

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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OKIE OLIGARCHY

*Powerful Carbon Barons Thwarted People
Power This Legislative Session. How Can
Oklahoma Break The Greed-Lock?*



– SPECIAL REPORT begins on page 5

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OUR MOTTO

To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

OUR CREDO

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

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

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LETTERS TO EDITOR

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Observations

Disgrace

It's no longer debatable: The Legislature's current leadership does not give a damn about the will of the people.

A broad brush indictment, to be sure. But there can be no other conclusion after lawmakers this session mostly ignored voters' overwhelming approval of two criminal justice reform measures on the 2016 statewide ballot.

One House Republican, Chickasha's Scott Biggs, took the most public heat for the Legislature's failure to implement the "smart on crime" initiatives – even getting called out by Gov. Mary Fallin in the session's closing hours.

But Biggs alone is not to blame for the gridlock, though the knuckle-dragging, bullying ex-prosecutor is both an inviting and deserving target.

Actually, most scorn should be heaped on the two weakest, lamest legislative leaders in memory: House Speaker Charles McCall and Senate President Pro Tem Mike Schulz.

They failed to lead on what should have been the legislative equivalent of a slam dunk. The voters gave them the political cover necessary to reverse a decades-old tough-on-crime experiment that did little to reduce crime and even less to rehabilitate lawbreakers.

The current system destroys lives and families and gives inmates scant reason to believe they eventually can become productive, taxpaying citizens. Moreover, in concert with the state's epic fiscal crisis, it yields overcrowded, under-staffed prisons that could cost taxpayers even more if federal courts intervene or inmates riot.

Yet McCall and Schulz couldn't get it done, even though they have the power to determine the legislative agenda, who chairs which committee, even who gets which office. The buck stops at their desks.

It's true, and noteworthy, that both were in charge this session for the first time. But failing on criminal justice reform is the equivalent

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THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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Observerscope



Dart: To billionaire Harold Hamm, decrying as “unconscionable” a proposed hike in the nation’s lowest gross production tax. If you look up greedy in the dictionary, you’ll see Hamm’s mug shot.

We mourn the passing of Observer contributor and devoted Newsmakers attendee Kurt Harrington, gone way too soon at age 62. Our hearts go out his mother, our dear friend Iris Lochner.

Laurel: To Rep. Regina Goodwin, D-Tulsa, publicly calling out GOP House colleagues for racism and sexism and confronting Gov. Mary Fallin on the budget debacle. Courage, personified.

Oklahoma Turnpike Authority stepped up to fund a sorely needed Highway Patrol trooper academy. Who’ll help save the Heartland Flyer passenger rail service between OKC and Fort Worth? Chickasaw Nation?

Dart: To retired U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn, attempting to big-foot the Legislature’s tax debate. He doesn’t have a clue about state finances, but couldn’t resist grabbing the spotlight.

Congratulations to Observer Advisory Board member Trevor James and wife Carley on the birth of their first child, Cohen.

Laurel: To Mike W. Ray, retiring after 19 years on state House media staff, the last four working for the Democratic caucus. He will be sorely missed.

Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy’s Heroes Ball is Aug. 10 at OKC’s Skirvin Plaza. Attendees are urged to accessorize their black-tie optional attire with superhero regalia. Visit oica.org for details.

How dim is Donald Trump’s bulb? He thinks he invented the phrase “prime the pump.” God help us.

Dart: To House Judiciary Chair Scott Biggs, R-Chickasha, refusing to hear criminal justice reforms. This, at same time state’s prison population skyrocketed to a record 62,000.

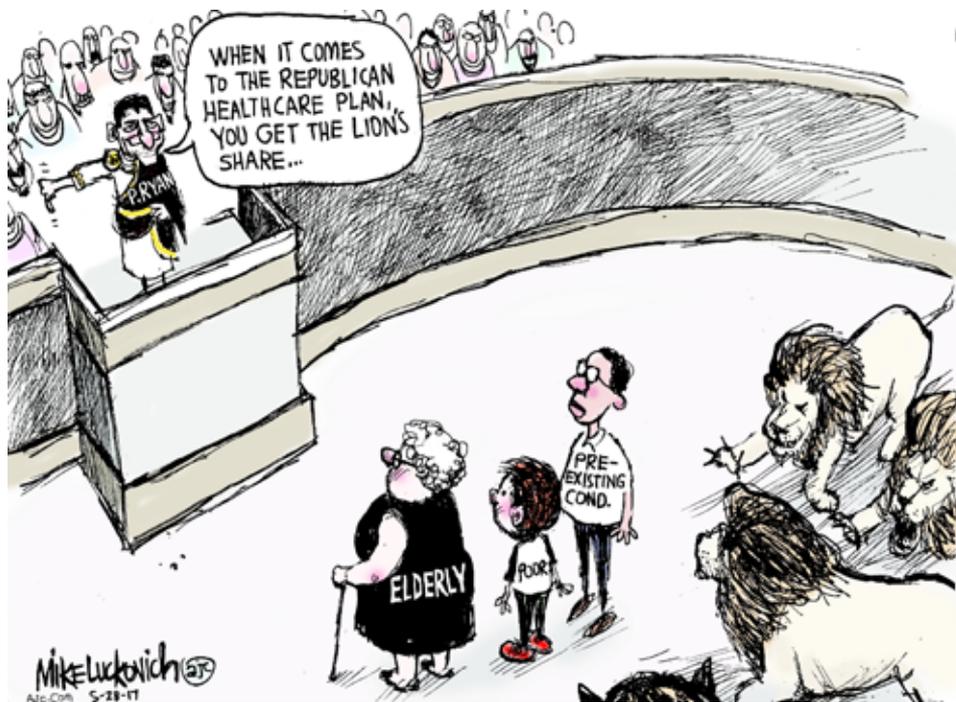
Irony Alert: The Senate confirmed Gov. Fallin’s appointment of ex-Speaker Jeff Hickman to State Regents for Higher Education. As speaker he presided over \$112 million in higher ed cuts between 2015 and 2016.

Future economic indicator: Oklahoma trails all but Arkansas among bordering states in percentage of adults with associate degrees or higher. Colorado tops the list at 47%; Oklahoma languishes at 32%.

Laurel: To Sen. Stephanie Bice, R-OKC, working tirelessly to bring state’s liquor laws into 21st Century. Latest success: county option to permit Sunday sales.

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Letters



Editor, The Observer:

Oklahomans are some of the most caring people anywhere. But that empathy doesn't translate to funding services [education, healthcare, criminal justice reform].

We are all bombarded with anti-tax messaging. A majority of "regular folks" feel they need to protect their finances. A majority miss the essential linkage between taxation and services for the common good. We are no longer willing to discuss these ideas; we don't listen to opinions outside our own echo chamber.

We cling to a national brand [Republican] which purports to be "Christian" and "conservative" primarily on overriding federal issues such as abortion and gun rights. This spills over dramatically to state elections and causes us to elect people with no sense of balance or cause-and-effect, only a sense of needing to downsize government.

We have just about downsized Oklahoma into the very bottom tier in every education, health, quality of life category.

Mickey Thompson
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Recently, a distinguished professor of constitutional law wrote a guest column in another Oklahoma newspaper supporting SQ 640 – the requirement for a supermajority in both houses to pass revenue measures. The article provided a tactically offensive and counterproductive playbook for the legislative majority. How can we work across the aisle cooperatively at the Capitol if we believe in the following approach and if we refer to and think of the minority party as the "rump" opposition or manipulable "back-benchers" disengaged from the legislative process?

He wrote: "Nothing in politics is easy, but dealing with this rump opposition comes close. The Republicans possess overwhelming supermajorities, meaning, on all other matters, you have the Democrats at your mercy. How can you not devise a policy or spending cut they hate so much that they would be willing to accept your tax plan instead? Remember that you're not asking them to betray their principles – you're asking them to vote for their own agenda items."

The professor should be happy. The majority has already "devised

a spending cut" that is onerous – a bill [HB 2414] that would fund one-half [or less] of the budget deficit and virtually assure that the oil and gas industry, that benefits and has benefitted from Oklahoma, will not need to equitably participate in helping solve the state's most pressing problems through any substantive increase in the gross production tax.

Jan New
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Republicans passed legislation that requires a supermajority of legislators to raise taxes for any reason. Then they ratcheted down income taxes that benefited wealthy Oklahomans most, starving essential public services. What could go wrong? Now Democrats pressure Republican legislators to raise gross production oil taxes because Republicans need them for that voting supermajority they implemented.

Dems and many citizens want oil and gas to pay their fair share to fund Oklahoma education, medical care, roads and essential public services. Oil tycoon Harold Hamm doesn't think it's a good idea. Of course not. He and his oil company cronies told the Legislature where to set the lowest gross production taxes in the U.S. in the first place, and they did it.

I'm an old Republican, but I am disappointed in the lack of leadership by our Republican House, Republican Senate and Republican Gov. Mary Fallin. They have been in charge since 2008. Looks like it's time for a change. Anybody got one of those voter registration forms?

Red Goldfarb
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

Two respected leaders on the World Stage, politically and spiritually, are Pope Francis and the

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RED LIGHT DISTRICT

Legislative Session Proves Where The Power Is Vested. Hint: It's Not In The People.

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

With two weeks left in session, the Legislature's Democratic leaders finally were invited into the 2017-18 budget negotiations.

Gov. Mary Fallin was there. So were the top Republicans, House Speaker Charles McCall and Senate President Mike Schulz.

Also present – metaphorically, via speed dial – were Oklahoma's oil and gas barons, including Continental's Harold Hamm and Devon's Larry Nichols.

Contextually, that is all you need to know about the 2017 Oklahoma Legislature, a session which will live in infamy for its venality, perfidy and ineptitude.

Historically, Oklahoma's deepest pockets have wielded outsize influence at NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd., mostly through threat of withholding campaign contributions or funneling them to opponents. This year, energy titans all but sat at The People's negotiating table, asserting a veto-like authority over what they would and would not accept, the greater good be damned.

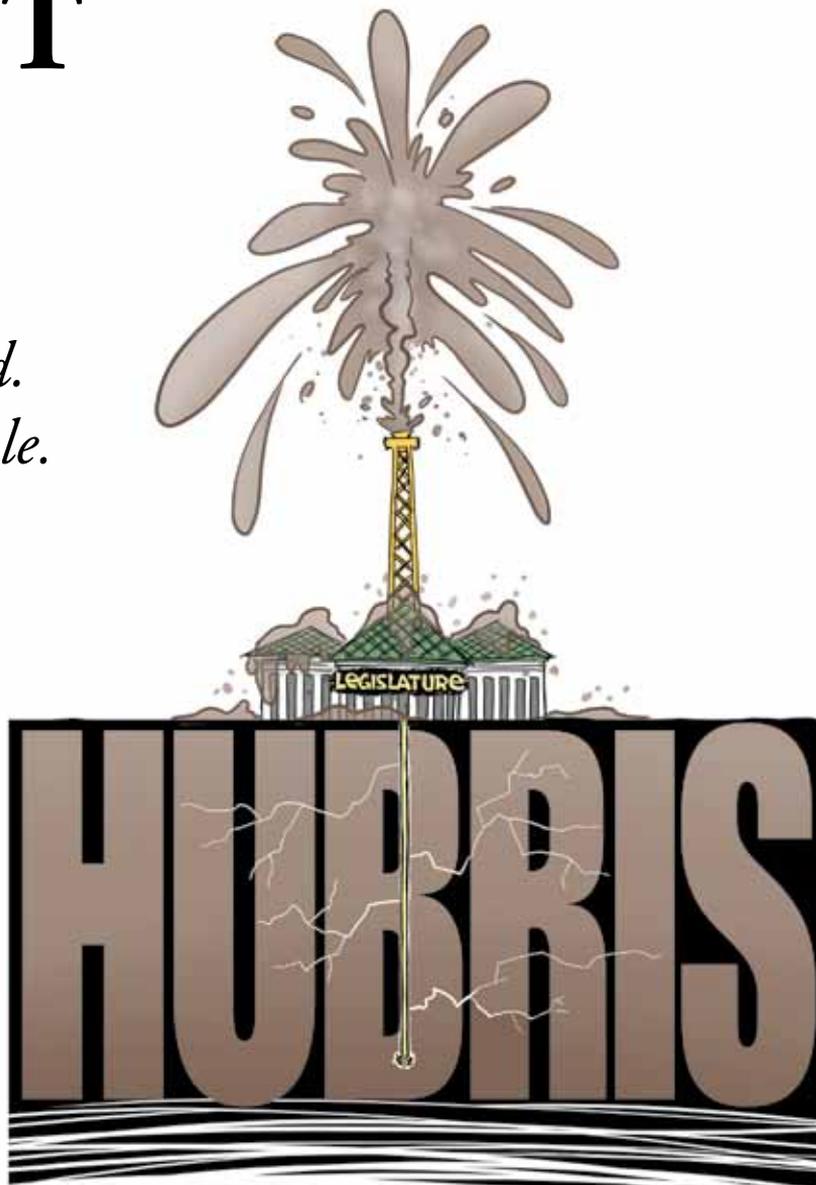
What Oklahomans who elected GOP supermajorities in the House and Senate and a Republican governor got was a Legislature built for Carbon Kings.

Threatened by a wind energy boom? Get your elected minions to pull the plug on tax credits designed to encourage the renewable power industry.

Not willing to give up your own government incentives, including the nation's lowest gross production tax? You know who to call.

Fearing Oklahoma could be next for a Dakota Access Pipeline-style protest? Put your legislative supermajorities to work criminalizing free speech.

Hubris, fueled by the mother of all political ste-



roids: the Okie Oligarchs.

The result was a legislative session that failed to set Oklahoma on a more sustainable, long-term fiscal course, bowing instead to the greedy demands of the haves at the expense of the have-nots.

Don't be fooled by claims that vital state services were held harmless. A standstill budget is a budget cut. Costs continue to rise. Population growth means higher demand for services.

Worse, lawmakers played a wreckless – and most likely, illegal – shell game in which they rammed through millions of dollars in higher taxes by ignoring the state Constitution's prohibition against enacting new revenue measures in the session's final five days and without the necessary three-fourths vote of both legislative houses.

The rightwing Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs already is threatening a court challenge to a measure capping personal income tax deductions, forecast to

yield \$102 million in new revenue.

Can OKC attorney Jerry Fent be far behind? He routinely files suit when the Legislature reinterprets the Constitution for its own purposes. Can it get any more blatant than this: Lawmakers couldn't get the votes to pass a \$1.50 per pack cigarette tax hike, so they attached a \$1.50 per pack "cessation" fee instead. Clever.

It's difficult to imagine that lawmakers will not be back in special session once the state Supreme Court passes judgment on the budgetary and tax hijinks.

The problem is, with Hamm and Co. in effect calling the shots, it's not likely the Legislature, at least in its current form, can summon the political courage to solve the state's long-term fiscal crisis – which requires restoration of income tax cuts and elimination of most corporate welfare.

In the meantime, Oklahomans watch helplessly as the best teachers depart for neighboring states that pay higher salaries, public school class sizes explode and school weeks shrink, state prisons teeter on the brink of a federal court takeover or riots, college tuition soars, road and bridge projects get mothballed, rural hospitals and nursing facilities go bankrupt ...

Here are five things to ponder as the casualties from the legislative train wreck become more obvious:

OLIGARCHS

The only thing that offsets money is people power. It was on display at the Capitol this spring.

Thousands of rank-and-file Oklahomans packed the rotunda and legislative halls and wrote and called, demanding lawmakers fix the state budget's structural deficit. They didn't win, but they turned up the heat.

You think this was a tough session for lawmakers, grappling with a \$1 billion budget hole? Wait until they face similar, if not bigger headaches next year – *an election year* – because they didn't have the political courage to make the hard revenue-raising decisions now.

Most incumbents won't face the voters until next year. But this summer and fall, there are five special elections to fill open legislative seats. Voters could use them to register their displeasure with the GOP supermajority.

Oklahomans unhappy with the status quo – and the power of the energy oligarchs – need to get involved in the two Senate [Districts 44 and 45] and three House [Districts 46, 75 and 76] races up for grabs between July and November.

TERM LIMITS

Voters surely now understand they were sold a bill of goods with term limits. Constant legislative turnover shifts nearly all political power to special interests. They return year after year to wine-and-dine inexperienced lawmakers who often can't find the restroom, much less know how to craft a bill.

The result is a dearth of real legislative leadership and an increase in the number of political ideologues who know the cost of everything and value of nothing.

They ignore the damage of draconian budget cuts on vital state services that help real, hard-working folks scrambling to keep food on their tables and roofs overhead. They regard those who rely on state services as "takers" – not fellow Oklahomans whose circumstances cry out for compassion, for a hand-up not a hand-out. They cannot grasp that investments in common and higher education, in services for the developmentally disabled and mentally ill, and in roads and bridges yield enormous dividends for a small state finding its way in a global economy.

It's time for Oklahomans to revisit term limits.

STATE QUESTION 640

It was no small matter that 51 members of the Oklahoma House – all Republicans – voted to raise taxes in early May, a testament to the cacophony of voices demanding lawmakers do right by rank-and-file Oklahomans, not just the silk-stocking elite.

Is this a turning point for Oklahoma politically? Is this the moment that ignites a grass-roots movement to repeal SQ 640, requiring a legislative supermajority or statewide vote to raise taxes?

Perhaps. But only this much is certain: These are not happy days for the GOP's legislative supermajority as Oklahomans come to realize they were sold false gold with the Republican takeover of state government.

You see, SQ 640 wasn't really about keeping wild-eyed legislative liberals from spending the state into oblivion. It actually was about dismantling and discrediting government, creating a system where the rich get richer and the rest, well, you're on your own.

The hard-right ideologues that promoted and bankrolled the 1992 state question were the brains behind the Republican revolution that supplanted a century of Democratic power in Oklahoma.

Today, after only six years of total control at the Capitol, the GOP's legislative supermajority reaps the rewards of a state question that makes it all but impossible for lawmakers to increase revenue, no matter the emergency.

Fifty-one House votes was a majority, but it was not enough to increase taxes. How does that SQ 640 straightjacket fit now?

It's an artificial barrier that has done real harm to the state. Surely this is something that Republicans and Democrats can now agree must be fixed.

BUDGET ONLY SESSION

The drumbeat for a budget-only session every other year is likely to intensify after this spring's epic failure.

The notion is sound: force lawmakers to focus on fiscal issues only and craft a two-year budget that by necessity would require more forward thinking. But it is politically naïve to think it would solve the state's fiscal problems.

What it actually would do is open the door to policy only sessions that would unleash the legislative ideologues to pursue their worst instincts. You can

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Oklahoma's Two Legislatures: Do We Really Need Both?

BY CAL HOBSON

Every state elects a group of leaders to write laws that regulate the behavior of the rest of us, but, of course, Oklahoma often prefers to be unique or different – some would say even quaint or curious. So, contrary to what you were taught in school, we residents of the 46th state have managed to develop, over time, two very active law-making bodies. You didn't know that. Let me explain.

First, there is our well-known Legislature that recently adjourned following another disastrous four-month fling in OKC. Like previous ones, it slashed funding for public schools, higher education, health care, your personal safety, the environment, and other responsibilities that most folks think are important.

