now, because it isn't.

South Africa had the right idea. We in America need a cleansing and a healing and an acknowledgment that we as a nation have not addressed why we now do not have a more perfect union. Our past is weighing us down because we won't open the scabs and let them heal.

It is time we did. It is the right thing to do. And as

Dr. King said, "The time is always right to do that which is right!"

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



Help keep the truth alive! Make checks payable to the Oklahoma Observer Democracy Foundation, PO Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113.

The Oklahoma Observer Democracy Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit. All donations are tax deductible within the limits of the law.



# *Democrats Must Win '18 Governor's Race Or Face Another Decade In Oklahoma's Political Wilderness*

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

In 2014, Oklahoma Democrats were in a bind. No one of stature, it seemed, wanted to challenge Republican Gov. Mary Fallin. The odds of unseating an incumbent are always long, barring scandal. The odds of defeating Fallin appeared even longer – remember, it was before state revenues careened off the fiscal cliff.

Up stepped term-limited state Rep. Joe Dorman – widely heralded for “taking one for the team.” By fall, with the state’s financial woes more obvious, Fallin’s support eroded. Democratic checkbooks finally cracked open, but it was too late. Still, Dorman captured a respectable 41% of the vote despite being under-funded, under-supported, and under-appreciated.

The 2018 gubernatorial race clearly will be much different.

Already, three high-profile Democrats and four well-known Republicans have embarked on what may be the longest, costliest gubernatorial race in state history.

Republicans are on the hot seat – their governing supermajorities imperiled by gross fiscal mismanagement, total deference to the state’s carbon barons and an emboldened wing-nutty fringe.

Democrats are desperate to escape the political wilderness, knowing the right candidate with the right message and the right funding can still win despite Oklahoma’s knee-jerk Red State proclivities. It was,

after all, only six years ago Gov. Brad Henry's two terms ended.

Far more significant than mere bragging rights or near-term political momentum is this: The next governor will be a key player in redistricting – the once-a-decade, post-census exercise of re-drawing the lines for Oklahoma's legislative and congressional districts.

Here's an early primer on the race and its implications:

### THE DEMOCRATS

So far, Democrats have three serious contenders: former Attorney General Drew Edmondson, House Democratic Leader Scott Inman and former state Sen. Connie Johnson, the party's 2014 U.S. Senate nominee.

Johnson is a liberal favorite – pro-choice, anti-death penalty – who would benefit if next year's primary turnout includes many of the same voters who gave Sen. Bernie Sanders a solid victory over Hillary Clinton in last year's presidential showdown.

But Johnson also faces an uphill battle convincing far too many Oklahomans to vote for a black, Ivy League-educated woman. Sadly, what would a powerful combination in many other states is a liability here.

Just ask Barack Obama's campaign teams in 2008 and 2012 about the racism they faced – especially among rural Democrats. Obama failed to carry a single Oklahoma county in either of his winning presidential efforts.

Misogyny also was on full display in anti-Hillary rhetoric and voting in 2016. And, of course, Oklahoma's anti-intellectualism doesn't bode well for a University of Pennsylvania grad like Johnson.

Imagine, though, what electing an Ivy League-educated, African-American woman would say to the rest of the nation – or the world – about Oklahoma? Welcome to the 21st Century, perhaps?

As a result, much of the early 2018 conversation is focused on Edmondson, mounting a political comeback at age 70, and on Inman, the 39-year-old Del City lawmaker who became the face of statehouse Democratic resistance in recent years.

Edmondson last appeared on the statewide ballot in 2010, losing the Democratic gubernatorial nomination to former Lt. Gov. Jari Askins. But his political batteries seem to be recharged after he helped lead the successful fight last year to defeat SQ 777 – the so-called Right to Farm proposal that, if approved, would have effectively freed Big Ag and Big Oil from any environmental restrictions.

Edmondson already has lined up support of many establishment Democrats who believe his experience and polish would help draw a sharp contrast to most of the announced, ideologically-extreme Republican candidates.

Inman won admiration of many Oklahoma Democrats for holding his 26-member caucus together last session in pursuit of higher gross production taxes

to help pay for better public school funding, higher teacher salaries and improved health care.

But the fact is, Inman's not as well known outside Oklahoma City as the other two contenders who've both previously run statewide. And he already is taking intra-party flak from liberals and progressives over reproductive rights – he holds a pro-life position reflective of both his Catholic faith and his blue-collar, more conservative Del City district.

It's early, of course, and Democrats are notorious for splintering – Will Rogers: "I don't belong to an organized political party, I'm a Democrat" – but Democrats I've surveyed insist they are resolute that they will support the 2018 nominee regardless of primary differences.

### THE REPUBLICANS

Oklahoma City Mayor Mick Cornett ignited a social media prairie fire with his early June announcement he's running for governor. It wasn't exactly a surprise – the minute he revealed last February he wouldn't seek a fifth mayoral term, his name appeared on almost every list of serious GOP contenders.

And why not? Popular ex-TV personality. Face of Oklahoma City's renaissance for more than a decade. Big checkbooks in his corner. A Cornett coronation in the making?

Not so fast.

Cornett is a formidable candidate, to be sure. But he faces a significant initial hurdle in his quest to occupy the Capitol's second-floor, southeast-corner office: The Republican primary.

The GOP is the state's majority party by registration and its dominant political force electorally, but its primaries tend to be dominated by voters even more conservative than the state as a whole.

Cornett is often regarded as a moderate Republican, by Oklahoma standards, his views on issues like LGBTQ rights becoming more progressive during his years as mayor.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 46



# LEGISLATIVE DISTRACTION

FRONT DOOR:  
HEARINGS AND  
HOOPLA

BACK DOOR:  
TRASHING EPA,  
EDUCATION,  
DODD-FRANK,  
HEALTHCARE,  
GUN CONTROL,  
PRIVACY  
& ANY OBAMA  
REGULATIONS



© WOLVERTON

THANK TO RANDY CATE

caglecartoons.com

## *A Vengeance Tragedy In Five Acts*

BY HARRY T. COOK

### PROLOGUE

The powers that be in America just now are pursuing policies that will impair the lives of all but those who already can claim huge percentages of the nation's wealth. Other policies will make the lives of women and immigrants more difficult than they have been in a generation. Yet other Americans will be to a greater extent hard-pressed to exercise their most fundamental duty as an American: voting. As scary as any of these developments is the effective abandonment of environmental protection.

### ACT I

As has been reported by the country's most respected news agencies, Congress is stealthily pushing through legislation that, if it became law, would snatch from millions of Americans living at the economic margins their health insurance under Medicaid. To what end? It is obvious: to find money that will support the cutting of taxes of those with bulging bank accounts – not incidentally some who fund political campaigns.

It is a rude departure for a nation with the motto e pluribus unum ["out of many one"] that appears on the Great Seal of the United States and of its president. It is on every coin struck by the U.S. Mint since 1873. The nation's One People are bound together, among other things, by a common currency. In a capitalist economy individuals' portions of that wealth naturally will vary, but it doesn't mean that those with much should have too much at the expense of those with too little.

If that sounds like godless socialism, there is plenty of advice and counsel to be found in the Bible, which has to do with every valley being lifted up and every mountain and hill being made low. And then there is the mandate credited to Jesus, the Nazarene sage, to the effect that if someone asks for one's coat, he should give him his cloak also. Maybe those who run Congress wish that Jesus would just go away for Christ's sake.

### ACT II

Women who gained a down payment on sexual free-

dom with The Pill in the early 1960s and the remainder in Roe v. Wade are once again at a disadvantage as legislators in many of the 50 states work overtime to lay every conceivable barrier in the path to their constitutional freedom.

State house zealots at the behest of misogynists masquerading as pious patriots are trying to put Planned Parenthood out of business, punish merciful physicians who try to help women with unexpected pregnancies, and in general take down the torch of liberty, which Roe v. Wade erected. Is it not clear that a woman's reproductive organs are hers, not theirs? How is it that those whose most avid political interest is to keep government at arm's length use it to interfere with what is none of government's business?

### ACT III

As if Earth were not a common home to each and every human being, as if the demarcation of nations and states had been etched by God above, it has become all too evident that countries that suffer from undefined insecurity – whether territorial, economic or political – are more and more given to walls, border fences and exclusion. Is the United States of American headed down that road with the xenophobia of Donald Trump going on before? The American poet Robert Frost said what needed to be said about that: "Something there is that doesn't love a wall ... Before I built a wall I'd ask to know / What I was walling in or walling out, /And to whom I was like to give offense."

Politicians in thrall to their evangelical constituencies should keep in mind this memorable text to be found at Leviticus 19:34: "You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

### ACT IV

In America, voting is as fundamental a duty as anything. It is both a privilege and a responsibility of citizens from their 18th birthday on. Nothing should be placed in the way of their fulfilling it. Every effort must be made to see that they do it. You'd think that with all the Red, White and Blue flourishes one hears from politicians and officeholders just such efforts would be permanent tasks. Au contraire!

Legislatures in a great many states are enacting law after law to discourage youths, minorities and the poor from claiming their franchise. Why? Because the power structure wishes not to be annoyed by such imperfect people. African Americans, for example, are said to be likely to vote Democratic. So it is arranged that the polls in the precincts where they live will be few and farther between with no early voting, the requirement of a special ID, etc. The idea is to discourage their participation or, if need be, to prohibit it.

### ACT V

If there were a prize for the most cynical Cabinet appointment made by the 45th president, it would be that of Scott Pruitt, recently the Attorney General

of Oklahoma, to head the Environmental Protection Agency. Pruitt does not want to hear anything about global warming that thousands of scientists working independently have documented. Pruitt also pooh-poohs the obvious fact that the warming leads to climate change, documented in this case by rising sea levels caused by the melting of polar icecaps – the warmer seawater causing monster storms. Scientists at the EPA who insist upon doing their proper work either are muzzled or let go. It is as if a major city had decided to forego its fire department because there is no such thing as an accidental fire. Madness.

