

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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As Student Enrollment Grows And Fewer Education Degrees Are Awarded, Oklahoma Faces A Daunting Challenge ...

Who Will Teach Our Kids?



Back-To-School Special Report: Pages 12-20

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OUR MOTTO

To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

OUR CREDO

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

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LETTERS TO EDITOR

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Observations

Tackling Taxes

With little fanfare, senators last month began unpacking public policy with profound, long-term implications for Oklahoma, taking what they called a “deep dive” into the state’s out-of-whack tax code.

It’s a daunting, but incredibly important task if Oklahoma is ever to escape the vicissitudes of an economy overly reliant on boom-bust carbon and agriculture.

As it stands, the state’s tax system disproportionately burdens the working class and poor and undermines core state services. It must be overhauled – with an unwavering commitment to fairness – if the state is to flourish in the 21st Century.

Sen. Roger Thompson, R-Okemah, got the ball rolling by scheduling the hearing, the first step toward a formal interim study this fall. If he doesn’t already know, he quickly will find out that Oklahoma tax policy is complex and lopsided because there were too many deep-pocketed special interest cooks in the policymaking kitchen over the years.

Just ask Gov. Mary Fallin. Her pleas to expand the sales tax to currently exempt services have all but been ignored by lawmakers, despite repeated billion-dollar budget holes. Hell, it seems, hath no fury like an industry whose tax break is jeopardized – which helps explain why overhauling the tax code is so daunting.

Even so, Thompson’s three-hour hearing served as a primer for senators of both parties seeking to better understand Oklahoma’s revenue picture. It also signaled that the Senate’s Republican majority has taken note of Kansas’ failed “trickle down” experiment – cutting taxes does not magically generate more income.

Instead, what helps create sustainable, predictable revenue streams to underwrite vital public services is a fairer, more broadly applied tax code that ensures the working class and poor have more to spend, the economy’s uber stimulant.

Reform must begin with the state income tax – the fairest tax of all,

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THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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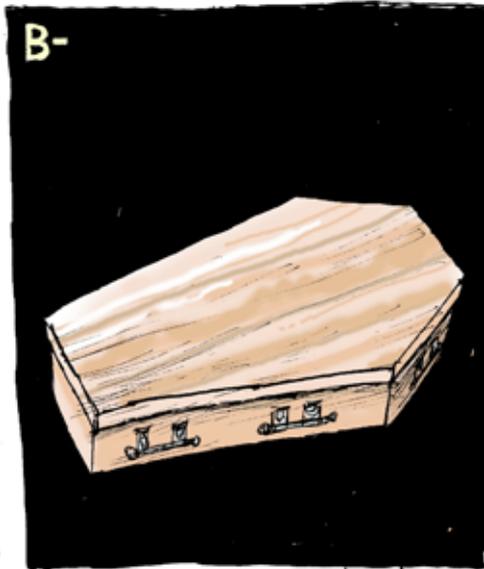
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Observerscope

WHICH BOX ARE REPUBLICANS INCREASING ACCESS TO?



Mark your calendars for Aug. 24: Our back-to-school Newsmakers event at OKC's Full Circle Books features OEA President Alicia Priest and Rep. Mickey Dollens. See back cover for details.

Dart: To the ol' ball coach and rookie Tulsa Sen. Dave Rader, eyeing the sale of Arkansas River water from near Muskogee to Texas. First, Arkansas would object. Second, it would be cost prohibitive to ship that distance.

Owe back taxes? If you make payment arrangements between Sept. 1 and Nov. 30, the state will waive interest, fees and other penalties. Lawmakers hope the amnesty program will generate \$14.6 million.

Laurel: To University of Central Oklahoma and Oklahoma City University, the only state schools among 79 cited nationally in The Chronicle of Higher Education's annual Great Colleges to Work For.

Wither, humanity? Male sperm counts plummeted nearly 60% between 1973-2011 in Western nations, including North America, Europe and Australia. Researchers don't know why. – New Scientist

Dart: To the Daily Disappointment, first burying the story that one of its major advertisers, Hobby Lobby, paid a \$3 million federal fine and forfeited illegally imported antiquities from Iraq – then publishing an ass-kissing editorial that depicted the law-breaking as a “commendable effort to preserve Bible artifacts.”

Another family values Republican is in hot water – Woodward Sen. Bryce Marlatt is accused of grabbing and kissing an Uber driver in late June. He was immediately stripped of three leadership posts pending OKC police probe.

Laurel: To Attorney General Mike Hunter, targeting more than a dozen pharmaceutical companies in a lawsuit alleging they fueled state's opioid epidemic by misrepresenting pain med addictiveness.

Dart: To AG Hunter, showing no sign of joining 18 states and DC in lawsuit aimed at protecting federal student loan borrowers from predatory colleges. Why? Could it be because the suit targets big GOP donor/Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, who refuses to implement Obama-era protections?

Speaking of Hunter, he curries favor with GOP voters by vowing to fight removal of Christian cross from East Central University campus chapel. Other state schools have chapels that do not blatantly favor one faith. ECU should separate church-state, as well.

Former Sally's List exec Kendra Horn hopes to unseat 5th District GOP incumbent U.S. Rep. Steve Russell. She joins a Democratic field that includes former nominee Tom Guild and corrections consultant Ed Porter.

Resigned Sen. Kyle Loveless, R-OKC, cut a deal with prosecutors, agreeing to pay \$112,524 for misusing campaign funds and never again hold public office or act as a paid political consultant.

Rural Oklahomans and health care providers dare not forget that U.S. Sens. Jim Inhofe and James Lankford both voted for “skinny repeal” of ObamaCare – it would have hastened closing of small town hospitals and nursing homes.

Dart: To U.S. Rep. Markwayne Mullin, R-Westville, breaking his three-term pledge because, well, he thinks his constituents just can't live without him. Another anti-government hypocrite who can't resist the taxpayers' teat.

Fifty-four Oklahoma lakes now on Department of Environmental Quality's Fish Consumption Advisory list because of elevated mercury levels – up 14 from last year. Meanwhile, EPA Chief Scott Pruitt undermines efforts to replace coal-burning power plants responsible for the pollution.

Dart: To Sen. Ervin Yen, R-OKC, predicting state Supreme Court will nullify constitutionally-dubious revenue measures approved in session's final hours. Then why'd he vote for all four?

CONTINUED ON PAGE 44

Letters

MIKE LUCKNICH ©
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Editor, The Observer:

The Dart you gave Gov. Mary Fallin in the July 2017 issue of The Oklahoma Observer should be removed. By vetoing HB 1210, the governor simply wanted to prevent a wasted effort. The governor's veto message states that HB 1210 conflicts with the federal Olmstead decision because it creates another entity to oversee the work of state agencies that are operating under guidelines established by that decision. The state of Oklahoma and those agencies providing the accommodations have been and are in compliance with the federal mandate.

Also, the governor, after closing institutions in Enid and Pauls Valley and moving all clients to community placements, created a Blue Ribbon Panel in 2013 to develop a comprehensive plan to support individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities and their families. In 2015, she signed an executive order establishing an inter-agency executive council with each agency that serves the I/DD population to develop plans to implement the Blue Ribbon Panel recommendations.

As a result, the governor found

this bill "confusing and not sufficiently well thought out" to replace the work already being performed by various state agencies. That work consists of assisting and accommodating persons with disabilities and I/DD in need of community-based integrated assistance.

In closing, you might consider giving Gov. Fallin a laurel because by her closing the state's two resource centers she has done more than any other Oklahoma governor to recognize and support individuals with disabilities. She stopped the outdated practice of warehousing them in institutions to moving them to community-based services where they are treated with dignity and respect as productive members of our society.

Michael McNutt
Oklahoma City

Editor's Note: Michael McNutt is communications director for Gov. Mary Fallin.

Editor, The Observer:

Our medical and medical insurance ethos sadly is that sick people are good for business. That health care should be a money-making machine is the mentality

of a nation tricked into believing for-profit health care and medical insurance are superior to national health care as practiced in every other industrialized nation.

In contrast, the ethos of all national healthcare programs is to keep people healthy in order to save buckets of money. It works. Every nation with a national program delivers health care for all at a fraction of the cost Americans pay. The incentives of public health care are opposite to those of a for-profit system.

I am a World War II veteran. My response to conservatives who are certain government can't do anything right is that I am grateful for VA health care and for Medicare, both run by the "government" and paid for in the same way we pay for public education, the fire department, roads, postal service, etc., i.e., through public taxation.

Closed thinking places profit over the health of the nation. It prevents Americans from having full medical insurance from day one. Unlike citizens of every other industrialized nation, Americans wait until old age to get 80% rather than total coverage.

We are the only industrialized nation in the world in which parents are forced to advertise in the local newspaper that an account has been set up at a local bank to accept donations to pay for treatment of a child with life threatening cancer. No Canadian, French, or English parent would need to "pass the hat" or to ask for charity in order to save the life of a child. In other nations it is never "charity," but "healthcare with dignity."

We are the only nation where private insurance companies can restrict services to a particular state, forcing clients to travel thousands of miles for treatment, or dictate where a client can get a blood transfusion, or deny payment for a bone marrow donor search.

"Why should I pay for the health

CONTINUED ON PAGE 45



A Know-Nothing Revival

Is a second American Know-Nothing Party in the offing?

It's not an idle thought given the recent release of a Pew Research Center poll that found nearly six in 10 Republicans and GOP-leaning independents think colleges and universities are bad for the country.

Not long ago, it was an article of American faith that higher education was a golden ticket, an invaluable step in becoming all one's creator intended. It also was enshrined in public policy – tax dollars steered to colleges and universities, the federal treasury backed low-cost student loans, and the GI Bill offered a brighter future for returning war heroes.

Now, higher education is the only institution viewed in more partisan terms than – *gasp!* – news media.

Pew's June 8-18 survey found 58% of Republicans and GOP-leaning independents nationally believe "colleges and universities have a negative effect on the country." Conversely, 72% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents regard higher ed positively.

That's an even slightly wider gap than Republican-Democratic perceptions of the lightning-rod news media – Republicans 85% negative, Democrats 44% positive.

Before we go too far, it's important to note the 1800s Know-Nothing Party wasn't driven by anti-intellectualism. Its proper name was the American Party, and it was primarily anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant.

But the Know-Nothing moniker seems apt for those who now regard higher ed as villainous in an era when economic globalization demands an increasingly higher-educated and -skilled workforce.

Yet, for a half century, well-heeled, far-right ideologues [think: Koch Brothers] have targeted colleges and universities, viewing them as the provinces of latte-sipping, pointy-headed liberal professors who, in effect, operate leftist indoctrination camps.

They've even established and underwritten so-called "think tanks" – replete with good government-sounding names like the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, the American Enterprise Institute and the

Heritage Foundation – whose missions all-too-often are to disparage public education.

And they've helped ignite free-speech dust-ups by financing campus appearances by uber right polemicists like Milo Yiannopoulos, Charles Murray and Ann Coulter – a thinly-veiled effort to further burnish a narrative of liberal, ivory tower intolerance.

The scheming has borne fruit.

It wasn't long ago that former Republican Gov. Frank Keating promoted his four-by-four college preparedness plan for Oklahoma high school students. Or that current GOP Gov. Mary Fallin unveiled a campaign to increase by 67% the number of college degrees and certificates earned in Oklahoma by 2030.

Today, however, Oklahoma not only leads the nation in cuts to K-12 funding, but also to higher education – down nearly 18% in the last five years, according to the Oklahoma Policy Institute. These cuts send the unmistakable message that Oklahoma's current policymakers and elected leaders don't value common or higher education, despite lip service to the contrary.

As Oklahoma K-12 teachers increasingly flee to better-paying jobs in other states and as common ed class sizes explode, less public and media attention is often afforded the plight of public colleges and universities. But tighter higher ed budgets also hurt Oklahoma families, left to absorb higher tuition and back-breaking student loan debt, and to navigate murky post-graduation job prospects in a languishing economy.

Interestingly, the Pew survey of 2,504 adults nationally found nearly three-quarters of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents from all age groups gave colleges and universities positive ratings. By contrast, only younger [ages 18-29] Republicans and Republican-leaning independents viewed higher ed positively [52%]; support among Republicans dwindled by age: 39% among 30-49 year olds, 29% for 50-64 and 27% for 65-plus.

The world's greatest 20th Century economy was fueled by the shared value in education – from kindergarten to university. The Know-Nothings need to be reminded of that fact.



These Guys Could Screw Up A Two-Car Funeral Procession

BY CAL HOBSON

Just last November, voters in Oklahoma and throughout much of America spoke loudly and clearly. They selected Republican legislative majorities in both Washington and most states, including Oklahoma. All levers of government are owned by the elephants while the donkeys, if thought of at all, are just an after-thought.

No serious barriers, short of rulings from an already divided United States Supreme Court or armed rebellion in the streets can stand in the way of any legitimate legislative initiative proposed by the majority as they carry out “the people’s business.”

Or so it would seem.

However, since January, both in DC and OKC, Republicans have stumbled, bumbled and fumbled

along the way in their dogged pursuit of significant public policy accomplishments.

For simplicity’s sake, we will examine the demise of just two high-profile promises made, then broken, by the pachyderms.

To begin, let’s travel to our state Capitol, comfy home of more Republican lawmakers than Russian spies that rent space in Trump Tower. For the seventh year in a row, many candidates guaranteed while campaigning that a teacher pay raise would pass during the 2017 session, be fully funded and take effect immediately ... if not sooner!

And why not? New House honchos – Speaker Charles McCall, R-Atoka, and Floor Leader Jon Echols, R-OKC – identified education, and specifi-

cally pay boosts, as issue numero uno. The other two power brokers still hangin' around NE 23rd Street – lame ducks Gov. Mary Fallin and Senate Pooh bah Mike Schulz joined in the chorus of support as well.

Amazingly, unbelievably and incredibly, these four failed miserably to deliver on salaries and, of course, blamed the Democrats, although that party controls just 32 out of 149 votes. This Republican debacle, and then placing blame on the donkeys because of their proximity, is like saying since Luxembourg is part of Europe, it started World War II – not Germany.

Now, let's leave the minor leagues when it comes to politics and move on up to the "bigs" in DC where that brilliant Senate strategist, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-KY, is in charge. Turtle lookalike leader Mitch, though limited in vocabulary to just three words – "repeal and replace" – promised, as did new Prez Donald Trump, to do just that to the suddenly more popular program known as ObamaCare.

On numerous occasions repeal and replace morphed into reject and retreat as several Republican senators bailed out on what had been a seven-year journey to abolish Barack's landmark legislation. It was two female senators, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Susan Collins of Maine, who would not bend to incredible pressure from the White House as well as their own leader and were steadfast no votes.

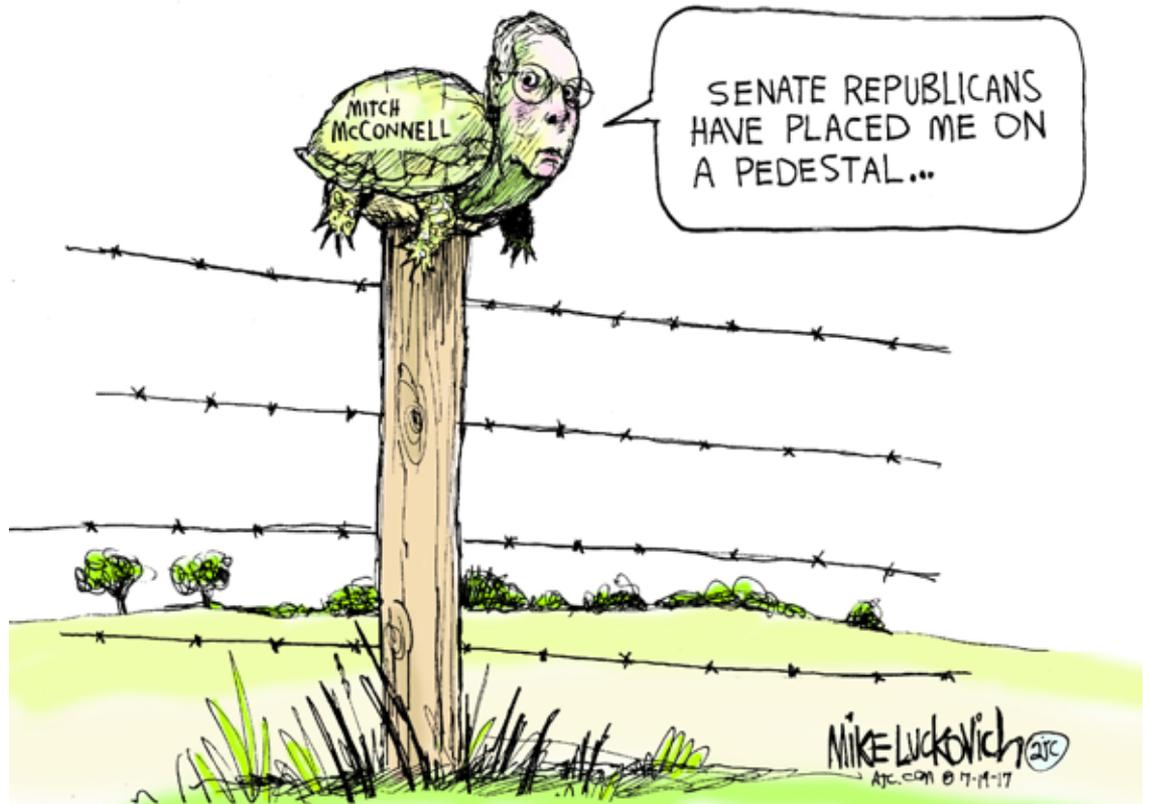
Surprisingly to some, it was cancer-stricken Vietnam war hero and grumpy old warrior John McCain who put the final shiv in the repeal-replace phony farce and, for now, much maligned and criticized ObamaCare remains the law of the land.

So what gives when the apparently inept party of Lincoln can't-won't-couldn't deliver on allegedly popular promises made only a few months ago: [1] a salary boost for educators in Oklahoma and [2] abolition of the Affordable Care Act in Washington, DC?

It's simple. Governing is hard, complicated and often unpopular with the easily distracted plebiscite. Conversely, sitting on your butt, voting no and criticizing is fun, popular and makes for a nice fit on bumper stickers. The latter approach also gets political phonies like Speaker McCall and Rep. Echols elected while the former can and often does end, or at

least derail, the genuine and necessary performances of dedicated public servants.

Speaking of ending, that time has come for the column so let me close with the following blunt assessment of the ever growing crisis at our Capitol. Former Appropriations and Budget Chair Leslie Osborn, R-Mustang, was recently fired from that important post by 'fraidy cat McCall, current but probably temporary occupant of the House speaker's chair, for the sin of telling the truth about how your tax dollars are being spent.