Of course, the authors of this annual fiscal folly will claim otherwise via press releases, radio and TV spots, interviews, campaign events, tweets, emails, texts and snapchats. They most certainly have a right to their own opinions on the matter – just not their own facts.

And one devastating, indisputable fact is that the terrible budget just passed is financed by numerous unconstitutional proposals Republican honchos dreamed up in the very last week of May.

Fortunately for the rest of us, such silliness requires our second Legislature to now spring into action. The entity is better known as the Oklahoma Supreme Court and, as usual, this third branch of government will spend several months, and tens of thousands of your tax dollars, striking down almost all of the foolishness disguised as the next budget to fund core public services.

Unlike our clueless lawmakers, these nine jurists know their jobs well, take them seriously and they also understand the oath of office they swear to uphold is more than just a bunch of words. It is their personal commitment to support and defend our 110-year-old founding document.

Not by accident it is also the identical pledge taken last November by members of the current Legisla-



ture. Obviously it should not be knowingly violated, ignored or abused, which, of course, our slipshod solons did daily during the just-concluded session.

Therefore, many such illegal proposals now await the signature of Gov. Mary Fallin, who, in all likelihood, will join in this absurd charade by signing them. In order to drive up your blood pressure let me cite just a few examples of this child's play, aka Okie legislating.

1. As plainly prohibited by our Constitution, no revenue-raising bills can be passed during the last five days of each annual session. But no matter. There were many, including SB 867, the \$1.50 per pack tax increase on cigarettes, and in separate legislation, a 1.25% sales tax will soon be added to the purchase of a vehicle, new or used. Space limits listing further examples but there are about a dozen more waiting to surprise you and your billfold or purse.

2. Logrolling – defined as packing more than one subject into a single bill – is strictly verboten. Pick your poison in this category [there are several to choose from] but one stands out for me: House Floor Leader Jon Echols, R-OKC, explained with a straight face and angry voice that the new and desperately needed Real ID law coupled with revised standards for baby seats in vehicles fit neatly into one statute. As Dave Barry would say, I am not mak-

ing this up. Giving a further bad name to the profession, Echols is a real lawyer with five years of service in the House of Representatives. Sure couldn't tell by watching or listening ... which I did.

3. At least one bill that had been vetoed earlier this session by the governor was inserted verbatim in another for her signature, thus avoiding the two-thirds vote required for a legal override. But who cares?

4. Apparently no one in the Legislature bothers to read *Robert's Rules of Order*, first published in 1876, to guide law-making bodies on how to proceed legally. Therefore, the only connection I can find between the words "germane" and "brain" is that they rhyme. Last session it was the shortage of the latter that allowed abuse of the former by the endless placement of befuddled presiding officers into the speaker's chair, some of whom had been in the Legislature for only a few months. They ruled improperly on important "points of order" like they were umpiring t-ball games during Memorial weekend. From what I observed, they are probably better umpires than legislators and, at least for the kids at play, I hope so.

Therefore, and as a nearly 30-year member of the Legislature, it pains me deeply to suggest that this branch of government should probably just be abolished. Far too many of its members are inept, unwilling to learn or listen, and they almost always ignore the priorities as provided to them by the people they claim to represent.

The clearest example of this cavalier behavior was displayed by Rep. Scott Biggs, R-Chickasha, as he played rope-a-dope with the criminal justice reforms overwhelmingly approved by voters last year. Like his now-departed but indicted Senate friend Ralph Shortey, Biggs declared with certainty and arrogance that voters just didn't understand what they approved at the polls. In other words, we are just a bunch of dummies.

Perhaps true, given some of the folks we've been sending to the People's Building. But what most of us commoners do understand is that the 10th best-

paid lawmakers in the nation indulge frequently at the ample troughs and taps provided regularly by hundreds of well-heeled lobbyists. They then cast their votes as directed by their ringmasters, often late at night and at the last possible second. Notably, the Ringling Brothers Circus gave its final performance May 21, but the elephants fed, watered, praised and stabled in our state Capitol are apparently just getting started.

Let me be clear. I am not saying our solons are bought and paid for by the wealthy special interests that troll in droves the halls, committee rooms, offices and rotunda of the Capitol. Of course not. They are only rented for a period of four months, then sent home to rest, recharge their batteries, mislead their constituents and replenish already bulging campaign coffers in preparation for next year's predetermined election results. Say what?

It's true because over 98% of these "public servants" who ask the voters to retain them will be overwhelmingly re-elected ... unless, of course, they are caught with a juvenile in a motel room, past midnight, smoking dope and behaving disgustingly. Then that election might be close.

After all, Oklahomans are a very forgiving bunch as proven every other year when many teachers routinely vote to re-elect their Republican representatives and senators. However, in doing so, they are not unique. Tens of thousands of uninsured Sooners also cast ballots against their own best interests by voting for members of the majority party who then regularly and gleefully deny them health insurance that otherwise would be available under the Affordable Care Act. Good grief. Makes me want to cry.

In summation, the situation along NE 23rd St. has deteriorated to the point the Oklahoma Legislature is so dysfunctional, incompetent and dishonest that it makes our federal Congress appear stable, competent and honest by comparison.

Now that is perhaps the unkindest cut of all. *Cal Hobson, a Lexington Democrat, served in the Oklahoma Legislature from 1978-2006, including one term as Senate President Pro Tempore.*

Dumb, Dumber, Dumbest

With apologies to the late Art Linkletter, Oklahoma lawmakers say and do the darndest things.

Consider these inanities from Reps. Justin Humphrey, John Bennett and Mike Ritze, who formed a Rogue's Gallery of this session's goober-speakers:

In proposing legislation that would require a woman seeking an abortion to first obtain written permission from her sexual partner, Humphrey, R-Lane, said: "I believe one of the breakdowns in our society is that we have excluded the man out of all of these types of decisions. I understand that [women] feel like that is their body. I feel like it is a separate - what I call them is, is you're a 'host.' And you know when you enter into a relationship you're going to be that host and

so, you know, if you pre-know that then take all precautions and don't get pregnant."

Bennett, R-Sallisaw, refused to meet with Muslim students at the Capitol until they completed a questionnaire that included these questions: "Do you beat your wife?" And "Do you denounce the terrorist organization Hamas?" Of course, Bennett is infamous for denouncing Islam as a "cancer in our nation that needs to be cut out."

Ritze, R-Broken Arrow, offered a solution to Oklahoma's fiscal crisis: "identify" an estimated 82,000 non-English speaking public school students and "turn them over to ICE to see if they truly are citizens ... Do we really have to educate noncitizens?"

Budget Leaves State Services Massively Underfunded

BY DAVID BLATT

After months of wrangling, legislative leaders finally introduced budget bills late on the last Tuesday of legislative session, just three days before the deadline to adjourn. This budget appropriates \$6.86 billion for FY 2018 – almost the same amount as FY 2017 after mid-year cuts and supplemental appropriations. But compared to the budget of eight years ago, this budget is more than 15% less when adjusted for inflation, a decrease of about \$1.25 billion.

Even as they worked to rush this budget through before adjournment, state leaders did not describe it in glowing terms.

House Appropriations and Budget chair Leslie Osborn provided a blunt assessment when presenting the budget Tuesday evening: “These are horrible funding levels. We are massively underfunded in state government.”

Gov. Mary Fallin said the plan “keeps our government from shutting down ... unfortunately it leaves many agencies facing cuts for the sixth year in a row.”

Lawmakers developed the budget knowing they had about \$800 million less revenue for FY 2018. The burning question all session was how to raise additional revenues to fill the budget hole and avoid devastating cuts to services.

Efforts to reach an agreement between Republicans and Democrats on tax increases that could clear the three-fourths supermajority hurdle of SQ 640 fell apart in the final week. This led Republican leaders to move ahead with only revenue measures that they claim do not fall under the legal definition of a “revenue bill” and thus could be approved with a simple majority.

The budget provides flat funding or small increases to about 20 agencies. However, even the relatively protected agencies may be forced to cut services and programs.

For example, common education was given a \$22 million increase to cover increased employee health care costs, but state aid funding will remain \$180 million below 2009 even as the student population has increased by 50,000 students – the deepest cuts in per pupil state aid funding in the nation. And despite the legislators’ promise to provide teachers their first pay raise in 11 years, they again failed to get that done.

The Department of Veteran’s Affairs took a cut of less than 1%, but that will provide little chance of increasing staffing at veterans care facilities where

staffing shortages have contributed to neglect and deaths of patients. The department has seen its state funding cut by over 20% since 2009.

Meanwhile, most agencies are facing cuts of just under 5% compared to last year. In most cases, the cuts are stacked onto deep cuts from previous years. Higher education will have its appropriations cut over 25% since 2009. The result will be program and staff cuts, and no doubt further tuition increases will be on the table.

Other agencies have been hit even worse: the Health Department is now down 29% from 2009, the Agriculture Department is down 33%, the Department of Environmental Quality is down 41%, and the Oklahoma Arts Council is down 46%.

Some lawmakers will claim that this budget was the best they could do given the size of the budget hole. But in fact, many reasonable revenue options were left on the table, including raising the gross production tax rate on new production, rescinding some of the income tax cuts of recent years, ending the capital gains deduction, and many others.

Oklahomans deserve better than a budget announced at the 11th hour that once again fails the families and communities of this state.

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



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Oklahoma Oil And Gas And The Charade Of Greed

BY MARK Y.A. DAVIES

Harold Hamm and Larry Nichols are desperate to keep Oklahoma's gross production tax on oil and gas at extremely low levels because they know that if they keep it low again this year, they will likely be able to keep it low for a number of years to come.

Here's why: They know that the Saudis are cutting back on production to stabilize and increase global oil prices. They also know that the Oklahoma Legislature they own will likely pass lessened restrictions on long lateral horizontal drilling in non-shale formations.

In other words, Hamm and Nichols know that a boom is likely on the horizon, and they want to enjoy that boom with the lowest GPT possible.

They also know that with a boom on the horizon there will be an increase in drilling and production and therefore an increase in revenue coming to the state from GPT even if there is not a restoration of a higher GPT. The increase in revenue will by no means cover the budget shortfall, but it will be an increase.

When this happens, Hamm and Nichols will say "See, the Oklahoma Legislature did the right thing by keeping the GPT low because it led to an increase in production and therefore an increase in revenue for the state, and they will create a bunch of fancy videos with the chamber of commerce and the Oklahoma Energy Resources Board touting the return of economic prosperity to OKC and Oklahoma and highlight oil and gas as the fuel for that prosperity.

What they won't tell you is that the increase in drilling and production that will likely occur in the next couple of years will have almost nothing to do with a low GPT rate and will have almost everything to do with global oil and gas prices, and perhaps some to do with less strict environmental regulations that will endanger our health and the climate over the long run but make it cheaper to drill wells and transport oil and gas.

They also will not tell you that in the last boom we cut education more than any other state owing to all of the tax cuts we keep giving to the wealthy and the oil and gas companies.

The oil and gas companies will have so much extra money from the coming boom that they will be able to increase their charitable giving, which will still be a tiny fraction of what they should be paying in taxes, and they will use this tax deductible giving as free advertising to claim that they are responsible corporate citizens even though many of the agencies they donate to might not need to exist if they paid in taxes

here what they have to pay in other states.

The problem is that enough people keep believing this charade of greed and will thank the oil and gas companies for leading the state from a more horrible state of hell to a less horrible state of hell, and our politicians and their oil and gas patrons will pat themselves on the back for keeping the GPT low, which will mean billions to the oil and gas companies in the years ahead while our schools, hospitals, mental healthcare, and other basic services continue to languish; and we gullible Oklahomans will likely continue to reward them for this charade.

This is why it is so critical to restore the 7% GPT now, so we can enjoy a reasonable recovery towards a more flourishing state in the years ahead. Will we have the political will to make these changes, or will it continue to be the same as it ever was?

Oh, and by the way, with higher global oil and gas prices and higher production, there will be more waste water produced; so unless we figure out a way to deal with that appropriately, get ready for some more shaking, and guess who gets to pay for the earthquake damage?!

Mark Y.A. Davies is the Wimberly Professor of Social and Ecological Ethics and director of the World House Institute for Social and Ecological Responsibility at Oklahoma City University.

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ABOVE: From left, honorees David Hall, Wanda Jo Peltier Stapleton and Tom Gallagher.
LEFT: Stapleton stumps for the Equal Rights Amendment at state Capitol rally more than three decades ago.

Amnesty Honors OKC Activists

BY RENA GUAY

Amnesty International's OKC Chapter honored former state Rep. Wanda Jo Peltier Stapleton with the David C. Craighead Human Rights Defender Award at an event held at Church of the Open Arms on May 30.

The award is named for a longtime chapter member, former state Rep. David Craighead, who died in 2016, and is intended to recognize a lifetime of service on behalf of human rights.

This was the first year for the chapter to bestow awards, with the goal of honoring significant achievements in human rights advocacy by Oklahoma citizens. Two other categories were also awarded, Student Activist of the Year and Member of the Year.

Stapleton was honored for her decades of work promoting the human rights of women in Oklahoma. She headed up the Women's Political Caucus, which was the second largest WPC in the U.S. during the time of her leadership [only New York state was larger]. She also was a leader in the Equal Rights Amendment campaign in Oklahoma. She served in the Oklahoma Legislature for 10 years, and used the platform to similarly advocate for justice and equality.

The issues of concern to her were extensive and she is a well-known writer of letters and op-eds [including to *The Observer*], speaker at public meetings and sign-holder at rallies. Her colleagues know her as a strong organizer who kept them very busy on the myriad details of a successful campaign for change.

Tom Gallagher was given the Member of the Year

certificate. His many years of dedicated volunteer service to the organization is unparalleled, according to Amnesty OKC Group Co-Coordinator Sara Bana. "Tom never seeks attention, but is always ready to staff a table at events or concerts, which is a major part of our outreach work."

The Student Activist of the Year award was bestowed on David S. Hall, who attends Oklahoma City University. Hall has been involved in numerous activist causes, but most notably to improve the foster care system in Oklahoma and the U.S. He came through that system and thus brings a very passionate and knowledgeable voice to the matter. He has helped write and get passed several pieces of legislation in the Oklahoma Legislature.

His activism also included work with the Human Community Network and the Think Twice Oklahoma campaign to oppose SQ 776 in 2016. He found time for all this while maintaining his studies and being part of OKCU's student government.

Student activism, a key part of Amnesty's mission and outreach, was included in this year's awards in order to promote young people who are getting an early start in improving the world, whether or not they are working within the Amnesty organization.

Amnesty International Oklahoma City meets on the first Monday of the month at 6:30 p.m. at 3131 N. Pennsylvania in OKC. All are welcome. Their website is amnestyok.wordpress.com, and their Facebook page is facebook.com/amnestyokc.

Privatizing SoonerCare Threatens Fragile Lives, Federal Funding

BY CARLY PUTNAM

Oklahoma's efforts to privatize expensive care for the most fragile SoonerCare patients was contentious from the beginning.

In 2015, HB 1566 directed the Oklahoma Health Care Authority, which administers the state's Medicaid [SoonerCare] program, to initiate requests for proposals for care coordination models for the program's aged, blind, and disabled members.

This would be no small change. More than 100,000 SoonerCare members are aged, blind, or have one or more disabilities, and while they make up less than 20% of Oklahoma's Medicaid population, their care constitutes nearly half of its spending. These individuals tend to be very medically complex, with co-oc-

curing chronic conditions and in-home care needs. As such, they are very sensitive to changes in their health care.

Lawmakers pushing for the transition were very clear that it was a cost-saving effort, leaving members and advocates concerned that their health needs would be overruled by budgetary concerns. Nevertheless, the transition to privatized care for aged, blind and disabled SoonerCare members continued with the request for proposals released in November of 2016. Original timelines suggested a contract would be awarded in spring of this year. It's since been pushed back to June at the earliest due to an administrative hiccup.

Then this spring, providers warned that a recent federal change in federal Medicaid rules could mean that transitioning to privatized managed care would jeopardize hundreds of millions of dollars in Medicaid payments to Oklahoma providers. According to the Oklahoma Hospital Association, the Oklahoma Association of Health Care Providers, and others, Oklahoma safety net providers could be out as much as \$650 million.

A majority of lawmakers tried to do something about it. House Concurrent Resolution 1009 was introduced earlier this month and quickly picked up more than 50 co-authors before easily passing the House 83-4. The measure would have directed the Health Care Authority to refrain from awarding a managed care contract without legislative approval – which can't happen until next year.

More than half the Senate signed on as co-authors, more or less assuring its passage if it was heard — except then it was never heard. Just two companies [Aetna and Global Health] ended up submitting bids to take over this program, and a lobbyist from Aetna was at the Capitol on the final day of session working against the bill.

Speaking to Oklahoma Watch when the privatization process kicked off, OHCA Chief Strategy Officer Buffy Heater said, "There is no room for failure. We have to get this right, because their lives really



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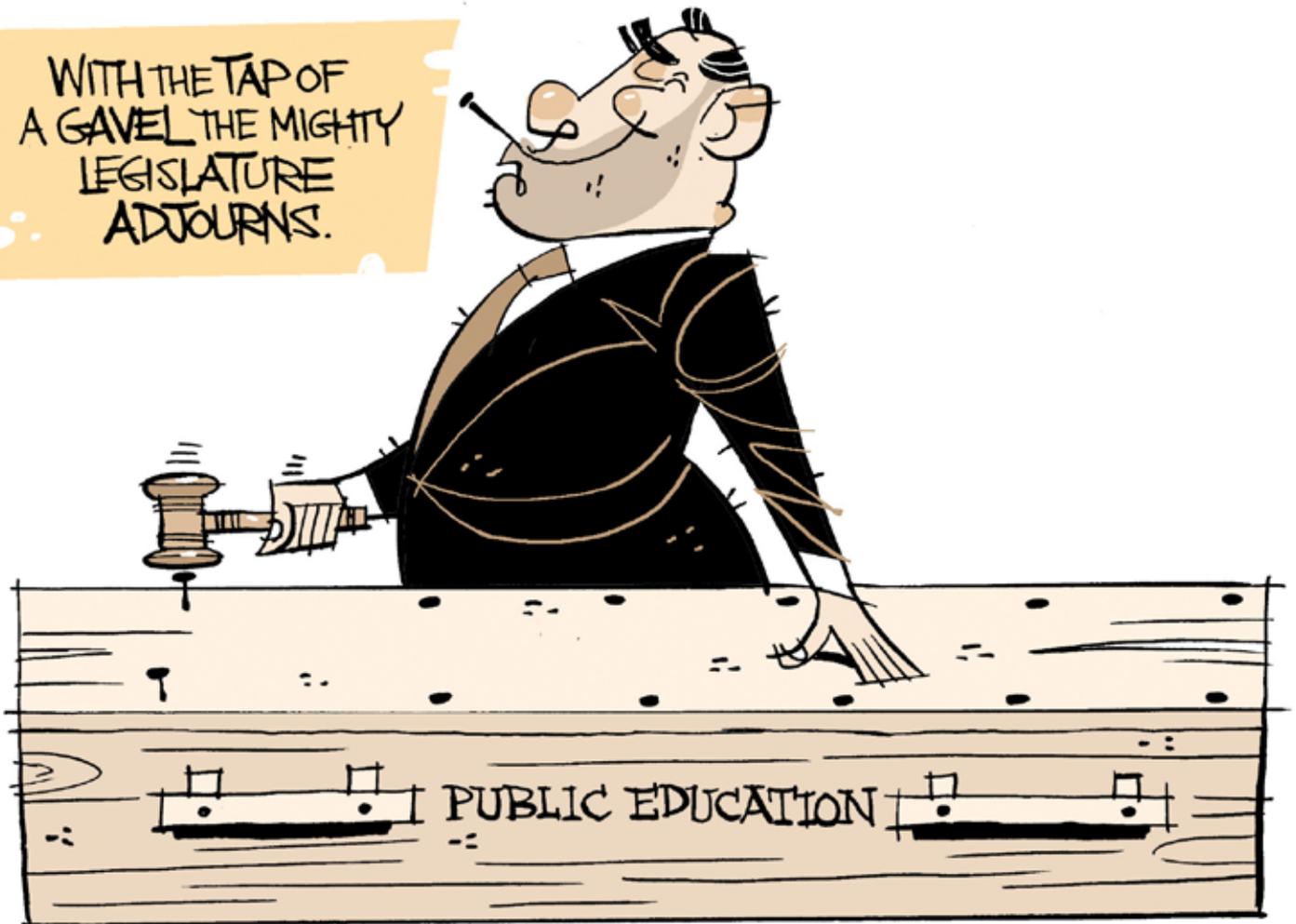
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All My Ex's Teach In Texas

BY SHAWN P. SHEEHAN

Editor's Note: In the April Observer, former Oklahoma Teacher of the Year Shawn Sheehan openly wrestled with whether to remain in Oklahoma or head to Texas for a higher salary. Here is his answer:

All my ex's teach in Texas. And Texas is the place our teachers love to be.