### EPILOGUE

As St. Paul said in a moment of anguish, "Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" The question for me, at least – and I hope for you – is how shall we keep the body that is our nation from being ruined by dirty dog politics? How shall we fight back against the un-American behavior and intent of those now in power? We have to find a way and follow it to the end. *Harry T. Cook is a Michigan-based Episcopal priest, journalist and author.*

## Of Human Natures And Democracy

BY ANN DAPICE

**N**umerous questions have surfaced in a variety of settings recently. "How stupid is he?" "Is he just plain dumb?" "Retarded?" "How did he get a college degree?"

Generally, these are words that infer that the new U.S. president is unintelligent, ignorant, dense, or lacking good judgment. Often, such questions are heard after a particular action that questions his knowledge of the U.S. Constitution, historical relationships with other nations, or other information that seems lacking.

These comments are often made by people who would normally be offended if someone used those words publicly to describe a person. They would instead say that a person is developmentally challenged or disabled. The conversations this week also turned to the people who helped elect and still support him. Do these same terms refer to them as well?

It is not just Democrats who are asking these questions; conservative authors are writing of their concerns as well. George Will wrote, "Donald Trump's disorderly mind is a dangerous disability that could have major repercussions for the country." [Washington Post, 5.3.17]. Michael Gerson, former speech writer for George W. Bush, has written, "He has displayed pathetic, even frightening ignorance on policy matters foreign and domestic." [Washington Post,

6.20.17]. But it is not just the president's intellect that is questioned; Gerson uses words like compulsions, vindictiveness, egotism, secrecy, conquest, and describes the president's associates as "ethically challenged."

The term developmentally challenged usually refers to cognitive ability. However, humans develop across the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual spectrum. The developmental progression is "me" [egocentric] to "us" [ethnocentric] to "all" [universalizing].

Young children need to be egocentric in order to survive. They are dependent on others to feed, clothe and protect them. The child develops through interactions with family, friends, school, and other organizations [e.g., religion, political party, race, nation]. These individuals and groups teach the child skills and values important to their groups. But it is the individual's own group and thus the person is ego/ethnocentric. Research indicates that most people do not move to a universalizing stage that is concerned with justice for all races, religions, sexual orientations, etc.

People can remain in the "me" stage, doing things for what they'll "get out of it." A young child may have tantrums and throw toys, but it is pathological if adults are physically or emotionally violent, externalize blame, lie despite evidence to the contrary, are opportunistic, wary, manipulative, and exploitive. To the extent that they are bigger [as in "bullies"] and more powerful, they can cause great misery. People in this stage rather enjoy the challenge of breaking the law and are not intimidated – nor usually stopped – by rules and laws [Dapice, Oklahoma Observer, June 2016.]

History shows well that a population can be fooled by the positive values that pathological leaders promise, not realizing that this is the manipulation that allows for power over others. The more intelligent they are, the more successful they will be in doing damage to others. They are variously called narcissistic, sociopathic and psychopathic. Clinically they are designated to have an antisocial personality disorder [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, psychiatry.org]. This is the present political dilemma.

The U.S. president's behavior is pathological – but he has not been examined by psychiatrists, and most people with his pathology would not cooperate with such examination. However, it doesn't take professional experts to observe from his behaviors that he is "smart as a fox in a hen house" or "street smart." It is curious that the one word we hear, rarely heard in the past, is that to ignore this behavior is to "normalize" what is pathological. "Denial" is the psychological term for those who choose to ignore his pathology.

But what of his associates who Gerson describes as ethically challenged? What of the political party that is willing to work with him in order to accomplish its political goals? What of those who voted for and

still support him? What of those who believed what he promised and who will likely suffer badly when promises are not kept?

Most people at a "me and my group" stage are not pathological. They pay their bills, fulfill contracts they have made, don't misuse funds, but their views on some areas are in complete conflict. If encouraged to examine conflicts in what they say they believe and what their actions display, they can move beyond their ego-ethnocentric status. Sadly, humans often don't understand issues until faced with them in their own lives.

What are the practices that stimulate intellectual, moral, physical and spiritual development? We know that there are certain genetic, biological and chemical givens. People seem to be born with wired in psychological preferences and their development is aided by working in ways best understood through their preferences.

These are well described by Myers-Briggs psychological types [[www.myersbriggs.org](http://www.myersbriggs.org)] where individuals show preference for extroversion or introversion, sensing or intuiting, thinking or feeling, and judging or perceiving. These combine in 16 different types such as extroversion/intuiting/thinking/judging, for example, or, introversion/sensing/feeling/perceiving.

The most common type in the U.S. is extroversion/sensing/thinking/judging. Each type has advantages and disadvantages. The extrovert is more likely to go along with others than to make an individual decision. Sensing types generally don't like change while intuiting types are future oriented where change is an expectation. As would be expected, thinking types tend towards what appears to be logical, while feeling types are more comfortable with decisions that consider values such as compassion. Judging types see things in yes or no, black or white, while perceiving types examine multiple alternatives.

What socialization practices encourage moral development and action? Clearly children who are physically and emotionally abused are often negatively affected for a lifetime. Socialization for autonomous decision-making and action occurs when there is flexibility in thinking through moral situations and probable outcomes. It is the understanding that humans are to act on moral decisions in autonomous and responsible ways. This socialization is in contrast to that which enforces external power and rules without question and actions are based on decisions made by others in power.

Good governing assumes an educated public. Education is not just inculcation. Education must respond to the challenges of our human natures. Otherwise, we are left to a disorderly mind that is a dangerous disability of frightening ignorance, that is vindictive, secretive, manipulative – and his chosen ethically challenged associates.

Our government with its supposed checks and balances does not appear to have easy solutions to the negative repercussions already evident from the pres-

ident and these associates. Nevertheless, we have many intelligent, creative and moral minds in this country and it is time for them to lead.

Tulsa resident Ann Dapice [Lenape/Cherokee] received a PhD from the University of Pennsylvania. She has taught and/or served as administrator at a

number of universities and is executive director of the Institute of Values Inquiry, a 501(c)(3) research organization and director of Education and Research for T.K. Wolf Inc., a 501(c)(3) American Indian organization.

# Reality Check: This. Is. Not. Normal.

BY DAN RATHER

**A**s with many of my fellow Americans, I don't consider myself partisan politically – never have. I am a registered independent voter and have been for most of my life. With that in mind, I submit the following:

Can we please get this out of the way? None of what is happening at the top of government now is normal. None of it. And no one should normalize it. No one.

We have a president who lies without a second thought. Big bold lies that are easily disproven. That is not normal.

We have serious allegations around obstruction of justice by that president. That is not normal.

We have an FBI director fired for insisting to continue pursuing a serious investigation into the sanctity of our republic. It has never happened before in our history. That is not normal.

We have a hostile foreign power attacking and undermining our electoral process. That is not normal.

We have an attorney general under a serious shadow of association with said foreign power, with indications that there is much more to this story than we yet know. That is not normal.

We have federal judges, our closest foreign allies, and the free press under scurrilous attack from the president and his enablers. At the same time we have despots praised. That is not normal.

We have an administration fanning the flames of division over race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and gender. That is not normal.

We have an overhaul of our entire healthcare system that was written in secret on a rapid time frame. That is not normal.

We have a sordid confluence of the president's business interests and his political power. That is not normal.

The list could go on and on.

What concerns me even more than any of these items is the fact that they are largely being met by a shrug or excuses from most Republican elected offi-



cials. Even many Democrats seem overwhelmed and are inclined to let some of this just ride.

That may be how politics works. But this is bigger. It's about our nation.

We are shifting the goalposts for our democracy. We are failing to be outraged by the outrageous because there is something even more outrageous that always seems to hit the news cycle. And that is dangerous.

What gives me hope is we have had waves of abnormality in our country's history. And we've had times when what we would consider now to be not normal, like segregation, was considered normal.

What has centered and saved our country time and again is civic engagement.

I believe that most people in this nation don't think any of this is normal. And they could very well vote out those elected officials in both parties who are normalizing these outrages.

Dan Rather is former longtime anchor of the CBS Evening News and now anchors the television news magazine *Dan Rather Reports* on the cable channel AXS TV.

---

**Read The Observer On-Line**  
**[www.okobserver.org](http://www.okobserver.org)**



"I'M STUMPED—HOW DO WE CONNECT WITH AVERAGE AMERICANS?"

## *Voters Fired Up For Single-Payer, Creating Dilemma For Democrats*

BY MARGARET FLOWERS

**O**n June 4, the same day that Our Revolution, a Democratic Party group that arose from the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign, organized rallies and die-ins to highlight the number of people dying in the United States due to lack of access to health care, the New York Times published an article, "The Single Payer Party? Democrats Shift Left on Health Care," prominently on the front page and above the fold.

The article quotes RoseAnn DeMoro, head of National Nurses United, saying, "There is a cultural shift. Health care is now seen as something everyone deserves. It's like a national light went off." Minnesota Congressman Rick Nolan was also quoted, saying that rank-and-file Democrats "are energized in a way I have not witnessed in a long, long time." Nolan is correct in stating that following the Democrat's large

loss in 2016, the party needs "a more boldly 'aspirational' health care platform."

Democratic Party voters have been strong supporters of single-payer health care for a long time. Polls have consistently shown that super-majorities of Democratic Party voters want single-payer, but Democratic Party candidates keep telling them that they can't have it.