To her credit, unlike banker ne'er do well McCall, Leslie can add and subtract, knows where your tax dollars are spent, or just as important where they are not, and bravely called Charlie's empty hand ... and head.

As usual, when cornered by the truth and facts, McCall did what dictators have done forever.

Lie.

Well, at least when it comes to fibbing, he is consistent. McCall lied to teachers about a salary increase. He lied when he opined that a fee is the same as a tax. He lied when he said education was his No. 1 priority and he lied when he swore to uphold his oath of office.

During my 28 years of elected service at the Capitol, I learned that there are only two things of value in that building: [1] knowledge and [2] your word.

McCall possesses neither.

Sad.

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

In Deposing Osborn, Speaker Reinforces Good-Ol'-Boy Politics

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

Speaker Charles McCall's firing of House Appropriations and Budget Chair Leslie Osborn not only underscored his weakness as a leader, but also further besmirched the Legislature's already tattered reputation.

How so?

First, McCall, R-Atoka, was foolish to think he could shift blame to the state Department of Human Services for \$30 million in cuts to programs serving vulnerable children, adults and the elderly.

Anyone with even passing knowledge of the facts knew it was lawmakers whose fiscal mismanagement left DHS unable to offset court-ordered upgrades to the state's child welfare system and declining rates of federal matching funds.

In contradicting the speaker's nonsensical version of events, Osborn, R-Mustang, simply told the truth: the Legislature didn't do its job. The state's most vulnerable will now pay a terrible price.

Second, it's important to note who McCall didn't punish: Reps. Earl Sears [chair of Appropriations and Budget Subcommittee on Revenue and Taxation] and Pat Ownbey [A&B Human Services chair]. Both also pushed back publicly against the speaker.

Neither were deposed as chairs. Only Osborn, a

strong-minded, sharp-tongued woman, got the ax.

It's a sad reality that Osborn's punishment echoes the Legislature's good-ol'-boy history – all too often what few women hold public office are to be seen in the male-dominated chambers and not heard.

Example: On May 26, Tulsa Rep. Regina Goodwin's remarks on the House floor were interrupted by nearby off-mic, redneck commentary. Goodwin abruptly spun around and demanded to know whose mouth was running. Some of her Democratic colleagues even bowed up and got between her and the offending dipsticks.

Example: In the session's final hours, when Gov. Mary Fallin, McCall, and Senate President Mike Schulz finally invited Democratic leaders into budget negotiations, the two women chairing House and Senate appropriations committees – Osborn and Porter Sen. Kim David – were conspicuously absent.

When haven't the budget/appropriations chairs – the ones most conversant on revenues and agency needs – been at the negotiating table at crunch time?

The speaker's office insists Osborn's firing had “nothing” to do with the dust-up over DHS funding. Yep, and pigs fly.

Former Speaker Steve Lewis, who knows a thing or two about intra-caucus flareups, noted, “When you are in the leadership you are on a team, you have your relative voice within the team, but in the end, you must go with the team so long as you can.

“But if you're a person of good conscience and judgment you cannot lose sight of your own values. Some decisions become a bridge too far.”

No doubt. But it's worth remembering that Republicans crowed last winter when Osborn and David became the first women to lead the two chambers' appropriations committees at the same time. Then came their absences during final negotiations. And now Osborn's dismissal, replaced by a man – Rep. Kevin Wallace of Wellston.

For the record: Only 20 of Oklahoma's 149 legislative seats [13.4%] are held by women – second lowest nationally, behind only Wyoming.

In dismissing Osborn, McCall shot himself in the foot: He should have followed Schulz's lead and kept mum about the DHS nightmare. Then he wouldn't have felt compelled to dump Osborn for insubordination, igniting a political firestorm.

McCall's grip on power already was shaky. Can he survive a six-month interim when legislators have plenty of time to plot a coup?

Deborah Astley

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State's Rank In Child Well-Being Is Mediocre

BY MIKE W. RAY

When it comes to ensuring that children in this state are safe, healthy and protected, Oklahoma is just OK. Not much to brag about.

Oklahoma falls below the national average in several areas of child well-being, placing the state at 36th in the nation, according to the 2017 Kids Count Data Book released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The annual Kids Count Data Book uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains – health, education, economic well-being, and family and community – that reflect what children need most to thrive.

“A ranking of 36th place out of 50 is not good enough for our children and not good enough for Oklahoma,” said Joe Dorman, chief executive officer of the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy. “Our mediocre outcomes reflect mediocre investments made in the services that children rely on, like public education and health. We have to do more to lift our children up and lay the groundwork for the next generation to be successful.”

Oklahoma ranks:

- 28th in economic well-being. The economic well-being domain examines data related to child poverty, family employment, housing costs and whether older teens not in school are working. In Oklahoma, 22% of children – more than one in five – are growing up below the poverty line.

- 29th in health. The health domain looks at the percentage of children who lack insurance, child and teen death rates, low-birth weight babies and alcohol or drug abuse among teens. Oklahoma moved up five spots in health to 29th place, due in part to increased access to health insurance. Seven percent of Oklahoma's kids now lack coverage, a 30% decrease between 2010 and 2015.

- 39th in education. This domain examines the percentage of children ages three and four not attending school, fourth graders not proficient in reading, eighth graders not proficient in math and high school students not graduating on time. Fifty-seven percent of Oklahoma's three- and four-year-olds are not attending school, higher than the national average. A disappointing 77% of eighth graders lack proficiency in math.

- 39th in family and community. This domain examines the percentage of children living in high-poverty areas, single-parent households and education levels among heads of households, as well as teen births.

The teen birth rate in Oklahoma remains far higher than the national average at 35 births per 1,000 females, compared to 22 nationally. Twelve percent of children are living in high-poverty neighborhoods.

Despite the rankings, Dorman said, the state has made progress in pursuing reforms that should eventually have an impact, such as a push to address child nutrition. OICA worked closely with legislators to pass a bill strengthening child nutrition by supporting greater partnerships between food banks and public schools.

“While we still have a ways to go, I am proud of the progress that Oklahoma has made for our state's children through data-driven investments and policies,” said Dorman.

“Maintaining health care programs, investing in early childhood education and expanding programs to create economic stability for families will help ensure all children in the state have the opportunity to thrive.”

“We have a long way to go,” said former state Rep. Laura Boyd, the national public policy director of the Family Focused Treatment Association. “It is not OK when any child is homeless, hungry, lacks clothing, and is growing up in an institution or congregate care.

“Oklahoma's elected officials cannot assume this is solvable by churches or any community-based agency without their direct support through necessary appropriations to the Department of Human Services and for Medicaid,” Boyd, a Norman resident, continued. “Statistics suggest that 28% of youth nationally have a mental disorder, and 69%-80% who are in foster care need mental health services.

“Now that we are ‘improving’ in areas such as lower teen pregnancy rates and a decline in teen abuse of alcohol and/or drugs, we must tackle the hard problems of family poverty and lack of hope.”

OICA research indicates that in Oklahoma:

- More than 200,000 children are impoverished, and more than 110,000 live in high-poverty areas.

- Research indicates 23.5% of the children in Oklahoma County, and 22.6% of the children in Tulsa County, live in poverty. In McCurtain County, the child poverty rate is 32.3%.

- Oklahoma has one of the highest rates of “food insecurity” in the nation; more than one-in-four children face hunger daily.

- In the 2015-16 school year, 62% of Oklahoma's public school students qualified for free or reduced-

price meals.

- Some 71,000 children have no health insurance.
- Approximately 279,000 children have parents who lack secure employment.
- About 17,000 teen-agers are not enrolled in school and not working at a job.
- Almost 4,400 teens gave birth last year.
- Approximately 61,000 young children are not in school, for various reasons.
- The state Department of Education documented more than 27,000 homeless students during the 2014-15 school year. It is estimated that four of every five of those youngsters were “doubled-up,” meaning they were “couch-surfing,” often unaccompanied, living with relatives or friends on a temporary basis. In addition, 5.4% of them were unsheltered and living in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, substandard or inadequate housing, and 3.4% were living in hotels/motels.
- Two-thirds of Oklahoma fourth-graders are not proficient in reading, and three-fourths of Oklahoma eighth-graders are not proficient in math.
- More than 315,000 children live in a home where

just one parent resides.

- Some 96,000 children have, or have had, at least one parent incarcerated. For years Oklahoma has logged the highest, or nearly the highest, incarceration rates in the nation.
 - Six percent of Oklahoma’s children are being reared by their grandparents.
 - In Fiscal Year 2016, the DHS received 80,573 reports of alleged child abuse, neglect, or both, and subsequently 15,187 children were confirmed to be victims.
 - Almost 10,000 Oklahoma children were in foster care at the end of Fiscal Year 2016, records indicate. On a positive note, though, 5,599 children left state custody this year and were successfully reunited with their biological families, adopted, or placed in a guardianship situation, the DHS reported. This is the highest number of exits from state care in one year since FY 2009, according to the agency’s Child Welfare Services.
- Mike W. Ray, a veteran Oklahoma journalist, lives in Oklahoma City. He recently retired after four years as media director for state House Democrats.*

Minimum Wage Isn't What It Used To Be – It's Worse

BY COURTNEY CULLISON

The federal minimum wage was established in 1938. Since then it's been adjusted 29 times to keep up with inflation and rising living standards. The most recent change was in 2009, when the minimum wage increased to \$7.25 an hour – but that hasn't been enough to maintain the value of the wage.

Adjusted for inflation, today's minimum wage is worth about 33% less than it was in 1968. The wage was raised to \$1.60 that year, which equates to \$11.04 in 2016 dollars.

Some states have taken the initiative on making the minimum wage a livable wage. Twenty-nine states and DC have set a minimum wage higher than the federal standard, and many of them have built in some automatic annual cost of living adjustment. And these states are seeing improvements in wages.

It's not only minimum wage workers who benefit. Because wage increases tend to trickle up, research has shown that raising the minimum wage would improve the financial situation of most income groups.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates that raising the minimum wage to \$10.10 would raise the average income for all families making less than \$72,300 per year.

Families with incomes above that would see very little or no change in their income. Families near the

bottom of the income scale would see the greatest boost.

A common perception is that minimum wage workers are primarily teenagers or college students trying to make some extra pocket money with summer or after-school jobs. But that's a myth.

Nationally, teenagers made up only 20.6% of the minimum wage workforce in 2016, and 20- to 24-year-olds accounted for 24.8%. The majority [54.6%] of minimum wage workers are 25 or older.

In Oklahoma, most people who work full-time for minimum wage or less are adults, living alone or with a spouse or partner.

That means most minimum wage workers are trying to support themselves and possibly a child or other family member. Is that possible for someone making minimum wage?

Basic estimates for food, housing, utilities, and child care costs in Oklahoma show that a single adult may be able to get by working full-time at minimum wage, but having even one child pushes expenses well over income. Two full-time working adults can't support two children on the minimum wage. And that's before transportation, clothes, medical care, and any other expense that may crop up are included.

It also assumes full-time work is available, but for thousands of workers in the retail and restaurant in-

dustries, the hours they are given to work can vary dramatically month to month.

Simply put, the minimum wage has not kept pace with what our society views as the basic income that a job should provide – even in a state like Oklahoma where the cost of living is relatively low.

Adults working full-time at this wage will struggle to make ends meet. They might manage to get by for a while, but it's unlikely they will ever get ahead. They will be extremely vulnerable to the financial, health,

or family emergencies that happen to nearly all of us at some point in our lives.

When they simply can't pay the bills, they may be targeted by predatory lenders who trap them in expensive, spiraling debt.

Working poverty will persist, drawing down the tax base and increasing the cost of public assistance. And that's a problem for all of us.

Courtney Cullison is a policy analyst with Oklahoma Policy Institute, www.okpolicy.org.

Cherokees Fight Opioid Epidemic

BY BILL JOHN BAKER

When the U.S. Surgeon General visited Oklahoma last year, he declared the “prescription opioid epidemic that is sweeping across the U.S. has hit Indian Country particularly hard.” This is absolutely felt in the Cherokee Nation, where opioid-related overdoses have more than doubled in recent years and more Cherokee Nation citizens suffer from opioid addiction.

This epidemic has affected every aspect of our society: our economy, our hospitals, our schools and our homes. Our children are especially threatened by the epidemic, putting the future of the Cherokee Nation at risk.

When I was elected Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation, I made a commitment to protect the health and welfare of our nearly 350,000 citizens about half of whom live inside our tribal boundaries in north-east Oklahoma. We are made up of many communities and we feel the impacts of the opioid epidemic every day, as we watch our friends and loved ones grapple with the consequences of addiction.

I take this epidemic seriously and that's why we have taken proactive measures to fight it. To curb abuse at the point of care, our doctors and hospitals implemented a prescription monitoring program. Long before it was required, our health care system also adopted technologies to stop illegal distribution of opioids.

Despite our best efforts, the crisis is still ravaging our communities. This is a matter of life and death, which is why we are doing everything in our power to prevent bad actors from flooding the Cherokee Nation with prescription opioids.

Large distributors and retailers like McKesson Corp., Cardinal Health Inc., AmerisourceBergen, CVS Health, Walgreens Boots Alliance Inc., and Walmart Stores Inc. have fueled this epidemic by saturating our communities with these highly-addictive painkillers, ignoring warning signs that these drugs are not landing in the right hands.

This epidemic has cost Cherokee Nation health services millions of dollars, not to mention the thou-

sands of lives lost and ruined. That's dollars we could use for our schools, college scholarships, hospitals, roads or housing. I will not allow Cherokee Nation citizens to suffer while these companies make huge profits at our expense.

No one has felt the impact of the opioid crisis more than our children. For children born into families struggling with opioid addiction, their lives are a tragic cycle of abuse and neglect. A recent study found pregnant Native American women are up to 8.7 times more likely to be opioid dependent. This means more Cherokee babies born with lifelong physical, mental and emotional deficiencies. Many babies are hospitalized for weeks and some are immediately transferred to Tulsa-area hospitals to receive life-saving care. Sadly, these infants are then immediately placed in our foster system. Cherokee families are torn apart before they ever have a chance to be whole, and our entire tribe suffers as a result.

The drug distributors and retailers have avoided their duty as a “check” on the system by failing to monitor, report and prevent illegal opioid activity. Enough is enough. This epidemic is ripping apart families, straining our tribal resources and wreaking havoc across the Cherokee Nation. We'll ensure distributors and corporate pharmacies are held accountable for their negligence and greed. My hope is that this case will bring justice to our nation and serve as an example to other communities fighting the opioid epidemic.

Bill John Baker is principal chief of the Cherokee Nation.

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How students head off to college...



How To Reverse State's Looming Teacher Shortage

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

Oklahoma's pre-K to 12th grade enrollment growth is expected to slow over the next decade, but that is small comfort to the state's underfunded, overcrowded public schools.

An estimated 41,000 new students – 6% more than today – won't be easily absorbed without a significant increase in state funding. What's even more daunting: Who will teach them?

As lawmakers imposed the nation's deepest education cuts over the last decade – knocking Oklahoma's already stingy teacher salaries to the bottom regionally and second worst nationally – state colleges observed a disturbing trend.

The number of bachelor's degrees awarded annually in teacher education is in sharp, steady decline, down nearly 9% over a five-year period ending in 2016, the latest figures available.

Meanwhile, the number of emergency teaching certifications skyrockets – 1,160 approved last year in Oklahoma, 10 times more than four years ago.

Through July, the state Board of Education had OK'd 850 emergency certificates for the 2017-18 school year, compared to 381 at the same time last year.

It's no mystery what's happening. The teaching profession rightly feels disrespected by Capitol policymakers and budget writers. What once was a promising, fulfilling career choice is increasingly less so for millennials.

Larger class sizes. Outdated textbooks. Long hours. Salaries falling farther behind. Too much student loan debt to cover.

Lawmakers are not oblivious to the problems, yet seem incapable, collectively, of solving them.

ANNUAL EDUCATION ISSUE

The best they could do last session was approve a new pro-education automobile tag whose proceeds – if enough of the \$35 plates are sold – could fund a marketing campaign aimed at recruiting students into the profession.

That's the equivalent of rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic.

What Oklahoma needs is a comprehensive effort aimed at identifying the most promising future teachers, enrolling them tuition-free at the state's colleges and universities, then paying them competitive salaries.

This is the sort of big, long-term thinking absent at NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd., where current leadership is all-too-often content to slap Band-Aids on oozing, cancerous lesions, leaving future legislatures to come up with a cure.

Right now, during the so-called "interim" between sessions, is the perfect time for dreaming big dreams. There aren't thousands of pages of proposed legislation demanding immediate review. There aren't daily committee meetings or floor sessions beckoning.

There aren't hordes of special interest lobbyists and agency representatives pitching a tax break here or a budget boost there.

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

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

This year's lineup does, however, include a Senate study on tax reform that could be the first domino in a comprehensive plan to bolster public and higher education.

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

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

Legislators, of course, routinely pay lip service to education, oft-declaring it to be their No. 1 priority. But actions speak louder than words. Lawmakers crowed that K-12 schools were held "harmless"

fiscally in next year's budget. Not exactly.

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

And higher education? Good grief. It endured double-digit cuts last year and will absorb another 4% [\$30 million] this year. As a result, regents sought to



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stem the hemorrhaging by approving tuition hikes that will result in students paying an average 5.3% more [or about \$284 each] in 2017-18.

What that means, of course, is more student loan debt – which guarantees an Oklahoma teaching salary cannot be a living wage.

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

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

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

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

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

Of course, in order for tuition-free higher ed to become a reality, the state's biggest checkbooks would be required to pay more – actually, just their fair share. The tradeoff? It would help create for them a better-educated, higher-skilled pool of future workers.

And when it comes to future workers, which profession is more important than teaching? What happens in the classroom often determines a student's future success.

Unfortunately, the Legislature's disrespect for the profession discourages students who might otherwise jump at the chance for a classroom career. The numbers don't lie: Only 1,268 teacher education bachelor's degrees awarded in 2015-16, down from 1,498 in 2010-11, according to State Regents for Higher Education.

Tuition-free college is an investment with the potential to revolutionize Oklahoma's future. How about a pilot program that targets prospective teachers? Sign them up, secure a five- or 10-year post-graduation teaching commitment and see what happens.

Add in systematic teacher pay raises ... and Oklahoma's brightest days could be ahead. Isn't that at least worth discussing?

State's Higher Ed Cuts Lead Nation

BY GENE PERRY

For several years, Oklahoma has led the nation in cuts to state aid funding of K-12 public schools. Oklahoma lawmakers have cut state aid per student by 26.9% since 2008 – almost twice as much as the next worst state, Alabama.