That's the remix of George Strait's classic I've written for Oklahoma. Teaching in Oklahoma can feel like being in a dysfunctional relationship. You've got people telling you to stay and to go. You hear things like, "But we can change. Things will get better soon, we promise." And sometimes you feel pressured to stay in it for the kids.

This is certainly not to make light of actual dysfunctional or abusive relationships between individuals. I've got folks in my family who have suffered through that, so there's no joking here intended. I mean what I say and choose my words carefully.

Teaching in Oklahoma is a dysfunctional relation-

ship. And with a myriad of emotions, I have made the decision to end this relationship.

My wife and I are excited to announce that we have accepted teaching positions in Texas. We are joining many other teachers who have either already left or plan to do so over the next year.

This decision wasn't an easy one. Not by a long shot. Our circle of friends can attest to that. I considered other jobs, tried to find adjunct positions, and my wife and I have worked very hard to pay off our debt in bigger chunks. But at the end of the day, the simple truth is that we can be paid a respectable wage for doing the same job – this job we love very much – by heading out of state.

I'm sorry it's come to this, but I will leave with my head held high. I poured my heart and soul into my teaching at Norman High School. I represented our state at the highest level. I tried to help find funding sources via SQ 779. I ran for state senate. I started a

non-profit focused on teacher recruitment and retention that has spread nationwide. I've done everything I know how to do to try and make things better. We could stay, but it would cost our family – specifically our sweet baby girl. My wife and I are not willing to do that. We, like you, want what's best for our children and she deserves to grow up in a state that values education. And so do your children.

Before I go, I want to address the most frequently overlooked challenge to improving education in Oklahoma: teachers. In my last blog post that caught much attention, I asked, "Should I stay or should I go?" There were two kinds of responses to my post. The majority were to the tune of "We'd hate to see you go, but totally understand and wish you the very best." But there were unexpected critics; ones who actively impede improvements to education in Oklahoma.

There are teachers in this state who say things like, "I'm just in this for the students. If you're not in it for the kids, don't let the door hit you on the way out." This was one response from a teacher who vehemently disagreed with my statements.

Do other teachers out there really think we aren't in this for the students? Who in their right mind teaches in Oklahoma for the money? Of course I'm here for my students, their families, and this community, but I won't apologize for demanding a livable wage. I never said my situation was the reality for all educators. I was simply sharing my story with the world. It wasn't necessary for the teachers out there whose spouses earn more money than us to invalidate my story. They also missed my point about the bigger problem being a lack of funding for education and other core state services.

We won't move the needle forward in education until teachers in this state acknowledge the plight of the teacher next door. It's great that not all of us struggle, but for those of who do, please don't vilify us further. It's not helping. Surely they can imagine what life would be like living single on an Oklahoma teacher salary or what the bank account might look like for two married Oklahoma educators with a seven-month-old daughter.

Oftentimes, I find these are the same teachers who vote against legislation and/or legislators who would help our cause. If my reality isn't yours, is there a need discredit my and our colleagues' stories? How many times will they excuse these budget cuts and "proudly" declare that they'd teach 100 students in a classroom with no supplies and that they'd do it for free because it's all about the kids?

I have one last piece of advice for the incredible, hard-working, passionate, committed, responsible Oklahoma educators out there. While we have our work cut out for us at the state Capitol, and there's much work to be done in our communities, the quickest way we can see tangible results for our students is to have the tough conversations with our co-workers. We have to be better about supporting our teach-

er family and sharing everyone's stories. We need a stronger united front and while this is not meant to be a plug for your local teacher union, I will say they're a great starting point for information, member or not. And we have to stop pushing this idea of teaching as mission work.

I hope all my readers know I have loved every second of teaching in Oklahoma. There are great things happening in our schools every day and I have been honored to be a part of it. I hope I represented teachers well. I hope I shook things up a bit and sparked important conversations from the dinner table to the boardroom. And I hope my and my family's departure, which is among many this year, makes a statement. We're voting with our feet on this one.

My sincere thanks to my students, their families, Norman High's superb faculty and staff, the Oklahoma State Department of Education, and for all the #oklaed supporters out there who will fight on. We're hanging our hat south of the border but it was made in Oklahoma and we won't forget that.

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

Education For A Larger World

BY ANN DAPICE

Oklahoma has a crisis in education – as do other places across the U.S. Insufficient funding by legislators results in too few teachers and the closing of schools. Teachers in Oklahoma are moving to other states for more livable wages. The will to do what is needed for quality education in Oklahoma and elsewhere has been lacking for too long.

Public comments by any number of political figures from the new U.S. president all the way to state legislators demonstrate ignorance that is, at best, embarrassing and, at worst, dangerous. Did these political leaders fail to learn what was made available to them in their schooling or were the schools they attended lacking in what was offered in content and methodology?

Serious concerns compete for attention in the U.S. and the world. They include, but are not limited to, the environment, race relations, healthcare, domestic and foreign terrorism, the newly recognized opioid addiction, imprisonment of the mentally ill, and the few "haves" and the many "have nots."

Why focus here on education? The short and simple answer is that quality education is required to respond to the issues facing us in Oklahoma, the U.S. and the world. The issues are complex and require the ability to analyze and understand the relationships of each to the other – and to each of us as individuals.

Most of us have had both positive and negative experiences in schooling. A teacher can make a big difference in what is learned at the time and remembered throughout life. As a third grader at a Tulsa school I had a rigid teacher who made my life, and the lives of other students, miserable. She seemed to enjoy embarrassing us in class.

At another school the following year I had a pleasant teacher. Every Monday she brought the lesson she'd taught in Sunday School the day before and shared it with the class. I remember wondering at the time how the Jewish student who sat behind me felt about her lessons.

But it was our principal who probably had the greatest impact on me. In fifth grade he would sit with us by the fence at the edge of the playground during recess. We asked him why he was leaving the school

in Tulsa?

We are daily bombarded at the state and national level by the embarrassing ignorance of our leaders. There is often overt refusal by these leaders to accept a great deal of scientific research on global warming, racism, healthcare, terrorism, addiction, mental illness, and the great disparity between the haves and have nots.

In Oklahoma, we have legislators who, while denying the need for taxes, use taxpayer money in trivial and often demeaning legislation that seeks to worsen life for Oklahoma citizens. Our state has refused the Medicare expansion that would lessen the impact of illness on its poorest citizens. At the national level, progressive programs to address these and other issues are being dismantled daily by our new president and those we voted into office.

But that is the point. Our president and leaders were elected by citizens who agreed with the policies that were proposed. There was frequent voicing of religious rhetoric in campaigning, but there is a lack of concern for others, not even a universally recognized Golden Rule – a societal id with no superego to counter the id.

This is a moral problem. What can education do about narcissistic leaders and followers – some who talk tough and some who mesmerize in soft preacher-like voices that distract from their lived actions?

and he told us he was going back to school to obtain a doctorate in education.

He didn't just sit next to us, but talked with us on that school playground – long before studies showed that children responded best to adults who sat not above them but with them at their level. And research would come to show how important flexible and egalitarian, not authoritarian, teaching is to the development of cognitive complexity in the brain.

The same research would show the danger of political authoritarianism.

So, what is education? The root of the word educate comes from the Latin word *ducere*, or *educere*, which means to lead out. This understanding is in marked contrast to what often happens where the goal seems to be to have students “cram in” as much information as possible.

When a large amount of information is needed in school tests, we have “cram” sessions. Too often it is understood that the material will not be needed or used again, thus negating its importance. After all, what is used in a continuing way will be remembered because its use is reinforced.

Did our present leaders doubt the importance of what they were taught? Or, also likely, did their schooling not cover such inconvenient facts as the genocide of American Indians or the 1921 “race riot”

It is the school teacher using her Sunday School lessons in class regardless of the religions of students in the class. She is a “nice” teacher, but it isn't clear how she is addressing the curricular needs of the students. The “other” has not been welcomed in recent politics – whether the other is an immigrant, a member of a minority group, or a person of a different religion.

This is a moral problem. What can education do about narcissistic leaders and followers – some who talk tough and some who mesmerize in soft preacher-like voices that distract from their lived actions?

Education that helps people sort out the relationships of complex issues to their own experiences is critical. After the November elections, farmers have suddenly realized that they needed international trade to sell their goods. After the elections, some have realized that they would be left out in the replacement of ObamaCare.

Education must always respond to what the individuals understand and experience in their daily lives. It is not enough to post policies on websites. These policies compete with postings of all kinds of misinformation chosen to seduce voters to vote in a particular way – often with no immediate way to refute what is said.

It has long been understood that democracy re-

quires an educated public. As our world has moved from small tribes, to nations, and to the world, the requisite knowledge has often been missing.

Small groups are typically egalitarian and communitarian. The needs of the group are obvious and seen by all. It is understood that if something happens to one member, it will affect all in the group. As groups enlarge, it is not so obvious what the needs are and how to meet them.

This is the new challenge we have. We must induce [again from the Latin “inducer”] each other from known realities to learn to respond to the needs not only of ourselves, our families, and our country, but also the needs of the world.

It is a world that makes our clothes, our cars, our food and so it directly affects us all.

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.

Democrats Must Reclaim Mantle As Public Ed Champs

BY DIANE RAVITCH

Of all the corrupt, unqualified, and extremist characters Donald Trump has tapped to lead his administration, none has generated the tsunami of liberal outrage whipped up by Education Secretary Betsy DeVos. And with all due respect to Jeff Sessions, there’s good reason for the backlash: The billionaire Amway heiress from Michigan, who long ago made “school choice” her passion project, is the first education secretary in history to be hostile to the very idea of public education.

Prodded by grassroots activists and what’s left of teachers’ unions, Democrats went all out to defeat DeVos. George Miller, the former congressman from California, slammed her plan to create a \$20 billion “school choice” program that would underwrite private and religious schools, calling it “a perfect storm of ignorance, money, and power.” Sen. Al Franken grilled DeVos at her confirmation hearing, drawing out her jaw-dropping ignorance of federal programs. Sen. Michael Bennet called her nomination an “insult to schoolchildren and their families, to teachers and principals and communities fighting to improve their

public schools all across the country.” And when DeVos was confirmed by a vote of 51 to 50, over unanimous Democratic opposition, Sen. Cory Booker went on Facebook, “frustrated and saddened,” to sound a sorrowful note: “Somewhere in America, right now, there is a child who is wondering if this country stands up for them.”

Listening to their cries of outrage, one might imagine that Democrats were America’s undisputed champions of public education. But the resistance to DeVos obscured an inconvenient truth: Democrats have been promoting a conservative “school reform” agenda for the past three decades.

Some did it because they fell for the myths of “accountability” and “choice” as magic bullets for better schools. Some did it because “choice” has centrist appeal. Others sold out public schools for campaign contributions from the charter industry and its Wall Street patrons. Whatever the motivations, the upshot is clear: The Democratic Party has lost its way on public education. In a very real sense, Democrats paved the way for DeVos and her plans to privatize the school system.

Thirty years ago, there was a sharp difference between Republicans and Democrats on education. Republicans wanted choice, testing, and accountability. Democrats wanted equitable funding for needy districts, and highly trained teachers. But in 1989, with Democrats reeling from three straight presidential losses, the lines began to blur. That year, when President George H.W. Bush convened an education summit of the nation’s governors, it was a little-known Arkansas Democrat named Bill Clinton who drafted a bipartisan set of national goals for the year 2000 [“first in the world” in mathematics, for starters].

The ambitious benchmarks would be realized by creating, for the first time, national achievement standards and tests. Clinton ran on the issue, defeated Bush, and passed Goals 2000, which provided grants to states that implemented their own achievement metrics.

The Democrats had dipped a toe in “school reform.” Before long, they were completely immersed. After George W. Bush made the “Texas miracle” of improved schools a launching pad for the presidency, many Democrats swallowed his bogus claim that testing students every year had produced amazing results. In 2001, Ted Kennedy, the Senate’s liberal lion, teamed with Bush to pass No Child Left Behind.

For the first time, the government was mandating not only “accountability” [code for punishing teachers and schools who fall short], but also “choice” [code for handing low-performing public schools over to charter operators].

When Barack Obama took office in 2009, educators hoped he would return the party to its public school roots. By then, even Bill Clinton was calling No Child Left Behind a “train wreck.” Instead, Obama and Education Secretary Arne Duncan doubled down on testing, accountability, and choice. Their Race to the

Top program was, in essence, No Child Left Behind II: It invited states to compete for \$5 billion in funds by holding teachers accountable for test scores, adopting national standards, opening more charter schools, and closing low-scoring public schools.

The Obama years saw an epidemic of new charters, testing, school closings, and teacher firings. In Chicago, Mayor Rahm Emanuel closed 50 public schools in one day. Democratic charter advocates – whose ranks include the outraged Booker and Bennet – have increasingly imported “school choice” into the party’s rhetoric. Booker likes to equate “choice” with “freedom” – even though the entire idea of “choice” was created by white Southerners who were scrambling to defend segregated schools after *Brown v. Board of Education*.

It’s fitting that Trump and DeVos rely on the same language to tout their vision of reform. They’re essentially taking Obama’s formula one step further: expanding “choice” to include vouchers, so parents can use public funding to pay for private and religious schools.

Democrats are up in arms about the privatization scheme, as they should be: It’s a disaster for public schools. But if they’re serious about being the party that treats public education as a cornerstone of democracy, they need to do more than grandstand about the consequences they helped bring about. They need to follow the money – their own campaign money, that is. As Democrats learned years ago, support for mandatory testing and charter schools opens fat wallets on Wall Street. Money guys love deregulation, testing and Big Data, and union-busting.

In 2005, Obama served as the featured speaker at the inaugural gathering of Democrats for Education Reform, which bundles contributions to Democrats who back charter schools: Among its favorites have been those sharp DeVos critics George Miller, Michael Bennet, and Cory Booker. Conservative funders like the Walton Foundation also give generously to charter schools and liberal think tanks such as the Center for American Progress.

The money had its intended effect. When Andrew Cuomo decided to run for governor of New York, he learned that the way to raise cash was to go through the hedge funders at Democrats for Education Reform. They backed him lavishly, and Cuomo repaid them by becoming a hero of the charter movement.

Connecticut Gov. Dan Malloy, often celebrated for his unvarnished liberalism, is another champion of the charter industry; some of its biggest funders live in his state. California Gov. Jerry Brown vetoed a bill to ban for-profit charters in the state, and has resisted efforts to make charters more accountable. As mayor of Oakland, he opened two charter schools.

There are plenty of reasons that Democrats should steer clear of the charter industry. Charter corporations have been repeatedly charged with fraud, nepotism, self-dealing, and conflicts of interest. Many charters make money on complex real-estate deals.

Worst of all are the “cybercharters:” mega-corporations that offer virtual schools, with high attrition, low test scores, and abysmal graduation rates. The biggest cybercharter chain is K12 Inc., started by former junk-bond king Michael Milken and listed on the New York Stock Exchange.

But it’s more than a matter of sleeping with the enemy. School choice doesn’t work, and “evidence-based” Democrats ought to acknowledge it. Charter schools are a failed experiment. Study after study has shown that they do not get better test scores than public schools unless they screen out English-language learners and students with profound disabilities.

It’s well-established that school choice increases segregation, rather than giving low-income students better opportunities. And kids using vouchers actually lose ground in private schools. Support for charters is paving the way for a dual school system – one that is allowed to choose the students it wants, and another that is required to accept all who enroll.

This is what Democrats should be yelling about. And if there’s ever a moment for them to reclaim their mantle as the party of public education, it’s now.

The misguided push for “reform” is currently being led not by Obama and Duncan, but by Trump and DeVos, giving Democrats an opening to shift gears on education – though they’ll lose some of that hedge-fund money. But if 2016 taught Democrats anything, it’s how unwise it was to allow the demolition of organized labor – including teachers’ unions, once a great source of money and grassroots energy. The party needs strong teachers’ unions and it needs their enthusiasm.

The agenda isn’t complicated. Fight privatization of all kinds. Insist on an evidence-based debate about charter schools and vouchers. Abandon the obsession with testing. Fight for equitable funding, with public money flowing to the neediest schools. Acknowledge the importance of well-educated, professional teachers in every classroom.

Follow the example of Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe, who vetoed a bill to expand charters in March. Or Montana Gov. Steve Bullock, who insists that charters employ certified teachers, allow them to unionize, and fall under the control of local school districts. Democrats should take their cue from Bullock when he declares, “I continue to firmly believe that our public education system is the great equalizer.”

There is already an education agenda that is good for children, good for educators, good for the nation, and good for the Democratic Party. It’s called good public schools for everyone. All Democrats have to do is to rediscover it.

Diane Ravitch is research professor at New York University’s Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development and author of Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America’s Public Schools.

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The Deadly Consequences Of Pauls Valley Center's Closing

BY STEVE JARMAN

I was reading Cal Hobson's "The Oklahoma Standard Just Ain't What It Used To Be" [May Observer] and at one point he mentions the word "travesty." At that point I literally had a flashback. Let me tell you the entire story.

Back in January 2015 talk was going around that Gov. Fallin was going to close the Southern Oklahoma Resource Center [SORC]. Later that month I saw Mel Smith, a retired former SORC superintendent, at the barber shop. Mel told me then that there were residents at SORC who could not make it in a group home.

Several days later I ran across a cousin who worked out there. She and I were talking about whether or not SORC was going to be closed. She told me, "But Steve, Gov. Fallin is coming out to take a walking tour

of the facility." I told her that the governor had made up her mind before she ever set foot out of her office.

Late February 2015, it's official: SORC would be closed.

Late March 2015, I ran across Barbara Grant, another SORC retiree. She told me that 13 families had filed suit against the state of Oklahoma. They had family members who had lived there and had died since being moved out. I asked her what the suits were for. She said, "Just name it."