The Democratic Party has refused to add Medicare for All to its healthcare platform despite resolutions introduced by single-payer advocates. Even the Congressional Progressive Caucus refuses to include single payer health care in their "People's Budget."

In 2009, with a Democratic President and majorities in the House and Senate, single-payer health care was off the table. Instead, the "public option" was used to divide the Democratic Party voters and

convince them that they were asking for too much. Democrats were told that the public option would be more politically feasible and would create a "back door" to single-payer.

Many were fooled. And the joke was on them because even the public option, which I call the "Profeeter's Option," was never meant to be in the final leg-

islation.

While the New York Times wrongly blames the liberal and centrist Democrats for not supporting a public option, it was actually the White House and Democratic Party leadership that kept it out of the final bill. In December 2009, public pressure was working

CONTINUED ON PAGE 33

# Single-Payer Should Be Litmus Test For Democrats

BY SCOTT GALINDEZ

I am so tired of hearing people say they don't support litmus tests. If you can't judge candidates by their positions on issues, then how do you know who to vote for?

Too many people supported George W. Bush because he was a "good Christian man." George Will is a great guy at a baseball game, but I disagree with him on the issues, and it is those disagreements that will cause me to not vote for him.

Healthcare is important to me, and if a candidate does not support single-payer healthcare, they will not get my vote. I am not a single-issue voter; healthcare is not the only issue I care about. It is, however, a deal breaker.

I do not have time or money for any politician who does not support single-payer healthcare. I don't want to hear anyone say all we have to do is tinker with ObamaCare.

I do not support the current repeal efforts, only because they are not replacing it with single-payer or a step in that direction.

I am working, paying for health insurance, and the current system is failing me. My insurer would rather pay for dialysis three times a week than pay for a kidney transplant.

The private insurance system is not sustainable without allowing them to deny treatments. That is what Trumpcare would do. Young, healthy people would pay less for health insurance while older Americans would pay more and receive less.

Single-payer has to be the ultimate goal. Currently, you get sick, go to the doctor if you have insurance, and the doctor gives you the treatment the insurance company approves – and even then you could go into debt paying your co-pay.

Under single-payer, you go to the doctor and get the treatment he thinks is best, and it is paid for by the government out of your taxes. It is not free ... we pay for it out of our taxes.

I want the government to guarantee me healthcare, education, electricity, clean water, and pub-

lic safety. The market can take care of everything else. The market can determine the cost of my TV set, not my healthcare.

What would happen if the police started checking your ability to pay before accepting a call to your house? Healthcare is a necessity and should be the right of every human being on the planet.

Any Democrat who does not support single-payer healthcare should be opposed in the next primary. On Election Day we sometimes have to hold our nose and vote for candidates who are better than the alternative, but on Primary Day we need to be running candidates we believe in. That is how we will create a Democratic Party we believe in.

If your elected official or candidate for office does not support single-payer healthcare, look for one who does.

The current healthcare fight is a little more complicated. ObamaCare is not sustainable, and it needs to be replaced by single-payer. TrumpCare, however, is not the answer. We must oppose repealing ObamaCare without replacing it with single-payer.

Senate Democrats appear to be united on that, and it will only take a couple of Republicans to block replacing ObamaCare with the cruel plan the GOP is proposing.

We do have to be careful, though, to make sure a Democrat like Joe Manchin doesn't betray us.

Medicaid expansion seems to be the key to killing the effort to repeal ObamaCare this year. Conservative Democrats like Manchin do not want to explain why they gave up federal funding for expanded Medicaid. That will likely be why a few Republicans vote with the Democrats against repeal.

We should fight to stop a move backward on healthcare, but that should not be the end of our struggle. Single-payer healthcare is the issue that progressives can unite around to take back the Democratic Party and then the country.

© Reader Supported News

# Jim Hightower

## *If Trump Is So Great, Why Is His Approval Rating So Puny?*



© Creators.com

**W**hat's the matter with these people? The Trumpsters in the White House and Congress, I mean.

Start with The Donald himself, a guy who can't pass a mirror without casting an adoring eye at his own reflection. What is it about him that requires the top officials of his government to humiliate themselves publically in the White House cabinet room, making them try to outdo each other in a groveling Worship-a-thon of praise for this magnificence? And what's wrong with his Cabinet members? One after another, the Vice President, Chief of Staff, Treasury Secretary, Secretary of State and all the other supposedly-powerful luminaries of the Government of the United States of America were called upon in June's televised cabinet session to say their name, then meekly offer their smarmiest praise of Trump's integrity, agenda and manly leadership. This spectacle of forced adulation of "The Leader" was so eerily insane that even North Korea's Kim Jong Un would've been too embarrassed to orchestrate it!

Yet Trump went even further in his flight from reality. Not satiated by the string of superlatives from his cabinet of sycophants, he resorted to stroking his own ego, opening with the fanciful claim that Americans are "seeing amazing results" from his presidency. Shifting into overdrive, the chief proclaimed that "never has there been a president – [except maybe] FDR, who's passed more legislation, who's done more things than what we've done."

Uh... no, Mr. President ... not actually, not even close. I realize you don't "believe" in facts, but here's one to sober you up: The Trump White House has produced no major legislation. Zero.

You're right, however, that we Americans are seeing truly "amazing results" from your six months on the job: We're amazed that in such a short time your so-called presidency is mired in conflicts of interest, constitutional quagmires, erratic behavior, ideological arrogance, tweeted ignorance, lame policy proposals and – let's admit the obvious – your own incompetence. If President Trump and his apologistas

in Congress wonder why they're consistently getting such miserable job approval ratings from the public, they should take a deep breath, hold their noses, and actually look at the god-awful policies they're pursuing.

For example, they're intentionally pushing a Draconian health care scheme that would cause widespread suffering for non-rich Americans and even deaths, while also slipping another tax giveaway of nearly a trillion dollars to corporations and wealthy investors. It's so ugly that Trump, who originally said he was "100% behind this," now calls the bill "mean."

And the one widely-popular idea that Trump promised – a trillion-dollar investment to create good jobs for repairing America's collapsing infrastructure – has turned into a scam. His actual proposal is to give \$800 million in tax credits to Wall Street investors, hoping they'll put money into infrastructure projects. It's like promising to feed the oats to horses, hoping they'll pass through some seeds for the birds to peck out.

Also, remember his promise to crack down on Wall Street greed heads? Now, he and Congress are pushing a bill to coddle the banksters by removing consumer protections that restrict Wall Street greed.

But he is creating new jobs for 4,000 lucky Americans. In Afghanistan. The 16-year war there has been an interminable, unequivocal disaster for the U.S. and our troops. But rather than being a commander-in-chief, Trump has washed his hands of that presidential responsibility, becoming a wimpy delegator-in-chief by handing off responsibility to the military brass. They're now shipping 4,000 more troops into a hellish war the American people do not support.

The greatest, overriding failure of Trump and congressional leaders is that they have no vision, no big ideas, no moxie and no understanding of grassroots people's democratic idealism.

Saying "Make America Great" over and over again is easy. Any gasbag can say it. But doing it takes real leadership, and the people now in charge just can't measure up. Sad.

# *GOP Will Free You From Having Health Care*

**W**hen I think of freedom, I think of it in positive, aspirational terms – our First Amendment freedoms, for example, or FDR's "Four freedoms" or the uplifting songs of freedom sung by oppressed people around the globe.

But right-wing, corporate-funded ideologues have fabricated a new negative notion of "freedoms" derived from individual choice. You're free to be poor, free to be politically powerless or free to be ill and uncared for – it's all a matter of decisions you freely make in life, and our larger society has no business interfering with your free will.

This is what passes for a philosophical framework behind many of the policies of today's Republican congressional leaders. For example, they say their plan to eliminate health coverage for millions of Americans and do away with such essential health benefits as maternity care for millions more is just a matter of good 'ol free-market consumerism.

As explained by Jason Chaffetz, a Utah Tea Party Republican, "Americans have choices. And so maybe, rather than getting that new iPhone that they just love and they want to go spend hundreds of dollars on that, maybe they should invest in their own health care."

Lest you think that Jason must simply be an odd-ball jerk, here's a similar deep insight from the top House Republican, Speaker Paul Ryan: "Freedom is the ability to buy what you want to fit what you need." Yes, apparently, you are as free as you can afford to be.

As Vice President Mike Pence recently barked at us, TrumpCare's you're-on-your-own philosophy is all about "bringing freedom and individual responsibility back to American health care."

The GOP's austere view is that getting treatment for your spouse's cancer should be like buying a new pair of shoes – a free-market decision by customers who choose their own price point from high-dollar Neiman Marcus to bargin-basement Dollar General. And some go barefoot ... but then, that's their choice.

So, that's what Republicans' TrumpCare is offering us, this so-called "freedom" from health care. Well, good news, people – at last, congressional Democrats have gotten a clue, grown some spine and are beginning to act like ... well, like Democrats!

In particular, a majority of Dems in the U.S. House are responding to the rising public demand that de-

cent health care be treated as a right for everyone, rather than being rationed by profiteering insurance conglomerates. Nearly six of 10 Dems in the House have now signed on to Rep. John Conyers' "Medicare for All" bill, which is being carried in the Senate by Bernie Sanders.

So – Hallelujah, progress!

Yes, but many speed bumps remain on the Democratic Party's entry ramps onto the moral high road of politics. Rep. Nancy Pelosi, for one. When the leader of House Democrats was asked if the party should make health care for all a major issue in Congress and in the 2018 elections, she replied with a flat "no." Basically, Pelosi says "the American people" aren't ready for it – by which she really means that the narrow slice of the public that inhabits her world – health industry executives, lobbyists and big campaign donors – aren't ready.