The results are clear. Many of our best teachers are leaving for other states, nearly one in five school districts have gone to four-day weeks, arts, athletics, and STEM programs are being cut, class sizes are growing, and more.

These problems have gotten attention in state and national media – so much that Gov. Mary Fallin says she is having trouble convincing businesses to come to Oklahoma because of what they've heard about our education struggles.

The state of higher education funding has drawn less attention, because even though Oklahoma's support for higher education was also cut deeply, those cuts weren't leading the nation.

That has changed, according to a new report from researchers at Illinois State University. Over the past five years, Oklahoma cut state funds for higher education by 17.8%, the most in the nation. As with K-12 funding, our cuts were much deeper than the next worst state [Louisiana with 11.5% cuts].

We are one of only seven states that didn't increase funding over this period and one of only three states that cut funding by more than 10%.

We jumped to the lead primarily because lawmakers severely cut higher education last year, when they expected colleges and universities would recover much of those cuts by the passage of SQ 779, which would have sent 19.25% of the revenues from a 1% sales tax increase to higher education. Of course, SQ 779 did not pass, but this year instead of rolling back their cuts, lawmakers cut higher education again by another 3.95%.

Colleges and universities have coped by a combination of layoffs and program cutbacks, increased reliance on private donations and grants, and tuition increases. The hardest hit have been Oklahoma's regional universities, which don't have the large private endowments or other resources that the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University can use to cushion the blow.

Oklahoma has now cut total state education spending in seven out of the past ten years. Accounting for inflation, we spent \$887 million less on education in

Pastors' Group Hopes To Support, Enhance Public Education

Clark Frailey is a co-founder of the nearly year-old, pro-education group Pastors for Oklahoma Kids, which now includes more than 50 ministers from across the state, all working on ways to support public schools, teachers and students. Frailey, pastor at Edmond's Coffee Creek Church, grew up attending Olive Public School in Creek County. His mother was a teacher. He remembers marching at the state Capitol in support of the HB 1017 education reforms. In a recent visit with Observer Editor Arnold Hamilton, he explained how Pastors for Oklahoma Kids began and what it hopes to accomplish.

So after [SQ] 779 [proposed one-cent sales tax for education] failed I hit rock bottom a little bit. We've been working on the schools in our area for a while, trying to make connections with how can we help the schools and teachers.

We'd done doughnuts for teachers. Dinners for teachers. We paid to have an ice cream truck come out. Do something nice for the teachers, because we felt if we did something nice for them, then they'd take care of the kids.

I looked for a [pastors'] group probably five years ago, and didn't find anything [in Oklahoma]. I found a group in Arizona that included the Chamber of Commerce and followed what they were doing. They came up with some really neat ideas for schools. So I tried to do some of the things they were, without being overtly religious. We're not trying to get people to come to our church. We're trying to find ways to support a hyper local community.

[In 2015] I found a group in Texas called Pastors for Texas Children and I considered contacting them. I read their blog, I liked what they were doing, but I just didn't think I had the time. It seemed like they were very deep into the politics

of Texas. That's not me. I've never been political. I've always wanted to stay out of voter guides and didn't want to tell anyone how to vote. Even on issues I never said anything from the stage about how to vote.

In 2016 I felt really strongly that we had to do something with teacher pay ...

I thought 779 was not perfect ... I thought 779 was a stop-gap measure. Maybe it would lead to or get us a little forward motion. When it failed, I again looked up that group in Texas and thought it's time.

If there's one thing that will fire me up, it's Oklahoma kids, if I can be part at least of a positive voice. Because it seemed like there were so many negative things being said about schools. I didn't grow up that way. I went to public schools in Oklahoma – I think four generations of my family had been in public school as students, teachers, support staff – and that's not my story. I thought, what schools are they talking about?

So I kept thinking, when I'd see these negative things coming out of politicians' mouths, what are they talking about? Their town? Or are they talking about some non-descript school they chose to pick on?

I contacted the leader of the Texas group. I laid it out ... and said, we need help. How can I get a group like yours organized here? What do I need to do? Because by this point, they were very well organized. They were being published in newspapers and just blowing up across Texas and Texas is spread out further than us. So I thought, well, maybe we can get some grass roots support here.

He emailed me back and said, 'Funny thing – another pastor in Norman [NorthHaven Church's Mitch Randall] just contacted me yesterday. I want

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20

2016 compared to 2009 – a nearly 17% drop. That's almost three times what we would need to give every teacher a \$5,000 raise and make their salaries competitive with other states.

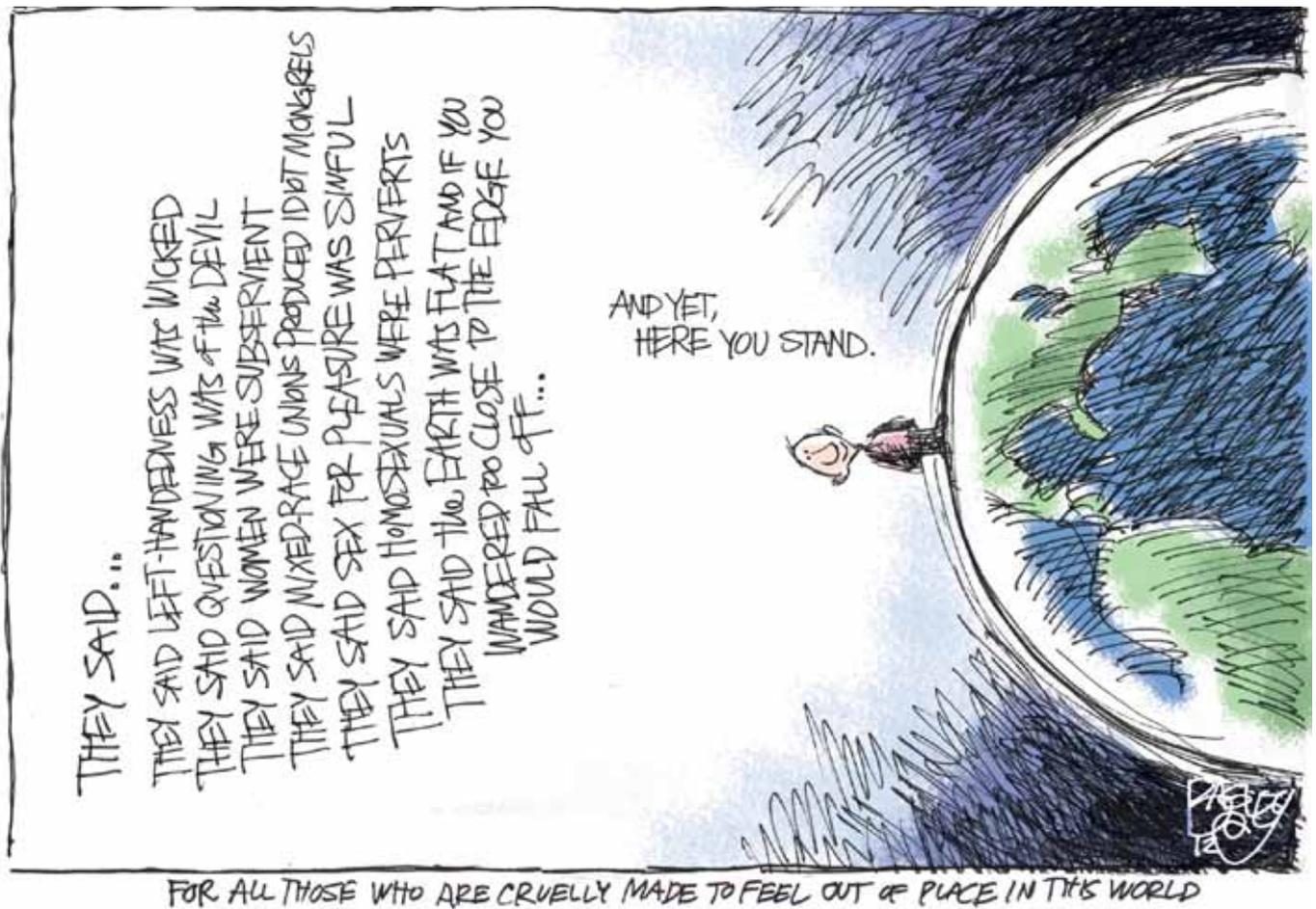
These cuts should worry all Oklahomans – not just those who are students or have kids in school. Across the country, the states with the highest productivity and wages are those with the most college graduates.

This correlation has grown much stronger in recent decades, as degrees become increasingly important

for getting a good job. From 1979 to 2012, the wage gap between families headed by two college graduates and families headed by high school graduates grew by \$30,000, after inflation.

Despite the clear evidence that investing in education strengthens the economy, Oklahoma has become the nation's biggest outlier, taking our state in the wrong direction, and fast.

Gene Perry is Policy Director of Oklahoma Policy Institute, www.okpolicy.org.



Protecting Kids From School Bullying

BY JOE DORMAN

It is almost time for more than 700,000 children in Oklahoma to return to school! With the return of the school year, anxiety can run high, sometimes leading to some traumatic issues. One of the most stressful situations children face is how to deal with bullying.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has some good suggestions on how to deal with bullying issues. Bullying, or the modern form of cyberbullying, is when one child or more picks on another child repeatedly. Bullying can be physical, verbal, or social. It can happen at school or on a school bus, in the neighborhood, over the Internet, or on computers and smart phones.

When your child is bullied, it is best to alert school officials to the problems and work with them for solutions. You should teach your child how and when to ask a trusted adult for help.

It is important to recognize the serious nature of

bullying and acknowledge your child's feelings about being bullied. This will likely be one of the most traumatic situations they will face in their young life, so do not take the situation lightly even if it seems minor to you. Help your child learn how to respond by teaching your child how to look a bully in the eye, stand tall and stay calm in a difficult situation, and walk away without increasing the likelihood of violent actions.

Other tips on how to help overcome situations should include encouraging your child to make friends with other children and supporting activities that interest your child. As a parent, being an active part of your child's life will play a significant part in his or her social development.

If the situation appears to be more than a one-time event, make sure an adult at school who knows about the bullying can watch out for your child's safety and wellbeing when you cannot be there. It is also impor-

tant to monitor your child's social media or texting interactions so you can identify problems before they get out of hand.

Sometimes the bullying situation comes from the opposite perspective and it might be your child who is the bully. If this is the case, be sure your child knows that bullying is never OK. Set firm and consistent limits on your child's aggressive behavior.

You should also be a positive role model and show the child they can get what they want without teasing, threatening or hurting someone. It is also recommended to use effective, non-physical discipline, such as loss of privileges in a situation, and to develop practical solutions with the school principal, teachers, school social workers or psychologists, and parents of the children your child has bullied.

If your child observes bullying, encourage them to tell a trusted adult about the bullying. You should also encourage your child to join with others in telling bullies to stop. The best scenario is for children to help support other children who may be bullied. Encourage your child to include these children in activities as this will often reduce the likelihood of bullying.

As adults, we can play a significant part in reducing bullying. Hopefully these tips can help improve the lives of the children close to you.

Former state Rep. Joe Dorman is chief executive officer of the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy.

Why It's Important Parents, Students Share Their Lives

BY BILL CIRONE

From coast to coast and around the globe, one of the most common questions parents ask children is: "What did you do at school today?"

A very common frustration we hear voiced by parents is that their children invariably respond with "Nothing," or "I don't know," or "I don't remember."

It's hard to deal with because parents truly want to know the answer. They are very much interested in what goes on inside and outside the classroom – what their children are learning and what kinds of interactions they are having with other students.

Through the years, parents have gotten creative. Some give their children time to relax and decom-

press after school before asking questions, hoping the space will provide the respite needed to prime the pump.

Others have changed that initial question to one that seems more promising to start the conversation. They ask open-ended things like, "How was your day?" or "Who made you laugh today?" or "What games did you play at recess?"

Other variations include: "What was the best thing that happened today" or its converse "What was the hardest thing that happened today?" These questions are met with varying degrees of success.

Sara Ackerman, a parent and teacher, wrote an article earlier this year for the Washington Post about a technique that finally worked with her own young daughter. She flipped the script and asked, "Do you want to hear about my day?"

Her daughter said yes and Ackerman then launched into a tale of meetings and photocopying, jammed printers, lost keys, and funny comments from colleagues.

It worked. Her daughter then took her turn telling her about the day that just ended.

Said Ackerman, "I think my daughter is most interested in unveiling the mystery of what I do when I'm not with her.

"It doesn't matter whether you're a software developer, a cashier, a blogger, a doctor, a bus driver, or a stay-at-home parent, because it's not about the minutiae of the work," she said.

"It's about sharing what makes us laugh and what bores us, the mistakes we make and what is hard for us, the interesting people we meet," Ackerman said.

Parents sometimes forget that the skill involved in relating an experience is not simple or innate. Children need to learn how to do it. The best way for them to learn is to see how others do it and then imitate the behavior. Parents can be the best models of all for this purpose.

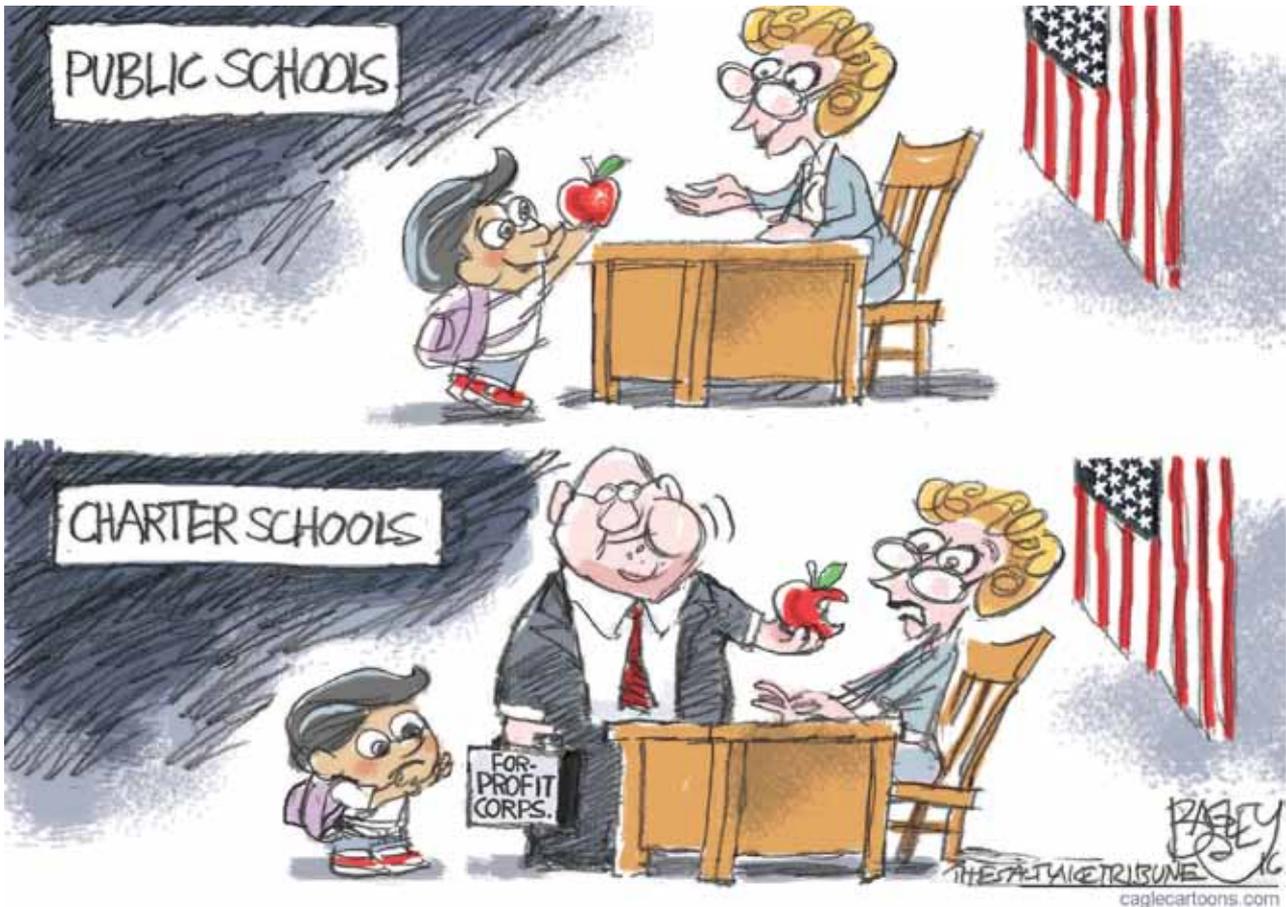
As Ackerman acknowledged, work is often the last thing parents want to talk about when they get home. They think a listing of the day's details would bore anyone with a pulse, especially a young person.

Maybe the child feels the same way. That's why the game of sharing can be so effective.

Every child is different and each needs a different approach, so this technique is certainly not for everyone. But it's worth a try in households where young children seem reluctant or unable to relate the details of their day.

Sharing and modeling are easy ways for parents to help children learn how to relate, and it's a skill that could prove useful over a lifetime.

Bill Cirone retired recently after 34 years as superintendent of Santa Barbara County Schools superintendent – California's longest-serving county superintendent.



Why Democrats Should Unite On Charter School Moratorium

BY JEFF BRYANT

Democrats know that success for their party relies on bringing labor and civil rights advocates together on key issues.

Faced with disastrous Donald Trump, labor and civil rights advocates are rallying in common cause behind health care for all, a living wage for every worker, a tax system where the wealthy pay their fair share, tuition-free college, and an end to senseless, never-ending wars.

Here's another rallying point labor and civil rights agree on: A moratorium on charter schools.

In early July, the nation's largest labor union, the National Education Association, broke from its cautious regard of charter schools to pass a new policy statement that declares charter schools are a "failed experiment" that has led to a "separate and unequal" sector of schools that are not subject to the same "safeguards and standards" of public schools.

To limit the further expansion of these schools, the NEA wants a moratorium on new charters that aren't subject to democratic governance and aren't supportive of the common good in local communities.

The NEA's action echoes a resolution passed earlier this year by the national NAACP calling for a moratorium on the expansion of charters and for stronger oversight of these schools. These declarations also align with a policy statement issued last year by the Movement for Black Lives, a network Black Lives Matter organizers, calling for a moratorium on charter schools.

Now that labor and civil rights have come together in a unified call for a moratorium on these unregulated, privately-operated schools, prominent leaders in the Democratic party can champion this issue knowing they have a grassroots constituency that supports them.

Democrats in states where charters have been the most controversial – such as Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and California – should be especially interested in leading on this issue for a number of reasons.

A SHARED CONCERN FOR BASIC RIGHTS

First, in most communities, unregulated charters are segregating students and undermining democratically governed public institutions.