Mid-July 2015, SORC closed its gates. Our local newspaper shows the closed gates on the front page with the headlines, "End of an Era."

In the following Sunday's edition Grace Donaldson, a retired SORC social worker, writes the definitive letter to the editor. The death toll was up to 19. These

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were people who had to wear adult diapers. They could not tell you what they needed much less what they wanted.

Later there is a 20th death. A former resident was placed in one of the two nursing homes we have here in Pauls Valley. That resident raped an old fellow who was bedfast and causes him to die.

I have a relative who works at the other nursing home who told me that they were having trouble accommodating the rapid increase of patients who were being moved into the nursing home where she works.

I spoke to Joe Dorman at the 2015 Oklahoma State Democratic Party convention and asked him if the decision to close SORC was made by a committee or by Gov. Fallin. He said, "It was Mary's decision."

Yes, when I saw the word "travesty" in Cal's article I thought about what happened at SORC. This has to

be one of the greatest travesties in our state's history. I've been telling people ever since that if you or I had done this we would be on Death Row right now and rightfully so.

I ran into former state Rep. Bill Mitchell in the grocery section of our Walmart one day. He told me there would be residents die the day they moved them out of SORC.

Last year I ran for state Senate District 13. While I was knocking on doors I took time to tell one lady what Mel said about not being able to make it in group homes. She said, "They don't even know how to do a trachea." I said, "You used to work out there." She smiled and nodded her head.

It was pitiful. It was a travesty. I don't know what else to say.

Steve Jarman lives in Pauls Valley.

Why We Should All Be Afraid

BY BOB BEARDEN

Here we go again – or as ol' Ronnie might be prone to say, "There he goes again!"

Did he have the right to reveal classified information? Yes, he did, but the way he did it and whom he shared it with are highly problematic and reveals more about how the Trumpster operates sans controls than anything else.

Should he not have talked to his National Security advisor, Gen. McMaster? With a normal, non-sociopath in the Oval Office, one would say yes, because all the past presidents have done that and all would have done that, but not this guy. He operates in a vacuum. He has advisors, but their job is mostly to clean up the messes he makes when he does such things as this and goes off on a tangent, willy-nilly, harum-scarum.

Our past presidents always thought before they took any action, especially dealing with national security issues, but this guy doesn't see himself as a past president might be expected to go, the route of advise and consent. He is the dictator-in-chief and it's his thought [saying he thinks cognitively at all] that since he is the president he has the power.

He thinks like a despotic dictator, not like a president. It isn't so much that he is out of control. It's simply that he has no controls and he sits along somewhere in the West Wing late in the night or early in the morning and tweets and thinks and attempts mightily to put two coherent sentences together, which for him is truly a herculean feat of accomplishment.

He is his own counsel and he doesn't see the need to consult his advisors. That's not what they are there

for. If he strings a couple cognizant ideas together, look out tomorrow. His ideas are always about him and how he will be perceived, not whether what he decides to do makes any real sense to the rest of us.

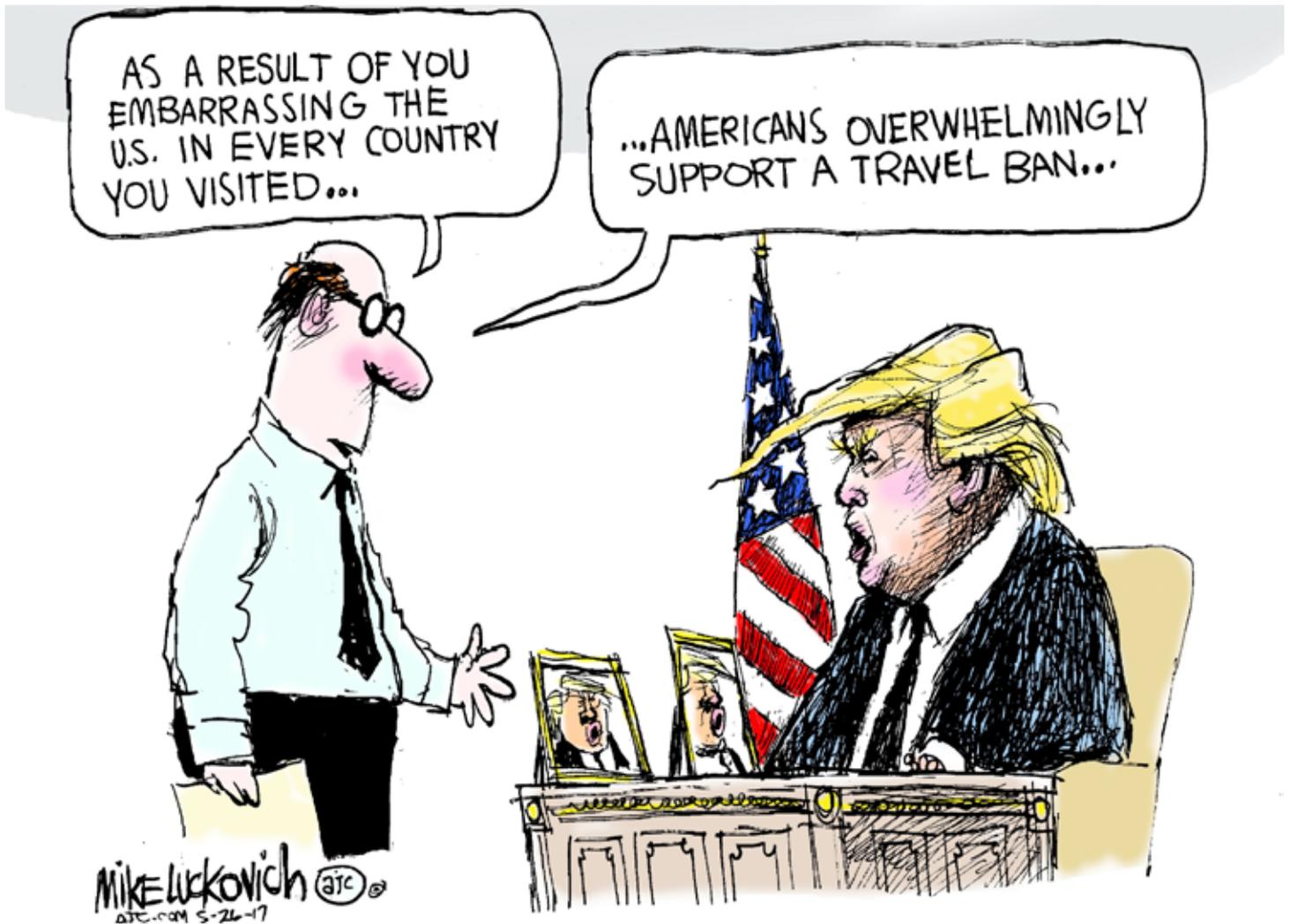
He is in sore need of an ego boost and whatever he decides to do is forever directed in the direction of ways and means to boost his creds as our president. Whether he should do them doesn't enter into the equation. The only consequences he considers is whether he will be considered heroic for what he has done. And that, in and of itself, is what makes him so scary.

If his numbers continue to stay in the cesspool of public opinion, we can expect more and more wild and woolly antics from this guy. He will enviably up the ante if his numbers continue to tank. For the Trumpster, it's all about him. Whatever he does is forever linked to his ego and how much it gets bruised by others.

He doesn't think in whole sentences, only short bursts, most of which are not connected to reality or any kind of world view of actions having consequences. It's not in his DNA to think beyond what the world can do for him. He desperately needs to be taken seriously and what is so very scary is that no one in government really does that when it comes to his actions.

Can you imagine what an uproar there would have been if Barack Obama had acted in this manner or for that matter even Bush the Lessor? Bush the Lessor, for all his lack of intellect, had a pretty good understanding how government worked and what the role of the president was. The Trumpster sees himself as

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an Island in the Stream, isolated in the middle of the night with all the many slights visited upon him each day of his presidency and acts accordingly.

For me that the rub. He has no idea what he is doing and he has no one close to him who will put the brakes upon his errantly erratic ways. He is a cannon that has no aim nor any consideration for what destruction he may unleash. He runs through the night unchecked by constraints that most normal people have that keeps them sane and grounded.

He is back at military school running the world because he can. And it's his perception of reality that makes him so dangerous. For him, reality is blowing the hell out of all who oppose him and even though he likely knows somewhere in his demented mind that he can't do that, it is what pushes him forward. His lies are his only comfort. They are the truth that he sees. It makes no difference that no one else believes them because in his reality show world, real is what he believes it to be.

And for that reason, if for no other we should all be sorely afraid.

Bob Bearden is a trustee with the Central Oklahoma

Labor Federation and a member of Mayflower Congregational Church in Oklahoma City.

SoonerCare

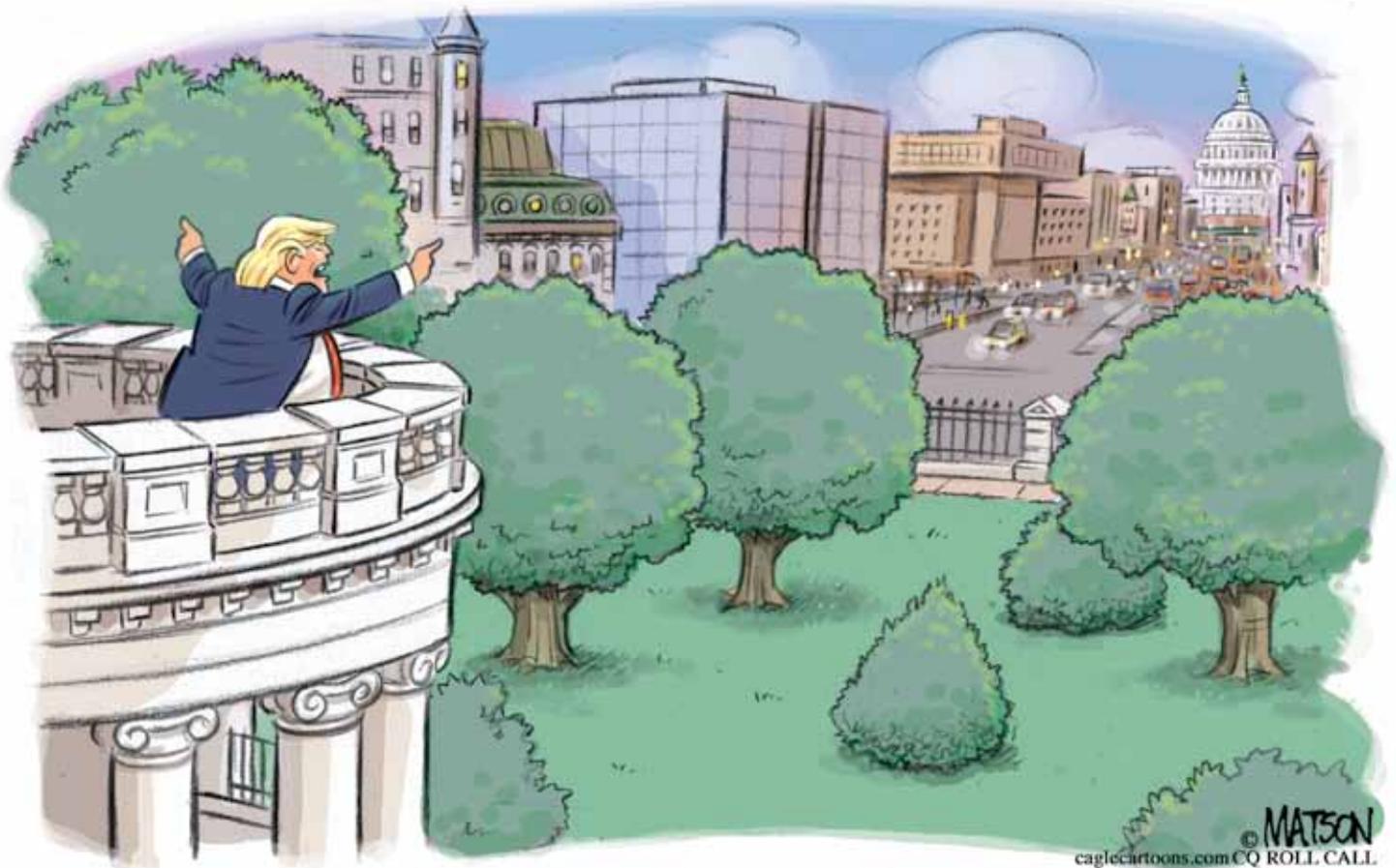
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

hang in the balance.”

She's right – but now, too many variables are outside the Health Care Authority's control to guarantee members' safety. The state's budgetary agonies aside, proposals by Congressional Republicans and the Trump Administration are threatening to devastate Medicaid funding and end the program as we know it. Massive uncertainty on the federal level makes this precisely the wrong time to be further monkeying with a system that more than 100,000 Oklahomans need to survive.

Despite all of this, Oklahoma is poised to move ahead because Senate leadership wouldn't allow a vote on a popular bill.

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



"YOU'RE ALL FIRED!"

What Will It Take, People?

BY VERN TURNER

The volume and intensity of news regarding the Trump Administration is becoming more convoluted than a John LeCarre' spy novel. It seems that the corruption, lies, deceit, sedition, incompetence and embarrassing episodes have no limits with this latter-day Romanov impersonation. With each breaking story line, that wonderfully salient line from *All the President's Men* keeps cropping up: "Follow the money." Yes. The money. It's always been about money for Trump and the Trumpites, hasn't it?

As each investigation plods along, more and more evidence and suspicion is unearthed to cast a dark, thick pall over this presidency and its players. Is it any wonder that Trump has surrounded himself with his faithful family, sycophants of high loyalty and nobody to tell him the truth ... who are still around. Firing the unfaithful seems to be the *modus operandi* for

Trump's management "style." Ironically, it is this action plus the words from the recently departed Mike Flynn that damns this group of miscreants the most: If they have to invoke the Fifth Amendment or ask for immunity from prosecution, they must be guilty of some crime. Mike must be gagging on his own words these days.

OK. Enough about the current news avalanche. I can't keep up with it and still write a coherent essay without it being out-of-date by the time you read it. No, this essay is about you. You, the voter, or the potential voter. Voting is all we have short of outright revolution, you know. So, which will it be? Will you educate yourself by following the truth? Will you finally realize that much of the media that Trump whines about is indeed worthless? That's the part that includes Fox News, the Sinclair Group, Alex Jones, Rush Limbaugh and Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Pat-

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rick.

These entities are indeed fake news. The rest of the ink-stained wretches are actually trying to do their job that the Constitution itself asks them to do and that guarantees them that right to investigate. They are not fake news. The irony about Trump's "fake news" rants is that he is the fake. His latest adventure to Europe laid to rest any doubts that he is absolutely clueless about anything but himself.

So, people, here we are stuck with a complete incompetent fool as our national mouthpiece [with a little help from the frightening ideology twins, Steven Miller and Steve Bannon], and a Congress that is shamelessly whoring itself out to him in order to get some bizarre, mean-spirited and self-immolating budget passed. They do this so that the rich Republicans running these Congressional Republicans get yet another pound or three of tax relief flesh from the somnolent taxpayer who isn't paying all that much attention.

That's the con, folks. The Republican agenda fronted by House Speaker Paul Ryan and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell is, and has been, predicated on lies about economic realities and regulations that have saved us all from the evil of unchecked greed and avarice from the money moguls.

Trump and the current collection of Republicans – especially the completely mis-named Freedom Caucus – are there at the explicit invitation of the .1% of the richest people in this country. Their sole purpose is to create even more wealth for themselves. It is no coincidence that Congressional districts have been gerrymandered to the point of meaninglessness to the people who live in them. It is no coincidence that brain-dead ideologues like Ryan, McConnell and the rest have only one purpose: to create an oligarchy run by the plutocrats through what is left of the Constitution – which Trump sees as an inconvenience for his dictator wannabe self-serving ideals.

Do you not see what is happening? Have you been so subsumed by the anti-Hillary and anti-Obama propaganda by the racist white people who want to deny so many of our citizens their rights that you can't fathom that our democracy hangs by a thread now? Think of the following scenario the next time you read or hear Trump's mouth or the Congress's apology for him:

- The investigations into the Trump collusion, treason and corruption cases starts to identify family members and close associates of Trump that lead directly to him.
- Trump invades North Korea or bombs them back to the stone age. He could also declare war on Iran for sponsoring the terrorism we can't defeat.
- Trump suspends the Constitution and declares that Congress is no longer valid. He places himself as absolute authority. Sound familiar?

Game over. Democracy in the United States dies. No elections. No free press. Suppression of protests. Sounds other-worldly, doesn't it? Well, the model is well-worn. Every Third World, tin-pot dictatorship has done it this way. Clearly, Trump has the mindset of one of these pots. Remember: "I alone can fix the system." Get it yet?

Yes, I mean to scare the daylights out of you, and I don't mind if you think my concerns are too far-fetched or around the bend. What I care about is that you and anyone you can influence get off your asses and start organizing while we still can. We must prepare to defeat every Republican we can in the coming elections – at every level, in every election, local or national. It is the Republican brand that is undermining our democracy and destroying the American dream for those who work for a living.

Our middle classes don't go to work every day and shift billions of dollars around the world for the sake of the rich and their enrichment. The middle classes actually make stuff. They actually come home and put their elbows on the table and try to figure out how they're going to pay for everything including their child's education. Ask Betsy DeVos about how they're going to pay for private school when their tax dollars and more will be needed because the public schools failed for lack of funding. Go ahead. Ask. What you'll get is a vapid smile and silence. She is one of the most egregious entities in our government today. Why? Because she is attacking our children's future and their education quality.

It's never been more important to get involved. Your country's future depends on it.

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.



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Left: OKC Manning supporters celebrate her freedom. From left, Kayla Bonewell, James Branum, Paula Schonauer, Victor Gorin and Dana Johnson. Photo by Rena Guay.

Below: Chelsea Manning after her release from prison.



At Last, Freedom For A Prisoner Of Conscience

BY JEREMY KUZMAROV

Pvt. Chelsea Manning is a free woman after serving more than six years in prison for leaking military battlefield logs from Iraq and Afghanistan and State Department diplomatic cables through the website Wikileaks.

Manning originally was sentenced to 35 years – the longest in U.S. history for leaking classified information – though the sentence was commuted by President Obama before he left office.

Sen. John McCain, R-AZ, characterized Manning’s commutation as a “grave mistake,” and Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-SC, a “slap in the face” for other soldiers.

President Donald Trump called Manning an “ungrateful traitor” after she wrote an op-ed suggesting that Obama had compromised too much with his political opponents during his presidency.

In this age of great public cynicism and apathy, Manning however should be properly viewed as a voice of conscience who, as Noam Chomsky put it, holds to the principle that “it’s important the public should know what its government is doing.”

She decided to share hundreds of thousands of sensitive files, she explained, “out of concern for my

country, the innocent civilians whose lives were lost as a result of war, and in support of ... transparency and public accountability.” Manning grew up as a boy in Crescent, OK [she underwent a sex change operation while imprisoned in Ft. Leavenworth after her conviction].

According to Chase Madar in *The Passion of Bradley Manning: The Story Behind the Wikileaks Whistleblower* [OR Books, 2012], she developed a critical thinking capability from a young age along with a certain sensitivity that came with being bullied because she was small for her age and gay.