Meanwhile, a good 60% of regular Americans are damned sure ready, telling pollsters flat out that our government has a responsibility to ensure that everyone gets the care they need.

Let's be blunt: When it comes to the fiery leadership that America's grassroots people want and need, the Democratic Party establishment is weaker than Canadian hot sauce. When you've got 60% of your party's rank-and-file congressional members ready to go on such a basic issue, and 60% of the public is also ready to go – it's time to go!

The national party's "leadership" must get going on health care for all, or the leadership itself must go.

## *Single-Payer*

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

to convince the Senate to include a public option in its healthcare bill. That's when leadership stepped in to stop them. Glenn Greenwald wrote on 3.12.10:

*"I've argued since August that the evidence was clear that the White House had privately negotiated away the public option and didn't want it, even as the president claimed publicly [and repeatedly] that he did ... it is the excuse Democrats fraudulently invoke, using what I called the Rotating Villain tactic [it's now Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin's turn], to refuse to pass what they claim they support but are politically afraid to pass, or which they actually oppose [sorry, we'd so love to do this, but gosh darn it, we just can't get 60 votes]. If only 50 votes were required, they'd just find ways to ensure they lacked 50. Both of those are merely theories insusceptible to conclusive proof, but if I had the power to create the most compelling evidence for those theories that I could dream up, it would be hard to surpass what Democrats are doing now with regard to the public option. They're actually whipping against the public option. Could this sham be any more transparent?"*

I was present at the Center for American Progress

in March 2009 when Sen. Max Baucus stated that the public option was a bargaining chip being used to convince private health insurers to accept more regulations. It was Baucus' staffer, Liz Fowler, a former senior vice president for one of the largest private insurance corporations, WellPoint, who wrote the framework for the Affordable Care Act and shepherded it through Congress.

The scam was revealed early and though progressive groups knew it, they were complicit in the scam because they accepted being controlled and silenced by the White House.

Jim Messina, a former Baucus chief of staff, was hired by the White House to be "the enforcer" for President Obama's agenda. Ari Berman described the situation in an enlightening 3.30.11 article in *The Nation*:

*The administration deputized Messina as the top liaison to the Common Purpose Project. The coveted invite-only, off-the-record Tuesday meetings at the Capitol Hilton became the premier forum where the administration briefed leading progressive groups, including organizations like the AFL-CIO, MoveOn, Planned Parenthood and the Center for American Progress, on its legislative and political strategy. Theoretically, the meetings were supposed to provide a candid back-and-forth between outside groups and administration officials, but Messina tightly controlled the discussions and dictated the terms of debate [Jane Hamsher of Firedoglake memorably dubbed this the "veal pen"]. "Common Purpose didn't make a move without talking to Jim," says one progressive strategist. During the healthcare fight, Messina used his influence to try to stifle any criticism of Baucus or lobbying by progressive groups that was out of sync with the administration's agenda, according to Common Purpose participants. "Messina wouldn't tolerate us trying to lobby to improve the bill," says Richard Kirsch, former national campaign manager for Health Care for America Now [HCAN], the major coalition of progressive groups backing reform. Kirsch recalled being told by a White House insider that when asked what the administration's "inside/outside strategy" was for passing healthcare reform, Messina replied, "There is no outside strategy."*

*The inside strategy pursued by Messina, relying on industry lobbyists and senior legislators to advance the bill, was directly counter to the promise of the 2008 Obama campaign, which talked endlessly about mobilizing grassroots support to bring fundamental change to Washington. But that wasn't Messina's style – instead, he spearheaded the administration's deals with doctors, hospitals and drug companies, particularly the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America [PhRMA], one of the most egregious aspects of the bill. "They cared more about their relationship with the healthcare industry than anyone else," says one former HCAN staffer. "It was shocking to see. To me, that was the*

*scariest part of it, because this White House had ridden in on a white horse and said, 'We're not going to do this anymore.' When they were negotiating special deals with industry, Messina and Baucus chief of staff Jon Selib were also pushing major healthcare companies and trade associations to pour millions of dollars into TV ads defending the bill.*

This was the Democratic Party's deal with the devil. They rejected their voter base and went with the donor class to create and market a health law, the so-called Affordable Care Act, that protected the profits of the medical-industrial complex, and it backfired. In the 2010 election, 63 Democratic incumbents lost their seats in Congress and the party has been in decline ever since with a record low number of elected officials nationally. On issue after issue, the Democratic Party betrayed its base and voters finally gave up, choosing either to vote for other parties or not vote at all.

The question now is whether the Democrats will change.

So far, despite the title of the *New York Times* article, the answer is no. Although there is widespread voter support for single payer, Nancy Pelosi says the party is not going there and is funneling advocates' energy to the state level, even though state single-payer systems are not possible without federal legislation. At the national level, Democrats are paying lip service to Medicare for All: "We need to get there eventually but right now our task is to fix the ACA" is the current talking point.

The reality is that the political currents have shifted. The public is not going along with the con. People want solutions to the healthcare crisis, not more tinkering with the current failed healthcare system. Across the country, the message is clear that the public supports National Improved Medicare for All. And whichever political party in power embraces this will see a surge in popularity.

Our task as advocates for National Improved Medicare for All is to stay fired up – continue to speak out about Medicare for All, write about it in local papers, meet with members of Congress, organize in our communities and run for office. We must be clear and uncompromising in our demand for National Improved Medicare for All to create a visible tsunami of support that will wake our legislators up.

When the people lead, the legislators will follow. Margaret Flowers is a Maryland pediatrician seeking the Green Party nomination for the U.S. Senate. She is co-director of PopularResistance.org and a board adviser to Physicians for a National Health Program, and is on the Leadership Council of the Maryland Health Care Is a Human Right campaign.

© Truthout

---

**Read The Observer On-Line**  
**www.okobserver.org**

# *Amyloid And Alzheimer's*

BY SUSAN ESTRICH

**S**ome years ago, my colleague and client Dr. Paul Aisen, an internationally recognized researcher of Alzheimer's disease and the director of the Alzheimer's Therapeutic Research Institute at USC, discovered that people with Alzheimer's all have elevated levels of the protein amyloid in their brains.

Following this discovery, clinical trials targeted amyloid in patients with Alzheimer's disease, but those trials failed: Intervening after the disease has already resulted in significant degeneration of the brain did not work.

Still, the relationship between AD and amyloid has become so established that elevated amyloid levels and mild or moderate cognitive impairment is now classified as pre-AD.

Thirty percent of Americans 65 and over have elevated levels of amyloid in their brains. The incubation period for Alzheimer's disease – the period during which you can have elevated amyloid levels but no symptoms – can be as long as 10 years, longer than the period of dementia.

In a study published by Dr. Aisen and his colleagues last week in the Journal of the American Medical Association, healthy people with elevated amyloid levels were twice as likely to develop symptoms of AD than those who did not start out with elevated levels of amyloid.

After four years, 32% of those with elevated amyloid showed symptoms of dementia.

Analyzing a smaller group after 10 years showed 88% of those with elevated amyloid levels suffering significant mental decline, Aisen told me over the phone. Eighty-eight percent.

I was silent. I am not a doctor or scientist, but I recognize a public health crisis when I hear one.

In 2014, 15% of the population – 46 million people – were 65 or older. In 2050, that number will reach 22%, a total of 88 million people.

The answer?

Likening amyloid's relationship to Alzheimer's to cholesterol and heart attack, Dr. Aisen and other researchers have hypothesized that the key is to reduce or eliminate amyloid buildup before degeneration sets in – in other words, early intervention.

"To have the greatest impact on the disease, we need to intervene against amyloid, the basic molecular cause, as early as possible," Dr. Aisen says.

Clinical trials are underway around the world, of different drugs, different therapies. They all depend on one thing: us. We baby boomers, if we are to defeat this scourge, will have to be a generation of volunteers.

Dr. Aisen thinks the patients who volunteer for these clinical trials – people with elevated amyloid levels who agree to participate in studies where they might be given a drug that they don't actually need [because they might not develop dementia] or might not be given a drug that they could desperately need [because otherwise they will develop dementia] – are ensuring that their children will not face this scourge.

If you turn down the partisan bickering in the background, it is hard to think of anything we could do that is more important for our children. For if we fail, they are the ones who will bear our burden. And what a terrible one.

I do not know anyone who has not been touched by AD. We do our crossword puzzles, keep our minds active. But if biology is destiny, then we must be its masters.

© Creators.com

## *Things To Ponder*

I read that 4,153,237 people got married last year. Not to cause any trouble but shouldn't that be an even number?

Today a man knocked on my door and asked for a small donation towards the local swimming pool. I gave him a glass of water.

I want to die peacefully in my sleep, like my grandfather. Not screaming and yelling like the passengers in his car.

I find it ironic that the colors red, white, and blue stand for freedom until they are flashing behind you.

Relationships are a lot like algebra. Have you ever looked at your X and wondered Y?

America is a country that produces citizens who will cross the ocean to fight for democracy but won't cross the street to vote.

Did you know that dolphins are so smart that within a few weeks of captivity, they can train people to stand on the very edge of the pool and throw them fish?

If you think nobody cares whether you're alive, try missing a couple of payments.

*– Thanks to A.J. Henshaw for sharing*



## *How Eating Beans Instead Of Beef Can Save You And The Planet*

BY SUSAN LEVIN

**A**s the world's second largest greenhouse gas emitter, the United States' withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement drastically curbs international efforts to fight global warming. But concerned Americans don't have to feel powerless. It turns out that simple choices we make every day – or three times a day – have the power to help protect our planet.