In their calls for a charter school moratorium, NEA, NAACP, and the Movement for Black Lives express a basic concern that these privately-operated schools are not subject to the same legal constraints as other public institutions, including federal and state laws and protections for students with disabilities, minorities, and school employees.

The statements share a belief that charter schools have become counter-productive to a school system intent on serving the needs and interests of all students, and they argue that charters are reversing the progress achieved by civil rights milestones like the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision.

All three organizations maintain that charter schools, as currently conceived, undermine local public schools, particularly those that are in communities that are already marginalized by racial prejudice and economic inequities. These organizations insist that charters must not be financially supported at the expense of local schools.

Each statement shares the concern that charter schools are not subject to the same transparency and accountability standards as public schools, and they argue that making charters subject to a democratically elected local authority is the way to bring these schools back in line with responsible governance.

CHARTERS: AN IDEA GONE AWRY

In a press release announcing its new charter school policy, the NEA declares that charter schools have evolved far from their original intent to serve local communities as “incubators of innovation” and have instead become a force undermining local schools “without producing any overall increase in student learning and growth.”

NEA's contention that charter schools are an idea gone awry has widely held support.

The original vision of charter schools as laboratory schools, where teachers would have a stronger voice, has evolved to a more politically conservative vision that views charters as competitors of public schools in a market where only the schools with greater advantages can survive.

A cornerstone of this free market version of charters is that their governance and accountability should be diffused into a morass of appointed bureaucrats and unaccountable entrepreneurs.

Currently, most states have no limits on the growth

OKC Income Tax Proposed For Schools

Tired of waiting for the Legislature to properly fund K-12 education, supporters of Oklahoma City Public Schools are taking matters into their own hands.

On Aug. 15, they will unveil a Save OKC Schools initiative petition drive that – if approved by voters – would create a temporary city income tax to underwrite annual bonuses to teachers and support staff, allow for hiring additional teachers and decrease class sizes.

The kickoff event, from 7-8:30 p.m., will be at OKC's Tower Hotel, 3233 Northwest Expressway, and will feature former Gov. David Walters, OKC School Board Chair Paula Lewis, OKPolicy's Gene Perry, American Federation of Teachers' David Gray, Pastor Jesse Jackson, Pastor Christine Byrd, and OKC Councilman Ed Shadid.

For more information, visit facebook.com/saveokc-schools/.

Big Oil Propaganda In State Classrooms

A recent Center for Public Integrity investigation found that the oil and gas industry is using its clout to get petroleum-friendly messages into K-12 education.

For example, the Oklahoma Energy Resources Board – a state agency funded by oil and gas companies – shelled out \$40 million over the past 20 years to get pro-fossil fuel materials into the state's curricula and programs.

Schools and libraries across Oklahoma received more than 9,000 free copies of the children's book *Petro Pete's Big Bad Dream*. The premise: Little Pete wakes up one morning to find his toothbrush and bike tires have disappeared. Then his school bus doesn't show. When he finally gets to school, his teacher says, “It sounds like you are missing all of your petroleum by-products today!”

Clunky dialogue aside, the book is part of a larger culture war over climate change with American classrooms as the battlefield. To wit, thousands of teachers received the book *Why Scientists Disagree About Global Warming* in their mailboxes this year, courtesy of the climate-denying Heartland Institute.

Sinister? Heck, yeah. But is it working? According to a June 6 New York Times story featuring a straight-A, climate-denying Ohio student, the answer appears to be [shudder] yes. – *Kate Yoder, Grist*

Pastors

In Colorado, Pot Taxes To Rescue

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

to teleconference with you two at the same time. So we did. There were three of us at that point – a pastor from Tuttle, Todd Littleton, he had come in and we all three sat down, this was just right after the vote, so late 2016, and started saying, what can we do?

We're now a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. [Visit pastorsforoklahomakids.com for more information.]

We weren't ready for the session. We just tried to get some stuff out there. We were really concerned about the voucher issue and then we tried to get up to speed on all the other issues and that's really difficult for full-time pastors that are not gifted in politics and in navigating how all that works.

So far our influence has been pretty limited to the OKC area [an organizational meeting is scheduled Aug. 29 in Tulsa]. So we realized we needed to use the tools available to us to expand our network further. Getting into rural Oklahoma is important to me because that's where I went to school and if you tell the truth to people in rural Oklahoma about what they're doing at the Capitol, I think there's a group that's a sleeping giant that will get fired up like none other.

Just because a politician wears cowboy boots and comes out and shakes some hands doesn't mean that when they get up to Oklahoma City that they really have your best interest in mind.

We're not intended to be any sort of lobbyist organization. We just educate. We want to be a voice. And we feel like we have a pretty good place of authority when we're not beholden to anybody for money. We don't have a political action committee behind us, telling us to say things.

For some of the pastors, their whole church is probably organizing around [Pastors for Oklahoma Kids]. I don't typically use our time on Sunday for it, but I definitely will speak to anyone who has a question about it. We have kids who are in public and private schools. We have folks who work at private schools in our church and public schools. They know it's not an issue of either/or – it's an issue of trying to look out for those who are overlooked.

I think about that a lot. We talk about it in terms of food and housing, and education is another way we talk about it ... to try to interject a sense of justice for kids is to give them the ability to pursue their dreams, to pursue a successful future, and education is key to that.

That's the dream our founders had – to give every kid a universal education so that everyone would have an opportunity to pursue happiness. It's not the pursuit of happiness on your own – it's we develop people.

Editor's Note: With Oklahoma voters expected to decide the fate of a medical marijuana initiative next year, Colorado is showing what pot taxes can do for underfunded, crumbling public schools.

The K-12 school in Deer Trail, CO, is in rot. The swimming pool is in such grave shape that students can't use it anymore. People in wheelchairs have to be lifted up stairs. A sewage leak has closed the coach's locker room. Even basic security is a problem, as the doors are so out of shape that they can be difficult to close and lock.

All of this, detailed in a report in the Denver Post, may soon come to an end. Thanks to an infusion of state cash, the small town is finally building a new school. And here's the kicker: Some of the money funding the school is coming from Colorado's excise tax for marijuana.

That's right: Marijuana legalization is helping build new schools in Colorado.

As part of the state's legalization plan, Colorado allocates \$40 million in marijuana tax money into the state's Building Excellent Schools Today [BEST] program every year. The money then goes to building new schools or improving them. BEST is expected to fund nearly \$300 million in school projects over the 2017-18 fiscal year, of which about \$40 million will come from the state's marijuana excise tax.

The money has led even some people skeptical of legalization to accept some of its benefits. So far, not a single school district has rejected the funding. "I don't care where the money comes from. If we get a new school, I'm for it," said Hayley Whitehead, a Deer Trail graduate who works for the school district.

The \$40 million for BEST is only part of what Colorado gets from marijuana each year. In 2016, the state raised an additional \$117 million through the rest of its pot revenue, made up of marijuana license and application fees, sales taxes, and the excise tax. That other money was allocated to the Marijuana Tax Cash Fund, which is largely used for health care, education, drug treatment, drug prevention, and law enforcement programs; local governments; and a public school fund separate from BEST.

Marijuana legalization can't solve every budget problem. In total, Colorado's cannabis taxes and fees amount to less than 1% of the state's budget. But legalization still provides more than \$150 million a year Colorado otherwise wouldn't get, allowing for extra spending on projects that perhaps couldn't be done before.

For Colorado, that means a bit of help building newer, better schools. – *German Lopez, Vox*



An Education In White Privilege

BY MARION HILL

I just returned from a church conference where my denomination [Unitarian Universalist] was grappling with the phenomenon of white privilege, defined as “an invisible package of unearned assets.” People of color are all too familiar with that concept, while many white people seem blissfully unaware of the automatic benefits that their color bestows.

Most of the workshops during the four-day conference, plus a pre-conference Anti-Racism workshop, dealt with some aspect of race and its impact on everything humans do, including their worship experiences. I hope other churches are wrestling with this important topic as well, because for far too long – as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. remarked years ago – “the most segregated hour of the week” has been “at eleven o’clock on Sunday morning.”

As a person of fair skin, I know I’m more likely to be hired for many jobs than are my darker-skinned sisters and brothers. I’m also less likely to be closely watched while shopping than are people of browner skin. And if I should be hauled into court on some charge, I’m more likely to get the benefit of the doubt because I look like a “sweet little old white lady.”

But this conference, plus several books by African American authors that I’ve read recently, have made me realize that I’m also privileged in ways I don’t even notice.

For example, I, like many white people, assume that my experiences are universal, the “normal,” and that those of others who differ are the exception to the norm. History is usually told from a Caucasian perspective, with whites the central figures. Even when I read fiction, I assume the characters are white unless they’re specifically portrayed as being of another race.

An audience member in one of the workshops told of an incident at her church that illustrates an easy assumption whites often make, that they “know best” about everything. An event was planned at her church by a committee of white people – I believe the event had to do with Black History Month – then African Americans in the congregation were invited to participate. The committee members’ feelings were hurt when they were told that the blacks weren’t interested in joining a “white” celebration. But shouldn’t the committee at least have suspected that could be a problem?

One book I recently read that discussed the realities of white privilege was *Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America* by Michael Eric Dyson, a Georgetown University sociology professor and a New York Times contributing editor.

Dyson tells of his own experiences growing up, being schooled about how to behave around police – in order to avoid being shot – and then as an adult being forced to prove himself in ways that his white peers were not expected to do.

He writes with compassion toward whites whose color blinds them, but also with searing honesty about the way things are for blacks.

I highly recommend it to anyone not afraid of reading the truth about race in this country.

Not all white people experience privilege equally, of course. Color may intersect with class or other fac-

tors. Someone of low income or limited education, or someone with a physical limitation or learning disability, may be treated badly whatever their color. But in the birth lottery, pale skin often confers privileges not available to those of a dusker hue.

We have a long way to go to achieve the ideal of equality in the way people are treated in this country. Maybe we'll never get all the way there. But as the saying goes, "every journey begins with a single step."

White Democrats, we like to think we're more sensitive than white Republicans to the problems our black brothers and sisters deal with every day. Some of us probably are. But that doesn't mean we don't all need to recognize how we're privileged every day. Change can begin when we admit we have a problem. *Marion Hill lives in Durant.*

Complacency No Longer An Option

BY NATHAN COSBY

Bill Maher, before sticking his foot in his mouth a couple weeks ago, made a solid point about the current state of America. He went into a rant about how there are so many superhero movies that it has left Americans [read: Millennials] waiting for their superhero to show up rather than fighting for justice themselves. I would have to agree because the current American Populace seems to have become docile and 100% willing to follow the Elected Class' status quo.

We have seen protests all across the U.S., we have seen a handful of riots, we have seen millions of people come out to march together but we haven't seen change. The changes that we need are dire – we are no longer joking about tax breaks for the 1%, we are talking about the health and wellbeing of the rest of us. The current incarnation of the conservative party in the U.S. is formed out of cyclical thinking stuck in wheel like a hamster.

They don't want to restrict guns because gun deaths are a mental health issue. They don't want to give access to mental healthcare because it is a tax issue. They don't want to speak about tax issues because their plan all along has been to increase taxation on the middle class. But more importantly, they don't want to talk about anything real or substantive because they are afraid of showing the fold-worthy hand.

When Trump tweets about a major shift in American government, it pulls all of the talking heads in that direction [I see this as a distraction detonation] then quietly his administration says nothing will change and the president was confused. This is the wand waving misdirection. Then we get a completely

unrelated explosion of bad news from yet another member of the administration.

We saw this recently when Trump tweeted about banning Trans people from the military, then the Joint Chiefs quietly said they will not be changing policy and then the Scaramucci vs. Priebus situation ... happened?

This Cabinet should represent to all of us the most disappointing moment in American history. The first Cabinet was made up of America's greatest political minds – trying all they could to make America stay afloat after being born from war. Now we have AG Jeff Sessions who can't focus on anything while those "bad people" burn the devil's lettuce in Colorado. We have Tillerson who might as well have dual citizenship with the U.S. and Russia. We have spies and CEOs and half of the Goldman Sachs' Hall of Fame. We are falling apart.

It feels like the current 24-hour news cycle is all about yelling fire in a crowded theater. They are releasing stories before they are fully developed, relaying claims before they have been fully vetted, scaring the people before the threat is real. Although this has left us jaded, I think we have reached a point where you can almost feel it in the water – something is coming and we have to get ready for it.

Protests will not stop a declaration of war. Marches will not stop collusion. And riots make us less credible. We need to run.

Run for everything, and run for it as fast as we can. No more uncontested seats, no more status quo, no more corporate Democrat "My Way or the Highway."

Liberals, Progressives, Moderates, Libertarians and those Conservatives who haven't tasted blood yet –

PUBLIC FORUM

we need to make sure America stays where we should be on the world stage. We are leaders, we are cooperative contributors, we are creators – we will not become predators.

Domestically, we cannot let our population slip further into poverty. We cannot keep trusting the ultra-wealthy to do the right thing. Our country has given Trickle Down two hard-fought attempts and it has led to some of the greatest economic downfalls in world history. What will the next recession look like? Are you ready for Soviet era bread lines? Are you ready for the demise of the dollar? Are you ready to bail out Goldman Sachs? We shouldn't be and we shouldn't have to.

Now, hopefully, we have learned our lesson. For some it took only the inauguration speech and “alternative facts” to seal the deal, but for many it took the Russian lies, bombing Syria over dinner, the voter fraud lies, the Paris Agreement, the DeVos tragedy, embarrassment at the G20, or the literal admission of treason by DT Jr. Those Americans who are still on board with Trump are lost to us now; they will never

be won over, and they cannot be trusted to vote for the good of the people anymore.

We can no longer run on compassion and hope for the best. We must run on actual policy with loud united voices. We must spread our voices like the GOP does. We cannot be afraid to make mistakes and we cannot roast our allies when they make a mistake. We need fighters like Anthony Weiner and Elliot Spitzer to fight off Wall Street. We need strong backbones and strong but open-minded morals. Most importantly for the country, we need to win because when we win America is great.

There is new wind sweeping in the Democratic Party and it is the warm wind from the prairie. It is the young people in this state who organized and won two major state seats. It is the strong victory for Bernie Sanders in the primaries. It is the work ethic of the fly-over state that will bring change but we must start small. Local, then state, then federal, then executive and judicial. We can survive but we have to run. *Nathan Cosby is a 20-something sales representative living in Oklahoma City.*

This Land Is Our Land

BY BOB D. AND MARIA ROUNSAVELL

Woody Guthrie's resounding proclamation covers the public domain of 640 million acres managed by the Fed today and owned by us the people.

The concept of public land ownership was the best creation of the federal government. The federal government indeed claims ownership of all land and we the people are co-owners and responsible stewards.

Unfortunately, some politicians, including our president, want to wrest the public lands from our ownership and dispose of them, preferably through lease to corporate America, which will extract all value from it for its purposes, unmindful of exercising wise stewardship. It makes little difference whether the federal government leases out our public lands or the states lease or sell them. The people will lose the opportunity to utilize them for the common good.

Let's cite one example. Last October Utah, through its Trust Lands Administration, sold 3,700 acres, without the people being consulted probably to forestall protest or maybe even prevent sale, thus significant reduction in property value. The acreage had virtually no mineral or energy potential, hence little leasing value.

However, recognizing the chance to sell the properties and utilizing prime parcels like the scenic 200-acre Cave Valley tract adjoining Zion National Park, Utah affected one sale bringing \$1.74 million into its coffers. The state auction netted a total of \$5.52 million altogether, one company purchasing about half.

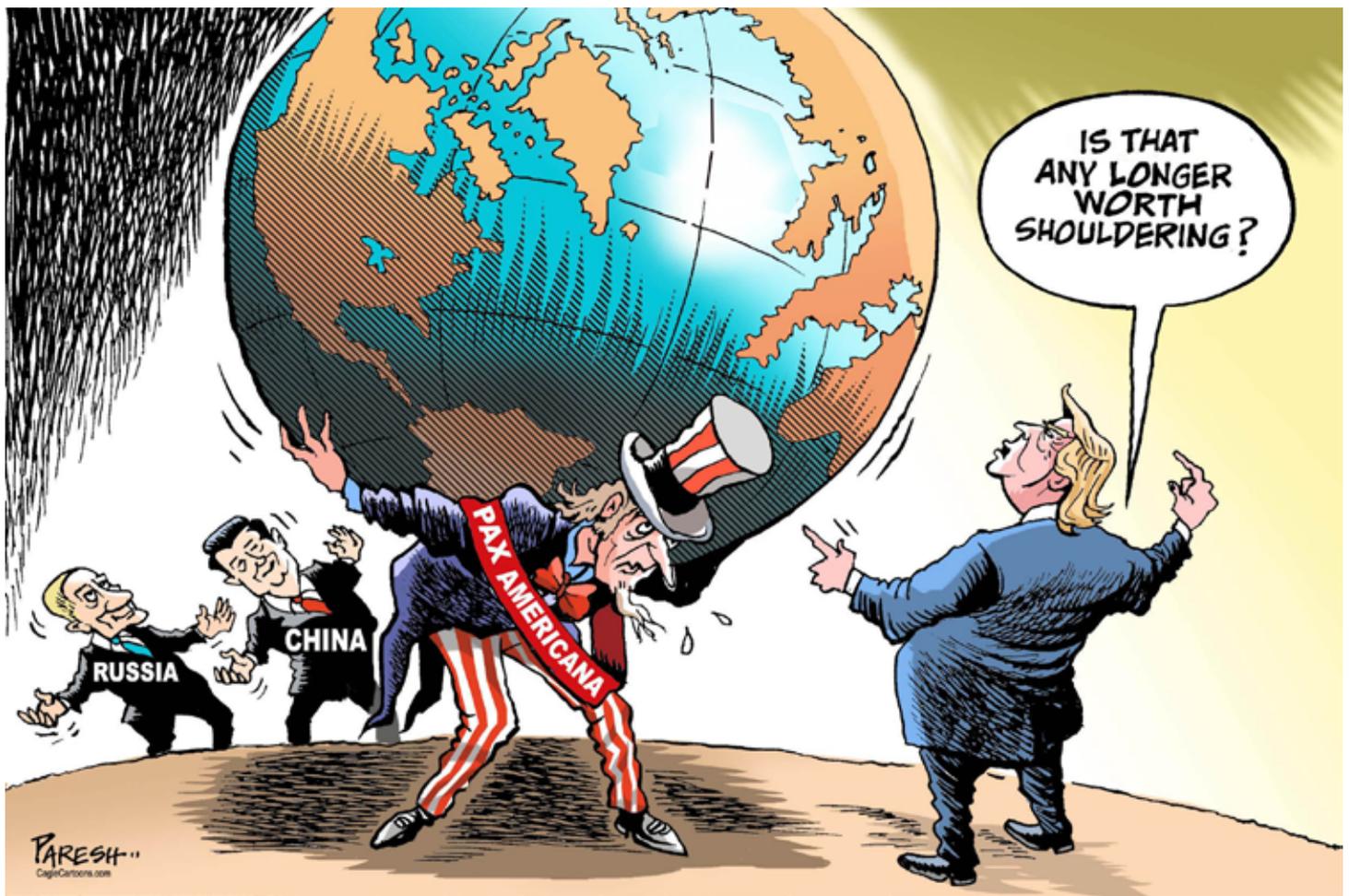
Nineteen of the parcels contained significant archaeological, hunting, or scenic value, as well as access to federal public lands. Although none had agricultural potential, buyers eagerly took them off our hands and will never again make them available for public benefit or probably charge us hefty fees for their use later.