In 2007, after working for some time in computers, Manning enlisted in the military to pay for college and because at the time she believed that the United States military was a global protector of freedom.

Her worldview began to shift while working as an intelligence analyst in Iraq when she observed the arrest of Iraqi civilians for printing a scholarly critique of Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki entitled, “Where did the Money Go?”

Manning said that she took this information to her

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In Oklahoma, A Celebration Seven Years In The Making

BY RENA GUAY

It might have looked like an impromptu yard sale to passersby, but on the afternoon of May 17, on a grassy corner in downtown Oklahoma City, the motley collection of vinyl banners, posters, t-shirts, palm cards, stickers and buttons on display was in fact a celebration of successful activism and freedom for our local prisoner of conscience [as designated by Amnesty International], Chelsea E. Manning. Because on that day, she walked out of Fort Leavenworth, the result of a commutation by President Obama.

We displayed many of the items we had used over the years-long campaign to support Chelsea. We spoke about our own personal feelings about her or the work we were now happily laying down. Notable to me was how everyone spoke about Chelsea as if she were a personal friend, someone we knew, and were looking forward to welcoming home. That's the effect Chelsea has on people, even those of us who have, in fact, never met her.

Manning, born and raised in Crescent, OK, just a few miles north of OKC, became a cause for me in 2010, shortly after her arrest by the U.S. Army. That July, my organization, Center for Conscience in Action, held a march and vigil to the Capitol, where we played the video that became known as "Collateral Damage," one of the many files she released through Wikileaks earlier that year that exposed State Department and military wrongdoing that the American people deserved to know about.

In subsequent years, our activities with the call for freeing Chelsea included protests, letter-writing campaigns, petitions, forums, fundraisers and birthday parties every Dec. 17. I even traveled to Maryland for her court martial in 2013, with a press pass from The Oklahoma Observer in hand. Along the way, the local Amnesty International chapter got involved and provided vital support and resources.

I wrote articles, op-eds, and, of course, letters to Chelsea herself. I followed her support network at chelseamanning.org, and later on enjoyed reading her own writings in The Guardian and on medium.com and Twitter.

Throughout this, it should be remembered, Chelsea's name and her cause was a global phenomenon. She was far, far better known outside the U.S. than inside. Such is the fate of most U.S. dissidents.

Many big names came to support Chelsea, from entertainment icons to political "celebrities." At one point, a campaign called "I Am Chelsea Manning"

published photos of such people as comedian/author Russell Brand and Daniel Ellsberg of Pentagon Papers fame. As part of that project, I contributed photos of the GI Rights Hotline volunteers and the OKC Amnesty International chapter.

It was a disorienting campaign at times, with unexpected issues or complications arising along the way. Just after the court martial, the now convicted GI announced that she identified as female and planned to transition. We learned that Army doctors had, in fact, diagnosed Chelsea with gender dysphoria prior to the trial.

On one hand, this made the cause more difficult to explain and find support for, but on the other, it demonstrated a person fully committed to personal integrity at any cost, which served to echo her rationale for releasing the documents in the first place. For many of us, it only served to make us love her as a person, and not just as a just cause. Her bravery was not an abstract thing, but a personal statement about her own truth.

Ultimately this "problem" proved to be a blessing, in my opinion, as it raised awareness about gender dysphoria and transgender rights, and brought new supporters into Chelsea's cause. Now I see it as the beautiful example of intersectionality it is.

But it did lead to so many unnecessary and frustrating struggles [and legal challenges]. She had to fight for every little dignity – the right to have appropriate

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Trump Makes Us Vulnerable To A True Authoritarian

BY DAVID KLION

Well before the Russia scandal became a national soap opera, comparisons between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin were a media staple. Trump encouraged these comparisons by praising the Russian president, widely regarded as an authoritarian, dozens of times in the past four years.

But the more apt analogy may be post-Soviet Russia's first president, the late Boris Yeltsin, who served from the eve of the Soviet breakup in 1991 to 1999, when he handpicked Putin as his successor.

Initially greeted in the West as a hero and a democratizer, Yeltsin is now regarded as an embarrassing failure in Russia. Famed for his public alcoholism and erratic behavior, he became an international laughingstock while allowing the oligarchs who surrounded him to loot the country.

Yeltsin was also known for issuing heavy-handed, unconstitutional decrees in a failed attempt to exert authority, and for the war crimes committed in his botched war in Chechnya. His approval ratings were consistently pathetic, as he oversaw a collapse in living standards due to the rigged privatization of the economy, which his advisers forced through with minimal public oversight. Nevertheless, he was

re-elected due to media manipulation, and arguably, the covert interference of a foreign power, the United States.

In retrospect, Yeltsin's catastrophic tenure is seen as paving the way for Putin's strongman presidency.

The parallels are inexact and shouldn't be overstated. The point is that Trump isn't much of an autocrat, but that doesn't mean he isn't doing lasting damage to American democracy. He lacks some of the tools of an effective authoritarian, like a centralized secret police force that would give him control over the everyday lives of Americans; moreover, he lacks the discipline and intelligence to build and operate such an apparatus.

Unlike Barack Obama, who could hardly be called a dictator, he lacks even the discipline and intelligence to pass major legislation. But it is precisely Trump's absence of authority that makes his presidency so dangerous. He has created a vacuum in the executive branch, and the worst forces in American life have rushed to fill it.

Despite his pledge to "drain the swamp" in Washington, Trump's policymaking has amounted to little more than an open house for industry lobbyists to draft executive orders and legislation aimed at en-

riching themselves at the public's expense. The prospect of historic tax reform legislation in particular has buoyed markets for most of Trump's presidency, regardless of his dismal approval ratings or constant scandals.

Far from viewing Trump as a threat to their power, corporate executives and the mainstream Republicans who represent them in Congress understand the Trump presidency as a unique opportunity to defund the government, including vital programs like Medicaid, and rack up profits.

Early in his tenure, Putin famously jailed, exiled or marginalized those oligarchs who threatened him politically, to ensure loyalty from the rest. By contrast, Trump's presidency has benefited all of the wealthiest Americans, including the ones who find him distasteful. But it isn't just industry lobbyists and wealthy donors who are exploiting Trump's weak presidency. The president can be influenced by anyone, from white supremacists and conspiracists like his adviser Steve Bannon to national security establishment figures like Defense Secretary James Mattis and even the Russian government.

While the idea of Trump as a Manchurian candidate has always seemed over the top, what is likely closer to the truth [as far as one can tell during an ongoing murky investigation] is that Russia was able to compromise key Trump advisers, such as Michael Flynn, any other president would have avoided. This suggests not that Trump is a Russian sleeper agent, but that he's uniquely vulnerable to influence by foreign powers in a way that compromises U.S. interests.

Indeed, it was recently revealed that Flynn successfully pushed policies favorable to Turkey in the U.S. campaign against ISIS, after accepting large sums of money from the Turkish government. That doesn't make Trump a Russian or a Turkish puppet, it makes him a dupe whose policies can easily be swayed by rival powers.

This was certainly on display in his visit to Riyadh, where he posed menacingly with a glowing orb beside Saudi Arabia's King Salman and Egypt's dictator Abdel Fattah el-Sisi after signing off on a massive arms deal with the country he once blamed for the 9/11 attacks.

As of this writing, it seems plausible either that Trump could be removed from power within months, or that he could serve out at least one full term. Regardless, he is likely to leave the presidency a diminished office.

While this might seem to have some upsides, given longstanding concerns about the dangers of an imperial presidency, in practice it means power will have been ceded to corporate and overseas actors – an ironic outcome given Trump's superficially populist and nationalist campaign.

An intelligent and well-intentioned president can serve as the one nationally accountable figure in the dysfunctional American government, the role Obama saw himself as playing for eight years. In the absence

of such a president, Washington devolves into little more than a free-for-all for unaccountable wealthy interests.

It's also worth considering who might succeed Trump. One hopes Americans will rebound from his failed, humiliating presidency by electing a progressive Democrat who will stand up for the interests of regular Americans in 2020. But it is also possible that Trump, like Yeltsin, will leave behind a demoralized, traumatized and cynical country, where the social contract lies in tatters and faith in existing institutions is weaker than ever.

Under such circumstances, America would be ripe for a genuine authoritarian. Surveying Trump's party, it's not hard to identify figures who might relish the role – starting with Vice President Mike Pence, whose newly launched PAC and far-right tenure as governor of Indiana suggest an impatience to govern with the kind of ruthlessness Trump seems incapable of summoning.

Trump, in short, is no strongman, but his presidency is the kind of emergency that makes a strongman seem like a reasonable alternative.

David Klion is a former editor for Al Jazeera America and World Politics Review.

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The Sadism Of Creeping Dictatorship

BY JUAN COLE

One of the classic techniques of dictatorship is humiliation, a manifestation of the sadism of the regime. Most people want to avoid being made the butt of ridicule, and authoritarian personalities calculate that they will even surrender some rights and liberties to avoid it.

Even if you didn't agree with him on many issues, fired FBI Director James Comey did not have an easy job and he put a lot of years and effort into it. If you're his boss and you want to fire him, you owe him a face-to-face meeting to explain to him that he will be cycling out. In this case the firing was unwarranted and disturbing, given that he had a 10-year appointment and a presumption of protection from being let go over politics. But nearly as bad as the termination of employment itself was the way it was done.

Comey was personally humiliated. He was giving a talk in Los Angeles when the news came across the television screen. Here you have the director of the FBI appearing in public and having his dignity abruptly stripped away. He reportedly thought it must be a hoax to begin with.

What is the message here? If you work for the federal government, you work for Trump. And if you work

for Trump, and you cross him or he just decides he doesn't like the look of you, he will degrade you and make you abject in front of the whole world. Therefore, be afraid, be very afraid.

This technique of abruptness and lack of transparency was also visible in Trump's attempts at a Muslim ban. The first executive order was deliberately issued on a weekend when it is hard to get hold of a judge. People who had duly applied for and received visas and who had spent money on airplane tickets were informed suddenly and without warning that their visas were no good and they had wasted their money on air fare and would have to go back on the next flight. Mothers were split from children, grandchildren from grandparents. People with jobs were not allowed back in to return to them.

Comey to his credit pushed back against the Steve Bannon-Trump Muslim ban, pointing out that "Citizenship alone" is not a "threat indicator." So it is perhaps not surprising that he was treated by his boss exactly as the Syrians, Libyans and Somalis were.

The message here is to be afraid, to be obedient, not to cross the Boss. It is a shameful message in a democracy, the whole basis of which is that every citizen is equal before the law. The president himself is not above the law.

Rule through sadism and humiliation and fear violates democracy because the most powerful man in the country goes around treating people like shit in order to terrify them into submitting to his will.

These thuggish techniques were also used to fire Sally Yates as acting attorney general. She was informed that she was history *two minutes* before it was announced on TV. The letter to her from Trump talked about her betrayal, implying she was let go for treason. Questioning the constitutionality of an executive order is not treason.

Or there was the sudden arrest of a reporter for "disorderly conduct" at the insistence of Tom Price, secretary of Health and Human Services. Reporters are often disruptive because they keep asking hard questions. If that is an arresting offense, then all of us are in danger. And that is Tom Price's point.

That is, the same techniques, of sudden pouncing and smearing of reputation have been used over and over again by now not just by Trump but by Bannon and by cabinet secretaries.

The person thus humiliated is not even the real target. You are. Trump is trying to make you afraid to stick your head up, lest it get cut off. Price is trying to intimidate journalists. Bannon is trying to terrify would-be immigrants.

Everyone kept wondering what the first sign of descent into dictatorship would be. This is it. Government by sadism, government by humiliation, government by fear and caprice.

Juan Ricardo Cole is the Richard P. Mitchell Collegiate Professor of History at the University of Michigan. His blog, Informed Comment, can be found at <https://www.juancole.com>.

Talking To The Other Side

BY LEE HAMILTON

I've had a number of conversations recently that convince me our country is divided into two political camps separated by a deep and uncomfortably wide gap. No, I'm not talking about liberals and conservatives, or pro- and anti-Trump voters. I'm talking about people who believe in politics and our political system, and people who don't.

I've found this latter view expressed most frequently among young people. In lecture halls and in informal conversations, I've spent some uncomfortable hours serving as a human pincushion for their pointed barbs about the system they've grown up in.

Many are uninterested in politics. They do not see politics as a worthy pursuit or even as an honorable vocation. They doubt our political institutions can be made to work, are suspicious of elected officials in general, and don't believe that our democratic institutions are capable either of solving the problems faced by the country or of helping them as individuals.

They find reason to be discouraged every time they tap into a political story. They're disheartened by political polarization, by the dominant and excessive role of money in the process, and by the seemingly impregnable influence of special interests on the course of policy. They struggle with their own problems, especially the debt they'll confront when they get out of school – and believe that they'll get no help from government.

Indeed, they're convinced that people in power place their own interests ahead of the country's – which is why so many of them express real contempt for politicians. They certainly don't see politics as an uplifting pursuit; I hear the word "messy" a lot, not as an objectively descriptive term, but as an expression of ethical disapproval.

They have a point. There are many reasons for disappointment in our groaning system, and the descriptions they give have much merit.

Yet I still consider politics a worthy profession. It can be pursued in a manner that deserves respect, even admiration. I've known a lot of good people in politics, men and women who are in it for all the right reasons, take pride in pursuing a political career, and embrace it as the best route available for solving our common problems.

In fact, I think people who reject the political system often underestimate its accomplishments. We are a strong, prosperous, and free nation because of – not in spite of – our system and the politicians who have come before us.

Sure, politics is “messy,” but not because it’s tainted or morally bankrupt. It’s messy because it often reflects deep-seated disagreements that are hard to resolve, with merit on both sides.

Politics is rarely a struggle between good and evil; it’s how we Americans try to make the country work better. It’s our opportunity to help our neighbors, to give us better schools and hospitals and highways, to make our communities safer and more orderly. It’s a means of resolving our differences through dialogue and compromise, rather than through ideological battle or pitched warfare. If you pay attention, you’ll see a lot of politicians who go about their business intelligently, quietly, and competently – and who get good things done.

So I find myself wondering how those of my persuasion might win these young people over. Discourse matters, obviously. Tolerance of others’ views does, too. And I consider the 240 years of our history, despite all the obvious blemishes, to make a pretty good case for the political system’s accomplishments.

Above all, though, we have to encourage young people’s engagement with the problems we confront. If they want to improve things, they really have no alternative. Getting involved is the only way to see how tough these issues are and how much work goes into even incremental progress. We live in a complicated country and there are a lot of disappointments inherent in trying to make change. But it’s the only way we’ve got.

Those of us who believe in the system must shoulder the burden of persuasion – and I’m worried about what happens if we don’t meet it. If we lose the argument and the next generation turns away, we face dangers and risks – chaos, authoritarianism – that are far worse than what we face now.

Lee Hamilton is a Senior Advisor for the Indiana University Center on Representative Government; a Distinguished Scholar, IU School of Global and International Studies; and a Professor of Practice, IU School of Public and Environmental Affairs. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for 34 years.

Trump’s Epic Budget Swindle

BY JOE CONASON

Elect a fraudster to the presidency – remember Trump University and the Trump Foundation? – and he will soon deliver a fraudulent budget. What makes this presidential fraudster’s first budget so special is the simultaneous perpetration of multiple levels of fraud.

Aside from defense spending, the Trump budget vi-

olates nearly every programmatic promise he made to voters last year. And he pretends to fulfill his promise of balancing the budget with fake numbers.

Not only are the numbers phony but also they represent the most audacious mathematical con game in a federal budget in recent memory. It is phonier than the phony budgets cooked up during the Reagan era, when the president’s own budget director eventually confessed, “None of us really understands what’s going on with all these numbers.”

Trump’s numbers aren’t really so hard to understand. First, he projects an average 3% growth in gross domestic product over the next decade, which no sane economist of either party considers possible. Then he estimates that this economic spurt will produce \$2 trillion in federal revenues – and he counts those trillions twice in the same budget. It’s hard to believe but true: The same \$2 trillion is supposed to offset the Trump tax cuts that mostly benefit the wealthiest taxpayers, and to balance the budget over the next 10 years.

So Trump is pretending that his tax cuts will produce revenue growth instead of revenue deficits. And he is claiming that his pretend \$2 trillion will somehow fill up a \$4 trillion hole. When reporters pointed out that this doesn’t add up as economics or arithmetic, White House budget director Mick Mulvaney amazingly affirmed that he had set down this double counting of trillions of dollars “on purpose.” He went on to claim that the budget would work out anyway because its other calculations are so “conservative.”

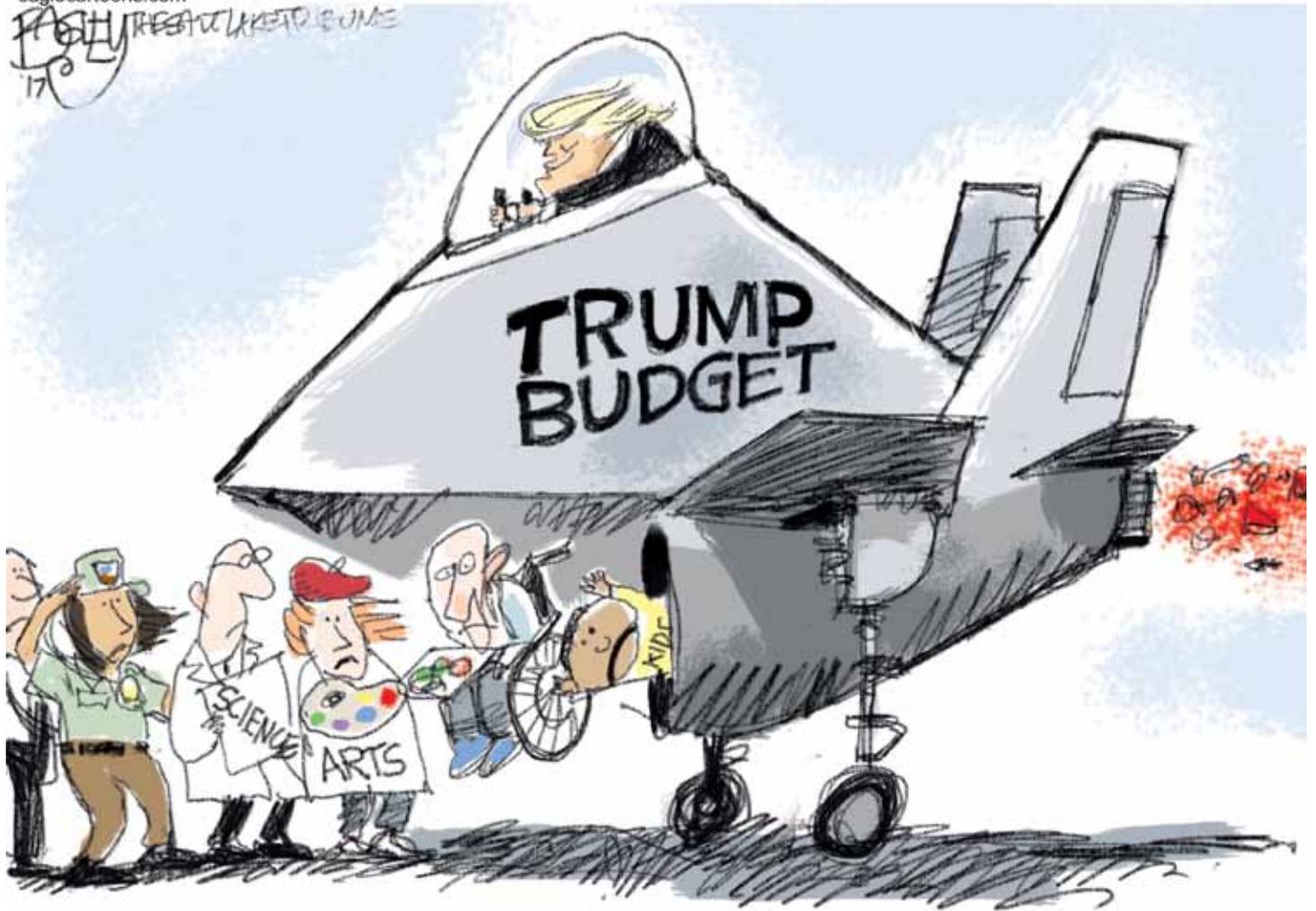
Meanwhile, the details of Trump’s budget show in black-and-white just how coldly he swindled the voters who believed him last year.