Recently, researchers from Loma Linda University released a new study finding that if Americans simply replaced the beef in their diets with beans, the U.S. would immediately reach up to 75% of its greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets for 2020. It confirms what we've known for a while: To protect our warming planet, we must start moving animal products, like meat, cheese and eggs off of our plates. Animal agriculture now contributes more to global warming than all forms of transportation combined.

The livestock industry also gobbles up massive amounts of resources, including land. Part of the problem is that growing and then converting animals,

especially cows, into food is tremendously inefficient. By some estimates, just 1% of the calories fed to cattle eventually translate into human-edible calories. That means that acres upon acres of land are devoted to growing crops or livestock feed, instead of food for humans. In fact, a whopping 80% of protein from U.S. crops is fed to animals. This would be enough to feed one billion people: every last person in the U.S., Canada and South America combined.

On top of that, meat production gulps up huge amounts of water. We usually think about shorter showers and drier lawns when we think about water conservation, but agriculture accounts for 80% to 90% of our water consumption. Think of it this way: An average American's daily shower requires about 17 gallons of water. Making a single hamburger guzzles up a staggering 660 gallons. Producing a pound of beef requires a total of 1,800 gallons of water. To put it in perspective, producing just 3½ pounds of beef – or 10 burgers – requires the same amount of water as an entire year's worth of showers.

*It's Easy To Be A ...*

# CHANGE AGENT

MyChange is a new app that makes it easier than ever to support your favorite progressive organizations – like The Oklahoma Observer.

Every time you use your linked debit or credit card, MyChange rounds up your transaction to the next dollar and steers the difference to the Oklahoma Observer Democracy Foundation.

Spend \$4.70 on a latte? The Observer Foundation receives 30 cents. It's that simple.

With just a few easy steps, you can dedicate your spare change to the Observer Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit whose mission is to help create a better, more informed Oklahoma. It's a tax-deductible gift that supports independent, hard-hitting journalism and commentary, an antidote to the state's lockstep rightwing mainstream media.

To sign up, visit [mychange.com/okobserver](http://mychange.com/okobserver)



So what can we do? The Loma Linda researchers were on the right track when they proposed swapping beef for beans. Producing equivalent amounts of protein from beans requires just a fraction of the resources needed to make beef. One study found that compared with beef, beans require just one-twentieth of land usage per unit of protein consumed. And when it comes to water, kidney beans require just one-tenth of the water needed to produce beef. Even better, ditching the meat altogether in favor of plant-based foods reduces an individual's food-related water footprint by nearly 60%.

As an added benefit, it turns out that what's good for the planet is also good for our health. As a dietitian, beans are one of the superfoods I always recommend to my patients. Beans are packed with protein, but unlike animal products, they're low in the fat, saturated fat and cholesterol linked to heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, weight problems, dementia and even some types of cancer.

Beans are also packed with fiber, an important nutrient 97% of Americans fall short on. Fiber, which is only found in plant foods, can help control weight, lower cholesterol and even fight off cancer. Fiber also helps control blood glucose, which may be why studies show that beans could play a key role in stem-

ming our growing Type 2 diabetes epidemic.

In addition to being versatile – take your pick from black, pinto, kidney, garbanzo, navy, soy and more – beans are also easy on the wallet. A pound of pinto beans runs for about \$1.20, while a pound of lean ground beef now costs \$5.70.

Choosing more plant-based foods is an astonishingly simple solution to so many of our nation's problems. As the mother of a toddler, I'm concerned. Unless something changes, our next generation – predicted to be the first to face a shorter life expectancy than their parents – is in trouble. Already, about a third of children today are overweight or obese, and a third will eventually develop Type 2 diabetes in their lifetimes. By the time today's kids reach adulthood, projections show that health care spending will account for a third of our GDP. On top of that, they face the ever-increasing threat of global warming, fading air quality, flooding, and all of the health problems that accompany these disasters.

By simply incorporating more plant foods into our diets, we could exponentially find solutions for all of these problems without waiting for our leaders or policies to catch up with us. Our children's health and the planet are worth it.

© AlterNet

## *What's The Big Deal About Paris?*

BY GARRISON KEILLOR

No sensuous pleasure can compare to the thrill of righteousness, and when the poor schlump stood in the Rose Garden and read his speech about America victimized by the crafty Europeans and the treacherous Chinese who designed the Paris accords, he could not have imagined the uproar he would cause.

Moments later, everybody to the left of Jabba the Hutt was shaking their fists as if he had stuck his hand up under the Statue of Liberty's gown. Birds shrieked from the trees, small dogs growled, even heinous criminals looked upon him with loathing.

People love the chance to get all apocalyptic: The right wing has enjoyed this for years and now it was everyone else's turn. The polar ice cap melting, the incidence of depression among chickadees rising, tooth decay in chickens, acorns falling, the planet turning to toast. Prophets of doom wherever you looked.

I am from Minnesota so I know about righteousness and I am a little tired of it. In Minneapolis, if you use the word "dark" to mean pessimistic or gloomy, you may be required to go through sensitivity training. Same for "left-handed compliment," which is derogatory to the state's half-million southpaws. Or if you offend native peoples by referring to toilet paper

as "t.p."

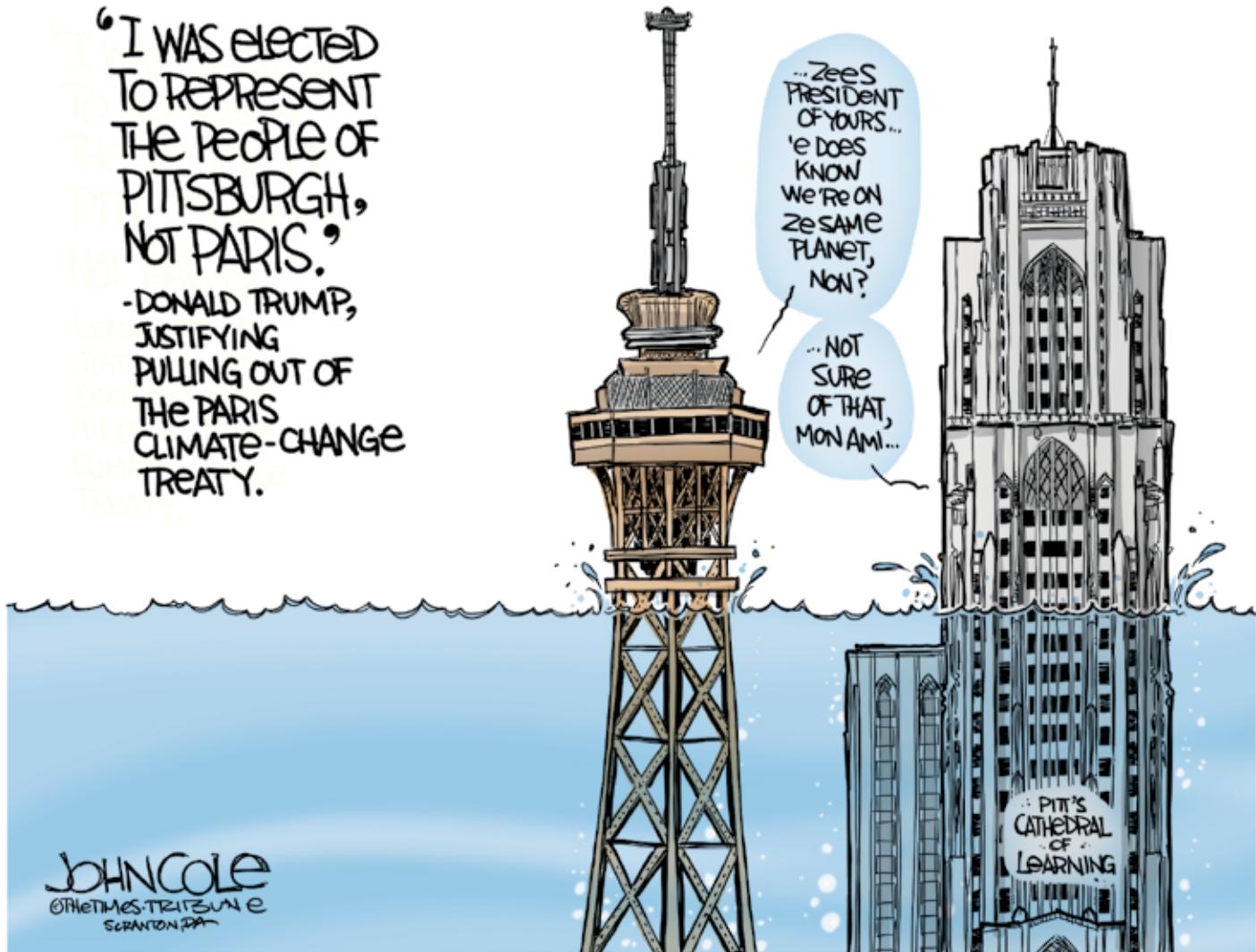
Even though the scientists are right about climate change, the sanctimony is awfully heavy. It's like the people who told me the mortality statistics for heavy smokers back when I was doing four packs a day. They took satisfaction from my imminent demise and to demonstrate my immortality I upped my intake and switched to unfiltered Camels. The Paris accords were a bunch of drunks agreeing to go on the wagon, and what the guy at the lectern did was to invest in a chain of distilleries. So what?

The man is only trying to please the folks who voted for him. They want him to walk into church and moon the clergy. They've always wanted to do it themselves but didn't dare offend their devout neighbors. So they went along, saying the appropriate things about Community and Cooperation and Tolerance and the Value of Education, which made them miserable because they didn't believe in any of that stuff. They believed in Family Loyalty and outsiders can go to hell. Be a winner. Race to the buffet table and pick all the beef out of the stew and let the others have the celery and onions.