State trusteeship of these lands takes many forms of depriving the public from having full access to public lands. The state of Colorado, for example, bans recreation on all but 490,000 of the 2.8 million acres of these lands. Arizona, Montana, New Mexico and Washington all charge access fees on these state trust lands.

Once the Fed managed all public lands, if we conveniently forget the communal rights of Native Americans, including those in the old Mexico. Through the Louisiana, Gadsden and Alaska Purchase, the Mexican Cession, and similar agreements, the federal government gained ownership of all territory covered by the present U.S. Today the U.S. government manages the remaining public land for multiple uses: a careful balance of public needs like forestry maintenance, utility generation, recreation, industry and wildlife and resource protection.

When western states began entering the Union, the federal government granted them trust lands for specific beneficiaries like public schools. This situation now needs oversight by the citizens. Our public lands

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Serious Issues On U.S. Doorstep

BY HAROLD V. SARE

Our great country is nearly 2½ centuries old, and we have experienced many problems over that period of time, including a bloody civil war, depressions, and world wars. The problems we face today are internal as well as international. Our economy is reasonably strong, but we must adjust to rapid technological change, an aging work force, and scores of international, political, and economic issues.

Also, we are coping with ideological camps – political divides that make decision-making difficult. We have a president who is erratically interfering with various possible solutions to our problems. He seems to create problems with his tweets, set forth unreasonable solutions, and reflect a basic lack of knowledge of political and diplomatic processes. Dangerous consequences are likely.

We must face a number of issues or find ourselves going the way of the Roman Empire, which lasted only 240 years. Our country, the United States of America, is now at year 241.

Our inclination as a nation is to divide along strong

ideological lines. The extreme conservatives believe their solution is absolutely correct and they will not compromise; the extreme liberals have their own absolute orientation. However, a functioning constitutional democracy depends on reasonable and functional discussion, compromise, and the goal of practical solutions that may be modified over changing times. That is a reality that entrenched ideologists seem to be unwilling to recognize.

The national health program, ObamaCare, that Republicans have been trying to replace for seven years with their own very conservative program is a good example of the problem. The House of Representatives has passed a bill, but the Senate after a number of failures has not been able to match the House bill.

Senate Republicans have not been willing to work with the Democrats, who realize changes are needed in the Obama program and would work with them in making appropriate changes. Senators have been working in men-only meetings and closed to the Democrats, a most undemocratic tactic, and they have come up with ideologically conservative propos-

als that moderate members of their majority would not accept. Ideological deadlock is the problem.

Today, medical care is critical for the masses of people with low incomes and the unemployed. Health care is an area of change vitally needed in a highly technological economy.

The U.S. and other technologically developed nations have had to make changes in the role of government. But even Adam Smith [1776] and, more recently, Barry Goldwater recognized the need for government. Goldwater argued that if we had groups of people who could not earn enough to feed and house their families, government programs had to come into play.

Social Security [1940] virtually wiped out hunger and basic needs among the aged, retired people in the U.S. Our employment programs and aid to poor families and children have been needed, and have actually helped the economy. Poor people and children who receive aid have to spend the resources they receive from government in private businesses.

Nevertheless, opponents often charge that these programs are creeping socialism. That viewpoint seems not to grasp the total picture.

I grew up on a small farm during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Our rent was paid with one-third of our crops. However, I was never hungry because we raised our food, had animals to butcher, and at times were able to sell produce. Dad sometimes found extra work that paid small wages. However, there were times that there was no money to buy needed items. In those days we were primarily an agricultural society.

Today, however, we are a technological/information-based nation coping with continuous change, a much more complicated national economy that is heavily dependent on the international economy. Our people basically have to cope with continuous changes in the work world and the impact of the international economy.

Many of us find that very difficult to do; thus it requires government support to keep us viable. This is not socialism. In fact, both socialism and communism, where they last existed in Great Britain and Russia, have failed.

Government has become very complex and at times has not been able to keep up with changing needs; and at times it is very inefficient. Good and fair government requires very competent people. Good and fair government requires continuous analysis and constant updates, and it must be as free as possible of inefficiencies and corruption.

Unfortunately, Congress members face considerable pressure from 3,500 or more wealthy lobbyists who represent extremely wealthy companies or individuals that the average voter does not have to contend with.

We now have elected a president who is not knowledgeable about government or foreign affairs and is facing considerable difficulty because of an unstable administration. Furthermore, he faces considerable

opposition from within the government, as well as political forces across the country and abroad. His public messages are neither consistent nor dependable – which keeps the public confused.

We have survived 241 years and I fervently hope that our nation is determined to survive and prosper. I remain optimistic, but concerned and alert.

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

Land

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certainly should not be used to reward only the financial elite. What a loss that would be for our country.

Undoubtedly now is the time to reconsider the issue of public domain. Should the states get full control of these public lands and national monuments without citizen oversight, their elected representatives at both the state and national levels will soon be wreaking havoc on our patrimony. Notice the Trump Administration beginning its assault?

The general public needs to ensure that our public lands stay under the control of the federal government with its record of protecting them for the public good. For the moment, we are forgetting the federal trusteeship of tribal lands, which has never been resolved even with the most altruistic of intentions. Or maybe we should look closely into it as an object lesson of how any president's intention could lead to possible loss of national monuments and even federal parks like the Yosemite, Yellowstone, or even the Grand Canyon.

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



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Sinclair Applying Fox Propaganda Model To Local Television News

BY PAM VOGEL

According to Sinclair Broadcasting Group, it's doing a service to its viewers by requiring the many local TV news stations it owns to air unabashedly pro-Trump propaganda on a regular basis.

The local TV news giant – which owns KOKH Fox 25 and CW affiliate KOCB 34 in Oklahoma City and CBS affiliate KTUL 8 in Tulsa – has been pushing a rightwing slant on local television stations across the country for years.

Owned by the Smiths, a family of longtime Republican donors who have all the ambition of News Corp.'s Rupert Murdoch but a much lower profile, Sinclair has mostly flown under the radar. But following the election of President Donald Trump, the network has begun adopting the playbook Roger Ailes used to turn Fox News into a conservative media goliath.

Over the last few months, Sinclair has been requiring its stations to run more commentaries from pro-Trump personalities and expanding its reach to greater numbers of unassuming viewers in new local media markets. Now it's defending these clear moves to mimic the aspiring state media over at Fox with warped, brainwash-y logic: The conservative propaganda it pushes on its viewers is necessary because the rest of the media is biased.

Politico's Hadas Gold obtained a new internal memo from Sinclair executive Scott Livingston declaring that much of the recent reporting about Sinclair's moves to expand rightwing local news is "false."

In the memo, Livingston said the network's rightwing commentary segments "provide a viewpoint that often gets lost in the typical national broadcast media dialogue." His memo closed with an attempt to

cast recent criticism of Sinclair as illegitimate and perpetrated by “biased” reporters seeking to “destroy our reputation.” On and off-screen, it’s Sinclair vs. the world:

“What we find most troubling in the reporting about our company, by major media outlets [like the New York Times and Washington Post], is the omission of key facts in their stories,” Livingston wrote. “Such omissions suggest the existence of either journalistic incompetency or editorial bias. We do not believe these journalists are incompetent, so we are left to conclude that they are biased.

“We are proud to offer a range of perspectives, both conservative and liberal --- to our consumers – on our Sinclair broadcast stations each day. It is unfortunate that so many of our competitors do not provide the same marketplace of ideas,” he continued. “Our commitment is to tracking the truth, providing context and perspective in our reporting and serving our communities with valuable and, at times, life-saving information. We value our viewers and our journalists who work hard each day to serve the communities in which they live – all across this great country. It’s concerning and troubling that so many once trusted news organizations continue to push false narratives with an agenda to destroy our reputation and discredit the great journalism across our company.”

Like Ailes before him, Livingston hopes that he can garner ratings by presenting his network as “fair and balanced” in opposition to the mainstream press. But here are the undeniable, troubling facts about the direction Sinclair is taking:

Months after hiring former Trump aide Boris Epshteyn as its chief political analyst, Sinclair announced it would be increasing the number of times per week that Epshteyn’s right-wing commentary segment, “Bottom Line with Boris,” must air on its local stations. Media critic David Zurawik has described these segments as “as close to classic propaganda as I think I have seen” over his 30-year career.

“Bottom Line with Boris” is one of three regular Sinclair segments considered to be “must run” content, meaning that all Sinclair stations are required to air them. The other two segments are “Behind the Headlines” with conservative commentator Mark Hyman and a fearmongering “terrorism alert desk.” The practice has raised concerns from experts and employees at local Sinclair stations.

Sinclair is currently seeking to acquire Tribune Media for \$3.9 billion, a move that would make Sinclair the largest provider of local television news in the country. The potential acquisition, by the way, is possible only because of a Trump Administration move to roll back Obama-era consumer regulations.

It’s clear that Sinclair is attempting to push an increasingly skewed view of the news to an ever-expanding audience in regions across the country. And this isn’t Livingston’s first time lashing out at non-Sinclair outlets. Back in March, Livingston set this tone by narrating a strange “must run” segment

Sinclair Poised To Dominate TV News In Oklahoma

Sinclair’s rightwing propaganda machine is on the verge of expansion in Oklahoma.

It currently owns two OKC stations – Fox affiliate KOKH 25 and the CW’s KOKC 34 – and Tulsa’s ABC affiliate KTUL 8. It soon could own two more – the capital’s NBC affiliate KFOR 4 and KAUT 43 – if federal regulators approve its bid to purchase Tribune Media for \$3.9 billion.

If it ends up with all four OKC stations, Sinclair would control half the capital’s television newsrooms, positioning it to exert enormous influence over political thought in the western two-thirds of Oklahoma.

How do we know it will attempt to do so? First, it has a track record of weaponizing its 173 TV stations – mostly in smaller markets – to advance its rightwing worldview.

Take KOKH, for example: It’s had some excellent reporters and reporting over the years, but its newscasts are littered with slanted “must-run” stories [often tightening an already cozy relationship with advertisers] and uber conservative commentaries straight out of Trump White House talking points.

This past session, KFOR’s statehouse coverage was solid, often drawing the ire of a Republican supermajority that did not welcome factual reporting. Sinclair probably would not welcome such independent reporting.

For more on Sinclair, check out Bloomberg Businessweek’s July 20 cover story on Sinclair’s Executive Chairman David Smith – “the most powerful person in American media you’ve never heard of.”

warning viewers about “biased and false news” from “members of the national media.”

While Livingston is trying to pass off the must-run segments as merely conservative commentary, there’s no doubt that the Epshteyn and Hyman segments are straight-up propaganda. In the first weeks nearly three weeks of July, neither commentator seems to have aired a segment touching on possible collusion between members of the Trump camp and Russia, despite frequent bombshells on the top story. [In June, Hyman’s take on Russian meddling in the election was: “We do it. Russians do it. Everyone does it. Meddling in another nation’s democratic elections is actually routine behavior.”] They’ve also had little to say about the dangerously inept Republican effort to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, a major

news story and a Trump administration priority gone wrong.

At its very worst, the Sinclair “must run” strategy also attempts to drive a wedge between local audiences and the facts. Both Epshteyn and Hyman have found time to produce several segments each since Trump’s inauguration attacking mainstream media outlets in a direct echo of both their employer’s rhetoric and Trump administration talking points. Epshteyn even cheered Trump’s threat to scale back White House press briefings in June, calling the briefings “a circus and a distraction.”

And at its very, very worst, Sinclair is sneaking the very lowest in fringe, far-right commentary into the living rooms of unsuspecting Americans who did not sign up for it. The most devastating example is this must-run segment from April, in which Mark Hyman alludes to the heinous far-right conspiracy theory about the death of DNC staffer Seth Rich.

The Hyman and Epshteyn segments are doing the dirty work of pushing Sinclair’s openly pro-Trump agenda and anti-media propaganda efforts to unknowing local television viewers on the regular.

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Russia Imitated Murdoch/Fox Model

BY JUAN COLE

In Edgar Allan Poe’s *Purloined Letter*, detective C. Auguste Dupin discovers a stolen letter in the thief’s own apartments after police searches had failed to turn it up. It was hidden in plain sight, on a card rack hanging from a ribbon, though it had been resealed. The police had assumed that it would have been hidden away and could not see it in the open.

Fox Cable News [not the affiliates but the national propaganda outfit] is the purloined letter of today’s news. Because it is out in the open, it isn’t being seen.

The allegation is that Vladimir Putin orchestrated the U.S. news cycle by using Russian hackers and Russian media to collaborate with the alt-Neo-Nazi rag Breitbart and rightwing social media to smear Hillary Clinton and build up Donald J. Trump. They are said to have targeted close states in hopes of suppressing the Democratic vote by smearing Secretary Clinton as a pedophile and part-time witch.

The emails released by Donald Trump Jr., show that the Russian government was likely using Russian friends of Trump to dangle tidbits before his team, to see how corruptible they were. When Trump Jr., Jared Kushner and Paul Manafort came running to meet Natalia Vesselnitskaya, they had their answer. That she did not fork over anything of consequence then is not important. She was an opening gambit, not the end game.

I have no idea whether the Russian narrative is correct. But what I do know is that a much more obvious and successful attempt to manipulate the American public toward the far right has been run by Rupert Murdoch at Fox Cable News since the 1990s.

In fact, Murdoch and Putin are very similar. Both are billionaires. Both are influencers in the U.S. despite being born elsewhere. Despite Murdoch’s naturalization, his values are those of the old “White Australia” policies. Both are amoral and apolitical. Both push the agenda that they perceive will benefit them. Both have pushed Islamophobia for political purposes. Both helped elect Trump and so inflicted enormous

harm on the United States of America.

Both use their control of media to engage bullying and threats of smears to manipulate people. John Major revealed that as soon as he became prime minister, Murdoch threatened him. He could have good press or bad press, Murdoch told him. It depended on Major’s policies toward Europe.

Both use hacking to get information with which to smear enemies. Murdoch’s newspapers in the UK routinely hacked into people’s phone messages to get dirt on them. They then erased 20 million internal emails in an attempt to cover it up. I’ve long suspected that Murdoch’s U.S. operations must have done the same thing but that British law enforcement is much less corrupt than the American, so it never came out over here. Putin recently praised his own Russian hackers as patriots.

Murdoch’s Fox is an attempt to subvert American democracy. Its employees have deliberately falsified video. They have retailed blatant lies as news. They have supported an implicit white nationalism. They have propagandized relentlessly for climate denialism. They have promoted war and war industries. They are about knee-jerk support of the Republican Party and more recently of the Trump faction within it. They have show consistent bias against minorities. The whole Mexican Wall fantasy was pushed by Bill O’Reilly for years. Even rightwing thriller writer Tom Clancy at one point told O’Reilly it was a stupid idea.

So as everybody is trying to track down some vague and complicated Russian plot, the Rupert Murdoch plot is in plain sight. And to any extent the Russian election plot has some truth to it, it is simply a use of techniques pioneered by Murdoch and Fox.

Which M. Dupin in the corporate media will dare blow the whistle?

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



Trump's Six Month Report Card

BY ROBERT REICH

So after six months, has President Trump delivered what he promised you?

1. He told you he'd repeal Obamacare and replace it with something "beautiful." You bought it. But he didn't repeal and he didn't replace. [Just as well: His plan would have knocked at least 22 million off health insurance, including many of you.]

2. He told you he'd cut your taxes. You bought it. But tax "reform" is stalled. And if it ever moves, the only ones whose taxes will be cut are the wealthy.

3. He told you he'd invest \$1 billion in our nation's crumbling infrastructure. You bought it. But his infrastructure plan, which was really a giveaway to rich investors, is also stalled.

4. He said he'd clean the Washington swamp. You bought it. But he's brought into his administration more billionaires, CEOs, and Wall Street moguls than in any administration in history, to make laws that will enrich their businesses, along with former lobbyists, lawyers and consultants who are crafting new policies for the same industries they recently worked for.

5. He said he'd use his business experience to whip

the White House into shape. You bought it. But he created the most chaotic, dysfunctional, back-stabbing White House in modern history, in which no one is in charge.

6. He said he'd close "special interest loopholes that have been so good for Wall Street investors but unfair to American workers." You bought it. But he picked a Wall Street financier, Stephen Schwarzman, to run his strategic and policy forum, who compares closing those loopholes to Hitler's invasion of Poland.

7. He told you he'd "bring down drug prices" by making deals with drug companies. You bought it. But now the White House says that promise is "in-operative."

8. He said that on Day One he'd label China a "currency manipulator." You bought it. But then he met with China's president and declared "China is not a currency manipulator."

9. He said he wouldn't bomb Syria. You bought it. But then he bombed Syria.

10. He called Barack Obama "the vacationer-in-Chief" and accused him of playing more rounds of golf than Tiger Woods. He promised to never be the

kind of president who took cushy vacations on the taxpayer's dime, not when there was so much important work to be done. You bought it. But in his first 6 months he has spent more taxpayer money on vacations than Obama did in the first 3 years of his presidency. Not to mention all the money taxpayers are spending protecting his family, including his two sons who travel all over the world on Trump business.

11. He said he'd force companies to keep jobs in America. You believed him. But despite their promises, Carrier, Ford, GM, and the rest are shipping jobs to Mexico and China.

12. He said he'd create coal jobs. You believe him. He hasn't. But here's what he has done: Since 1965 a federal program called the Appalachian Regional Commission has spent \$23 billion helping communities in coal states fund job retraining, reclaim land, and provide desperately needed social services. A.R.C. helped cut poverty rates almost in half, double the percentage of high-school graduates, and reduce infant mortality by two-thirds. Trump's first proposed budget eliminates A.R.C.

Robert Reich is chancellor's professor of public policy at the University of California-Berkeley. His latest book is Saving Capitalism: For the Many, Not the Few.