At the big rallies where he basked in their adulation, Trump’s supporters heard him promise, again and again, that he would “save Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security, without cuts.” They heard him angrily accuse other Republican candidates of wanting to cut those popular, vital and successful programs. They heard him vow to “solve the student loan crisis,” which was hurting their kids, because they “should not be asked to pay more on their loans than they can afford and the debt should not be an albatross around their necks for the rest of their lives.” They heard him guarantee, in the most emotional terms, that their narcotics-addicted families, friends and neighbors, would receive “the top treatment” necessary to “get better.” They heard him swear to expand Medicaid treatment in communities ravaged by opioid addiction. And they wildly applauded when he described a trillion-dollar infrastructure program to rebuild the nation and create millions of high-wage jobs.

According to the budget – grandly titled “A New Foundation For American Greatness” – those speeches were all hyperbole or, to put it less politely, a pack of lies.

There is in that document no sign of a trillion-dol-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 46



The Losing Warfare State

BY RALPH NADER

The U.S. is still bogged down in Afghanistan [the 16 year-old occupation is the longest in American history] and in Iraq [since the unconstitutional, illegal invasion of the country 14 years ago].

With about 30,000 poorly equipped fighters, the Taliban has held down a U.S. equipped and trained Afghan army eight times larger in soldiers, plus the U.S. forces – fluctuating from 100,000 at its peak to 8,500 now, plus contractors – with advanced air, sea and land weaponry that is second to none.

Moreover, the Taliban has been advancing, controlling 30% to 40% of the country and a third of the population, according to the Wall Street Journal.

In Iraq, the U.S. had hundreds of thousands of soldiers and contractors during the Bush years. Yet today the country is still in the throes of a civil war, where a previously nonexistent threat – ISIS – with less than 15,000 fighters, has been successfully re-

sisting a huge Iraqi army backed by U.S. trainers and air force.

How can this be? “We are vulnerable,” writes military author William Greider, “because our presumption of unconquerable superiority leads us deeper and deeper into unwinnable military conflicts.”

Jim Fallows, asserts in *The Atlantic*, that our military “is the best-equipped fighting force in history ... also better trained, motivated, and disciplined than during the draft-army years.” Nonetheless he concludes: “Yet, repeatedly this force has been defeated by less modern, worse-equipped, barely funded foes. Or it has won skirmishes and battles only to lose or get bogged down in a larger war.”

It gets worse. Less than 3,000 ISIS fighters took sudden control in 2013 of Mosul, Iraq’s second largest city with over a million residents. Notwithstanding being vastly outnumbered by the Iraqi military and police – who fled – ISIS went on to control over a

third of Iraq's land area. Iraqis and US forces are now destroying West Mosul in order to save it from a few hundred remaining ISIS fighters.

Fallows quotes former military intelligence officer, Jim Gourley, as saying "it is incontrovertibly evident that the U.S. military failed to achieve any of its strategic goals in Iraq."

Setting aside the fundamental questions about why we invaded Iraq and continued to occupy Afghanistan long after 9/11, Americans are entitled to question how continued American occupations across the Middle East serve any kind of vital national interest and why they continue to fail.

In his analysis, military historian Thomas Ricks writes that "an important factor in the failure" is that no one gets "relieved by the military brass for combat ineffectiveness." But there are other reasons all the way up the chain of command. Cargo planes ship \$100 bills in bulk to Kabul airport as part of an extensive bribery/extortion system that weakens the opposition to the Taliban, whose appeal to the masses,

level of questioning by the lawmakers of Pentagon officials that would embarrass a mediocre high school student.

But the senators and representatives have their reasons. They simply do not want the responsibility for military action except to provide a virtual blank check from taxpayers for the department and its avaricious, wasteful contractors who fund their campaigns. Second, members of Congress see the military expenditures as a jobs program back in their states and districts. Finally, members of Congress are not getting any heat from the detached, indifferent voters [with few exceptions], either during or between elections. Notice there is never a debate by candidates on the military budget – how it is used or misused financially and strategically [yet candidates regularly pledge ever increasing dollars for the defense budget].

As a final cruel insult to our children and grandchildren, Congress, by refusing to fund the wars as they persist, has built up a huge deficit for future generations of Americans to pay.

Retired Admiral Mike Mullen makes another point concerning "the growing disconnect between the American people and our military." He observes that, "fewer and fewer [American citizens] know anyone in the military. It's become just too easy to go to war."

despite their harsh rule over them, is to drive out the foreign invaders. That is a very powerful motivation, one that is lacking among Afghan forces and politicians whom the people of Afghanistan view as puppets of the U.S. and its western allies.

Retired Admiral Mike Mullen makes another point concerning "the growing disconnect between the American people and our military." He observes that, "fewer and fewer [American citizens] know anyone in the military. It's become just too easy to go to war."

The ease at which we embrace military interventions is in large part due to a gross dereliction of duty on the part of the Congress, which allows the White House to commence wars, large and small, without legal authority. Congress is the only branch of government constitutionally authorized to declare war and appropriate funds for war. The Libyan war, which was pushed by Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama [and opposed by Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates] was waged without seeking either legal authority or funds from the legislative branch. The Obama Administration took monies from the unauditable Pentagon budget to start that continuing disaster in Libya and neighboring African countries.

Listening to the House and Senate Armed Services Committee hearings, one finds a sycophancy and

Retired Colonel Andrew Bacevich has written, "A people untouched [or seemingly untouched] by war are far less likely to care about it. Persuaded that they have no skin in the game, they will permit the state to do whatever it wishes to do."

But, collectively, we all have skin in the game. Look at the unmet needs in our country, crumbling infrastructure, toxic environments and the corrosive costs of corporatism escaping law enforcement that would protect consumers and workers.

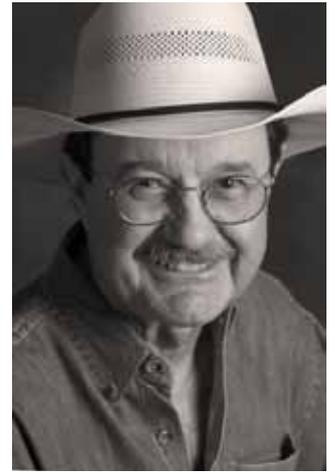
It is the members of Congress who have no skin in the game. Very few of their children are in the armed forces. Were the American people to demand enactment of a one page bill that requires drafting all able-bodied children and grandchildren of members of Congress anytime they or the White House plunges our country into war, you would see a very attentive Congress that pays attention to its Constitutional duties and responsibilities.

Why not ask your senators or representatives to put such a bill in the hopper?

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Jim Hightower



Populism Isn't About Mobs, Anti-Government Rants Or Opinion Polls

If a political pollster asked whether I consider myself a conservative or a liberal, I'd answer, "No."

Not to be cute – I have a bit of both in me – but because, like most Americans, my beliefs can't be squeezed into either of the tidy little boxes that the establishment provides.

I've observed that the true political spectrum in our society does not range from right to left, but from top to bottom. This is how America's economic and political systems really shake out, with each of us located somewhere high or low that spectrum.

Right to left is political theory; top to bottom is the reality we actually experience in our lives every day – and the vast majority of Americans know that they're not even within shouting distance of the moneyed powers that rule from the top of both systems, whether those elites call themselves conservatives or liberals.

For me, the "ism" that best encompasses and addresses this reality is populism. What is it? Essentially, it's the continuation of America's democratic revolution. It encompasses and extends the creation of a government that is us.

Instead of a "trickle down" approach to public policy, populism is solidly grounded in a "percolate up" philosophy that springs directly from America's founding principle of the Common Good.

Few people today call themselves populists, but I think most are. I'm not talking about the recent political outbursts by confused, used and abused Trumpian ranters who've been organized by corporate front groups to spread a hatred of government.

Rather, I mean the millions of ordinary Americans in every state who're battling the real power that's running roughshod over us: out-of-control corporations.

With their oceans of money and their hired armies of lobbyists, lawyers, economists, consultants and PR agents, these self-serving, autocratic entities operate from faraway executive suites and Washington backrooms to rig the economic and governmental

rules so that they capture more and more of America's money and power.

You can shout yourself red-faced at Congress critics you don't like and demand a government so small it'd fit in the back room of Billy Bob's Bait Shop, but you won't be touching the corporate and financial powers behind the throne.

In fact, weak government is the political wet dream of corporate chieftains, which is why they're so ecstatic to have Trump out front for them. But the real issue isn't small government; it's good government.

This is where populists come in.

You wouldn't know it from the corporate media, but in just about every town or city in our land you can find some groups or coalitions that, instead of merely shouting at politicians, have come together to find their way around, over or through the blockage that big money has put in the way of their democratic aspirations.

Also, in the process of organizing, strategizing and mobilizing, these groups are building relationships and creating something positive from a negative.

This is the historic, truly democratic, grassroots populism of workaday folks who strive to empower themselves to take charge economically as well as politically.

With the rebellious spirit and sense of hope that has defined America from the start, these populists are directly challenging the plutocratic order that reigns over us.

This populism is unabashedly a class movement – one that seeks not merely to break the iron grip that centralized corporate power has on our country, but also to build cooperative democratic structures so that ordinary people – not moneyed interests – define and control our country's economic and political possibilities.

It's necessary to restate the solid principles of populism and reassert its true spirit because both are now being subverted and severely perverted by corporate manipulators and a careless media establish-

ment.

These debasers of the language misapply the populist label to anyone who claims to be a maverick and tends to bark a lot.

Although the targets they're usually barking at are poor people, teachers, minorities, unions, liberals, protestors, environmentalists, immigrants, LGBTQ or other demonized groups that generally reside far outside the center of the power structure – the barkers are indiscriminately tagged as populist voices – even when their populist pose is funded by and operates as a front for one or another corporate interest.

That's not populism; it's rank hucksterism, disguising plutocrats as champions of the people. And it is important that we call them out on it.

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What Is Worse Than Being Poor?

These are hard times for America's gold miners. They're struggling to haul wealth out of the land, but seeing their pay dropping further and further down.

Take Bob Mercer, who's been a top miner for years, but last year, [which has been described as somewhere between lackluster and catastrophic] even Bob was down. He pulled in only \$125 million in pay. Can you feel Bob's pain?

No, these are not your normal miners. They are hedge fund managers, digging for gold in the Wonderland of Wall Street. If you divided Bob Mercer's pay in his "bad year" among 1,000 real miners doing honest work, they'd consider it a fabulous year.

Hedge funds are almost literally gold mines, though they require no heavy lifting by the soft-handed, Gucci-wearing managers who work them. These gold diggers are basically nothing but speculators, drawing billions of dollars from the uber-rich by promising that they are investment geniuses who will deliver fabulous profits for them. But the scam is that Mercer and his fellow diggers get paid regardless of whether they deliver or not.

Their cushy setup, known as 2-and-20, works like this: Right off the top, they take 2% of the money put up by each wealthy client, which the hedge fund whizzes like Mercer keep, even if the investments they make are losers; if their speculative bets do pay off, they pocket 20% of all profits; hedge fund lobbyists have rigged our nation's tax code so these Wall Street miners pay a fraction of the tax rate that real

mine workers pay.

Thus, practically every year is a bonanza for these slicks. Last year, for example, the 25 best-paid hedge fund operators totaled a staggering \$11 billion in personal pay – even though nearly half of them performed poorly.

Meanwhile, Donald Trump, who promised just last year to close that special hedge fund tax break, is now promising to give an even bigger break to them. Guess who was one of Trump's most generous funders last year: Bob Mercer.

One of the lucky things about being rich like these hedge fund hucksters is that you automatically become handsome, your jokes are hilarious, and politicians treat you with fawning deference.

On the other hand, the unlucky thing about being poor is that ... well, you're poor. And society generally treats you poorly, even inhumanely at times.

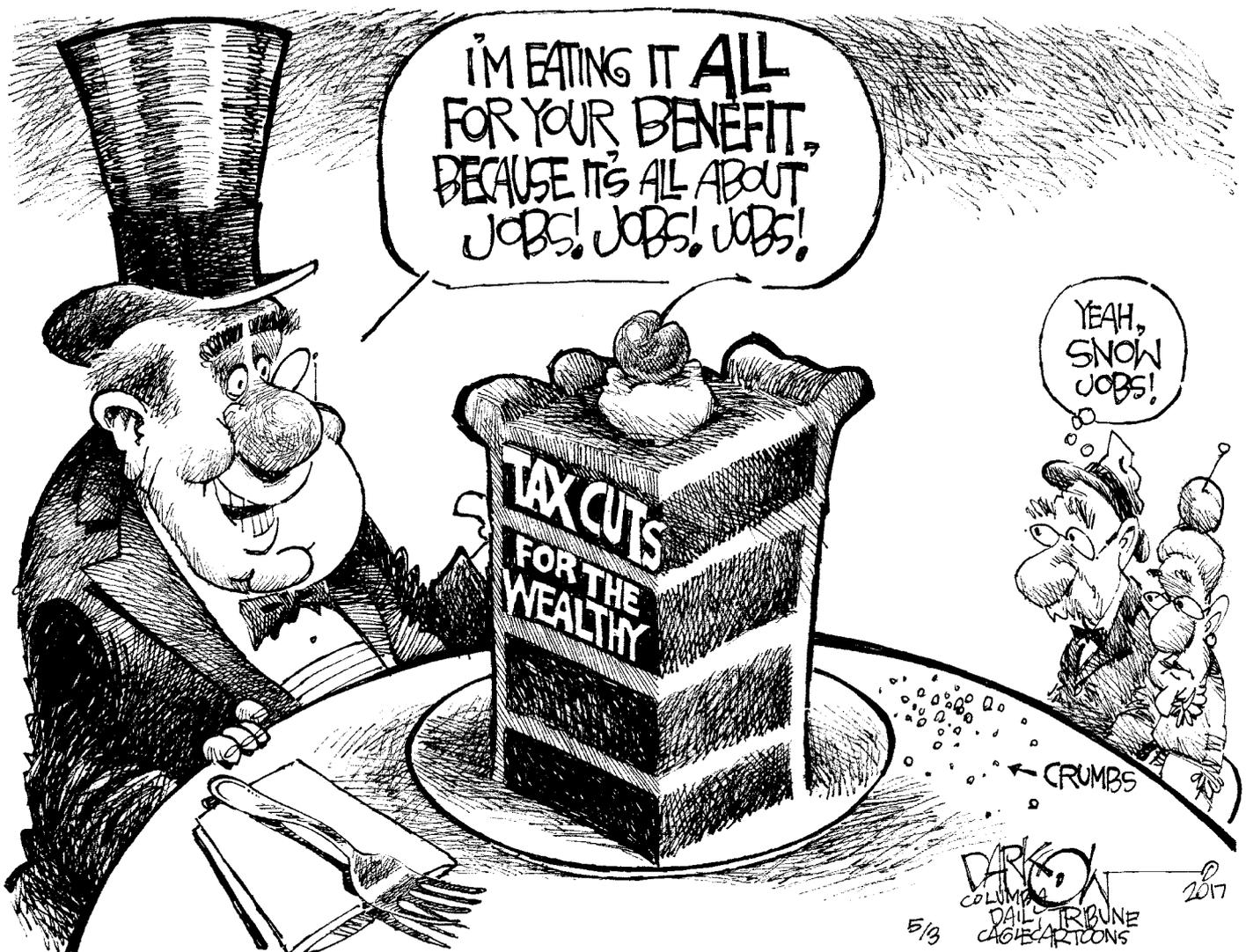
Indeed, right-wing officials in Washington and across the country are pushing a morally corrupt ethic that poor people must be punished, as if debilitating poverty is not punishment enough. One especially ugly example of this is spreading through hundreds of school districts – an abhorrent practice called "lunch shaming."

From first-grade through senior class, most schools make families pay for their kid's cafeteria lunch, and a computer program alerts cashiers when a student's lunch account is unpaid – a shortfall that nearly always involves poverty-level kids. Rather than dealing with this shortfall discretely, school systems have taken to a crude policy of publicly humiliating children whom the computer tags as having a meal debt.

Some schools literally take an indebted student's tray of food away from them, making a show of dumping it in the trash in front of everyone. Some remove the hot food from the child's lunch tray and replace it with a cold sandwich of white bread and a slice of cheese, claiming that this so-called "sandwich" meets federal nutrition standards. Others actually brand the meal offenders, using markers to write "I need lunch money" on the poor kids' arms! Nearly half of America's school districts use some form of shaming and stigmatizing, embarrassing children to tears.

What educational lesson is this teaching? And what's the matter with school boards and lawmakers who are either allowing or directly causing this abuse, using school lunch to punish the poor? Being poor means you lack money; being mean to the poor means you lack a soul.

Now consider Donald Trump's recently unveiled budget proposal. It is a truly soulless piece of work. Not only does it slash taxes for the wealthiest Americans and do nothing to close the loophole Bob Mercer and his ilk take advantage of, it will cut about 25% – or \$191 billion – from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program over the next 10 years, leaving even more of America's school children hungry and ashamed. – *Jim Hightower*



A Job Guarantee And The Federal Reserve

BY DEAN BAKER

The idea that the government would commit itself to act as an employer of last resort and guarantee a job to everyone has been getting more attention in recent months.

While many on the left have long pushed this position, the Clinton-linked Center for American Progress [CAP] recently embraced the idea in a conference last month. It is good to see ideas outside of the mainstream getting attention, but there are a couple of issues worth keeping in mind to ensure that the effort does not end up being counterproductive.

The first is to recognize that a job guarantee is a huge lift, not only politically but also in its implementation. In effect the guarantee is not only going to be providing jobs to workers who do not currently

have one, but it will also end up offering a potentially more attractive alternative to millions of people now in low-wage jobs. How attractive the alternative is will, of course, depend on the wage offered in the government supported jobs.

The number tossed around for a wage by the CAP folks was \$15 an hour. In the current economy, this would be higher than the wages of 30% of men and more than 40% of women workers. That is more than 50 million workers.

Presumably this \$15 an hour wage is some number of years in the future and likely associated with a sharp increase in the minimum wage, but we would still likely be looking at a situation where the federal government would be overseeing the employment of

well over 10 million people under this program.