It's a selfish worldview but so what? Sew buttons on your underwear. They never had a champion until this guy came along and spoke for them loud and

**"I WAS elected  
To REPRESENT  
The PEOPLE OF  
PITTSBURGH,  
NOT PARIS."**

-DONALD TRUMP,  
JUSTIFYING  
PULLING OUT OF  
THE PARIS  
CLIMATE-CHANGE  
TREATY.



clear, and they eked out a narrow win in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin and now they're making the most of it. That's how it works. And every week or so, their guy walks up to the altar and drops his trousers.

The guy is trying to save the coal industry. We each have our causes. I am fighting for the typewriter industry and for the revival of rotary telephones. That doesn't make me a bad person. I think the 1951 Studebaker was the most beautiful car of the 20th Century. With a few billion dollars in federal subsidies and a ban on foreign imports, we can bring the Studebaker back. This will be a great boon to South Bend, IN.

The truth is, the man has a lousy job. He is penned up in the White House with a bunch of gossipy underlings and he is expected to make big decisions about matters he doesn't know or care about and he is expected to make nice with world leaders who disdain him, like the Frenchman who gave him a bone-crushing handshake.

And he did the speech and was reamed by the media and academicians and loser Democrats, that whole high-fiber crowd, and you know what? He does

not care. He is 70 and no scientist in the world says the sky is going to fall in the next 20 or 25 years so what exactly is the problem? Like his followers, he has no beliefs, only urges. Look at the expression of chill hauteur on the man's face as he shoves his way through the NATO heads of state to stand in front. It's all there. That's him. The Duke of Earl. When you know nothing, nothing can stop you.

*Author Garrison Keillor was longtime host of public radio's Prairie Home Companion.*

© Washington Post

## THE OKLAHOMA OBSERVER

*Your Passport To Oklahoma's Most  
Progressive, Socially Responsible  
And Intellectual Audience*

*Advertising rates start as low  
as \$40 per issue.*

*Call 405.478.8700 for details.*

# Books

## *On The News Beat: Never A Dull Moment*

---

### **DEADLINES**

**Covering Crime, Courage And Characters**  
**By Betty Ridge**  
**Mountainspring Press**  
**309 pages, \$10 [Amazon]**

---

### **BY MIKE W. RAY**

**T**he life of a small-town newspaper reporter is far from captivating and lucrative, but can be interesting and, on occasion, even exciting. Betty Smith Ridge had just such a career in northeastern Oklahoma, which she recounts in *Deadlines: Covering Crime, Courage and Characters*.

Over a 35-year career as a professional journalist she worked for the weekly Pryor Jeffersonian, the Muskogee Daily Phoenix and the Tahlequah Daily Press. [Confession: the author and I worked together in Muskogee for five years and I am mentioned in passing in her book.] Several members of her family are journalists and two members of her husband's family were writers.

#### **COVERING THE 'DARK SIDE' OF HUMANITY**

During her 19 years at the Phoenix, Muskogee, like many other American cities, coped with a plague of drugs, guns, sexual abuse and mistreatment of children.

She tells about a man convicted of multiple rapes who was sentenced to 3,007 years in the state penitentiary, and the admitted sex offender who was sentenced to just one year of incarceration but 59 years' probation. She writes about children being violated, "some almost daily, by step-parents or others in a position of trust."

She recalls the woman who wrote the name of her would-be killer in blood on a bedsheets.

Ridge writes about "one of those guys police refer to as 'frequent consumers of law enforcement services.'" Among many offenses he was accused of assaulting two men with a knife; one of the victims testified that he was so drunk he didn't realize he'd been stabbed until paramedics and sheriff's deputies awakened him.

In one bizarre case at a "puppy mill" north of Musk-

ogee, law enforcement officers discovered a four-year-old boy confined in a pen adjacent to several other pens that contained dogs. "The boy didn't just live with the dogs," Ridge writes. "He scrambled around on all fours, panted, barked, carried things in his mouth, and exhibited other doglike behavior." The boy's grandparents said they constructed the pen to prevent him from running out onto nearby U.S. 69 highway.

The Muskogee State Fair had steadily deteriorated by 1989, which "marked the downfall and end of a tradition nearly a century long, beginning when gunfire broke out on the fairgrounds." An Elvis impersonator canceled his scheduled appearance at the fair, "saying he didn't want to get shot," Ridge reports.

Ridge also writes about a member of the prominent Edmondson family who was convicted of armed robbery and attempted murder. The Edmondsons produced a member of Congress, a governor, district and U.S. attorneys and an Oklahoma Supreme Court Justice.

Ridge witnessed the execution of Charles Troy Coleman, who was put to death in 1990 for the 1979 murders of a couple; he also killed a Missouri man and stole his vehicle, slashed a Luther police officer's throat and held a New Mexico trooper hostage.

The next day, back in the Phoenix office, she covered the initial court appearance of a man who pleaded guilty to forcible sodomy of a 5-year-old boy, and the day after that she covered a cow chip-throwing contest at the Muskogee State Fair.

"So much for a journalist's life of glamor and excitement," she quips.

#### **MANY CRIMINALS ARE NOT GENIUSES**

Although the law enforcement investigations and courthouse hearings reveal a dark side of mankind,

Ridge also managed to find humor and peculiarity in her job.

For example, there was the case about some shootings at Possum Holler, a remote rural area. During a court appearance arising from the incident, "I wasn't the only one in the courthouse who got the impression some of them had walked off the set of 'Deliverance,'" Ridge writes.

She tells about a "not-so-bright bank robber" who used his paycheck stub for his holdup note. There was the day a group of filthy prisoners arrived for arraignment, but courtroom staff and defense attorneys "began to raise a stink" about the malodorous defendants' hygiene.

One convicted felon had 13 aliases, and one woman's criminal record included more than 20 convictions in California, the use of at least 14 aliases, six Social Security numbers and several birthdates.

There was the man charged with attempted grand theft of a locomotive. He was arrested at 3:25 a.m. as he sat in the cab of a train at the MKT train yard in Muskogee, "blowing the whistle and punching buttons."

#### CAST OF COLORFUL CHARACTERS

Deadlines also includes a cast of colorful characters.

Among them is "Diamond" Dayne Henry, a self-described "ladies' agent." Henry is a federal fugitive living in Brazil, which has no extradition treaty with the U.S. In federal court facing tax evasion charges, while on probation from a conviction on state prostitution charges, Henry fled the country.

In 1998 Henry had his tombstone erected prematurely in a Catholic cemetery. The black monument depicted a football player, dice totaling seven, a poker hand holding a royal flush in diamond and two voluptuous women. After a controversy erupted, a judge ruled the tombstone was not protected by the First Amendment and ordered it removed from the cemetery.

There's the late Billy Joe Clegg, a Baptist minister from Shawnee who ran for president of the Unit-

**SUBSCRIBE  
NOW AND  
RECEIVE A FREE  
BOOK!!!  
(see restrictions below)**

**FIND TODAY'S  
HOTTEST  
CURRENT  
AFFAIRS  
TITLES AT**

**Full Circle Books**

1900 NW EXPRESSWAY  
OKC OK 73118  
405/842.2900

**THE OKLAHOMA  
Observer**

New subscribers only — Limited time offer  
Non-transferable — Must be redeemed in person  
Merchandise must not exceed \$20

## WHY WAIT?

Now you can subscribe to *The Oklahoma Observer*  
at the Full Circle Books checkout counter  
and receive your free book certificate on the spot!

#### IMPORTANT RESTRICTIONS

To take advantage of this offer, visit Full Circle Books, where you can subscribe to *The Oklahoma Observer* at the checkout counter and receive your free book certificate immediately. You also may subscribe to *The Observer* using the coupon on page 3 of this issue or by visiting our web site [www.okobserver.net](http://www.okobserver.net). You then will receive via U.S. Mail a certificate from Full Circle Books for a free book [\$20 limit]. The certificate is not transferable and must be presented in person at Full Circle Books in order to receive your free book. No facsimiles, printouts or photocopies will be accepted as a substitute for the original Full Circle certificate. This book offer is for new subscribers only. Not valid with any other offer.

ed States seven times and for an Oklahoma U.S. Senate seat; his campaign slogan was, "Vote for Clegg, he won't pull your leg." A former reporter described Clegg as "looking like Elmer Fudd with hair."

Ridge also writes about the 1990

race for District 14 state representative, pitting the late John Monks, a long-time legislator, and Muskogee attorney Jeff Potts. Their campaign featured a pair of women who stood at a busy Muskogee intersection one Sunday morning, clad in cutoff T-shirts, waving cam-

paign signs and displaying their buxom-ness.

Ridge also writes openly about her protracted battle with the bottle, which she finally overcame with the help of another alcoholic. [In the mid-1970s, while I was a reporter at the Lawton Morning Press, one of my newsroom colleagues overdosed on vanilla extract and passed out in the middle of Second Street while driving his car.]

#### **NEWSPAPERS GET A BAD RAP**

Ridge mentions a study released in 2013 by Career-Cast.com which ranked newspaper reporting as the worst job in the nation; it cited low pay, long hours, few holidays and often working weekends, high levels of stress from daily deadlines, plus a decreasing job market because of the changing technology of news

gathering.

I disagreed with the ranking – I am a fifth-generation newsman who toiled in the news/communications business for 47 years and would do it all over again – but I can attest to the coolie wages, long hours, limited holidays and weekend work frequently demanded of many newspaper reporters and editors.

*Deadlines* is a well-written insight into small-town Oklahoma journalism. It tells myriad stories about people Ridge encountered and events she experienced, and the effect they had on her life as a newspaper reporter and editor.