How To Impeach The President

BY SUSAN ESTRICH

Will he be impeached for this?" people ask me every day. All that changes is what "this" is: It might be Donald Trump Jr.'s "love" for the Russians; or Jared Kushner's four meetings; or their failure to disclose such meetings; or Donald Trump's threatening to fire the attorney general and replace him with a recess appointment; or worst of all, Trump's repeated comments that show how determined he is to fire Robert Mueller.

What else can you say when you see our president behaving so badly. He turned the Boy Scout Jamboree into a partisan political rally for himself – contrary to all the presidents before him, who always spoke about service and patriotism, not their personal enemies. He sent out an absolutely outrageous tweet attacking transgender people who are risking their lives for our country [which earned the whiner in chief a rare rebuke from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who announced that they would ignore his tweet]. He continues to try and stymie the investigation of his ties with the Russians and of all the secret meetings that no one disclosed and secret deals and dirty tricks that have yet to be disclosed. He continues to

attack the attorney general [can it be that I'm really defending Jeff Sessions, a man with whom I disagree about almost everything except his decision to recuse himself from the investigation?] and threatens to replace him with a recess appointment [which Supreme Court precedent actually doesn't allow, should the president care]. And of course, he remains most determined of all to fire Robert Mueller.

What will it take? What are the "high crimes and misdemeanors" that can be the basis for impeachment?

These look like legal questions, but they're not. Impeachment is a political process. High crimes and misdemeanors are whatever Congress thinks they are. The Republican House is not going to impeach President Trump, ridiculous as they look these days. The Republican Senate is not going to convict him.

For all the president's many sins and the Republicans' hypocrisy and disarray, Democrats have problems of their own. Skepticism about the president does not translate automatically into support for the Democrats. If it did, Kid Rock would not be leading one of my favorite senators, Debbie Stabenow, who is up for re-election in Michigan.

The numbers favor the Republicans. Incumbents win re-election more than 90% of the time. As the recent special election in Georgia proved, and as the late House Speaker Tip O'Neill used to say, mostly politics is local. People may hate Trump, but if they like their congressmen or congresswomen, they usually vote for them. In the Senate, Democrats effectively have 25 seats up [23 Democrats and two independents who caucus with them], while only eight Republican Senators are up. You do the math.

And frankly, most of the people I talk to [and most of the polls] suggest that many who are frustrated with Trump are also frustrated with the Democrats and their failure to be more than an opposition party. "A better deal" – the latest pitch by the Democrats, with all the familiar jargon about standing up for working families – was widely mocked as a bad play on the slogan for a pizza chain. The analogy to the New Deal is lost on those who don't know what it was. The election will not be won on the legacy of Franklin Roosevelt, or on rhetoric that I could have written, and on occasion did ["Good Jobs at Good Wages"], decades ago. ObamaCare should not be repealed, but it does have to be fixed. I'm not saying it will be easy – it won't – but Democrats are kidding themselves if they think that saying no and promising a better deal will be enough.

So if it's a business-as-usual midterm, the Republicans may lose a few seats, but not enough to doom the president, no matter what he does. And he won't be impeached. He might even get re-elected.

What it will take to impeach the president is an election. What has to happen is very simple. The way to impeach the president is to turn the midterm elections into a referendum on it, and to win.

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Breast Cancer-Wine Link: Scary Or Just A Scare?

BY FROMA HARROP

Many women obsess over their risk for breast cancer. That's why news media flash blazing headlines whenever a study suggests a link between breast cancer and some "exposure." That's why television news shows that rarely spare even five minutes for science of existential importance to humankind find time for this.

A new report cites evidence that drinking even one small glass of wine a day heightens a woman's risk for breast cancer. Released by the renowned Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle, it set off the usual alarms. It certainly got my attention while raising some questions.

The intention here is not to criticize or otherwise judge the study's validity. Rather, it is to interpret the findings in a way that's useful to one who cares to protect her health but also loves a glass or two with dinner.

Helping in this process is a fascinating new book, *Making Sense of Science: Separating Substance from Spin*, by New York Times science writer Cornelia Dean.

Its mission is to help non-scientists evaluate scientific claims, with much attention paid to studies related to health.

"People who want to scare us typically give us relative risk figures," Dean writes. Raising a risk that starts off small can result in a risk that's higher but still very small in absolute terms.

This is best shown in an example. "Something that raises your risk of heart attack by 30% [relative risk]," she explains, "could be no scarier than raising your odds from 6 in 1,000 to 8 in 1,000 [absolute risk]."

When we hear that a small glass of wine a day may raise a premenopausal woman's breast cancer risk by 5% and a postmenopausal woman's by 9%, remember, those are relative risks. You want to know the absolute risk.

So what do we know about women and drinking? I asked Dean.

"We know drinking modestly raises the risk of breast cancer," she said. But "it is widely believed that moderate drinking is associated with better heart health and longer life expectancy. And we know that almost half of American women die of heart/vascular causes, whereas about 3% die of breast cancer."

Another interesting point: "When an epidemiologist gets interested in an exposure-risk relationship, it's typically when the exposure doubles the risk.

Here we are talking about increases of about 8% or 9%. None of the wine studies gets near that."

For contrast, consider the studies linking tobacco to cancer. Among smokers, the risk of lung cancer is about 900% higher.

A public that poorly understands risk also falls short on evaluating statistics. Some years ago, reports of a cluster of breast cancer cases on Long Island grabbed the headlines. The alarms were loud. They were also false.

When a cancer [or autism, for that matter] is distributed randomly over a large population, there will inevitably be clusters of cases. This is a product of statistics, not evidence of something bad in the water.

"What Long Island has in relative abundance," Dean concluded, "is not breast cancer but rather affluent women with access to good insurance coverage."

So the problem with today's unnecessarily scary reports is usually not the scientists suggesting elevated risks or the statisticians crunching the numbers. It's how these risks and numbers are reported. It's the job of journalists to interpret these findings for a general audience.

Non-scientists, meanwhile, would do well to arm themselves with some basic understanding of what studies and reports are really saying.

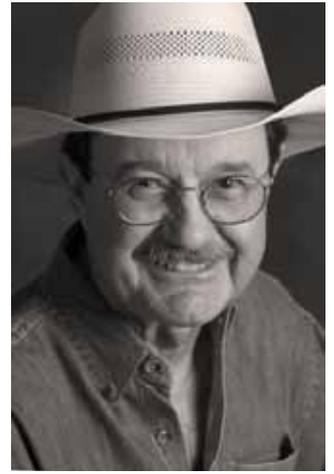
As for me, I shall continue drinking wine – moderately, of course.

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The Partisan Use Of Preemption Is Surging

We the People are being burgled. Again. The latest hit is just the latest in a long string of political robberies, a nationwide crime wave being pulled off by moneyed elites and their political henchmen. With each heist, they haul off a little more of our democratic power: the ability of the working majority to have any real say in the corporate and governmental decisions that affect us.

The elites are master thieves, often plucking pieces of our power without us realizing it, until we try to use it and – phhttt – it’s gone. And yet another democracy-stealing tool has recently been fabricated and quietly distributed to profiteering corporations and right-wing ideologues throughout the country: preemption.

This concept has been around since Day One of our nation, contained in the Supremacy Clause of the U.S. Constitution and in similar clauses in state constitutions. It allows higher levels of government to intervene and overrule lower levels – the Feds can legally preempt state and local laws, and states can preempt city and county ordinances.

Obviously, this extreme power is fraught with danger, so it’s meant to be used sparingly and only to advance a very big public purpose like, for example, overriding state and local laws that officially sanction rank racial discrimination.

In just the past half-dozen years, some of the greediest corporations and grubbiest of politicians have concluded to take preemption into their own hands. Discarding the concept’s core principle of serving the public interest, they’re presently wielding its nullifying power as a cudgel to clobber democratic rule and impose special interest policies against the will of the people.

As you might expect, Trump & Co. are big on federal preemption. They’re targeting a multitude of state and local laws for extinction, including popular and effective provisions enacted to ensure workplace safety, provide consumer protection, establish sanctuary cities, expand voting rights, prevent air and water pollution, reduce gun violence, maintain public oversight of for-profit charter schools, improve chil-

dren’s health and mitigate climate change.

It’s at the state level, however, that the intrusive and abusive power of preemption is exploding, as today’s right-wing governors and legislators rapidly escalate a state war to quash progressive actions by local governments and grassroots movements. Democracy be damned.

Far from advancing any big public goals, preemption is now being used to advance corporate agendas. A February report by the National League of Cities found:

- 24 states [including Oklahoma] preempt local authorities from increasing the minimum wage;
- 17 [including Oklahoma] preempt local ordinances providing paid-leave benefits for workers;
- Three preempt city regulation of home-sharing networks such as Airbnb;
- 37 preempt the authority of local officials to set safety standards for ride-sharing corporations such as Uber;
- 17 preempt municipalities from providing low-cost broadband service to residents [who otherwise get no internet service at all or are stuck with monopolies like Comcast];
- 42 preempt local officials’ authority to increase taxes to meet local needs.

And there’s much more. States are also dropping the preemption bomb on communities trying to regulate damage from factory farms, Big Oil frackers [Oklahoma, again], coal-fired utilities, pesticide spewers, gun manufacturers, plastic bag makers, e-cigarette peddlers, pipeline builders, et al. According to the Center for Media and Democracy, 36 states introduced laws preempting cities in 2016, up from 29 states in 2015. State lawmakers are on a pace to exceed those numbers in 2017.

The legal theory behind states’ authority to overrule local governments was first articulated by Judge John Forrest Dillon. In an 1872 opinion, he ruled that municipalities have only the powers state legislators expressly grant them. “Dillon’s Rule” has subsequently been cited and adopted by the U.S. Supreme Court and other courts, but the theory is not without its critics.

Other judges have made eloquent arguments for the principle of “home rule,” noting that unlimited state power imposes unreasonable constraints on the ability of local communities to govern themselves.

Notably, Supreme Court rulings do not prevent states from passing legislation or amending their constitutions to expressly allow home rule, and to-

day a new Home Rule movement is taking root to reassert the rights of local people for self-governance.

To learn how to get involved, look into Campaign to Defend Local Solutions. It’s a “nonpartisan and people-powered” coalition of local leaders focused on defending communities’ rights to local solutions.

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Do-It-Yourselfers Unite!

Planned obsolescence has long been a consumer expense and irritation. Now brand-name profiteers are pushing a new abuse: Repair prevention.

This treacherous corporate scheme does more than gouge buyers on the original purchase. Using both legal ruses and digital lockdowns, major manufacturers are quietly attempting to outlaw the natural instinct of us humanoids to fiddle with and improve the material things we own in order to charge us to fix it.

Indeed, the absurdity and arrogance of their overreach is even more basic: They’re out to corporatize the very idea of “owning.”

Chances are you’ve bought an Apple iPad, Chevy Malibu, Amazon Kindle, Samsung TV, GE Frigidaire or some other brand-name consumer product equipped with a dazzling array of digital doodads. And in doing so, you unwittingly consented to the corporation’s repair-prevention “gotcha” tucked into its license agreement.

But in addition to deceiving and/or intimidating buyers into believing they’re legally required to trek to the high-dollar Corporate Tech Genius Store for routine maintenance, powerhouse corporate marketers are increasingly forcing customers to bring all their repair business to them.

Such an attack on individual and independent fixers is unprecedented – with cabals in industry after industry asserting their ownership control far after sales.

This explosive, defining issue of the people’s democratic authority over corporate behavior has received little media coverage, is not on the radar of either major political party, and it is not widely understood – even by people who rely on the repair economy. But that lack of public awareness is about to change. Consumer advocates, small businesses, farm groups, computer activists and environmentalists are coming together in a unified, bipartisan, full-throated rebellion: The “Right-to-Repair” Movement.

This challenge to the collective might of many of the richest corporations on the globe has a solid chance of succeeding because in addition to anger, this corporate overreach stirs a visceral reaction: The profiteers are not merely messing with our “stuff,” but with us – our sense of ourselves as self-reliant, in-charge people.

This year, the grassroots groups got lawmakers in 11 state legislatures to introduce and begin pushing various versions of “Fair Repair” bills. This show of strength has startled the likes of Apple, Deere, and IBM, flushing their policies from the shadows and leading the companies to mount public, lobbying campaigns to protect their greed.

The manufacturers’ influence peddlers have killed this year’s right-to-repair bills in Minnesota and Nebraska, and punted Tennessee’s into the 2018 legislative session. But efforts are still alive in Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Massachusetts, Missouri, New York, North Carolina and Wyoming. Each attempt is a terrific organizing tool to expand the coalition, raise public awareness, extend the effort into other states, and come back stronger next year.

Populist mavericks are now joyously disobeying the corporate order, teaching the rest of us how to become hands-on disrupters of the repair monopoly.

One very helpful group is iFixit, a jack-of-all trades wiki that demystifies technology and repair tasks. iFixit obtains and posts repair manuals for every Apple product made in the last decade.

It also publishes step-by-step repair guides for thousands of products, from trucks to toasters; invites skilled people to help write open-source repair manuals; shows novices hacks like using a guitar pick as a cheap, effective tool for fixing electronics; hooks people up with local “bike kitchens” and repair collectives; and promotes the fix-it-yourself culture through such means as “repair fairs,” with kids joining in the fun of taking apart broken items and making them work again.

People have been fixing stuff ever since stuff was invented. Tinkering is a natural expression of the human spirit – and it is folly [not to mention insulting] for corporate executives to think that even their enormous monopoly power will be enough to crush that spirit.

As awareness of this attempt by manufacturers to steal such a basic right spreads across grassroots America, so will people’s understanding of the rapacious nature of the unrestrained corporate beast – and that knowledge will fuel the people’s determination to rein the beast in.

The corporatists’ narcissistic arrogance could explode in their faces. – *Jim Hightower*

ExxonMobil Talks Good Game, But Still Funds Climate Deniers

BY ELLIOTT NEGIN

ExxonMobil executives repeatedly claim their company supports a federal carbon tax and the Paris climate agreement. The company's checkbook ledger, however, tells a far different story.

Recently, the company released its annual list of its "public information and policy research" grantees, which shows that it spent \$1.65 million in 2016 on a dozen think tanks, advocacy groups and associations that contest climate science and oppose both the Paris accord and a carbon tax – the very policies the company professes to endorse. Last year's outlay boosted the total of the company's expenditures on climate disinformation over the last two decades to \$34.6 million.

CHAMBER OF HORRORS

Most of ExxonMobil's spending on denier groups last year – 87% – went to four organizations: the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, American Enterprise Institute, Manhattan Institute and American Legislative Exchange Council.

ExxonMobil gave more than half of last year's kitty, a cool \$1 million, to the Chamber, which provided President Trump with a key, but fraudulent, rationale for pulling out of the Paris agreement. Parroting a recent report funded by the Chamber and the American Council for Capital Formation [ACCF] – which received \$1.78 million from ExxonMobil between 2000 and 2015 – Trump claimed that over the next several decades the accord would cost the U.S. economy nearly \$3 trillion and, by 2040, eliminate 6.5 million industrial sector jobs.

The Associated Press, Politifact and the Washington Post fact-checked the speech and arrived at similar conclusions: The Chamber and ACCF cooked the books.

"The study makes worst-case assumptions that may inflate the cost of meeting U.S. targets under the Paris accord while largely ignoring the economic benefits to U.S. businesses from building and operating renewable energy projects," AP reporters Michael Biescker and Paul Wiseman pointed out. "Academic studies have found that increased environmental regulation doesn't actually have much impact on employment. Jobs lost at polluting companies tend to be offset by new jobs in green technology."

The Chamber, which has a long history of denying climate science, made similar dire warnings about job losses in a 2014 report analyzing the Obama administration's Clean Power Plan. That report used

flawed assumptions to magnify the carbon rule's cost and exaggerate job losses and, like its recent report on the Paris agreement, didn't factor in the carbon rule's considerable benefits.

THE MARKET WILL TAKE CARE OF IT

The next biggest ExxonMobil grant last year, \$235,000, went to the American Enterprise Institute, which had already received \$4.1 million from the company between 1998-15. AEI economist Benjamin Zycher addresses climate issues more than anyone else these days at the free-market think tank, and his views are diametrically opposed to ExxonMobil's professed positions. He disputes the conclusions of mainstream climate science, insists a carbon tax would be "ineffective," and calls the Paris agreement an "absurdity."

Zycher's colleague Mark Thiessen, a former speechwriter for President George W. Bush, is also no fan of the international accord. In a June 2 essay, he cited numbers from the Chamber's discredited report and maintained that "our emissions will arguably decline faster because of Trump's withdrawal – because our free market economy will be stronger and more innovative without it."

WIND ENERGY BLOWS

The Manhattan Institute, which received \$705,000 from ExxonMobil between 2006-15, pulled in another \$135,000 from the company last year. Staffers there aren't too keen on the carbon tax or the Paris agreement, either. Senior Fellow Oren Cass, who previously worked at Mitt Romney's old firm Bain & Company, calls the accord a "fraud" and argues that a carbon tax would be "bad for the country" and "bad for the economy."

Another senior fellow at the libertarian think tank, Robert Bryce, previously worked as a newspaper reporter and for the Institute for Energy Research, a former ExxonMobil grantee that is largely underwritten by the Koch brothers. A self-styled agnostic about climate change, Bryce regularly attacks renewable energy. He especially loves to bash wind, carping about the industry's temporary federal tax breaks over the last 20 years and its threat to birds. Never mind that the oil and gas industry received an average of \$4.86 billion a year [in 2010 dollars] in permanent federal subsidies between 1918-09 [that continue to today], or that oil and gas industry fluid waste pits kill roughly three times more birds a year than wind turbines. Bryce never mentions either of those salient facts.

NOT-SO-SMART ALEC

Between 2006-15, ExxonMobil gave \$600,000 to the American Legislative Council, a secretive lobby group that drafts sample corporate-friendly legislation for state lawmakers. Last year, the oil company gave ALEC another \$76,500.

Does ALEC also oppose a carbon tax and the Paris accord? You bet.

In 2013, ALEC drafted a sample resolution for state legislators to reject “all federal and state efforts to establish a carbon tax on fuels for electricity and transportation.” More recently, the director of ALEC’s Energy, Environment and Agriculture Task Force slammed the Paris agreement as a “bad deal” for America.

“The Paris agreement is little more than an effort by the previous president to lend some international legitimacy to his destructive regulatory campaign against affordable domestic energy,” Kenneth Stein, a former legislative aide to Sen. Ted Cruz, wrote in May 25 essay on ALEC’s website. “As has been seen in any number of US industries, regulation and rulemaking stifle progress and innovation – much more so when the regulations become part of an international treaty regime.”

Why bother with a carbon tax or an international carbon-reduction agreement if, as ALEC erroneously maintains, scientists haven’t determined the role human activity plays in global warming?