By comparison, the federal government now directly employs 2.2 million people, not counting the Postal Service.

Is it reasonable to believe that the federal government could effectively oversee the employment of a workforce that is more than five times its current level? That seems like a serious leap.

And there will be political consequences to doing this poorly. If the government puts in place a jobs guarantee and a substantial number of people turn out to game the system, either directly as workers who don't work or as intermediaries who list phony workers, it is not likely to be long for the world.

During the Obama years some of us were pushing for what seemed a much smaller lift: a youth jobs program for people in areas of high unemployment. There was little interest.

While I never got a clear explanation of the downsides to such a program, I always assumed that the fear was that Fox News would get pictures of two kids enrolled in the program sitting on a park bench drinking beer.

Not wanting to deal with the fallout from this potential risk, the Obama Administration chose not to go this route. Clearly the risks of abuse with a full-scale job guarantee would be several orders of magnitude larger. This is why when Jared Bernstein and I discussed this issue in our book on full employment [Getting Back to Full Employment: A Better Bargain for Working People], we recommended trial programs. If we show that this can be done effectively, it will be possible both administratively and politically to expand the program.

There is another aspect to this sudden interest in this political long shot, which is a huge potential downside. The Federal Reserve Board is currently in the process of raising interest rates with the idea of limiting the number of jobs in the economy.

The Fed's ostensible concern is that the labor market is getting too tight, which will lead to more rapid wage growth, which will lead to higher inflation. There is a campaign organized by the Center for Popular Democracy to push back against the Fed's plans to keep hiking interest rates.

While it is great to talk about what the government could potentially do to help workers, the most immediate issue is to not have it do things to hurt workers, like having the Fed raise interest rates to reduce the rate of job creation. If progressives' focus on the aspiration of a job guarantee causes them to ignore the Fed's interest rate hikes occurring in front of our faces, it will be a serious loss.

It is worth noting how far we have to go in getting Democrats to accept that we should not have the Fed acting to keep people from getting jobs. During her presidential campaign, Hillary Clinton attacked Donald Trump for criticizing the Fed. She said that it was inappropriate for presidents or presidential candidates to discuss the Fed's monetary policy.

While her criticisms of Trump contradicted the Democratic Party platform's plank on the Fed, they were consistent with the views often expressed by Robert Rubin. Rubin was treasury secretary under Bill Clinton and remains an important figure in Democratic Party politics.

If we are going to get closer to full employment, and certainly if we are going to have some sort of job guarantee, we are going to need a president and Congress who are prepared to set the Fed on a policy that promotes full employment and is willing to tolerate a somewhat higher rate of inflation or at least the risk of a higher inflation rate.

This will mean not only talking about the Fed's monetary policy, but also selecting people for the Fed who are committed to a full-employment agenda. That is 180 degrees at odds with the Robert Rubin agenda, which undoubtedly still commands considerable support among major Democratic Party donors and many elected officials.

In short, a jobs guarantee may be a good aspirational goal, but we have a lot of messy work that we have to deal with first. If the push for a jobs guarantee distracts from this work, then it will be a major step backwards.

Dean Baker is a macroeconomist and co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington, DC.

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Road To Single-Payer May Go Through Medicare Part C

BY FROMA HARROP

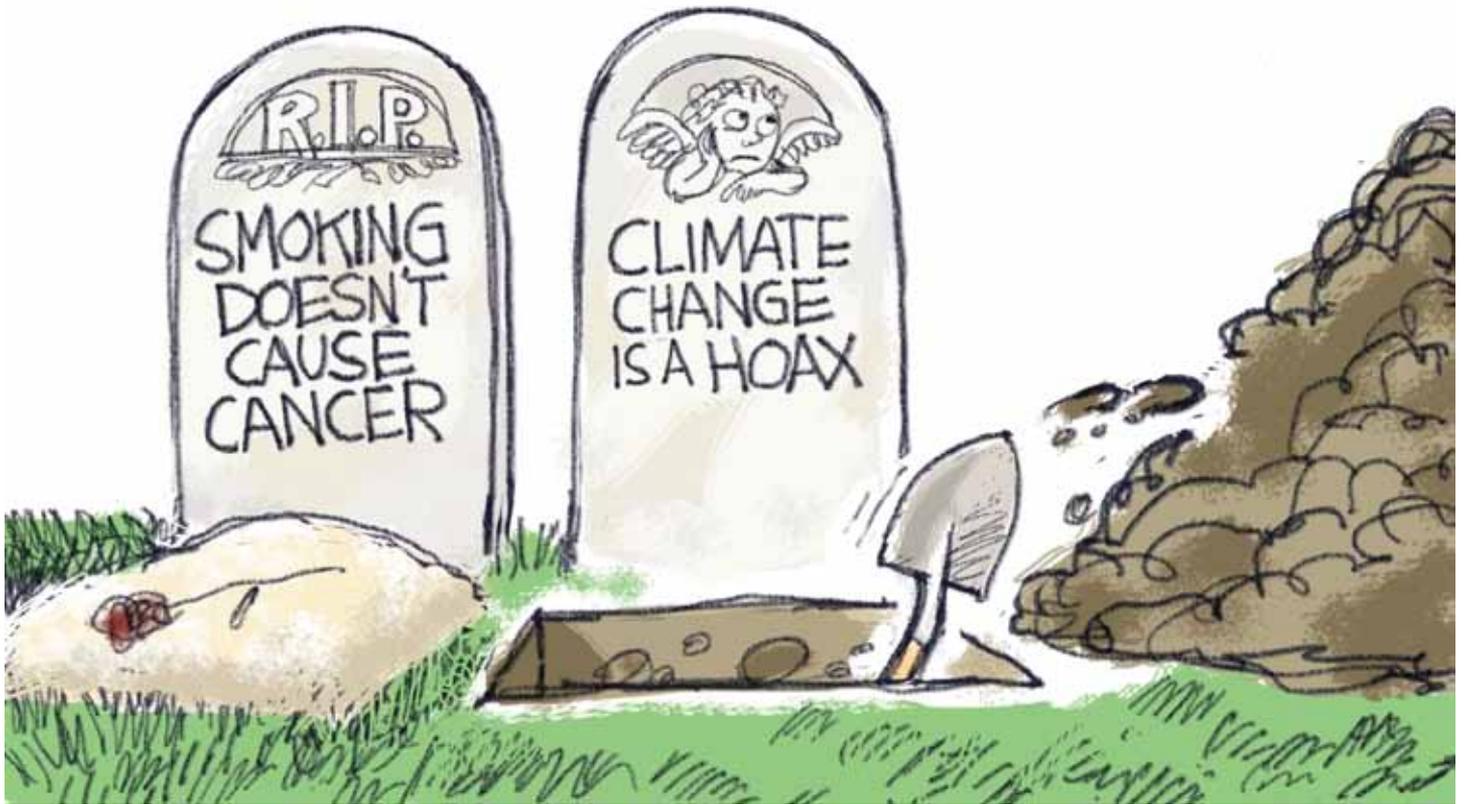
Rep. Todd Akin was wrong, wrong, wrong when he said that "America is threatened with a stage 3 cancer of socialism, and ObamaCare is Exhibit 1."

Actually, Medicare is Exhibit 1. Far more socialistic than the Affordable Care Act, Medicare requires a major transfer of wealth from taxpayers to older people. Medicare is also wildly popular, and I dare Akin to call it a "cancer" in front of his electorate.

That's why I can barely contain my anger at a Trump-voting neighbor, an otherwise lovely older woman who's undergone years of kidney dialysis and serial hospitalizations. She must have consumed a quarter-million taxpayer dollars by now yet would deny guaranteed health coverage to the younger workhorses paying to keep her alive.

[No, Medicare is not self-funding. The payroll tax-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 47



Renewables, Not Fossil Fuels

BY BOB D. ROUNSAVELL

Climate change deniers are still out there, their numbers growing smaller with each passing day. At least 92% of climate scientists believe the current crisis is not only for real but it is largely caused by ill-advised human behavior.

In the October 2015 American History magazine editor Roger L. Vance wrote:

“Mother Nature has a way to let us all know who is really in charge. Humankind has managed to harness natural elements to create cataclysmic weapons that can lay waste to a city in the blink of an eye, and has ignorantly befouled the global environment on such a grand scale as to threaten our existence – but nature still trumps all when it comes to unleashing disasters.”

A minimum goal was set by the International Energy Agency of keeping warming to no more than two

degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. If temperatures go beyond that threshold, many scientists believe the impact of climate change would become increasingly severe.

The worst natural disaster in our history was the Galveston, TX hurricane of 1900. As meteorologist Al Roker reminds us in his *The Storm of the Century*, “the epically powerful storm was made even more deadly by human error and chauvinistic arrogance.”

Today, that trend continues as climate deniers ignore all the signs occurring: Storms are bigger, seas are rising, drought increases annually, yet so many still close their eyes to the disasters inevitably coming with climate change.

According to the latest issue of FERC [Federal Energy Regulatory Commission] Energy Infrastructure Update, with data included through March 31, wind and solar provided 50.84% of new electrical generat-

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ing capacity added to the U.S. grid during the first quarter of 2017.

Thirteen “units” of wind were added, totaling 1,479 MW combined with 62 units of solar [939 MW]: the sum of 2,418 MW exceeded the 2,235 MW provided by 21 units of gas and 102 MW by one unit of nuclear power.

There was also 1 MW of capacity produced by other sources, e.g., fuel cells. In the first 3 months of this year, no new generating capacity was provided by coal and oil and renewable energy [RE] in the categories of hydropower, biomass or geothermal.

The growth pace of new solar and wind RE is accelerating at a fast rate compared to fossil fuels. For the first quarter of 2017, new capacity from RE sources is 18.07% greater than that added during the same three-month period in 2016 [2,416 MW vs. 2,048 MW].

Renewable energy sources now account for almost one-fifth [19.51%] of the country’s total available installed generating capacity. By comparison, at the end of 2016, RE provided 19.17% of total generating capacity.

Note that generating capacity is not the same as actual generation. Electrical production per MW of available capacity – i.e., capacity factor – for renewables is still lower than for fossil fuels and nuclear power.

While RE now provides 19.51% of the nation’s total, the actual electrical generation from RE for the first two months of 2017 was roughly 18.2%.

However, both these figures understate RE’s real contribution because neither the U.S. Energy Information Administration nor FERC fully accounts for electricity generated by small-scale sources like rooftop solar or PVs.

If the current growth continues, renewables should easily increase to 20% by year’s end. Generating capacity by renewable sources is now double nuclear power [9.10%] and rapidly approaching coal [24.25%].

Ken Bossong, executive director of the Sun Day Campaign, noted that the Trump Administration campaign to reboot and expand oil drilling continues to be proven wrong-headed in light of current FERC data.

“Once more,” he stated, “renewables – led by wind and solar – have proven themselves to be the energy sources making America great again.”

Obvious by now is this fact: regardless of what people believe or feel about energy sources, RE is replacing fossil fuels as the primary resource for energy. They are significantly cleaner and more efficient.

Most importantly they will not continue polluting our environment with greenhouse gases, thus ensuring survival of humans and most other forms of life in our planet.

Solar and wind power are growing faster by the year. Solar is now the cheapest form of renewable power. It certainly is getting cheaper to produce in California.

Perhaps the most interesting development is that over a third of the solar power generated there comes

from smaller rooftop systems.

Thus hundreds of thousands of homeowners are reaping the economic benefits generated from harnessing the sun rather than the state’s big utility companies or their investors.

California plans to generate 50% of its power from renewables by 2030. Not only are states the laboratories of democracy, they are also labs for energy innovation.

The good thing is that despite the wrong federal policy being pushed by the Trump administration, California and other progressive states are pushing ahead, providing a true model for the rest of the country.

This is especially encouraging in light of the Trump Administration’s proposed plan to slash the Department of Energy [DOE] budget for its renewable energy and energy efficiency program by 70%.

Again, the message is simple. Renewable energy is not only here, it is here to stay. It is the future and that future must be now if we are to beat the heat caused by ongoing climate change. Climate change is here, but so is RE.

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

Session

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

imagine the assault on individual liberty, reproductive rights, separation of church and state, Islam, immigrants ... it’s almost too horrifying to ponder.

INDEPENDENT JUDICIARY

Once again it will be left up to the state Supreme Court to pass judgment on the legislative game-playing.

If the court determines – as seems likely – that many of the last-minute revenue raises are, in fact, taxes and required a three-fourths’ legislative majority to enact, you will hear Republicans poobahs in the House and Senate wail about “activist judges.”

That would be a ruse, of course. They would hope to shift blame for their failures onto the court, gambling that many Oklahoma voters won’t understand the complexities of constitutional law.

Legislative leaders also could use the court’s rulings to make the case for judicial reform.

Despite claiming fealty to the federal and state constitutions, the GOP elected leadership really doesn’t like the idea of checks-and-balances.

One way to fix the problem of a court that actually applies the Constitution, without fear or favor, is to replace the current, scandal-free judicial selection process with partisan elections – which would sell justice to the highest bidders.

Stay tuned. As bad as this session was, the worst may be yet to come.

Freedom

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24

superior officer who “didn’t want to hear any of it ... he told me to shut up and explain how we could assist the Iraqi federal police in finding more detainees” whom Manning knew would be tortured.

Manning wrote to a friend that “everything started slipping after that ... I saw things differently ... I had always questioned the [way] things worked, and investigated to find the truth ... but that was a point where I was a ‘part of something’ ... I was actively involved in something that I was completely against.”

In November 2009, Manning began transmitting classified documents to Wikileaks including video footage of a U.S. helicopter gunship firing on and killing 11 unarmed civilians while the crew members made wisecrack jokes. The “Collateral Murder” video went viral and shaped broad public opposition to the Iraq war.

Over time, Manning leaked tens of thousands of documents that exposed war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq, complicity in torture, corruption and government deception.

The “Gitmo files” showed the detainment of a Pakistani journalist for seven years because he uncovered ties between Muslim radicals and the Pakistani state, and U.S. government efforts to suppress a German criminal investigation into the CIA kidnapping of Khaled El-Masri, an innocent German citizen who was abducted and then rendered to Afghanistan for torture.

Other diplomatic cables exposed corruption in foreign governments, America’s support for authoritarian states in the Middle East, and the U.S. State Department’s strong-arming the Haitian government into blocking a minimum wage raise in multinational textile makers from 22 cents to 61 cents per hour as a result of lobbying by Hanes, Fruit of the Loom and Levi-Strauss.

Manning was turned into federal authorities by computer hacker Adrian Lamo and transferred to a stateside prison at the Marine Corps Base at Quantico, VA where he was subject to a harsh regiment of punitive solitary confinement.

The torture, Mader writes, was designed “as a warning to other prospective whistle-blowers, and used as a way to break him, crush his spirit and force him to implicate Julian Assange [Wikileaks founder] and Wikileaks in espionage charges.”

Whistle-blowers throughout history have been subjected to public vilification and harsh demeaning treatment by authorities. As time passes, however, more and more come to acknowledge the courage of their conviction.

An Oklahoma original, Chelsea Manning will go down in history as a voice of conscience who in a dark hour of American history attempted to alert the public about state-sponsored atrocities and abuse of power. Whatever her imperfections, she will always stand for the principle of transparency in government – a pivotal cornerstone of functioning democracy. *Jeremy Kuzmarov teaches at the University of Tulsa and is author of Modernizing Repression: Police Training and Nation Building in the American Century [University of Massachusetts, 2012] among other works.*

Celebration

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

gender pronouns used by the Army, to receive medically advised treatment, to groom herself as the gender to which she was transitioning.

And when it seemed bleakest to her, there were suicide attempts, which kept her supporters so concerned not just for her liberty, but also for her very life. Thankfully, a light broke soon afterward with new hope for relief, a reduction of sentence at the least.

The final push came as Obama’s presidency drew to a close, an appeal, which included an apology from Chelsea, and for her supporters a renewed drive to seek clemency. A petition on the White House website garnered hundreds of thousands of signatures and possibly helped move Obama to mercy.

In the end, Chelsea, while anticipating her freedom, decided to continue to appeal the 35-year sentence, which most fair observers of military law recognize

as unprecedented for the crimes of which she was convicted. There were grave irregularities by the prosecution, and the judge may have been biased. All this is still to be resolved, but true to her nature, Chelsea fights on for what is right. The court’s decision may not have much impact on Chelsea herself, but it might prevent such injustice from occurring again.

Here in central Oklahoma, the most frequent question I get as the “face” of the efforts to support Chelsea Manning is, “Is she coming home?” I always answer the same: I hope so, but it will only be for a visit. She is making her new home on the East Coast, near family and friends, and starting a new life. That said, we very much hope that our hometown hero will come back for an in-person celebration to meet her Oklahoma friends. We will be ready when you are, Chelsea!

OKC resident Rena Guay is an organizer on many social justice, human rights and peace issues as well as an archivist of left-leaning activist events through photographs and audio recordings. She works as a freelance web developer, creating web sites for organizations and campaigns.

America's Ongoing Colonization

A COLONY IN A NATION

By Chris Hayes

W.W. Norton & Co.

256 pages, \$26.95

BY SUSAN GRIGSBY

What in the world is one supposed to do after graduating from Brown University with a philosophy degree? On its face, it would seem that there are not a lot of job openings that require a philosophy background. If, however, you want to change the world, it doesn't hurt to know how the world works on a philosophical basis.

Chris Hayes likely didn't set out to change the world anymore than any other philosophy graduate, but he has at least helped to explain it. The fast talking host of *All In With Chris Hayes* on MSNBC was the Washington editor of *The Nation* when he began appearing on *Countdown with Keith Olbermann* back in 2010.

After guest hosting for Keith, Ed Schultz, and Rachel Maddow, he was given his own two-hour platform on Saturday mornings called *Up With Chris Hayes*. In 2013, his current series, *All In With Chris Hayes*, began broadcasting in the hour before *The Rachel Maddow Show*.

His fast-talking, hip, wonky style is different from that of Maddow, but his in-depth knowledge of issues and his ability to explicate them is similar.

Hayes puts that ability to good use in his second book, *A Colony In a Nation*. Using the metaphor of a colonized people, he examines how justice and the enforcement of our nation's law and order policies fall differently on colonists than they do on members of the nation.

Although he is not the first to do so, his work feels fresh and timely. Beginning with the American colonists of England, he demonstrates the parallels between the smugglers like John Hancock who violated the English tariff laws and the drug dealers of today who do much the same. And while that seems like a stretch, it really isn't.

While we were taught that the Revolutionary War was fought against taxation without representation, it isn't often emphasized that those taxes often took the form of tariffs on imports that the British gov-

ernment decided to collect in earnest after the Seven Years' War left them deeply in debt. Who better to pay off the debt than the colonists who were so distant that their voices were rarely heard?

So British officials started our first "tough on crime" policy which empowered customs officials, established special courts, and allowed for the stopping of ships at sea to search for illegal imports without cause – other than their suspicion that the ship might possibly be carrying untaxed goods. It was an approach not at all unlike the NYPD's stop and frisk policies of the modern era.

And as it was the colonists' ships that were stopped for searches in the 18th Century, it was the members of our current "colony" who were subject to the stop and frisk searches of the New York Police Department.

Chris Hayes brings his personal experiences to bear in analyzing the two different lands we all occupy. Raised in the Bronx by a community organizer and a school teacher, he commuted daily to Hunter College High School and watched as the city was transformed under the "broken windows" policing that was done in response to the high crime rates of the 1990s.