*Mike W. Ray, a veteran Oklahoma journalist, lives in Oklahoma City. He recently retired after four years as media director for state House Democrats.*

## *Inside America's Fossil Fuel Kings*

### **HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE**

*The Men Who Are Destroying Life On Earth*

*And What It Means For Our Children*

**By Dick Russell**

**Hot Books Press**

**160 pages, \$21.99**

### **BY BOB JACKMAN**

Dick Russell's new book is a must read for all Oklahomans who suffer the slings and budget arrows of our almighty powerful fossil fuel kings.

It includes a chapter on billionaire Harold Hamm, and credits The Oklahoma Observer for outing those who suppressed the facts that the oil industry caused our swarming earthquakes.

In fact, the book reports – for the first time in print – that an estimated 100,000 to 150,000 uninsured Oklahoma homes have been damaged by oil-men made earthquakes.

Several Oklahoma residents are quoted in the book, including the author of this review.

Russell's work is timely and needed as a follow up, of sorts, to Jane Mayer's best-seller *Dark Money*.

It covers in scary detail the under-reported conse-

quences of dark powers like the Koch Brothers working with Hamm, former Exxon CEO-turned-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Peabody Coal's CEO and others fossil fuel kings – all driven by narcissistic greed.

Using their money to purchase elected powers, they march us onward to global warming's grave current and future damage to Earth.

The book was edited and introduced by environmentalist, lawyer and best-selling author Robert F. Kennedy Jr., and the foreword was written by Salon founder David Talbot. It details how powerful politicians like Oklahoma U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell truly believe climate change is not a crisis.

Though Warren Buffett, for one, identifies the world's new financial leaders as Apple, Google, Amazon, Microsoft and Facebook, we in Oklahoma are stuck with old-fashioned fossil kings who not only put profits before people, but also profits before protecting the Earth.

Just so you know, I read Russell's book while also studying NASA's research into the breakup of Antarctic's Larsen C Ice Shelf – it's the size of Delaware – which is another casualty of global warming. *Bob Jackman is a petroleum geologist living in Tulsa.*

### **Oklahoma Friends Meetings (Quakers)**

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

*- Author unknown*

#### **MEETING FOR WORSHIP SCHEDULE AND CONTACTS**

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

**STILLWATER:** Sunday morning. Call 405.372.4839

**TULSA:** Sunday afternoon. Call 918.743.6827

**NORMAN:** Sunday morning. Call 405.321.7971

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

# Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

First, common ed received \$54 million less in 2016-17 than was budgeted because of mid-year revenue failures, signaling it may not get all it is promised in the FY '18 budget. Second, operating costs aren't frozen just because budgets are [think: supplies, utilities, growth in student population].

And higher education? Good grief. It endured double-digit cuts last year and will absorb another 4% [\$30 million] next year. OU and OSU regents already approved 5% tuition hikes to help stem the hemorrhaging.

This is where it's important to think big thoughts and dream big dreams: Whether CEOs or day laborers, most Oklahomans recognize that education is the economic engine that will power the state's future.

Will we compete in the high-tech 21st Century economy or slip into Third World status? Will we generate more higher-paying, higher-skilled jobs or leave the next generations fighting over minimum-wage scraps? Will we tackle our criminal justice crisis by dedicating more of our collective resources on the front end [education] than on the back end [prisons]?

That's why it's important for legislative and civic leaders and rank-and-file Oklahomans to think long and hard about the notion of tuition-free higher education.

Tennessee figured out how to do it [for community colleges and technical schools]. So did Oregon [community college]. And New York state [two- and four-year schools]. Individual schools – including University of Michigan, Princeton, Duke and Harvard – also offer free tuition, based on need.

Why not Oklahoma? Gov. Mary Fallin, State Regents and business leaders clearly see the wisdom, pushing to increase by 67% the number of degrees and certificates earned in Oklahoma by 2030.

Of course, in order for tuition-free higher ed to become a reality, the state's biggest checkbooks would be required to pay more – actually, just their fair share. The tradeoff? It would help create for them a better-educated, higher-skilled pool of future workers. And it would protect future generations from carrying backbreaking student loan debt deep into their careers.

Isn't that worth at least discussing during the interim?

## All Aboard

As state lawmakers cobbled together yet another unsatisfactory budget, the state's lone passenger rail service, the Heartland Flyer, appeared in jeopardy. So,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 47

## Better Information, Better Policy

Oklahoma Policy Institute provides timely and credible information, analysis and commentary on state policy issues.

See our latest issue briefs, fact sheets and blog posts at:

**OKPOLICY.ORG**

David Blatt, Director ■ 918.794.3944 ■ dblatt@okpolicy.org

## Johnston & Associates

Landowner Environmental and Pollution Law

Free Consultation

Ken Johnston - Wes Johnston

405-224-4000

118 North Fourth St

Chickasha, Oklahoma 73018

Johnstonlawfirm@SBCGlobal.net

## TOM GOODWIN

Cheyenne, OK

Reader and supporter of *The Observer*  
for over 30 years and counting.



It's July ...

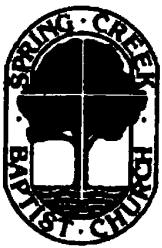
Celebrating the birth of  
our great nation!

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY,  
USA!**

Message Sponsored by Iris Lochner

The American  
Dream Starts  
@ your library

## Spring Creek Baptist Church



A Place Of Grace....  
A Place Of Healing....

11701 N. MacArthur Blvd.  
Oklahoma City, Ok. 73162

[405] 721-3252  
[springcreekbc.com](http://springcreekbc.com)



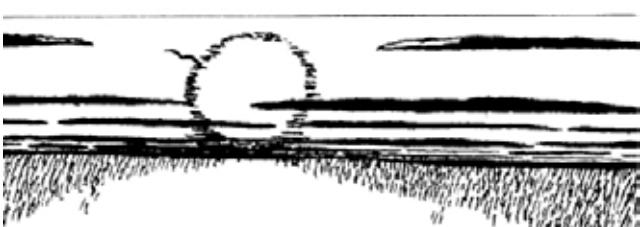
For a **VOICE**  
and **RESPECT**  
at work  
**ORGANIZE!**

Call Brad at  
(405)947-2333  
[Teamsterslocal886.com](http://Teamsterslocal886.com)

**REX FRIEND**  
*Attorney at Law*

*Immigration*  
**General Practice of Law**  
**3801 N. Classen Blvd., Suite 8**  
**Oklahoma City, OK 73118**

**(405) 557-1277**  
*Reasonable Fees — Terms Available*



**Tom Temple**  
*Natural Design*

405.478.4936  
[www.TTemple.com](http://www.TTemple.com)

## THE OKLAHOMA OBSERVER

*Your Passport To Oklahoma's Most Progressive,  
Socially Responsible And Intellectual Audience*

*Advertising rates start as low  
as \$40 per issue.*

*Call 405.478.8700 for details.*

## Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Where did Deepwater Horizon-spilled oil go? Nearly a quarter of the 172 million gallons is still unaccounted for, seven years after the disaster, according to USDA's Gulf of Mexico Initiative.

Dart: To Texas' Boys State, voting to secede from the union. The American Legion, sponsor of the mock legislature, was irate, its members proud veterans of the U.S. military. Poor Texas – raising another generation of wingnuts.

Trump Effect: June through August airline bookings to U.S. are down 3.5%, while increasing to other major travel destinations, according to travel consultant ForwardKeys.

As expected, Gov. Mary Fallin's appointee as attorney general, Mike Hunter, issued an opinion giving legal cover to her finance secretary, Preston Doerflinger, for unilaterally draining the Rainy Day Fund during a cash-flow crisis last spring. An alarming precedent.

Think about it: By 2030, one quarter of the miles driven in the U.S. are projected to be via shared, self-driving vehicles, according to Boston Consulting Group.

OK Lottery Commission projects HB 1837, boosting prizes in order to increase ticket sales, will generate \$110 million more for education over next five years – up to \$335 million.

Junk foodies, beware: An eight-year study of 4,400 older people found those eating fried potatoes more than twice weekly are twice as likely to die prematurely. Baked and mashed potatoes weren't linked to increased mortality. – American Journal of Clinical Nutrition

Don't forget: Two special elections July 11 to fill legislative seats vacated because of scandal. SD 44 race to replace ex-Sen. Ralph Shortey in OKC area features Democrat Michael Brooks Jiminez and Republican Joe Griffin. HD 75 battle for Rep. Dan Kirby's old Tulsa seat is between Democrat Karen Gadis and GOP's Tressa Nunley. Early voting: July 6-8.

# Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

acres of grasslands in Oklahoma and other southern states will decline to the point where they cannot support livestock. NASA bases its prediction on data produced by a group of satellites monitoring the earth's atmosphere. The data is showing a shift in the position of the jet stream.

The declining oil market and the loss of livestock enterprises over the next 20 to 30 years foreshadow dire consequences for the economy of the state of Oklahoma.

Meanwhile, the current political leadership of Oklahoma is mired in the muck of its oily past, encouraging the reckless fracking of our lands by awarding the oil companies the lowest gross production tax rate in the U.S.

It is generally understood that jobs and economic growth for the foreseeable future will be in research, development, and production of renewable energy resources and mechanisms. Our outstanding Oklahoma political leaders, however, just eliminated the modest tax subsidy to the fledgling wind energy industry in Oklahoma.

This move seems counterintuitive since the state is characterized in our state song by the opening phrase, "Oklahoma, where the wind comes sweeping down the plain." Indeed, Oklahoma City is second only to Chicago among American cities in terms of average daily wind velocity. Solar energy potential in Oklahoma is a no-brainer.

Citizens of Oklahoma, and the nation, deserve political leadership capable of understanding the need for change, because change is coming, whether we are prepared for it, or not.