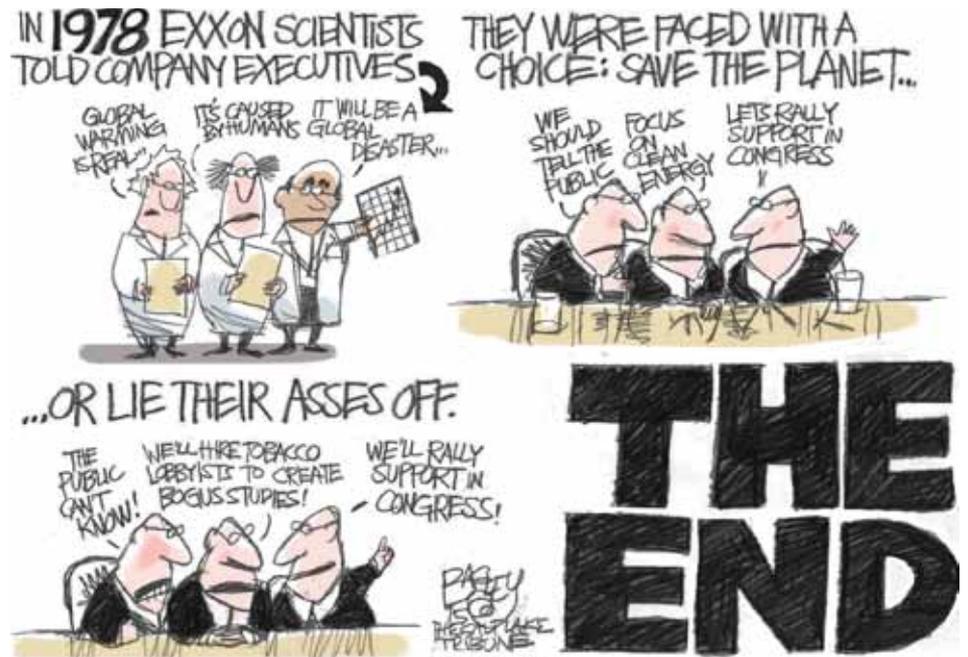
“Climate change is a historical phenomenon,” its website states, “and the debate will continue on the significance of natural and anthropogenic contributions.”

More than 100 corporations have quit ALEC for a number of reasons, notably its scientifically indefensible position on climate change. Those companies include a number of energy sector heavyweights, including American Electric Power, BP, ConocoPhillips and Shell. But not ExxonMobil.

MEET THE NEW BOSS ...

The fact that ExxonMobil’s grantees contradict the company’s avowed positions on climate science and policy should come as no surprise. Its funding pattern in Congress is analogous.

Over the years, the company has consistently rewarded legislators who reject mainstream climate science and vote against carbon tax resolutions by funding their reelection campaigns. Half of the nearly \$1.45 million it spent on candidates in the 2016 election cycle, for example, went to 81 climate science deniers in the House and 24 in the Senate. And 18 of the 22 senators who sent a letter to President Trump urging him to abandon the Paris agreement collectively received \$371,000 in campaign contributions from ExxonMobil between 2011-16.



Rex Tillerson began playing this game soon after he became the company’s CEO in 2006. In January 2007, the Union of Concerned Scientists published a report documenting that between 1998-2005, ExxonMobil had spent at least \$16 million on a network of more than 40 anti-regulation groups to manufacture doubt about climate science.

A week after its release, Tillerson acknowledged that his company had a PR problem. “We recognize that we need to soften our public image,” he said, according to a Jan. 10 story in Greenwire, a trade publication. “It is something we are working on.”

Ten years later, ExxonMobil’s PR offensive continues. Publicly, company officials repeatedly assure the news media and the general public they have seen the light. Climate change is indeed real and we need to address it. At the same time, however, ExxonMobil is still bankrolling climate disinformation groups and deniers in Congress to stymie government action.

In January, Darren Woods, who has been working for ExxonMobil since 1992, replaced Tillerson as CEO. So far, he’s the same as the old boss. His inaugural blog post, which champions natural gas as “powerful tool” to reduce carbon emissions and stresses the challenge of “managing the risks of climate change” while meeting growing worldwide energy demand, could have easily been written by Tillerson. And, like his predecessor, Woods dutifully reiterated ExxonMobil’s nominal support for a revenue-neutral carbon tax and the Paris agreement. But until the company stops funding climate science denier groups and the members of Congress standing in the way, it will remain a major obstacle to saving the planet from the worst consequences of climate change.

Elliott Negin is a senior writer at the Union of Concerned Scientists. His articles have appeared in the Atlantic Monthly, Columbia Journalism Review, The Hill and many other publications.

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National Popular Vote Plan Offers Remedy To Elitist Electoral College

BY ROBERT S. BECKER

Are others equally terrified that this pretend president, after his recent fundraiser, could get re-elected while again losing the popular vote? Hardly impossible – unless the National Popular Vote [NPV] movement succeeds, and the best news: it's all doable before 2020.

Already, 75% of Americans [per NPV website], a myriad of politicians, and 11 jurisdictions agree the Electoral College [EC] must be displaced, not banished.

Even Trump and Clinton agree on this one. Is that because 94% of '16 campaign events occurred in only 12 states? Undemocratically, every recent four-year circus shrinks all national elections to a dozen battleground states.

That compaction hands the election to as few as

125,000 voters [or .01% of 125 million]. Forget stupid tweets and calculated distractions: where's the outrage at this subversive, double whammy against majority rule?

How many Americans know there's a simple, nationwide solution underway, without amending the Constitution? The NPV simply insists every state deliver its entire EC share to the winner of the national popular vote. Simplicity itself, since the Constitution awards states wide authority how they distribute their presidential electors.

Without antiquated EC distortions, we'd have been saved from our two worst, recent presidents [count 'em, two out of three]. Right, Dubya in 2000 and what's his name, just last year. Already, huge num-

bers [like 60%-plus] are mulling over how to neutralize, even replace this buffoonish, minority president who shockingly finagled the EC. Insisting on majority rule is a noble hill to die on.

WINNER-TAKE-ALL, NATIONALIZED

So far, 11 jurisdictions representing 165 electoral votes endorse committing their entire EC share to whoever tops the national popular election [contingent on a 270-vote threshold consensus]. That's the only way to equality, short of abolishing the College, thus guaranteeing equal weight to every vote, wherever you live. Think of the tens of billions fat-cat PACs must spend to rig advertising across every urban and rural market.

Why this terrific [and simple] idea has not gained greater visibility is astonishing; this redemption of majority rules requires no new laws or legal decisions. Only zealots and tunnel-vision partisans object. Why not turn state winner-take-all mandates, already 99% in place, into national-winner-take-all outcomes?

True, until more people vote [40% don't], we won't have true majority decisions. But not voting is for most a choice [notwithstanding nasty GOP minority suppression]. That aside, the NPV plan empowers all voters equally, and half of 60% [62 million or so] trumps the minuscule few across a fistful of states who now pick presidents.

The morass was certainly dramatized by last year's deviant loser [by almost three million citizens] yet who still took the White House. Does majority rule not face another nightmare farce were Trump re-elected with only minority support? With 60% already disapproving, can Trump expect to outdraw any decent Democrat [failing badly even against a heavily-compromised Hillary]? Would Trump illegitimacy not grow [if possible] were he to lose, not by almost three million but double or triple that? When does our democratic system, already under siege thanks to billionaire payola, crack from its own internal contradictions?

MAJORITY RULE – OR MORE CHAOS?

You'd think today's majority, rebuffed twice in 16 years with two wing-nut, minority presidents, would rage against the non-democratic, distortion-laded Electoral College. You'd think that hapless, visionless Democrats would crusade against what put dim Dubya, then crazed, scatter-gun Trump in power. Why wouldn't desperate Democrats confront the outmoded, anti-populist Electoral College as fervently as they fight racial and gender discrimination, phony trickle-down economics, or fundamentalist folly on family planning?

After all, we managed to reverse the other original Constitutional sin [formalizing slaves as property]. We changed election of senators to direct voting [vs. crony state favoritism]. Yes, it could take years, but won't fighting for undeniably democratic outcomes boost today's wobbly "Democratic" party? Why not neuter the EC, a discredited "insurance policy" by

rich colonials against the suspect vox populi? No other major democracy followed suit, for good reason.

Presidential disasters like Trump don't just happen: they result from ill-conceived, dysfunctional, non-representative election systems. How many brilliant Founders would cringe at how two of our last three presidents were chosen? Across only 16 years, two clear, popular vote losers took the White House, both calamitous minority presidents. Dubya was bad enough – and who doubts eight, excruciating years of Trumpery would rewrite Bush-Cheney infamy.

NO FUN IN THIS HOUSE

On point, as confident rationalists in the Age of Enlightenment, what Founders wouldn't gag at today's addiction to willful ignorance, captured by USC Professor Marty Kaplan?

Trump wouldn't recognize a contradiction if it bit him on the butt. A fact isn't a fact to him; it's just a gambit, an alternative to consider. "Believe me" means "true"; "false" means "true"; "fake" means "mean." Welcome to the epistemological fun house.

Far beyond expedient lies or fabrications, the Trump fun house oozes fractured phoniness that abuses this core, western value: reason, thus rational decision-making. Was our revolution not against a seemingly irrational, out of touch monarch who oppressed our "self-evident," innate rights for self-rule? Would Founders not rush to join today's resistance against an irrational, delusional oligarch waging multiple Wars against Reason, buttressed by laughable surges of Orwellian doublespeak?

Trump "ideas" are an insult to reason. His lawless travel ban won't keep terrorists out, only display intolerant, bull-headed toughness. His border wall folly won't end undocumented immigration but panders to his frightened, anti-immigrant, white-nationalist crowd. Trump's worst nonsense – guaranteeing cheaper, more available, better medical care for all – now explodes as the cruelest, most fraudulent joke [read: lie] of all. Where's any "care" in TrumpCare – nothing more than a massacre of ObamaCare– and logically choking of late on its own hypocrisy.

AFTER TRUMP, WHAT DELUGE?

Failure to offset the EC is not only a body blow to majority rule. In the end, outlandish Trump/GOP wedge politics are bludgeoning the key, often tenuous linkages by which our melting pot accommodates differences of race, religion, and ethnicity. Naturally, this chaotic, "disruption at any price" president has worsened gridlock and squandered integrity and prestige abroad, substituting infantile theatrics for leadership.

In the end, I posit direct correlation between electing unfit, minority grandstanders and an undemocratic, divisive Electoral College system biased to reactionary minorities. Look at the hard lessons that accrue: minority rule and a minority president foster such open hostility they obliterate co-operation, problem-solving or progress. Multiple presidencies

full of smoke and mirrors [Dubya plus Trump] encourage miscreants to violate clear-cut Constitutional thresholds – with Trump, obstruction of justice, nepotism, inviting Russian vote-tampering, and illegally profiting from high office.

COMPLEX PROBLEM, SIMPLE SOLUTION

Could Founders have immunized us against Dubya's serial blundering or today's non-stop Lord of Misrule? Or saved us from criminal irresponsibility, as voiced by Trump [seconded by Cheney], "I don't regret anything, because there is nothing you can do about it"?

What better, fairer, more rational counter to indefensibly bad presidents than new, better election

methods that honor the historic sanctity of majority rule?

Even double calamities need not be permanent: any system fashioned [or allowed] by people will be reformed when enough resistance protests align with enough courage and enough endurance. Trump only dramatizes the flaws of the EC, so painfully exposed in the '00 Florida vote-counting fiasco.

The National Popular Vote movement is the best, simplest, and cleanest solution to our biggest problem: fair presidential elections. Check out their site, nationalpopularvote.com, full of short, yet enlightening videos. Talk it up: all that's at stake is the future.

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Health Care Attack Opening Gambit In Audacious GOP Political Project

BY PAUL BLEST

Before postponing an initial vote last month on the Better Care Reconciliation Act, aka TrumpCare, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell hid the legislation from his Democratic colleagues and the public, refused to hold a single committee hearing and limited debate time on the bill to just 20 hours.

As appalling as this break from procedure is, it is not without precedent. The GOP is merely following a blueprint that state Republicans have been assembling for the better part of a decade.

When Democratic House members launched a sit-in last year to force a vote denying gun sales to consumers on the no-fly list, one of its most aggressive opponents was Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina.

"The business of the House is more important than the antics that we see going on there," Tillis said on the Senate floor at the time, "and if it were my chamber, it would be cleared and people would be arrested, if that's what's necessary to get us back to the task at hand."

Tillis speaks from experience. As speaker of North Carolina's House of Representatives from 2011-14, he helped turn a genuinely purple state into a playground for conservatives, rolling back rights and protections for the LGBTQ community, people of color, immigrants, women, and workers at large. More crucially, he showed the Republican Party it can ram through legislation without even a pretense of transparency.

In early March, the House's ObamaCare replacement was kept so tightly under wraps, Republican Sen. Rand Paul created a small media circus when he endeavored to find it. Paul Ryan would ultimately withdraw the legislation after the Congressional

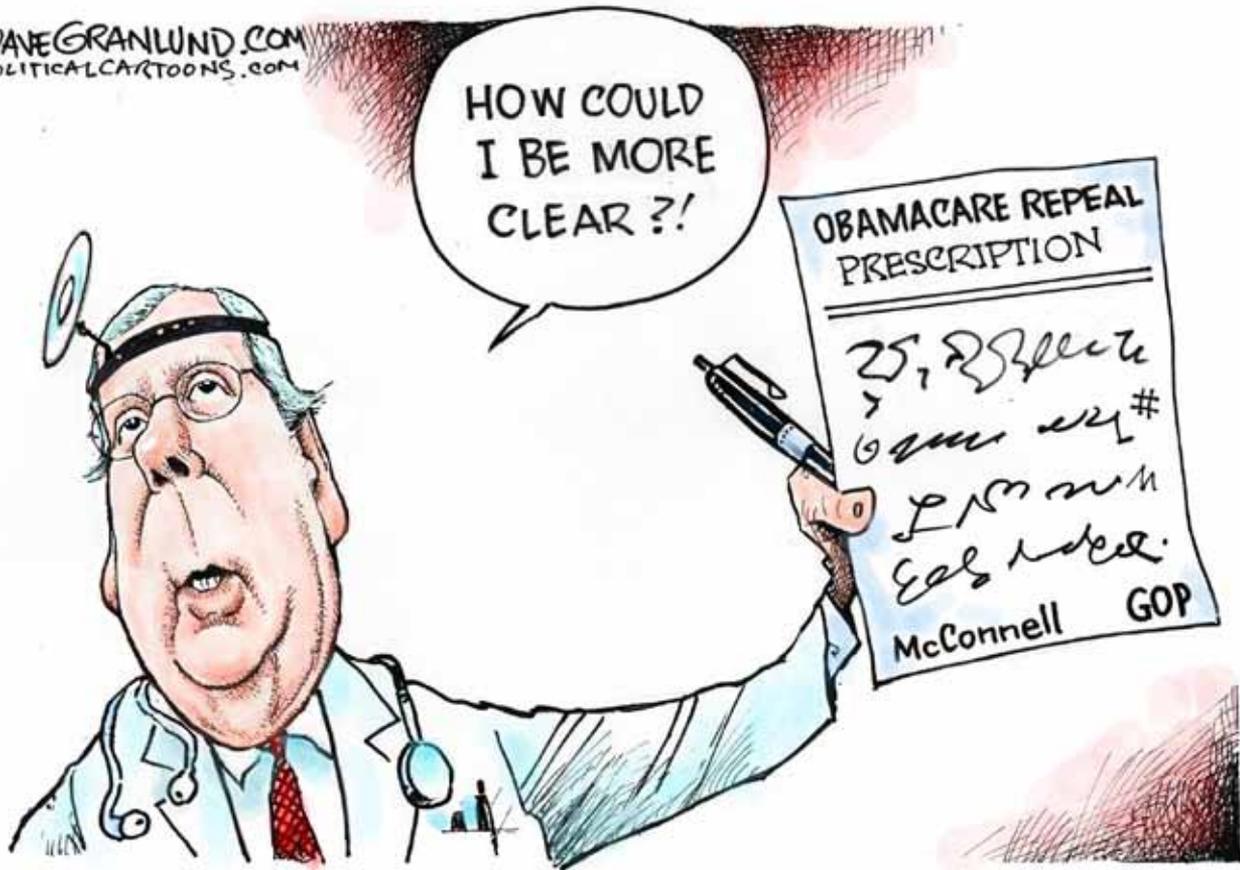
Budget Office's evaluation showed it would leave millions without health insurance. When the bill was revived, Republicans learned their lesson: the American Health Care Act was passed 19 days before a new CBO score was released.

Senate Republicans proved even less transparent with the BCRA, leaving national political reporters understandably flummoxed. "Republicans do not want the country to know what is in their health care bill," Vox's Sarah Kliff wrote on June 15. "The extreme secrecy is a situation without precedent, at least in creating health law," added longtime Kaiser Health News reporter Julie Rovner. [Rovner blamed three decades of decreasing congressional transparency.]

For those of us in North Carolina, what's happening at a federal level looks shockingly familiar. Although the Tar Heel state has long had a reputation for opacity over its 100-plus years of conservative and moderate Democratic rule, Republicans have implemented a far more authoritarian brand of politics since assuming power in 2010.

Perhaps the most glaring example arrived in 2013 when Tillis' House of Representatives took a bill aimed at "motorcycle safety" and tacked on provisions imposing numerous new restrictions on abortion. The legislation was ridiculed as the "motorcycle abortion bill," but that didn't stop Gov. Pat McCrory from signing it into law.

This process continued after Tillis left the Legislature. Last year's HB 2, which has been described as the most homophobic legislation in the United States, was introduced at 10 a.m. on March 23, when Democrats saw it for the first time. McCrory would approve the bill 13 hours later.



When McCrory lost the governor's race to Democrat Roy Cooper, another special session was convened in order to deal with funding for areas affected by Hurricane Matthew. After the bill passed, legislative leaders conferred for a few minutes before calling yet another special session, this one aimed at disempowering the governor and the state Supreme Court.

In none of these three instances were legislative Democrats, let alone the public, included in the process of governance. As a reporter covering HB 2 and last year's extra special session, it was a bewildering spectacle to watch. Rumors swirled across the state Legislature, as Republicans ruthlessly wielded power to make decisions for their constituents without their knowledge or approval.

Since becoming governor, Cooper has held fast to the notion that North Carolina is a purple state rather than a red one, upbraiding Republican leaders for refusing to negotiate with him. [The GOP holds a supermajority in both chambers because it has refused to redraw districts that have already been ruled to be gerrymandered by a federal court].

A recent piece in the New York Times Magazine captures the tension at the heart of his administration. "It is Cooper's misfortune to have finally arrived at his apparent destiny," writes reporter Jason Zengerle, "in a political climate that does not have much use for the sort of cautious, consensus-seeking governor he has spent his life preparing to be."