He examines his own white privilege in telling anecdotes. Passing through a security checkpoint on his way into the Republican National Convention as a college student with his future wife and her father, Chicago journalist Andy Shaw, he realizes that he has marijuana in his backpack, which is hand-searched. The marijuana is discovered [he had been carrying it in an eyeglass case] but after an interminable time span and consultations with police officers, it is simply replaced in his backpack and returned to him without comment.

He accepts that the campaign for law and order, which has focused on order more than on law, has brought benefits to those of us [mostly white] who live in the Nation while penalizing, heavily, those who live in our internal Colony.

White neighborhoods have benefited and have become increasingly safer and quieter while the neighborhoods of our Colony have become a police state. Those denizens of the Colony are closely patrolled and monitored, and laws that are routinely ignored by police in our Nation of white America are fiercely applied in our Colony to those with black or brown skin.

American criminal justice isn't one system with massive racial disparities but two distinct regimes. One [the Nation] is the kind of policing regime you expect in a democracy; the other [the Colony] is the kind you expect in an occupied land. Policing is a uniquely important and uniquely dangerous function of the state.

Dictatorships and totalitarian regimes use the police in horrifying ways; we call them "police states" for a reason. But the terrifying truth is that we as a people have created the Colony through democratic means. We have voted to subdue our fellow citizens; we have rushed to the polls to elect people promising to bar others from enjoying the fruits of liberty. A majority of Americans have put a minority under lock and key.

Nowhere was this demonstrated more clearly than it was in Ferguson, MO, after the shooting of Michael Brown.

Section 29-16[1] of the municipal code of the city of Ferguson codifies this principle. It is a crime to "[f]ail to comply with the lawful order or request of a police officer in the discharge of the officer's official duties." As the Department of Justice would later show, the police much abuse this statute. Ferguson cops routinely issue orders that have no legal basis and then arrest citizens who refuse those orders for "failure to comply." It's a neat little circular bit of authoritarian reasoning.

And it is just one more example of the over-policing that is used to establish order. There is no law against standing in one's own front yard, but a video showed what happened when black men in Ferguson did so. They were tear-

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gassed by police officers who were not enforcing any laws, only order. They were able to use a law written so broadly that it covered anything they wanted it to.

Hayes examines the autonomy given to police officers on the street. Allowed to participate in

a police training simulator, he learns that they need to have the authority to choose when to apply any given law, and when it can be advantageous to ignore minor infractions. The problems arise when that authority is granted to young men who may not have the

judgment to know when to be flexible, and when their superiors insist, as a police sergeant in Baltimore did, that they not “treat criminals like citizens.” But overall, the root of the problem lies in tasking police with preserving order rather than with ensuring safety.

Hayes begins his book with a story of how one night, in his quiet, affluent neighborhood, he heard the angry voice of a man loudly berating a woman. Concerned, he dialed 911 and explained to the dispatcher what he had witnessed. A police car arrived and he went to bed. Later he began to wonder what had happened to the woman. Had she been helped or hindered by his intervention? Could his call have worsened the situation for her? And what law, exactly, had been broken? He has the honesty to admit that what he wanted was not a law enforced, but order in his neighborhood restored.

He closes the book with an anecdote about four black teenage boys on bikes in Prospect Park in New

York City. He watched as their typical juvenile stunts became more threatening to passersby, culminating in the theft of a cell phone from a man walking in the park. Should he call 911, knowing what he does about the Colony and how it is policed?

At 256 pages, this is an important as well as a quick read. I listened to Chris Hayes narrate it and he is quite good at verbally differentiating quotes from text. The points Hayes makes have nothing to do with Donald Trump, but they have everything to do with how and why he was elected president. It didn't start with him, but he has benefited from the existence of the Colony.

The voters who've endorsed the Colony's construction were selecting from a menu of options. And that menu was put together by shrewd politicians who offered up options that they felt would benefit them and/or neatly play to the white fear that is one of the most singularly explosive forces [if not the most explosive force] in American politics.

Campus Liberals Too Easy To Bait

BY FROMA HARROP

Rising to the bait is a fishing term. Anglers lure fish hiding in the deep by positioning bait on or near the surface. Fish that rise to the bait usually end up on someone's dinner plate.

Conservative groups routinely try this technique on college liberals. Their lure is an inflammatory right-wing speaker. The catch comes in duping liberals to act badly as censors of free speech or, even better, violently. The protesters provide free entertainment on Fox News Channel. And the broader public sees them as spoiled college kids. It's painful to watch.

Why else would Berkeley College Republicans invite the likes of Milo Yiannopoulos to speak on their famously left-leaning University of California campus? A publicity freak trafficking in racist slurs, Yiannopoulos is currently best known for advocating sex between men and boys.

Taking their cue in a play their enemies wrote, the

offended ones made a big deal out of this cartoonish character. The cameras caught “protesters,” some wearing masks, in full rampage. They trashed the campus before heading off into downtown Berkeley to smash some windows. [By the way, who exactly were these people hiding their identities?]

Over at the State University of New York at Buffalo, agitated students all but shut down a speech by Robert Spencer, an alleged Islamophobe. Spencer's claim to fame is his controversial Jihad Watch website.

Behind many such speaking engagements is a group called Young America's Foundation. And behind Young America's Foundation are the Koch brothers, Richard and Helen DeVos and other very rich financiers of the right. Their agenda relies on discrediting anyone to their left.

Frankly, I don't care enough about Ann Coulter to even dislike her. Her political shock act ran its course long ago, and being ignored is probably her greatest

fear. But the left seems determined to revive her career.

Coulter's scheduled speech at Berkeley was canceled after protests raised security concerns. It should surprise no one that the foundation was picking up her \$20,000 speaking fee. College Republicans and the foundation are now suing Berkeley for allegedly violating Coulter's First Amendment rights.

Oklahoma Friends Meetings (Quakers)

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

- Author unknown

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Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

of screwing up a two-car funeral. All they had to do was heed the voters' wishes and shepherd the reform measures through their chambers to a governor who couldn't wait to sign them into law.

The obvious conclusion to be drawn from this abysmal session is that McCall and Schulz were not ready for prime time. They were most effective when matters involved the state's biggest checkbooks. Whatever Harold Hamm, Larry Nichols and Co. wanted, the Legislature's Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee delivered. Whatever the people wanted, not so much.

Even Joe Allbaugh, the crusty corrections' director who's undoubtedly seen it all in a political career that's included top state and federal posts, including in President George W. Bush's administration, could not hide his disgust – quoted by the Oklahoman as saying, "I don't know where the leadership is."

We know where it isn't. If McCall, Schulz and their lieutenants continue next session to disregard the will of the people, they must be held to account.

Gov. Failin

With only 19 months left in office, Gov. Mary Fallin's legacy already is being etched in stone. It's hardly inspiring.

The governor played a key role in creating the state's worst fiscal crisis since the 1980s oil bust, unwavering in her support of corporate welfare and income tax cuts – until it was too late.

Confronted with massive, annual budget gaps, she finally broke with GOP orthodoxy the last two years, promoting higher taxes to help underwrite vital state services.

Not surprising, she ignored the fairest tax of all – the income tax, which is based on ability to pay – and focused on the most regressive – expanding sales taxes to services not currently covered.

Worse, she's been unable to help forge a legislative consensus to address the state's long-term structural deficit, even though her party enjoys supermajorities in both houses.

She threatened to veto this year's budget if it did not protect vital state services and generate new revenue. Yet she now seems poised to sign a spending blueprint that relies on constitutionally dubious revenue generators and continues to starve public education and corrections, among others.

Little wonder she garners such low marks from registered Oklahoma voters – and is the nation's fifth lowest rated governor, according to U.S. Morning Consult surveys.

The polling firm nationally quizzed 85,000-plus reg-

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TOM GOODWIN

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istered voters weekly between January and March, finding 41% of Sooners approved and 52% disapproved of Fallin's job performance.

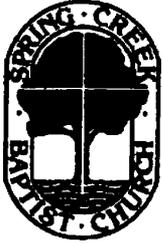
She was in worse shape with her constituents than Michigan's Rick Snyder, even though he's accused of poisoning Flint residents, but better off than Kansas' Sam Brownback [27% approval] and New Jersey's Chris Christie [25% approval].

The best way to begin rehabilitating her legacy would be to veto the budget, order a special session and demand long-term solutions to the state's fiscal woes. It's not only good public policy, but it's also smart politics.

Better to spend a long, hot summer this year doing the right things than reprise this nightmare session in the midst of 2018's gubernatorial and statehouse campaigns.

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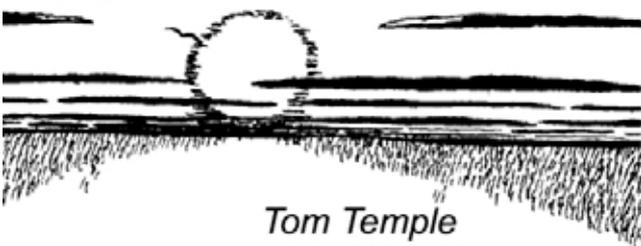
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Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Congratulations to former state Democratic chair/ state Rep. Wallace Collins and former Rep. Anna Belle Wiedemann, honored as OK Democratic Party's 2017 Carl Albert Award winners. Bravo!

Cause-Effect: Prices for the most popular name-brand drugs jumped 208% from 2008-16. Median 2015 salary for pharmaceutical CEO: \$14.5 million. Amount drug companies spend annually marketing to doctors: \$24 billion. – AARP

Notable: Natural gas generated 34% of U.S. electricity last year, more than nuclear [20%] and coal [30%]. Now Three Mile Island nears closing, unable to find takers for its nuclear-generated electricity.

Youth Movement: OK Democrats tabbed 24-year-old Anna Langthorn as chair and 33-year-old Brian Jones as vice-chair at recent state convention. Rachel Hunsucker is new treasurer and Dave Ratcliff was re-elected secretary.

Laurel: To economist extraordinaire Craig Knutson, chosen as new president/CEO of the OKC-based Potts Family Foundation. Our friend Pat Potts is retiring after 15 years leading the child advocacy non-profit.

Good news: Underage American teens are drinking less, down to 32.8% in 2015, lowest since 1991 when rate was 50.8%. – Centers for Disease Control

2018 governor's race heating up. Announced Dems include House Minority Leader Scott Inman, former AG Drew Edmondson and ex-Sen. Connie Johnson. Republicans in or eyeing: Auditor Gary Jones, Lt. Gov. Todd Lamb and Tulsa attorney Gary Richardson.

Expect President Obama's nominee Scott Palk to be confirmed as new federal judge in OKC – now that the OU Law assistant dean has been re-nominated by President Trump. Petty Senate partisanship.

Get moving! Exercise helps preserve your cells – specifically, telomeres, parts of the DNA that shorten as we age, according to Preventive Medicine study. Alas, AARP reports 35% of Oklahomans 50-plus engage in no physical activity.

Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

Dalai Lama. Both are learned in science and public policy. Both support the need to address climate change as the result of human activity. Both are men of integrity and compassion. Both have a balanced personality.

The leader of the Free World, President Donald Trump, is patently lacking in all of the leadership qualities of those two men.

What is wrong with American culture?

1. The culture of America has been dumbed down.
2. The culture of America is tragically out of touch with reality.
3. The culture of America is just fine: Love it or leave it!

Jeff Hamilton
Midwest City

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

Editor, The Observer:

Waiting more than 106 days into his administration, President Trump ostensibly fired his FBI director for "poor handling of the Hillary Clinton e-mail investigation," first announced by Director Comey in July 2016 as "requiring nothing further." The announcement obviously disappointed the Trump campaign at the time.

However, just 11 days before the election in 2016, Director Comey announces that the Clinton investigation was re-opened! This surprising announcement plays at least some role, perhaps a major one, in bringing about the defeat of Secretary Clinton in the Electoral College despite her three million margin in the popular vote.

What's wrong with this picture? Surely it has had nothing to do with the director's recent request for additional funding in order to pursue the increasing likelihood that Russia interfered in our election!

Frank Silovsky
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

I don't subscribe to our local propaganda journal, the Lawton Constitution, and am so thankful for all those who make The Observer possible.

I'm 82. Sole income is Social Security and teacher's retirement. I thank God daily for my health care facility, Indian Health Service hospital, for which [U.S. Rep. Tom] Cole and our other Republican leaders do



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absolutely nothing to support financially yet continue to propagandize and “play the role” as benefactors, having bully pulpits to continue their lies through the above mentioned “news” paper.

Yvonne Cannon
Lawton

Editor, The Observer:

As a white man, I have never feared police. I have always considered them protectors, and have called them when I heard gunshots in my neighborhood or observed some driver obviously impaired or endangering others.

The Betty Shelby and Terence Crutcher tragedy [in Tulsa] is best understood in light of statistics revealing aspects of race relations in America.

Black men are stopped by police roughly twice as often as white men, and unarmed black men are three times as likely to be killed by police as unarmed white men. Most of us know that African-Americans are convicted and imprisoned at higher rates than caucasians for similar offenses under similar circumstances. And African-Americans know that when new laws are enacted to block Sunday voting, or require ID cards to vote, it is to reduce black voting.

It is sad to consider that race relations are actually better today than they have ever been, which only reminds us that, historically, things have been a lot worse. Fifty-four years ago, Dr. King reviewed the ways black Americans experienced discrimination in his famous “Dream Speech” – 17 minutes every American should listen to again. We all want to be better people. We can begin by confessing our silence about things that are not right, and committing to speak up for a more just world.

This tragedy has once again lifted the dialogue about police shooting and racism. Terence Crutcher did not deserve to die. What different training could help police defuse situations short of shooting someone? Will society pay for better training, or argue that things are fine as they are? What does your church or house of worship say about these things?

Nathaniel Batchelder
Oklahoma City

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

Editor, The Observer:

His true-blue Democrat father, former Muskogee Congressman Ed Edmondson, must be spinning in his grave.

Gubernatorial candidate Drew Edmondson says, “I don’t care about your political party or who you voted for president.”

This middle-of-the-road talk has condemned our Democratic Party of poor folks to minority status without a single statewide officeholder or member of Congress.

As long as we Democrats copy Republicans, voters will vote for the real thing every time.

We need a Bernie Sanders’ Democrat running for governor and standing for a \$15 an hour minimum wage, free tuition in public colleges and universities, and a Medicare-for-all single-payer system of health care.

Donald Trump and the Republicans are opposed to all these things because they represent the rich.

If Edmondson wants to sugar-coat Trump, I suggest he switch parties and run as a Republican. Unless he sticks up for poor folks, he is not worth a poop to us Democrats.

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner
Wagoner

Editor's Note: Edmondson's full quote, as reported in the May 2 Muskogee Phoenix, was, “I don't care about your political party or who you voted for president. I care about Oklahoma and Oklahomans. We didn't create this mess, but we can – and we will – fix it together.”

Swindle

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 29

lar infrastructure plan, just the mindless observation that “simply providing more federal funding for infrastructure is not the solution.” There is no expansion of treatment slots for opioid addiction, just massive cutbacks in all drug treatment and prevention programs. There is no solution to the student-loan crisis, just the elimination of the entire federally subsidized student-loan program and the public service loan forgiveness program, which will make life worse for millions of young Americans. There is no plan to protect Social Security or Medicaid, just nearly \$1 trillion in reductions in Medicaid funding that will cut off health care for at least 14 million low-income Americans, including children, and a steep cut in Social Security disability programs.

Of course there are mammoth tax cuts for the wealthiest fraction of 1% at the plutocratic top, the same people whose loopholes Trump promised to close.

Only a politician who thinks his supporters will never figure out how he scammed them would attempt such an epic betrayal. And perhaps that is the worst insult of all.

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Single-Payer

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35

es, premiums and deductibles the beneficiaries have paid don't cover it all. General revenues currently fund 40% of the program's costs, and that percentage is rising.]

Stories like these are why many of the Town Hall attendees currently hollering at Republicans who voted to dismantle ObamaCare are also yelling, "Single-payer 'Medicare for all.'" Well, what of it?

Let's talk policy, and that requires defining things.

Medicare is not single-payer like the Canadian system. In Canada, the government picks up all the medical bills. Medicare is multi-payer, combining public and private coverage. France's superb health care system, rated the best by the World Health Organization, is also multi-payer. Canada ranks 30th on the WHO list, and the United States is 37th.

So in developing a health care system that is universal, provides high-quality care and is affordable, we need not make a fetish out of copying the Canadian model.

There's now some bipartisan interest in what's being called – and it's a mouthful – "Medicare Advantage Premium Support for All." Billy Wynne, a health care consultant, champions this idea in the Health Affairs blog. He's taken some raw numbers and figures and determined that Medicare Part C could cover everyone and save businesses more than \$600 billion. And no new taxes.

To understand Medicare, one must take apart the parts. Part A covers hospital and post-acute care. Beneficiaries don't pay extra for that. Part B covers outpatient services, and Part D the drug benefit. To

get one or both, one must pay extra.

Part C is Medicare Advantage. These are private plans that offer Part A and Part B benefits plus some added perks, which may include vision, dental and drug coverage. Enrollees pay a premium depending on how fancy the plan is. Despite recent reports of their bilking Medicare [all billers need to be monitored], Medicare Advantage plans have a good record of controlling costs.

On quality of care, Medicare Advantage plans often do better than traditional fee-for-service Medicare. They are especially good at follow-up, making sure people take their medications and show for doctors' appointments. After all, sick enrollees are not good for their bottom lines.

Medicare Advantage Premium Support for All could be deemed single-payer, in that the government would pay the insurance companies. It could also be deemed market-based, in that people would choose their preferred plan.

How the medical-industrial complex would take to this remains to be seen. Insurers would see their benefits regulated and funding capped. They could use the clout of a national market to get good prices from providers, but providers might not like that.

ObamaCare has accomplished much but needs work. And the Republicans' American Health Care Act is a political and social disaster. America seems headed to some kind of single-payer system. Medicare Advantage Premium Support for All could be one of the roads that lead there.

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Liberals

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 42

What should smart lefties do? Three things.

One is develop a very thick skin. Many of you are unable to distinguish between merely provocative and totally offensive. You can simplify by dropping such distinctions. Both kinds of speech are protected. If right-wingers choose to invite promoters of disgusting views, let them own it.

Two is to understand this about the opinion business: Success can come from drawing a positive response or a negative one. Failure is no response. Thus, the most effective way to block an obvious attempt to bait you is to swim away. Don't petition. Don't attend. Don't enrich those who make a livelihood out of getting under your skin.

Wit, meanwhile, makes for a great offense. As the writers at Saturday Night Live have taught us, mock-

ery is a more fearsome weapon than raw rage.

Three, when campus conservatives book speakers custom-designed to enrage you, try this clever tactic: Host a sensible conservative to give a talk at the same time. The growing ranks of anti-Trump conservatives offer a pool of highly promising candidates.

Such speakers would draw audience and attention away from the flamethrower across campus. Finding common ground is good for the civic culture, and joining forces enhances power. Importantly, you would come off as open-minded and also be open-minded. We'd all do well to listen more to opinions contrary to our own.

Resist the flashing lures. The choice for campus liberals comes down to this: Either you frustrate those who would provoke you or you become their dinner.

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