Paul Cartledge  
Durant

Editor, The Observer:

Our state election apparatus managers are proud of the fact that the 2016 election process in Oklahoma appears completely free of any hacking, Russian or otherwise. Elected politicians like U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe have happily "seconded that motion."

The irony is that Russia, at least, would not have wasted time interfering in the voting taking place in the "reddest" of the "red states." Our current reputation is that all 77 of our counties vote "red."

Could there be anything the "Reds" in Russia would



[okea.org](http://okea.org)

**BEN F. SANDERS**

CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANT

3000 UNITED FOUNDERS BLVD, SUITE 107G  
OKLAHOMA CITY, OK 73112

[BFSCPA@HOTMAIL.COM](mailto:BFSCPA@HOTMAIL.COM)

PHONE 405.843.0037 / FAX 405.947.0209

**Oklahoma Retired  
Educators Association**



The only organization  
that works for  
Retired Educators

405.525.2230  
800.310.2230  
[www.orea.org](http://www.orea.org)



**International Brotherhood of  
Electrical Workers Local Union 1141**  
405/670-4777



**WE WELCOME NEW MEMBERS**

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

like better? After all, Trumps “fawning over Putin” occurred early and often during the entire presidential campaign!

Frank Silovsky  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Sons of Alabama never change.

Former Sen. Jeff Sessions, Donald Trump's attorney general, turns out to be as racist as former Gov. George “Stand in the Doorway” Wallace, the die-hard segregationist.

There is inherent racism in Sessions' order for federal prosecutors to charge defendants with the most serious provable offenses carrying the stiffest penalties, including mandatory minimum sentences.

Half of all federal inmates are primarily non-violent, low-level drug offenders; more inmates are serving

life sentences without parole for drug crime other than murder.

Drug prohibition has only sparked a deadly rise in untaxed criminal enterprises, drug-related violence and theft of unbankable drug money by sheriffs and police.

Drug legalization and regulation will be less harmful than prohibition. Treatment and counseling are more effective than jailing 20 million people who will always want to “get a buzz” or “expand my mind.”

We should have learned from liquor bootlegging that prohibition never has worked and never will.

Let's give Trump and Sessions the Carrie Nation prize for being as stupid as Nation who tried to stop drinking by using her hatchet to smash Kansas and Oklahoma saloons.

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner  
Wagoner

## Governor

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 26

A moderate Republican would be formidable in a general election, perhaps uniquely positioned to capture even more of the state's fastest growing electoral demographic: independents. But can he win his party's nomination?

How, for example, will primary voters view Cornett vis-a-vis state Auditor Gary Jones, a former state party chairman with deep roots in the late 20th and early 21st Century Republican revolution that swept every statewide office and forged statehouse supermajorities?

How will they compare Cornett to Lt. Gov. Todd Lamb, who spent the last seven years on the civic club circuit, glad-handing and speechifying in all 77 counties, and who cast his lot this session with the Legislature's uber-conservative anti-tax wing?

It's also worth pointing out the obvious: Both Lamb and Jones have run successful statewide campaigns. Cornett lost his only race beyond the friendly confines of Oklahoma City – for 5th Congressional District in 2006 [to future Gov. Fallin].

If he hasn't figured it out, Cornett quickly will discover that outside Oklahoma City, not everything revolves around Oklahoma City.

That point was driven home to me in 2004 when, as Oklahoma bureau chief for the Dallas Morning News, I was reporting a non-political story in McAlester. A local car dealer I interviewed wanted to discuss something else first: the GOP U.S. Senate primary between former U.S. Rep. Tom Coburn of Muskogee and former Oklahoma City Mayor Kirk Humphreys.

“What can you tell me about that silk-stockings mayor from Oklahoma City?” he asked, later expressing his conviction big city interests routinely run roughshod over more rural areas.

It's a refrain I've heard frequently over the years as I travel the state, an urban-rural tension fueled

not only by city vs. small town values, but also by economics as the state's population centers mostly flourish and villages often struggle.

Moreover, there remains a historic, psychological divide between the state's two largest cities, Oklahoma City and Tulsa. The Turner Turnpike and the internet clearly shortened the distance between what once was the rowdy, cowtown capital and the more urbane “state” of Tulsa.

But make no mistake: the urban centers can be fierce competitors, whether pursuing corporate relocations or larger slices of the state budget.

Could that lingering rivalry hurt Cornett's chances? Especially in a multi-candidate primary that also features a high-profile Tulsa attorney, Gary Richardson, presumably with the ability to self-finance his campaign?

### THE PRIZE: REDISTRICTING

The last time legislative lines were drawn, after the 2010 census, Republicans were already entrenched in power. They crafted state Senate boundaries, in particular, so that it was nearly impossible for Democrats to compete, much less win, in more than a handful. The result: Democrats occupied only six of 48 seats in this year's Senate.

Even in the House, where partisan gerrymandering was kept to a minimum, boundaries were crafted to ensure the state's dwindling rural population exercises outsize influence now that it votes overwhelmingly Republican.

How so? They continued to divvy up the state's high-growth urban areas, diluting the impact of younger, more progressive voters by spreading them across rural districts with high percentages of older conservative voters who take their political cues from evangelical leaders and Fox News.

For much of the last session, Republicans con-

# *Observations*

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 43

too, were dreams of linking Oklahoma and Texas to Amtrak's Chicago-Los Angeles line and creating new downtown-to-downtown service between Oklahoma City and Tulsa.

The immediate problem, of course, was money.

In Oklahoma, lawmakers scurried to plug a \$1 billion budget hole, some regarding the Flyer as a non-essential that could be axed. In Washington, the Trump Administration signaled that Amtrak service beyond the Boston-DC corridor could be in the cost-cutting crosshairs.

The long-term problem, however, was vision, or lack thereof.

In an era in which policymakers juggle climate concerns, air and highway infrastructure issues, and rural economic woes, passenger rail offers something of a back-to-the-future way forward in helping solve these complex problems.

Think about it. More passenger rail options could serve as something of a safety valve for an often maxed-out air transport system. It also could help environmentally by reducing vehicle traffic [including emissions], which in turn could slow wear and tear on the nation's highways and bridges. And it could help breathe new life into fly-over, drive-by rural towns struggling to survive, much less flourish, in a rapidly-changing, global economy.

Why talk about this now?

First, state policymakers wisely [when is the last time you read that phrase?] avoided raiding a revolving fund essential to the Heartland Flyer's existence. The Flyer lives – unless the Legislature's creative revenue-generating schemes are upended in court.

Second, Amtrak arranged a rare "inspection trip" June 9 from OKC to Kansas City, first step in determining whether existing infrastructure could support resumption of passenger rail.

Third, the state's two urban centers have reason to act sooner rather than later: For the OKC-Tulsa line to become a reality, existing lines must be improved

and/or leases and routes worked out between Del City and OKC's Bricktown and between Sapulpa and Tulsa's downtown.

OKC Council members already approved a study to determine what it would take to make the capital-Del City link happen. And the state already has a 99-year deal to piggyback on BNSF's Sapulpa-Tulsa line. The clock ticks on Stillwater Central's deal to launch passenger service no later than December 2019.

Last month's "inspection train" was a godsend for those who believe passenger rail can be an important leg on the nation's 21st Century transportation stool, if for no other reason than it reminds Oklahomans, Texans and Kansans of its potential.

Take Ponca City, for example, one of the towns on the inspection route. The former home of Conoco's headquarters once enjoyed federally-subsidized air service; now the closest commercial flights are in Stillwater. Passenger rail could give Ponca City a significant economic development boost, as well as providing residents more travel options.

Think rail is passé? Heartland Flyer ridership is up 8% this year – remarkable given that gas prices remain so low.

In addition, Flyer riders increasingly are connecting to Amtrak's Southwest Chief, providing service between Los Angeles and Chicago, via Newton, KS. Just after the Flyer arrives at about 9:30 each evening, some passengers hop a late night bus at the OKC depot that heads to Newton via Wichita for scheduled 2:45 a.m. westbound and 2:59 a.m. eastbound Amtrak departures. Southwest Chief ridership has grown to the point Newton's depot is now staffed seven days a week.

Improved service, linking to more cities, can't help but make passenger rail a more realistic alternative for Oklahoma travelers. What's even better, it's a relatively low-cost arrow in the transportation quiver – subsidies are a fraction of what is spent on airports and roads. All aboard?

---

eration. It also would be true when it comes to the 2018 governor's race.

If Democrats could somehow win the governorship, it would help swing the political pendulum much more quickly from the hard right – whose policies have bankrupted the state and crippled vital services – to the much more sensible center.

Republicans, of course, know the stakes. And so do their deep-pocketed benefactors. Thanks to the state's carbon kings and out-of-state ideologues like the Koch Brothers, the GOP war chest will be massive.

Only people power – in the form of a united Democratic effort – can possibly break up the Okie Oligarchy.

# *Governor*

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 46

trolled nearly three-quarters of the House's 101 seats – the numbers fluctuated because of resignations.

With such lopsided margins, Democrats aren't likely to flip the balance of legislative power anytime soon. But winning the governorship in 2018 would give them a seat at the redistricting table and, more importantly, veto power that would be invaluable with just a few legislative pickups to enforce it.

It's cliché in politics to say that the next big election is the most important ever – or at least in a gen-



# Newsmakers Series



*Join Observer Editor Arnold Hamilton and state Reps. Collin Walke and Jason Lowe for a lively discussion of their first legislative session: what they anticipated, what they learned, what was eye-popping and what can be done to steer Oklahoma onto a better path.*



Thursday, July 13, 2017  
Full Circle Books  
1900 Northwest Expressway  
Oklahoma City  
6:00 - 7:00 p.m.

Admission is free  
Light hors d'oeuvres will be served  
Wine and beer available for purchase