Compare that with this cautious, consensus-seeking quote from Republican state Sen. Ralph Hise:

"You'd be hard-pressed to find a more conservative record of any state Legislature in the nation than what we've had since 2011."

North Carolina's problem is now congressional Democrats' problem. While Sen. Chris Coons, D-DE, champions bipartisan petitions to save the historically reactionary filibuster and Sen. Joe Manchin, D-WV, signs pledges not to campaign against his esteemed conservative colleagues, Republicans – those who run things anyway – have decided that they have absolutely no use for norms anymore.

Democrats are fighting a losing battle against the New Right because they still believe in a spirit of bipartisanship that died an unceremonious death some time before Bill Clinton's impeachment and was never very useful to begin with. And while they see politics as an instrument for people to come together, the right is executing its agenda with brute force, to the delight of their corporate backers and hyper-conservative base.

Republican leadership has decided that transparency is a hindrance to its political aims. What Democrats and national political reporters alike need to understand is this: there is no norm that can't ultimately be discarded. If those norms failed to stop Donald Trump, then what chance do they have against Congress?

Paul Blest is a freelance writer based in Raleigh, NC. His work has appeared in Vice, Salon, Noisey, New Republic, Indy Week and Deadspin.

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Trump Merges Brand With Ultimate Symbol Of Power: The White House

NO IS NOT ENOUGH

***Resisting Trump's Shock Politics
And Winning The World We Need***

By Naomi Klein

**Haymarket Books,
273 pages, \$16.95**

BY TERENCE MCDOWELL

Naomi Klein's new book is based in part on research from earlier books.

In the first part she uses her earlier research for *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* to show how the Trump brand became the ultimate empty logo. In the second and third parts she uses her research for *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* to show how President Trump and his Cabinet are following the ideas found in disaster capitalism and how things could get worse. In part four Klein discusses ways to resist the shock politics of the Trump Administration.

When Donald Trump first became a national figure in the 1980s, he was still a fairly traditional real estate developer who happened to have a bottomless desire to see his own name in print. In the '90s, that started to change, mostly because Trump had so mismanaged his Atlantic City casinos that his bankers were taking over more and more of his business. But he didn't lose total control over his properties. Investors appeared to be convinced that they needed the Trump name – his personal brand – to keep his house of cards from crashing down.

After Trump saw the way companies like Nike were making a killing on the hollow brand model, he followed suit. His innovation was that he branded a part of the economy that had never been branded before: high-end real estate. Trump pioneered the idea that where you work, live, and play would all be franchises of a single global luxury brand.

But the real breakthrough came when Mark Burnett pitched Trump on the idea of *The Apprentice*.

Trump understood the potential immediately. The show would put the brightest possible spotlight on his gilded lifestyle. Most importantly, with *The Apprentice*, Trump wasn't paying to have his brand featured in a hit network TV show; he was getting paid a fortune for priceless free advertising.

After you have pulled off a feat like that, what's your next trick? Merge your brand with the ultimate symbol of power and authority: the White House.

Klein's investigation into the shock doctrine spanned four decades of history, from Chile after Augusto Pinochet's coup to Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union, from Baghdad under the U.S. "Shock and Awe" attack to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. The term "shock doctrine" describes the quite brutal tactic of systematically using the public's disorientation following a collective shock – wars, coups, terrorist attacks, market crashes or natural disasters – to push through radical pro-corporate measures, often called "shock therapy."

From the evidence so far, it's clear that Trump and his top advisers are trying to pull off a domestic shock doctrine. The goal is all-out war on the public sphere and the public interest, whether in the form of antipollution regulations or programs for the hungry. In their place will be unfettered power and freedom for corporations.

It's a program so defiantly unjust and so manifestly corrupt that it can only be pulled off with the assistance of divide-and-conquer racial and sexual politics, as well as a nonstop spectacle of media distractions. And, of course, it is being backed up with a

massive increase in war spending and a dramatic escalation of military conflicts on multiple fronts, from Syria to North Korea to Iran.

Senior members of Trump's team have been at the heart of some of the most egregious examples of the shock doctrine in recent memory. Vice-President Mike Pence is seen by many as the grown-up in Trump's messy room. Yet it is Pence who actually has the most disturbing track record when it comes to exploitation of human suffering.

At the time Katrina hit New Orleans, Pence was chairman of the powerful Republican Study Committee [RSC], a caucus of conservative lawmakers. Just 14 days after the levees were breached, the RSC convened a meeting at the offices of the Heritage Foundation. Under Pence's leadership, the group came up with a list of 32 pseudo relief policies which were all straight out of the disaster capitalism playbook.

Klein writes that the shock doctrine sometimes fails. Faced with a shared trauma, or a common threat, communities can come together in defiant acts of sanity and maturity. It has happened before, and the early signs are good that it might be happening again.

The Trump Administration is coming after huge sectors of the population all at once: tens of millions of people impacted by proposed budget cuts, civil rights activists, artists, Indigenous tribes, immigrants, climate scientists, etc. Their military belligerence and environmental arson are attacks that reach far outside U.S. borders to wage war on global stability and planetary habitability.

Although this blitzkrieg strategy has often worked in the past, it is actually quite high-risk. The danger of starting fights on so many fronts is that if it doesn't succeed in demoralizing your opponents, it could very well unite them.

The Bush Administration was able to mercilessly exploit the shock of the Sept. 11 trauma to attack civil liberties at home and launch wars abroad, which we now

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know were justified through doctored intelligence. But one thing that's become clear since Trump took office is that the memory of how terror was exploited after Sept. 11 lives on.

Though Trump and his support-

ers have tried their best to use fear – of Muslims, of Mexicans, of violent “ghettos” – to divide and control the population, the tactic has backfired repeatedly. Since Trump's election, countless people have participated in political

actions and gatherings for the first time in their lives, and have rushed to show solidarity with people who have been cast as the “other.”

I recommend this book to all the new organizers and resisters who have come forth in the last six months. The historical background of Trump and the goals of the Trump Administration should help new resisters plan for the future.

In the final chapter Klein writes, “Here is what needs to be understood in our bones: the spell of neoliberalism has been broken, crushed under the weight of

lived experience and a mountain of evidence. What for decades was unsayable is now being said out loud by candidates who win millions of votes: free college tuition, double the minimum wage, 100% renewable energy, demilitarize the police, prisons are no place for young people, refugees are welcome here, war makes us all less safe. And the crowds are roaring their agreement. With so much encouragement, who knows what’s next?”

Terence McDowell is a retired clinical chemist living in Edmond.

Moratorium

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

of charter schools regardless of local circumstances and regardless of whether there is a demonstrated need for the school

Often, charter schools have multiple authorizers that can overrule decisions made by local authorities on creating, closing, or renewing charter schools. These schools are most often operated by completely autonomous boards, frequently handpicked by the schools’ operators, that ask for and receive exemptions to local safeguards required for public schools. And families with children in charters are subject to the whims of the school operators who can make decisions with impunity, push out students they deem too difficult to teach, and close up shop when the circumstances suit them.

NEA calls for charter schools to be authorized and held accountable by local school boards, rather than distant boards or multiple administrative bodies, and NEA insists charters should be required to demonstrate a unique benefit to the local public school system, while operating with the same “basic safeguards” other public schools have to comply with.

A CLEAR LINE

Advocates for the charter school industry are likely to say a moratorium on new charters would be unfair to parents who want the privilege of choosing these schools.

However, no one is talking about shutting down ex-

isting charters, and no one is calling for ending new charter start-ups in perpetuity.

Further, arguing that charters are needed to serve certain parents who are inclined to choose these schools actually confirms what the NEA and other charter critics are contending – that these schools have become a special interest that’s been allowed to operate to the detriment of a public education system that strives to fulfill the education needs and desires of all students and the entire community.

Centrist Democrats may argue that advocating for a charter moratorium is dumb politics because it divides the party from its Wall Street-friendly branch that financially backs the charter industry. But these are the same centrist democrats who are really the ones dividing the Democratic party when they argue that every time Democrats support civil rights causes, they’re engaging in “identity politics” that alienates white workers.

In its budget proposal, the Trump administration has proposed spending hundreds of millions of federal dollars on expanding charter schools, and Education Secretary Betsy DeVos has made clear that expanding school choice, including charters, is practically the sole focus of her K-12 policy.

Democrats who continue to support charter school expansions under current circumstances risk muddying the waters at a time when there should be clear differences with what Trump-DeVos want.

A moratorium on charter schools draws a bright line between a political regime intent on serving the privileged and a Democratic party that seeks to uphold labor and civil rights. Democrats should step across that line.

Jeff Bryant is director of the Education Opportunity Network, a partnership effort of the Institute for America’s Future and the Opportunity to Learn Campaign.

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

because it is based on ability to pay. It makes no sense that Oklahoma's highest rate – 5% – kicks in at a mere \$7,200 of taxable income. Why should a teacher earning a starting salary of \$31,600 pay the same rate as Devon's Larry Nichols or Continental's Harold Hamm?

It's frightening politically for lawmakers to tinker with tax brackets, much less restore recent income tax cuts that cost the state treasury \$1 billion annually. After all, the wealthiest 20% of state households – including many political donors – realized 72% of the benefit from tax cuts enacted since the mid-2000s, according to the Oklahoma Policy Institute.

State Treasurer Ken Miller offers a way out for nervous legislators: create a bipartisan tax panel that would operate much like BRAC, the federal Base Realignment and Closure process that periodically has recommended un-amendable plans for streamlining and updating military operations.

Such a group could tackle comprehensive reform – everything from income tax rates to sales taxes on services to gross production and motor fuel taxes – then present a plan for an up-or-down legislative vote.

"We need to have a modernization of our tax code," Miller says. "It was built for an economy that doesn't exist any more."

Indeed, few things are more important to Oklahoma's future prosperity than a serious review, and fair, sensible overhaul, of the state's current tax policies.

Mullin's Ego

U.S. Rep. Markwayne Mullin's broken three-term pledge reflects a Washington-style narcissism his 2nd District constituents loath.

Cockamamie comments? A drunk driving arrest or two? Extra-marital shenanigans? Oklahoma voters often shrug.

Voter enmity builds, however, when they perceive elected officials have gotten too big for their britches. Mullin's 2017 offers the ingredients for just such a narrative.

Last spring, in response to unhappy constituents at a Jay town hall, Mullin declared: "You said you pay for me to do this – bullcrap! I pay for myself. I pay enough taxes where before I ever got there, and continue to for my company and pay my own salary.

"... This is a service. No one pays me to go. I do it as an honor, as a service."

At about the same time, Mullin abruptly canceled a constituent get-together in Tahlequah, citing "security" concerns and an "escalation of protesters" at congressional town halls nationally – a move that appeared to critics to be more about avoiding irate

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voters.

Now comes Mullin's term-limit reversal, no doubt influenced by the fact his \$174,000 a year salary is more than triple the state's median income, and his healthcare benefits are better than most of his constituents'. Moreover, it can be intoxicating to always be called "congressman" and catered to by lobbyists.

Will Mullin's constituents punish his term-limit duplicity?

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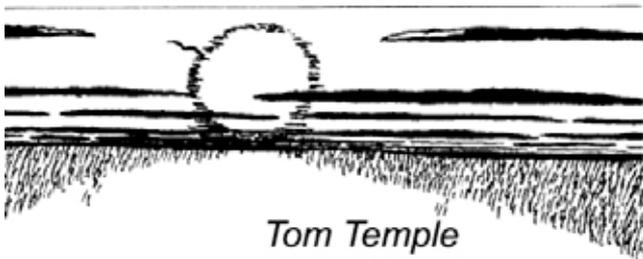
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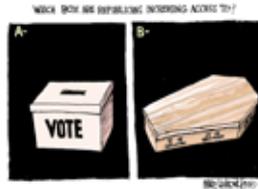
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Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Ask Tulsa Rep. Glen Mulready's constituents about the state insurance commissioner wannabe. His short-tempered responses to emails urging he vote to increase education funding reflected full-of-himself hubris.

Legislative leaders' refusal to acknowledge, much less address the state's revenue woes yields a predictable result: Fitch Ratings downgraded state bonds from AA+ to AA, meaning it will cost more to borrow for some projects.

The \$240.7 million that Finance Director Preston Doerflinger drained from the Rainy Day Fund during last spring's cash-flow crisis was returned, as promised. Still, it set a terrible precedent. The Legislature is supposed to control the constitutional fund.

Former regent/state Rep. Terry Matlock, D-Garvin, pleads no contest to felony charge stemming from disappearance of \$75,000-plus from Choctaw Electric Cooperative. He spent 10 days in jail, will serve 10 years probation and must pay \$54,000 in restitution.

Far right Yukon Rep. John Paul Jordan will lead an interim study on medical marijuana. He swears it will focus on regulation and taxes, not on the merits of the upcoming state question. We shall see.

Ousted House Appropriations-Budget Chair Leslie Osborn, R-Mustang, is running for state labor commissioner in 2018. Also eyeing the post: former Sen. Leo Kingston, who spent three years in federal prison on a real estate fraud conviction.

Oklahoma's 131 tribal casinos are responsible for 42,700 direct and indirect jobs – a \$2.275 billion boost for the state's economy. In addition, gaming centers steered \$132 million into state coffers in 2016, up 3% from the previous year. – Oklahoma Indian Gaming Association report

Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy's new board president is Mitchell Rozin, an OKC estate planning attorney. Rozin succeeds Effie Craven, who now will represent Oklahoma Food Banks and Feeding America.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 46

Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

care of my neighbors?" is the outraged cry of conservatives. With national healthcare the answers are: 1. My neighbors pay for mine. 2. It is the ethical thing to do. 3. Costs are half or less than half of what we pay now and would cover everyone.

Every other advanced nation pays a fraction of what the U.S. does. Canadians pay \$3,000 per capita to cover everyone while the U.S. pays \$7,000 per capita and leaves out 47 million plus an equal number of at risk underinsured souls. European nations pay a third of what we do with better outcomes.

A national health care system would make us feel good about ourselves. At last we could say with pride to the world, "We are willing to pay for the healthcare of our neighbors just like everyone else."

Oklahoma's only universal healthcare website is oklahomansforuniversalhealth.org. Please check it out.

Ron du Bois
Stillwater

Editor, The Observer:

As we approached the Fourth of July, I was reminded of my birthplace by a friend who shared over 200 beautiful photographs of Philadelphia – often referred to as the "Cradle of Liberty." It caused me to revisit Ron Chernow's biography *Washington: A Life* and also Washington's Farewell Address.

Recently I had the opportunity to listen to a speaker credibly describe the indoctrination of new Oklahoma state legislators – being told not to be seen talking to, dining with, photographed with, or cooperating in any way with a member of the opposing party. Nowhere in the discussion was an indication that senior legislators were helping new peers understand history, policy, process, and practice of the Legislature, let alone the Oklahoma Constitution or general structure and functions of state government.

The description of such "mind games" in not only onerous, but repugnant and unscrupulous.

George Washington warned Americans about excessive factionalism, which he believed led to discord and disunity. He realized importantly through his experience as a soldier, politician, statesman, and president that extreme partisanship or factionalism could hijack a democratic republic and create enough discord to tear apart the fragile fabric of democracy and lead to actions like demagoguery, authoritarian rule



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

and, in the extreme, secession and even anarchy. He understood the importance of education, enlightened debate, unification to common purpose, and that no one leader could replace the voice of “We The People” in a representative democracy.

If accurate, there is something small, shameful, and indeed dishonest about the described legislative behavior. How can we ever hope to work across the aisle, bridge differences, and achieve creative consensus if senior legislators lack this kind of integrity and purport to mentor incoming lawmakers? I hope this account was exaggerated, but the source was credible.

Jan New
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

No other country can match our record: four presidents shot and killed; another five presidents shot at but not killed, two of them wounded, one seriously. Imagine, 20% of all of our presidents have been killed or shot at!

Add notables: Alexander Hamilton, Sen. Huey Long, Martin Luther King Jr., Robert F. Kennedy, Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and John Lennon, each shot and killed.

Candidate George Wallace, shot and paralyzed. Congresswoman Gabby Gifford shot in the head and nearly killed. Mayor Anton Cermak shot and killed with a bullet intended for candidate Franklin Roosevelt!

What other democratically elected government compares? Is anybody ashamed? This writer is most definitely ashamed.

Frank Silovsky
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

A note to the other gun nuts out there: all the concern about the Clintons and Obama swooping down and taking away our guns has proved to be wasted anxiety, as most of us were aware. My money's on Trump turning into a “swooper” – no matter what he says about his love for the Second Amendment. Trump's connection with truth has pretty well been shown to be in the non-existent area.

How's about this for a conspiracy theory.

Putin to Trump: “Hey Donny-boy. Whaddaya think about me getting you elected POTUS and then for payback we can talk about lifting sanctions against Russia and then busting up NATO? Who knows how far we could go toward conquering the world?”

Trump: “Vlad, baby, that sounds like a hell of an idea. Why don't we get together and talk about it, just you and me. We can keep those congressional investigators and nosy press and fake newsies running around, chasing their tails looking for whatever we can think of to divert them. Some people have wanted government run like a business for quite awhile. All those pesky federal parks and protected areas, we

could make tons of money selling them off and then collecting all the royalties afterward.”

This all is probably ridiculous, what with Congress [such as it is] standing in the way. But with several departments and bureaus already on the way to collapse [Justice, EPA, Energy, just to name a few], this government would make a good story line for a Tom Clancy novel.

With Trump so paranoid and unstable, anything could happen. So why not take fantasizing to the extreme. We already know that he has a lot of respect and a real affinity for a few dictators around the world. With Putin as a mentor it's only a guess as to what might ensue.

Keep the faith baby.

Tom Ellis
Okeene

Observerscope

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 44

For second year in row, Commissioners of Land Office distributed a record amount to state's K-12 schools – \$103.4 million in FY'17, up \$1.2 million. Higher ed received second highest distribution ever: \$34 million.

The smart phone generation loves libraries. A new Pew Research Center survey found 53% of millennials visited a public library or bookmobile in the last year – making them the most likely generation to use the library.

OG&E and SunPower are set to build a 10-megawatt solar photovoltaic power plant on 80 acres in Covington. When it opens in 2018, it will serve about 1,000 Oklahoma homes.

Hopeful sign? Four Blue Dog Southern Democrats recently signed on as co-sponsors of Michigan Rep. John Conyers' Medicare-for-all proposal. All told, H.R. 676 has 113 co-sponsors, all Democrats. Republicans resist at their peril.

Forgetting things is good for you. So says research that found letting go of old memories actually clears the brain, allowing it to adapt to new information and make more intelligent decisions. – Time/Neuron

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